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How to cite this thesis
HOME, FAMILY AND SCHOOL LITERACY PRACTICES:
READING AND THE PRIMARY SCHOOL BOY

by

MADELEINE ROSS

THESIS
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DOCTOR PHILOSOPHIAE (Education)

in the

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM STUDIES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

SUPERVISOR: Dr Leila Kajee

OCTOBER 2013
DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Education and Curriculum Studies, University of Johannesburg. This thesis has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university. Where use has been made of the results of other authors, they have been duly acknowledged in the text.

_____________________________
Madeleine Ross
ABSTRACT

Literacy is regarded as a social practice that encompasses the activities of reading and writing, and the social structures in which they evolve and develop. Since the home and school environments form powerful domains in which the literacy culture develops and are shaped by values and beliefs, reading interest can be seen to be embedded in events and practices within these domains. This study is concerned with making the links between the enculturation of literacy in the informal domain of the home within a boy’s family, and in the formal environment of the school.

The focus is therefore not on schooled literacy, but rather on the way that literacy is schooled. The motivation to study boys emanated from concern about boys losing interest in reading during their adolescent years. The learners at the centre of this study constituted a privileged group of boys from print-rich homes in which there is a strong literacy culture of reading. The socio-cultural context within which the research was conducted, informed on the events and practices that influenced the ways in which each boy assumed his particular stance to literacy, and, at the same time, developed his attitude to, and distinct taste for literacy engagement.

This case study of eight boys in the upper primary school conducted over two years, draws on the literacy theories of Gee (1990), Street (1995) and New Literacies Studies who argue that literacy in everyday social practice is embedded in specific forms of activity that are culturally, historically, politically and economically motivated. This means that reading and writing can only be studied in the context of the social practices in which they operate, and therefore this study focuses on the way that the participants’ literacy is rooted in their knowledge and world view. The data from observations in classrooms and
in homes, and interviews with teachers, the school librarian, the boys and their parents, seek to understand how literacy practices encourage reading. The findings indicate that children learn the innate values attached to their home literacy practices to which they respond through parental encouragement, motivation and structure.

Critical to effective pedagogy is understanding the type of literacy with which the child enters school, since the evidence from the data show that strong literacy skills are built up and sustained in family surroundings. In the same way the discipline and encouragement, that will foster a similar culture of reading in the schools, ought to be harnessed and emulated. I conclude that the reading enculturation lies not only in exposure to books or having reading time, but in particular ways of guiding and encouraging literacy interaction in a disciplined milieu for children to engage in reading. The study promotes the concept that home literacy and parent involvement shape the child into responding to successful pedagogical engagement. The findings on the formal and informal school literacy practices that influence the boys to read, relate to the way in which teachers engage with literacy teaching, since their approach determines what learners take away from a lesson. Based on my research I argue that goal-directed strategies and passionate involvement in literacy pedagogy empower the learners, in the same way that the parents in the home practise their version of literacy to empower their children.

Parents and teachers should recognise that reading literacy is a process in which active involvement brings about an attitudinal shift. Reading is social, interactive, and it happens through mediation by a parent or a teacher who fosters a healthy disposition towards books. The analysis of the data has shown that the loss of interest in reading in some boys is linked to non-regulatory behaviours that are allowed to enter their daily activities. This study revealed that boys respond spontaneously to in-school literacy activities if they have been reared in the type of home literacy in which parents actively support the process. Strong indicators are exposure to books, guiding behaviours, creating meaningful
moments of interaction and discourse, showing an interest and motivating children to read, and providing an example to be followed. In relation to this, it is understandable that despite wisdom and knowledge that teachers bring to class, if there is no cognisance of what was appealing in a particular lesson, then learners were unlikely to be motivated to read.

Guidance, interaction and encouragement have been shown to contribute to perspectives in new literacies that place value on our thinking about how boys make sense of literacy. Involved parents and teachers have shown that they attain high levels of literacy success in their protégés in terms of creating a positive attitude to reading and literacy discourse, and those involved in educating the youth, whether as a parent or a teacher, must remain cognisant that regulation and discipline undergird even the most pleasurable literacy practices. Both the home and the school can be used as sites to promote the family culture of discourse around the table. This involves interactive talk and discussions, instead of the top-down power structure of instructional discourse. Parenting and teaching should occur in a context in which the child, through strict guidance and encouragement, shares in the construction of his/her literacy education, and is made to feel literate.
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I would like to thank my supervisor, Leila Kajee, for whom I have the greatest admiration. Her superbly sensitive handling of people and events, her quiet encouragement, and intense interest in the research process attest to this.

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CHAPTER ONE
OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY:
FRAMING THE QUESTION

“People who have stopped reading base their future decisions on what they used to know ... 
if you don't read much, you really don’t know much ... you’re dangerous.”

1.1 Introduction

Central to this thesis lies literacy development in boys within their homes and educational settings. As literacy encompasses the activities of reading and writing, and the social structures in which they evolve, the key aim in this study is to look at the relationship that exists between reading literacy and the environment in which it develops, and, particularly, the way in which this influences the adolescent’s reading habits. Teachers are constantly reminded that different children have different learning outcomes, which relate intricately to their socio-economic circumstances, ethnicity, race, gender, location, and parents’ education. Since there are few issues at school that conjure up more controversy and discussion than reading, its acquisition, and the development of reading ability, research has tended to focus on reading as a basic life skill that possesses the hidden ingredient for determining literacy levels, communication skills, and for guiding attitudes to reading habits. Further studies have been conducted on the discrepancy that exists between the reading skills of the genders, and these have elucidated the problem that exists for increasing numbers of boys who lose interest in reading during their adolescent years. Many of these studies do not address the cultural and socio-economic circumstances of families and schools that may have the ideological purpose of sustaining reading habits in the upper primary school boys. It is my intention to show that certain at-home and in-school literacy practices serve to guide boys towards retaining an interest in reading even during a time in their lives when peer influence may override learnt norms. I argue that the family home influence does not disappear when children enter school.
Children take with them their accumulation of experiences, privileges, disadvantages, cultural ways and linguistic capital.

In this introductory chapter I provide the context, the problem, and a discussion of the research that is located in an urban boys’ school in Johannesburg. It is difficult, however, to contextualise a privileged school in isolation without viewing the imprint of the legacy of the South African political system. I will therefore begin this chapter by locating literacy learning in the South African context. The historical watermark of socio-economic deprivation still resonates in homes whose habitants were educated during the apartheid era. I argue that to compare literacy learning of advantaged and disadvantaged boys would be inequitable, and, thus, for purposes of my study, I focus on one school that caters for boys from a culture of strong reading literacy in privileged homes. I have formulated my research questions accordingly. Later in this chapter I shall outline the questions and the research aims, demonstrating how these emerged from this particular context. Finally, I introduce literary and literacy theories that frame this study to show how children acquire language and gradually learn to transfer their linguistic knowledge into written form.

Barton (1994) reflects this notion when he suggests that print literacy cannot be understood without placing it in people’s lives, and situating it in its social context. Print literacy is closely tied to education, whether it is in the home or in the school, and can arguably only take on meaning within those contexts in which it is learnt. This foregrounds the way in which children acquire literacy. The anthropologist, Erickson (1984) reasons that human societies have reared their young “to master the knowledge and skills necessary for survival, [and asks] why does this not happen in modern societies with schools?” (1984: 527). Reading literacy can be termed a survival skill, yet one that can be dismissed if it carries no meaning, for the need to read lies not only in how-to-do-it, but also in what-it-does-to-the-reader.
1.2.1 The context and problem of literacy in South Africa

Since my research is being conducted in an independent urban school in Johannesburg, it is important to highlight the reading literacy context in which the study is embedded. The extent of the problem of literacy in South Africa is evident in the literacy learning in government schools, providing a disturbing view of the significance that reading holds for many citizens. The literacy found in the independent private school microcosm, in which the study takes place, can unquestionably not be likened to the reality that exists for the majority of the population in this country. Commentary to affirm this view is by education specialist, Graeme Bloch (2009), on South African education levels in his book *The Toxic Mix*. In the book he states that comparative scores for numeracy and literacy in South Africa are consistently among the worst in the world. He demonstrates this by means of both the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) scores, and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) analysis (published in 2003) in which South Africa fared worst out of 46 countries in both literacy and numeracy. South Africa chose not to take part in the follow-up tests in 2009, citing time and cost as the reason, despite global organisations expressing an increased need to gain timely data on learning that may inform on means of improving educational outcomes (Wagner, Babson & Murphy, 2011). Bloch (2009) maintains that poor skills and a complete lack of basics of learning and achievement seem to lie at the core of South Africa’s low scores. Official tests that were implemented by the Department of Education and released by Minister Kadar Asmal in 2003, showed that Grade 3s attained a dismal average score of only 30% on the Mathematics task, and 39% on reading and writing (without oral comprehension) (Bloch, 2009).

Similar results of tests in Mathematics, Language and Natural Sciences were released in 2005 for Grade 6 by the Department of Education. The mean scores were 35% for language, 27% for Mathematics and 41% for Natural Sciences, about which Bloch (2009: 62) writes: “only about one in ten learners was at the standard required by the National Curriculum Statement”. Furthermore, if one removes the comparison with the West or the emerging nations of the East, such as Singapore and Malaysia, and reflects on Africa only, South Africa remains at the bottom of the scale of achievement.
Bloch (2009) points out that the SACMEQ studies of the Grade 6 learners were specifically designed to bring together the ministries of education in eastern and southern Africa, which included Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, the Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It is therefore worrisome to be on the lower part of the scale in these tests that showed that in South Africa “about half the kids were not even at the stage of reading for meaning” (Bloch, 2009: 64) or were unable to do simple comprehension exercises, and only 19% were able to cope with analytic or critical reading.

Local newspapers have consistently expressed concern over the poor reading levels in South African schools. These include reports in the Business Day (Gernetzky, Wednesday, 29 June, 2011:1) and The Star (Mtshali, Smillie & SAPA, Wednesday, 29 June, 2011:1). The most recent results of the Annual National Assessments (ANA), written in September 2012, as released by the Department of Basic Education, demonstrate the reason for constant disquiet in educational circles. Of the 1800 schools moderated by the Human Sciences Research Council, the national average performance in Grade 3 for numeracy was 41%, and 52% for literacy, while in Grade 6, learners achieved 27% in numeracy and 43% for languages. In developing my argument, I demonstrate that the core of this dilemma can be found in home and school literacy, and in the lack of discipline and lack of skills teaching in schools. I argue that school literacy depends deeply on the level of literacy that a learner brings from home (Comber, 2000), and that home is a place that was altered for many people during the apartheid era. In order to define the South African situation, it is therefore necessary to refer to the racial descriptor of Black, White, Indian and Coloured used during apartheid, since the Black and Coloured schools experienced discriminatory substandard levels of education which have rendered a generation of parents unable to uplift their own children. Carrim and Soudien (1999: 155) describe this situation aptly:

‘Race’ influenced the material (italics in original) conditions of people’s lives in explicit and direct ways, ensuring that South Africans lived segregated and unequal lives in almost every sense of the terms. Given these conditions and history, South Africans are not in a position to ignore ‘race’. It is central to any understanding of South Africa, even in its current juncture.
Parents and teachers who were educated during this time and are the product of this system, cannot be armed with skills that were not taught – which is the notion expressed by Bloch (2011) in referring to the lack of basics in learning and achievement.

Home literacy, nevertheless, is not the only area of concern in South African education. The reading dilemma is debated by Jane Hofmeyer (2010) from the Independent Education Board, in which she cites the underlying educational approach of outcomes-based education (OBE) in South Africa as problematic, and proffers OBE as one of the causes of substandard literacy/numeracy achievement. She advances an argument in which OBE shifted the focus away from what teachers who were required to teach, to that which the child is required to understand and able to do, and these are the learning outcomes. The OBE approach was originally supported by the unions and business to link the separate worlds of training and education, so that adult learners transferring from one to the other would have the knowledge, skills and qualifications that they had mastered in the world of work (Hofmeyer, 2010). The system was not implemented effectively. The assessments were complicated, and this had the effect of burdening teachers with cumbersome record-keeping, which in turn detracted from the basic needs of learners, especially in core subjects like numeracy and literacy. The latest ANA results testify to this, and as a result, the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) that was implemented in 2012, is expected to provide more detail on what teachers ought to teach and assess in class. Teachers will receive more targeted subject-specific training, especially in numeracy/Mathematics and literacy/English in order to bring about the essential improvement in learner achievement.

The constant policy changes made by the Education Department highlight the efforts to make equitable the concept of difference that existed in pre-apartheid times. Scholarly literature of investigations into schooling in desegregated schools, the assimilation of school practices, and the adaptation of education systems such as OBE and CAPS, have, however, shown that the inequalities of race, culture, class, gender, religion and language have not been erased (Carrim & Soudien, 1999; Soudien, 2004).
Race, culture and language that lay at the political core of the apartheid construction, have largely dissipated through social integration. However worthwhile the research on desegregation seems to have been in underlining the state of poor education, overcrowded classrooms, the high dropout rate, the lack of commitment to teaching shown by teachers (Modisaotsile, 2012), it can be argued that the focus is simplistic, as research does not address the gap between home and school literacy, and here I refer specifically to disadvantaged homes where the early years of literacy learning are conceptually disregarded as unimportant.

My aim throughout the study is to focus on the influence of home literacy on reading, and thereby to understand the ways in which families guide and direct reading literacy habits. Academic attainment at school is inseparable from home learning (Comber, 2000), and without this firm literacy base, teachers are powerless to enhance reading literacy in the limited class time available, or within a school system that does not address academic excellence, but panders to feel-good mediocrity of the masses.

With this in mind, I wish to argue that it is not only the lack of literacy exposure that underlies poor performance in test scores, but also the great unease over the lack of books, and reading that take place at South African schools (Bharuthram, 2006; Bloch, 2011; Modisaotsile, 2012). The lack of constant exposure to books in many schools in South Africa may have a correlation to the mere 30% of students who read at age-appropriate levels (SABC3, 28 April, 2011 – commentary on the ANA literacy and numeracy benchmark results). The Limpopo Province schools suffered greatly during the 2012 academic year by not having had their textbooks delivered to their schools by as late as September, and the problem has continued in 2013. The learners and teachers were powerless, since the non-delivery of books was predominantly in socio-economically deprived areas. *The Star* newspaper cited the South African Department of Basic Education for maladministration (Mpuntsha, Tuesday, 7 August, 2012, online). Two years earlier the same newspaper carried commentary from the same department about the 78% of schools that do not have libraries (Kgosana, Monday, 29 March, 2010: 1). This, it stated, contributed significantly “to the poor grasp of literacy and numeracy among millions of South African pupils”, and to this can be added the fiasco of
textbook delivery to disadvantaged schools. These comments reflect the current situation in many educational institutions, demonstrating the necessity of upgrading literacy at school, and the importance of raised reading levels, and the necessary focus on literacy skills.

1.2.2 The legacy of our history

I have argued that home literacy provides the framework for understanding how to achieve in an academic milieu. Brahm Fleisch (2008) debates this aspect in his book, *Primary Education in Crisis*, in which he refers to the causal nature of South Africa’s results dilemma, saying that test scores could sometimes ignore the learner’s ability to write tests. It may not appear to be a valid observation, but considering the numbers of learners from socio-economically disadvantaged environments in South Africa, this remains a significant factor. When Bloch proffers that “[t]ests have cultural implications; there are language barriers that may reflect how he or she answers questions set at an international level” (2009: 66, 67), if achievement, therefore, is not easily within reach, learners lose interest. The fact that the school-leaving pass rate in South Africa was only 73.9% for 2012, has prompted South African educationalists such as Professor Jonathan Jansen, Rector and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Free State, (Serrao, Monday, 22 February, 2010: 6), and Graeme Bloch (2009) to concur that few children see education as their way to success. Most children simply rebel and do not have faith in the system. They see no future in education, and thus leave school altogether. Literacy is a concern, but boys’ literacy, of which no results could be obtained from South African sources, is a major concern. Fleisch and Shindler (2009: 7) suggest that given the “growing recognition that continued participation in school has positive consequences, particularly for vulnerable children”, the high drop-out rate in schools be granted attention. If one considers that only 22% of the 1994 Grade 1 class wrote the matriculation examination in 2006, it implies that 78% of South African learners are drop-outs from school.

Fleisch and Shindler (2009) further expand on their findings on the school-leaving trend. They found a gender pattern, that emerged in their analysis of age of entry and
late starters, that was evident in the patterns of attainment at age fifteen. At this age there was a significantly higher proportion of girls who had reached Grade 10 - 36% compared to 22% for boys. Further gender discrepancies established by these authors show that girls were promoted at a much higher rate than boys, indicating that boys repeated far more than girls, becoming more prevalent as they enter secondary school – more than three boys repeating standards for every one girl. By taking an objective view of this occurrence, it can be argued that boys mature later than girls, or that they feel that they will automatically realise their potential in the workplace at a later stage. This begs the question whether achievement is so important for boys at school level.

1.3 The gender gap

Because boys are central to this study, I locate this section on the disparity between boys and girls. What is so significant that there should be concern over biological factors that are, and have been, part of education ever since boys and girls have been educated together at school? James (2007) indicates that gender development occurs through imitation and observation of role models such as family members, and these expectations are the ultimate determinants of how boys and girls think, act or feel. The gender identities that develop are often the reason behind variable treatments of, and expectation from, learners in school in an attempt by teachers to give equal opportunities to both sexes. There is increasing pressure on boys to compete with girls in the marketplace and to prove their competence in many areas in which the written word plays a part in reflecting ability.

In view of this, I look at the extent of the gender gap worldwide to locate the problem of literacy differences between boys and girls, and explain what the gap means. Research on the concerns regarding the gender gap that I have been able to source, has been done in America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the European Union countries, South America and a few countries in Africa, yet in South Africa the research does not incorporate either the numeracy or literacy gender gaps (Hausmann, Tyson & Sahidi, 2008). The international studies reveal that, despite various strategies to improve literacy skills, girls have continued to outperform boys,
especially in the various fields of literacy (Burgess, McConnell, Propper & Wilson, 2003; Booth, Elliott-Johns & Bruce, 2010; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Freedmon, 2003). Booth et al. (2010) do, however, emphasise that there is a strong correlation between literacy achievement, unfocused and disruptive behaviour in class, and auditory processing capacity at middle grade levels, and that national and international scores indicate that male elementary and secondary learners do not achieve the same results as girls in writing and reading. Boys are also more likely to have a reading disability, to attend special schools, and that they are four times more likely to have social, behaviourial and emotional problems than their girl-counterparts (Rutter, 2004 cited in Booth et al., 2010). These findings are corroborated by Freedmon (2003) and Gurian (1999), who suggest that since boys are biologically more active, more aggressive, and show less empathy than girls do, they ought to be handled differently to girls.

Anecdotally most of the girls with whom I worked at an all-girls school in Johannesburg, for instance, were vibrant and eager about their reading, and their keenness never wavered throughout their primary and middle school years. This is reflected in findings by Cavazos-Kottke who suggests that such learners brought to class “a wealth of prior knowledge founded upon years of voracious reading” (2005: 182), which created a need to pursue more reading. The same vibrancy, however, is not prevalent in the majority of their male peers – a phenomenon that is of deep concern for researchers like Smith and Wilhelm (2002), Cavazos-Kottke (2005) and Newkirk (2002). The researchers found that, despite the influence and the availability of books in both homes and at school, and despite having the skills that inspired the girls to read, many boys do not have the same motivation or drive to do so, nor are they able to sustain, what in many instances, was a previous reading habit. They found that particular boys had been voracious readers like their girl-counterparts, but had at some point in middle school developed a dislike for reading, and in fact, proclaimed themselves non-readers.

A study on reading literacy of fourteen to sixteen year olds by Burgess et al. (2003) in 3000 schools in Britain examined the gender-related differences in school achievement. The research provided possible explanations for the achievement gap between the genders, showing that the source is not school related, nor does it lie
within-school practice. Boys’ inconsistent approach to reading is reflected in other publications such as those by the Ministry of Education for Ontario (Ontario Education, 2006), written specifically for teachers as an initiative to aid student success in literacy, which points out that various test scores conducted internationally highlight the fact that boys lag behind girls in literacy levels. These include assessments by: The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP), who all provide results of tests on Grade 3 to Grade 10 children, indicating that gender is indeed a significant factor in the choice of reading materials and reading achievement for girls and boys.

The PISA study for example, is a system of international assessments that focuses on fifteen-year-olds’ capabilities in reading literacy, mathematics literacy, and science literacy, and includes measures of general competencies and functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling. These tests are administered every three years and the most recent one was in 2009 during which the in-depth study focused on reading literacy. The study found that in 2000, 2003 and 2006 the girls’ scores were on average 32 points higher than those of boys’ in reading, and more males declared themselves to be “non-readers” (Booth et al., 2010). The 2009 PISA tests conducted in 65 countries on education systems again showed consistently higher scores for females in reading. The highest literacy scores were found in China, the Republic of Korea, Finland, Singapore, Canada, New Zealand, Japan and Australia, all of which produced the higher female discrepancy score.

In Canada the Grade 3 Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) literacy tests in Ontario produced reading scores of 21% lower for boys than girls (2003/2004), while Grade 6 fared better with a score of 14% lower than girls (Booth et al., 2010). In the US the male-female difference was less significant in reading literacy than the average difference, as the gap was 25 points (PISA, 2009). In the US the 1998 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) results, there was 10% more proficiency in reading by females, while in 2000 the females outperformed boys at all age levels; in 2002 only two states had improved since 2000, but the males’ scores on the average
were 24 points lower than females by the twelfth grade, and 75% of the gap was apparent by Grade 4 (Booth et al., 2010). The 2005 NAEP results also pointed to the trend of a gender literacy gap, with a 12% gap in reading (Bear, Connors, & Paradiso, 2007).

Similar results have emerged from England where girls remain ahead of boys at all levels of education from the early years onwards. Healey (cited in Booth et al., 2010) asserts that the girls’ literacy rates in England have been relatively stable over the past 25 years, until now that girls achieve higher average marks in a majority of Grade 12 subjects. The boys’ results have decreased to the point where 35% of fourteen-year-old boys fail to reach basic literacy benchmarks. He compares the literacy levels to those of Canada in Grade 3 and 5 where already the boys lag behind girls’ achievement.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) first identified their concern over the lack of engagement by boys as significant in 1996 (Booth et al., 2010), and, even though they reported a reduction in the difference in achievement in 1998 and 2002, they admitted that the gap still remains (Burgess et al., 2003).

Even though the evidence of a gap in literacy and underachievement by boys may be seen as a generalisation, and cannot be applied to all boys, the test results are consistent enough to create concern, since reading and writing skills can have a significant effect on not only literary subjects, but also on other subjects that may influence their success throughout their lives. With this in mind, and by looking critically at the results of these international test scores, one is left with the impression that literacy is only seen as school-based, when in fact, so much of literacy is contingent on the family and home enculturation. Alvermann and Moore (2011) echo this view in which they insist that in-school and out-of-school literacy cannot be separated. (This notion will be discussed further in Chapter 3.) Freedmon (2003) ascribes the reaction to the gendered results, to a traditional acceptance of males occupying positions of power and prestige in society, and an expectation that they are more self-reliant than girls. This further extends into emotional issues where relationship work has been assigned predominantly to women, turning emotions into a non-valued language for men – the perception being that most men possess little
awareness or understanding of feelings, and react to emotions in a competitive or controlling way which they have been taught to do by other men (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000). Their reactions stand in contrast to the more able verbal ability of girls who learn to speak sooner than boys do, and are more fluent – the boys then tend to be more physical, more active, and moving faster than their girl peers (Ballew & Gurian, 2003). There is therefore strong evidence that the more positive attitudes of female students to recreational and academic reading translate into higher achievement and performance at school (Black, 2006). I have argued that much of the research drawn on in this chapter with regard to the gender gap and the underachievement of boys, focuses on literacy learning in school, however, and omits to provide insight into acculturation into reading that takes place in home literacy learning. Yet Elmore (in Freedmon, 2003) argues that learners learn largely from schools, and what goes on in classrooms, which reflects but a small facet of pedagogy, while ignoring the literacy foundation that develops from bedtime stories (please refer to Chapter 6 and 7 for a discussion on this).

The role of parents in literacy enculturation is essentially discounted once children attend school, and one finds the attention shifting to the surrogate parents, namely the teachers. Society’s strong expectation of teachers and what is achieved in a class situation is often found in daily discourse, and even appears in media articles such as “Schools are failing boys of all races” (Gallagher, The New York Post, 17 November, 2010: n.c.), “The teacher is the most vital cog” (Rice, The Star, 12 July, 2010: 1-3), “Many of our kids can’t read or write” (Mtshali, Smillie & SAPA, The Star, Wednesday, 29 June, 2011: 2-5), “Our pass rate focus is too narrow” (Metcalf, Orkin & Glennie, The Sunday Times, Sunday, 15 January, 2012: 1-8), and The Education Department’s intervention in underperforming schools in the article “SA’s trillion rand education scandal” (Serrao, The Star, 22 February, 2010: 1-7). Further examples are found in research articles (Erickson, 1984; Duffy & Hoffman, 1999; Barton, in Baker, Clay & Fox, 1996; Prinsloo & Stein, 2004; Rush, Eakle & Berger, 2007). The school is thus held responsible, as the direct unit of education, for uplifting and improving student achievement. The attitudes and performance of schools and their related educational
departments, either locally or nationally, influence their students, and this makes them accountable to the community from which they draw their learners.

It is therefore my contention that even though the formal school time in learners’ lives strongly impacts on their literacy learning, there are multiple strands that have been learned through home, family and societal structures that are brought to school. When Frederick Erickson (1984) questions modern man’s capacity to teach his young, one must look to the whole journey of learning and teaching and cultural patterning for the answer.

1.4 Boys and their reading

The disparity found in the genders in terms of academic achievement (as shown in the previous section) highlights the reasons for the increasing concern over boys’ continued disassociation from reading during the latter part of their primary school years (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Even though boys are slower in developing their fine reading skills than girls, and Ballew and Gurian (2003) theorised that boys are wired for certain behaviours, they enjoy reading as much as the girls do during the early years. Their enjoyment of reading declines as they approach 9 to 12 years of age (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Mostert & Wikan, 2008; Bottigheimer, 2006; Padak & Rasinski, 2008; Bigum, Knobel, Lankshear, & Rowan, 2002; Kirby, Ball, Geier, Parilla & Wade-Woolly, 2011)) when their interest wanes, whilst the same does not seem to happen to girls of similar ages. The all-pervasive concern is therefore the way in which boys and girls apply and utilise their literacy skills, and the long-term effect of the fact that boys, in particular, lag behind in reading application.

Having focused on the under-resourced homes and schools that influence literacy readiness in learners, and having viewed the disparate literacy development in boys and girls, this section addresses boys’ loss of interest in reading for pleasure as they enter adolescence. To date much has been written about the discrepancy between the genders in terms of academic attainment, and studies verify the outcomes of, and achievements in, various subjects as a result of this dichotomous behaviour (Smith &
Cavazos-Kottke (2005) found in his endeavour to encourage a culture of reading in his school, that there was a clear difference in the motivation to read for boys and girls in his classes. His English classes were a part of the gifted programme for his high school, and, despite possessing acute reading skills, not all the students were eager readers. Yet, the majority of girls with whom he worked were readers, and he found that it was easier to engage these girls in some challenging texts as they already enjoyed a well-developed intrinsic drive to learn and read. This was not the case with the boys, and that they had somehow changed their attitude to this activity over time, having developed a reluctance to read, which was in keeping with their masculine preference for physical activity rather than literacy. Smith and Wilhelm (2002), Newkirk (2002) and Klinger, Shulha and Wade-Woolley (2009) reflect similar findings in their research, demonstrating that from an early age girls have been shown to have a significant and consistent advantage over boys in literacy, and that this advantage is found universally, not only in English-speaking countries, but also internationally across cultures and languages.

In this view, today’s adolescent boy is a much-favoured topic amongst researchers who question why boys are moving away from literacy - some pointing to home, and others to school cultures of literacy learning. It must be pointed out that research in South Africa predominantly focuses on family literacy in disadvantaged schools (Pretorius & Machet, 2004), family literacy practices (Stein & Slonimsky, 2001; Kajee, 2011), poverty and educational outcomes (Van den Berg, 2005), and literacy studies (Prinsloo, 2006), and little is known about the South African boy and his reading. Local knowledge on home and classroom practices relating to reading is an area that needs attention in order to understand how these worlds are constructed (Dyson, 1993). The context is complex and intricate, and the adolescent’s attitude to literacy is what eventually defines him/her. My contention is that if the adolescent is allowed to develop an attitude in a certain direction without specific scaffolded guidance from parents or teachers (Vygotsky, 1978), he/she will increasingly value his/her actions. During the study I turned to the works of Lev Vygotsky whose ideas informed my understanding of the relationship between natural development and guidance by elders. Vygotsky
believed that boys’ behaviour and their self-perception were affected when male or adult guidance was absent, and this occurrence is more prevalent in boys than in their female counterparts (Biddulph, 2008). In the light of this, my reasoning is not to focus my research on differences in gender, but to explain what types of literacy learning promote reading in boys.

Since research has been done on ways of bringing boys to books, changing classroom strategies to engender interest in reading, introducing the use of graphic books to capture visual respondents, widening the choice of books to incorporate interests and hobbies of the readers, or using modern books that are in line with their channels of interest (Padak & Rasinski, 2007; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Kirby et al., 2011), these attempts are fundamentally a means of changing an already existing trend. Yet there is very little research on determining the root of the decline in boys’ reading habits.

Therefore, my aim is to make sense of boys’ loss of interest in reading in the upper part of primary school by tracking their literacy exposure at home and at school. In order to understand this view, I have highlighted literacy learning by examining the South African and international contexts of literacy achievement to show that it becomes more difficult to motivate boys to read as they progress through school, since there is a clear preference for physical activity and computer literacy at this stage (Newkirk, 2002). Furthermore, I have indicated that there is a significant gender gap in literacy achievement and attitude to reading, despite similar home literacy experiences. I further viewed the role that parents play in transferring and modelling literacy in the home domain, and hence the home and school locales combine to offer the boy identity-affirming experiences to be examined in this study.

1.5 The study and its aim

Arising from the above particularities that characterise literacy that exists within certain socio-economic and gender domains, the main aim of this study is to explore how the home, the family and school literacies influence the reading practices of middle-school boys, whilst a further aim is to establish an understanding of boys’
reading practices, and how this may contribute to the promotion of reading in primary schools. The study looks at the reasons that underlie the general tendency for adolescent boys to lose interest in reading, even when they have grown up in print-rich homes that have given them consistent literacy exposure for the habit to become a constant. During her research in three communities in the South-eastern United States, Shirley Brice Heath (1982) drew on the repetitive patterning in the children’s varied socialisation into taking meaning from words, recognising that ways of taking from books are part of learnt behaviour. General expectations in the home are, therefore, those actions that consistently form the undercurrent of home literacy (Gee, 2000; Street, 2001). These include exposure to verbal communication, idiosyncratic sayings within the culture of the family, bedtime reading, exposure to various texts, and encouragement to participate in reading. If this does not take place, the interest in reading is not stimulated, and there exists the probability that the level of reading could trail behind that of those who are constantly exposed to writing and reading (Comber, 2000). This culture of literacy exposure is significant to this thesis as my contention is that, although the boys in this study come from literacy-filled homes, each individual experiences different literacy and schooled ritualisations, and therefore harbours varying views of reading. The data analysis in Chapter 5 and 6 provides insight into this.

In order to demonstrate this ideology in the framework of literacy learning, I have inserted the following analogy (Figure 1) of two English lessons that have formed part of this study. These lessons are drawn from my observation in two classrooms signifying the way in which two teachers facilitate literacy teaching.
### Classroom One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is a combined lesson for the three Grade 7 classes in the Resource Centre. It has taken 10 minutes of the 30-minute period for all the boys to settle down. State of the art technology is available in this room, but today, despite the interesting theme of World War II poetry, the teacher is not making use of the interactive board. The boys have each been given a written copy of the poem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of a war poem.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher starts lesson by recapping and asking what the boys remembered about the previous lesson. He proceeds to tell them, rather than eliciting an answer from boys. He reads poem. He consistently makes comments: “Oh, we notice a simile. There are techniques to deal with it. In tests they’ll ask you to identify figures of speech. As in ‘Why is this a simile, and why is this effective, and how would you answer it in a test?’” Teacher does not wait for an answer. “Do you see the assonance ... yes, quickly?” There is no encouragement to get an answer, just a strange retort: “Yes, the poet is very clever.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Classroom Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Grade 5 boys are working in four separate groups. There is a healthy hum in the class as the boys in some groups discuss and share their work. The class is neat. Quiet discipline prevails as no-one seems to push boundaries or oversteps the noise barrier.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write poem/identify nouns/find emotive words/cut out words from magazine and hang them in a sentence tree.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class discourse</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher asks questions and guides them into a process of self-discovery. “I want to hear what you’ve done.” “Do you want to share any of that with us?” “Talk me through this.” Boy asks if “lonely” is an abstract noun. Teacher answers: “You tell me.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 1: Observation of two English lessons at The Hilltop School serving as an analogy in literacy learning.

The boys in these two classrooms experience a different way of being literate (Fletcher, Grimley, Greenwood & Parkhill, 2012); teacher one perceives knowledge to occur in a sponge-like manner for the learners, while teacher two takes a similar
lesson to motivate the learners to interact and share “attitudes, beliefs, feelings, experiences and relationships” (Compton-Lilly, 2008: 668). Gee (2000) contends that literacy understanding rests not purely on written and oral language, but also on the worlds of home and school, and as in Figure 1 above, the way in which that world is brought to learners. The worlds of home and school therefore need to harness the intricate ways that keep boys interested in literacy – and this incorporates reading, writing and oral literacy – as these are the cultural places where learning exists and meaning is constructed (Farris, Fuhler, Nelson & Werderich, 2009). Moreover, as the two lessons above have shown, there are subtle ways of enticing learners into wishing to engage in the literacy process.

Against this background, I wish to argue that literacy learning is not an automatic process, which happens as the child grows up, for there are ways of doing (Heath, 1983) that keeps children interested in reading literacy (as occurred in the class of teacher two above). I demonstrate that since it becomes more difficult to motivate boys to read as they progress through school, there are some boys who do not require urging. I illustrate that the attention to specific literacy practices, some of which seem unremarkable and unobtrusive, firstly in the home, and thereafter in the school, are what keeps boys reading independently.

1.6 The research questions
In the light of the discussion thus far on boys becoming detached from books and reading in their upper primary school years, I perceived the basis of this dilemma to be the literacy habits and practices at home and in school that may influence this. I therefore draw on literacy theory as formulated by Street (1995, 1998, 2001, 2003), Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (2000), and Gee (2000, 2010), to explain how literacy is the product of its context, and the development of literacy is implicit in the social, political and intellectual structure of society. Lev Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) concept of “mediation” is central to my understanding of the cultural development of the boys within their homes, and particularly relates to the level of potential that unfolds under parental guidance. Further theoretical tools that are utilised are derived from Pierre
Bourdieu’s concept of habitus that informs my analysis of the social interaction in the home and school enculturation process.

These theoretical lenses provide a means to investigate the influence of the informal literacy learning of boys in their homes amongst their family, and in the more formal domain of their school experience. The main aim of the study is to explore the literacy practices and events that mould the identity of a sample of eight boys attending the same school, and to understand their reading practices.

In order to address this aim, the main research question for this study is formulated in the following way:

How do home, family and school literacies influence sustained reading in boys?

Secondary questions to address the inter-relatedness of the issues are:

- What are boys’ in-and-out-of-school reading practices?
- What literacy practices and events in the home influence the boys to read?
- How do these practices influence boys’ reading?
- What formal and informal school literacy practices influence boys to read? How do these practices influence them?
- Why do some boys lose interest in reading as they reach the upper primary school stage?
- How can an understanding of home literacies contribute to school reading curricula?

1.7 Motivation for the study
Since literacy is an evolving process in which parents and children participate in a culture of discourse in their home, and the literacy co-construction continues into formal pedagogy, the literacy journey can be viewed as the cornerstone of learning. Hull and Schultz (2001) suggest that knowledge-making and learning are activities that
connect to learners’ cultures and backgrounds, that, in turn, guide further knowledge-building on already existing knowledge. With this in mind, the suggestion is that learners from aliterate homes are perceived to have a disadvantage over the learners from reading homes on school entry (Heath, 1982). Given the advantage that the particular boys in this study have over the majority of learners in local schools for whom reading material is not readily available, I conceptualise social and literacy interaction as being areas where literacy influence from parents and teachers causes the learners to behave in a specific way, and defines the way in which their attitude to reading literacy is formulated through specific practices. My reasoning, therefore, for placing my research in this particular socio-cultural milieu of boys from print-rich homes and a private school where access to books and libraries is relatively easy, is twofold: firstly, I have demonstrated (in section 1.5) the area of concern that exists worldwide for boys and their disassociation from books as they reach adolescence, while their female peers do not lose interest in reading (Cavazos-Kottke, 2005; Wilhelm, 2008). Because reading intersects with understanding and knowledge, it is a valued skill that plays a significant role in the educational armoury of both genders. Secondly, since the rules of talking and experiencing literacy vary within cultures, the study draws on boys from a similar socio-economic milieu. Given that the area of emergent literacy learning in the home is where the young child has learned to use the adult in helping him to make sense of the world, the school is the chosen environment, in this case a private boys’ school, for a similar literacy world to be pursued as the boy experiences at home. Thus the relevance of literacy both in the home and at school is significant in this study, and is the key focus in this research study; and in observing the way in which literacy is learnt, taught, and practised, the aim of the study is to draw attention to the kind of literacy to which the boys are exposed, and the extent to which they identify with it.

If I further justify my study beyond the gender divide in literacy, and beyond the home, I am drawn into the parallel cultures of education that exist in South African schools. Even nineteen years after the end of apartheid, the country has two education systems. Brahm Fleisch (2008) describes the first as the former white, Indian and small independent schools that are well-resourced systems producing the majority of
university entrants and graduates. The learners from this sector, being children of the elite, white-middle and new black middle-classes, are literate, possessing mathematics competences that are comparable to anywhere in the world. The second system, however, enrols the vast majority of poor and working-class children, which Fleisch describes as bringing their health, family and community difficulties with them into the classroom, the second primary school ‘system’ struggles to ameliorate young people’s deficits in institutions that are themselves less than adequate. In seven years of schooling, children in the second system do learn, but acquire a much more restricted set of knowledge and skills than children in the first system. They ‘read’, but mostly at very limited functional level; they ‘write’, but not with fluency or confidence. They can perform basic numeric operations but use inappropriately concrete techniques that limit application. (Fleisch, 2008: 2).

The type of education that takes place is interwoven with that of society, and Chisholm (2004) identifies the interests of unequal and competing social classes and races in South Africa as the critical issue after Apartheid. There is a distinct achievement gap between the two systems of school, and it seems discriminatory and dishonourable to compare them. It is therefore with this discrepancy in mind that the participants in the research could not be drawn from both. What happens in the classroom must be a reflection of what takes place in the home and in the culture in which it operates. I argue that, for the purposes of my study, one cannot compare a home where bedtime reading is the norm, to a home where illiteracy is, or in fact aliteracy, has become the norm. The subtle nuances of the enculturation of literacy are under scrutiny in my research, drawing on boys of a similar socio-economic background with similar opportunities. The childhood initiation into literacy is regarded as a “collaborative group activity” (Gregory & Williams, 2000: 11) rather than one between parent and boy only. It is within the “social worlds” (Dyson, 1993) of the home, the school and his peers that the boy finds his identity, and it is in these three domains that the study seeks to understand the boys’ reading practices, focusing specifically on boys who have come from the same backgrounds.

I am aware that similar backgrounds are difficult to define and determine, but I refer here to systems of unequal learning. Given the implications of previously disadvantaged learners, who bring their “community difficulties” with them into the classroom, I opted for boys from the “growing independent sector” (Fleisch, 2008: 2),
and more specifically from a private boys’ school in Johannesburg in order to provide the study with unbiased lenses in terms of the environment and the culture borne from it.

1.8 Framing the study

In exploring the relationship between emerging literacy practices of home, the formal pedagogy of school, and the loss of interest in reading by some boys in the upper primary school, I rely strongly on the works of Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1986) which provide the insight into the dual developmental phases of children: firstly, the line of natural development comprising the process of growth and maturation, and, secondly, the line of cultural development. The latter aspect relates to the separation of instinct and intellect, reflecting the influence that cultural experience exerts on a child. This is best understood through Vygotsky’s perception that the culture, to which the child is inured, stimulates higher mental processes in the individual. The experiences and the social relations that are part of daily practices for the child are converted into cognitive functions and deep reflection, which accounts for literacy learning. If the learned capacities are changed, as in adolescent years, it is done to rationalise the situation into a form that makes sense to the child. James Wertsch describes these processes as “self-generated stimulation” (1985: 25). They become the immediate causes of behaviour, which inform on how a group creates higher mental functions, or a peer group is able to talk individuals into a view such as reading-is-not-cool.

This type of rationalisation is also the way in which people bring their cultural knowledge to an activity. For me, and most pertinent to my thesis, reading and writing are part of local ways of living, and these practices are supported by talk that is determined by the situation and the time. Prinsloo and Breier (1996) reflect this notion by suggesting that literacy is not a single unitary phenomenon attached to education only. In what has become a classic framework for conceptualising literacy as social practice, literacy theorists such as Street (1995, 1998, 2001), Gee (1996, 2000, 2005, 2011), and Barton and Hamilton (1998) have argued that literacy practices are the
cultural ways in which written language is utilised and which people draw upon in their lives.

This means that boys come to school with their own histories of language use, literacy experiences, and how they utilise them. They bring their cultural traditions to negotiate their entry into the social sphere of the classroom. Dyson (1993) refers to these overlapping social worlds, in which children co-exist, as comprising their respective home communities, their official school world, and their unofficial peer world. Each world requires particular kinds of ways with words and ways of doing (Dyson, 1993). The peer world, which is the new social world created by the boys at school, embraces different cultural traditions that are brought in as the members engage in activities of communal interest such as their music, popular books, magazines and recreation technology. Literacy occasions take place in specific social contexts such as the interaction of boys on the playground, and are shaped by them as they feed off one another (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). This means that texts are thus an integral part of literacy events, and important as a focus in my study, since, not only the materials used, but also the means of transfer, the type of medium used, and the technology applied, how learners are taught, and how teachers and parents respond to them, are all part of the literacy process.

The home and classroom are therefore not isolated spaces, but areas filled with “cultural capital” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977: 71) that provides the format for characteristics drawn on by learners. The challenge is to understand relationships and events to be able to consider their impact. This is, for instance, demonstrated in research by Stein and Mamabolo (2005), Mostert and Wikan (2008), and Kajee (2011), which focuses on conceptions of literacy in classroom and home contexts of disadvantaged communities. Stein and Mamabolo (2005) visited the homes of socio-economically disadvantaged learners to understand their early literacy learning, while the study of Mostert and Wikan (2008) was focused on the socio-economic background and home language of early learners to ascertain how these factors affected school progress and performance. Kajee (2011), on the other hand, demonstrated the difficulties that immigrant households experienced when their children needed to embrace both the home and the schooled culture. These studies point to the source of
initial literacy learning as the home, and if this environment is deemed to be deficient in terms of academic success, one should question what literacy entails. The same type of literacy does not exist in all homes, and certainly not in the homes in which this research study has been conducted. The space and the place in which children experience literacy have a bearing on the kinds of learners and readers they become (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004). Since there is the perception that literacy is complex, multi-layered, and culturally bound, it is imperative that I locate the study in one school, drawing from similar home cultures and economic conditions.

1.9 Scope and contribution of the study
In this section I take an elucidative view on the importance of my study. The study is significant as it contributes to the knowledge of reading as a social practice, particularly in the South African home and school system. While the early socialisation and development of boys are by nature different to those of girls, and expectations in activities and behaviour are accepted as such, the treatment of the boys within the study is not necessarily different within their present structure since they are in a boys’ school, not, however, withstanding the fact that some of the teachers are female teachers who may treat boys differently to the way in which the male teachers (Skelton & Read, 2006).

In addition, the study will contribute to an understanding of the environment in which teachers and parents must scrutinise their respective inputs into the learners with the knowledge that a relationship between school and home is jointly constructed, and mutually beneficial. For Padak and Rasinski (2007) there was no doubt that early readers maintained a higher achievement over time, and that the root to the early reading lay in parents who spent time with their children, read to them, answered questions, and demonstrated to them that reading was an important source of relaxation and information.

Parents and teachers participating in this study can therefore benefit from a critical insight into their own habits, serving the purpose of providing knowledge to the
parents on literacy application in the homes that will prepare boys for school, and at
the same time providing a strategy for teacher development in this area. This will
serve as a framework for school and home collaboration in literacy practices, as well as
provide input into the reading curriculum not only at school entry level, but also at the
upper primary school level.

Finally, I consider the contribution conceptually to the field of home literacy and
possible influence on schooled literacy. In terms of methodology, the domain of
literacy and reading will benefit from a study in the field. The study has potential to
contribute to professional development and the management of educational change in
terms of adapting the approach to teaching boys by providing informed reading
opportunities for improving and sustaining an interest in reading among boys.

1.10 Structure of the thesis
In order to answer the research questions set out in this study, the thesis has been
arranged in eight chapters.

In Chapter 1 I address the background to the thesis in an attempt to outline my study
in providing a framework for the aim and research questions, the problem, the context,
the motivation for the study, and the scope of this research.

Chapter 2 is a theoretical framework that formulates a perspective on children’s
literary theory in terms of gender differences and the attitudes that develop from this.
The characteristics that define children’s literature is, in fact, that as a body of
literature, it belongs to both an adult and a child system, or put differently, an adult is
present at every stage. I will therefore examine the perspective of children’s literature
studies put forward by Peter Hunt (2006) as an ideologically and politically significant
source of literacy for learners. I examine the work of Biddulph (2008), Dobson (2001),
to conceptualise the impact of gender on literacy. In order to provide a framework for
the research, I examine boys’ reading culture as it relates to their attitude to books and the influence of their literate environment.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework of children’s literature practices by providing a perspective on literacy. I will draw on theorists such as Street (2001), Gee (2000), Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (2000), and The New London Group (1996) to examine literacy in practice, and the way in which boys draw from their literacy experiences that form part of their worlds. While this work is framed in a theory of literacy as social practice, it is also framed by Vygotsky’s claim that higher mental processes in the individual have their origin in social processes, and that from the outset the child develops within the atmosphere provided by his/her speaking environment (Rieber, 1997).

Chapter 4 addresses the design approach and methodology that underpins this study. In this chapter I examine the relationship between my research design and the strategies employed in developing this study. I highlight my methodological approach to the research, and the epistemology that determined my theoretical framework. In this chapter I also consider the implications of my design as a qualitative case study, discussing the type of semi-structured interviews with parents, boys and teachers, my observations of the functioning in class and at home, and the context of the interviews. The setting, both at school and home, is described to make sense of the milieu in which the research has been conducted.

Chapter 5 is titled “Each boy’s story” and serves to outline the locale in which the research is conducted. In this chapter I seek to describe my observations within the eight homes discussed in this case study. I introduce the eight participants, namely Leon, Brian, Mark, Sean, Kevin, Barry, William and Simon, by locating them in their home environment. The description serves to situate each boy in his specific home literacy domain, and forms part of the data analysis of each boy’s enculturation into reading literacy.
Chapter 6 is an extension of Chapter 5, being titled “The boys in their homes”. This chapter describes the data gathered in the home milieu from observation and interviewing parents and boys, and exploring the boys’ out-of-school practices. Firstly, I will show that the intense focus on emergent learning of language, acquiring linguistic knowledge, the strict routine of bedtime stories, book buying and home reading by parents, reflect the literacy beliefs, habits and need for interaction that the families have constructed in their home domain. These practices echo Street’s (2003: 77 – 78) premise in the ideological model that literacy is a social practice embedded in knowledge, and the way in which people address reading and writing. I will, secondly, examine the literacy practices and events in the home that influence the boys to read. My intention is to show that the parental and family involvement and guidance form an integral part of the boys’ literacy enculturation.

Chapter 7 is titled “The school and the boy”. In this chapter I discuss the data gathered in the formal school day as experienced by the boys. The analysis is based on interviews with teachers, and observation in various areas of the school such as the classrooms, library and formal and informal reading periods. I argue that the learners’ attitude to classroom literacy learning is contingent on the teachers’ dissemination of the subject material, and their means of interaction with the learners while doing so. The first section in this chapter, therefore, explores the in-school reading practices, while the second section examines the way in which the literacy practices in this formal environment of the school influence the boys’ reading, focusing on goal-directed strategies and involvement by teachers in enticing active participation by learners. I will also concentrate on the reasons for the loss of interest that some boys experience, whereas others react keenly to challenges and incentives, while the final section of this chapter will address the importance of understanding the type of literacy with which a child enters school.

Chapter 8 focuses on the implications of this study on home and school literacy learning. Particular attention is given to the research questions that formed the basis of this study as I reflect on the significance of the findings from both the literature and the data. I deliberate on a critical approach in literacy engagement by parents and
teachers in understanding what subtle literacy practices represent encouragement in reading literacy, not only in practice, but also as a recommendation for further research.

1.11 Conclusion
In this study the aim is to gain knowledge about the notion that boys in their teens lose interest in reading when, in fact, they used to be readers at a younger age. The study takes the perspective that the reading skills learnt in school are not separable from the literacy teaching in a home situation, and that both the home and the school provide the boy with an environment in which specific literacy practices bring the culture of reading to the boy. The emphasis in this study is therefore particularly on the boy, as research attests to the fact that there is a significant gender gap in literacy, and underachievement by boys in international literacy tests is of great concern. In this analysis I argue that there are certain home and school literacy practices that play a role in engendering a mode of sustained reading, while the majority of boys continue to read less and less in their adolescent years.

The following chapter will provide a conceptual framework for the study of children’s literary theory that underpins this study. Therefore the prevalence of boys behaving differently in their literacy education is recorded. I will examine the perspective of children’s literature studies put forward by Peter Hunt (2006) as an ideologically and politically significant source of literacy for learners. I examine the work of Biddulph (2008), Dobson (2001), Gurian and Ballew (2003), Levine (2002), Smith and Wilhelm (2002) and Newkirk (2002) to conceptualise the impact of gender on literacy. In order to provide a framework for the research, I examine boys’ reading culture as it relates to their attitude to books and the influence of their literate environment.
CHAPTER TWO
BOYS AND LITERACY

"Books are like truth serum – if you don’t read, you can’t figure out what’s real."

Freak the Mighty by R. Philbrick (1993: 19)

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the focus of this thesis in which home, family and school literacies are discussed in terms of how they influence boys’ reading habits. I demonstrated that the South African educational context deprives many learners of the type of literacy exposure that orients them towards success in school literacy and beyond. Since home and school literacy activity for children are situated in social practices (Barton, 2007; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1998, 2001), and literacy practices provide the link between reading and writing and the social structures in which they take place, the socio-economic conditions in which a boy finds himself, are critical determinants of the literate person that comes from a particular milieu. The key is that the individual child is encultured in home literacy and brings to school his or her own personal histories of literacy experiences. I consider this perspective and draw on literary theory to explain how in-and-out-of-school reading practices influence reading habits.

This chapter serves to highlight the theoretical context of children’s literature that is relevant to my research. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I begin by placing literacy acquisition in the context of the South African milieu that has rendered an historical legacy of ignorance, deprivation and desperation for a large portion of the population through non-exposure, and a deeply committed home literacy base for advantaged sections of the population (Bloch, 2009; Fleisch, 2008; Fleisch & Shindler, 2009). The second section focuses on the trends that are set in the homes and continued into schools that have a similar culture to the one experienced at home. Home-school congruence has been a matter of great concern
to researchers (Lawson, 2000; Mullan, 2010; McCarthy, Brennan & Vecchiarello, 2011) as home literacy plays a significant role in developing reading and establishing a view beyond the words in the text. Parents are therefore their children’s first teachers (Heath, 1983; Comber, 2002; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Mullan, 2010), and the bedtime stories and incidental literacy lessons from the adults around the home not only prepare the child for the more formal domain of the school, but also provide the child with opportunities to explore language. The third section looks at emergent language acquisition and the connections that are made through literacy practices in everyday life. In the final section, I discuss approaches to adolescence when a change in attitude to literacy occurs. I will argue that during this developmental phase the differences in gender, gendered reading, and attitude evolve, leading to disengagement in the reading process by the adolescent boy, and assertiveness in terms of his likes and dislikes in literacy choices (Wilhelm, 2008; Newkirk, 2002; Kirby et al., 2011).

2.2.1 A historical perspective or long-lasting legacy

Speech comes first, words heard; reading follows. It is almost an axiom: You cannot begin to read what you have not heard said. Neglect of this preparatory relationship between child and language, child and book, means that by the age of five, a child is already in need of remedial teaching. The effect is just the same on the child’s mental and imaginative growth as the lack of essential ingredient in his/her diet would be on his/her physical growth (Chambers, 1979: 41 - 42).

The sentiment expressed in the excerpt from over thirty years ago, reflects the concern about keeping children reading, which in fact, forms part of the disquiet concerning the same subject in teaching today. One may well comment on the fibre of modern society when comparing it to that of thirty years ago, but no matter what has developed technologically, academically, scientifically, and sociologically, when one gauges the literacy and numeracy levels in education, reading lies at its core. I argued in Chapter 1 that homes and classrooms are cultural spaces in which the practices of knowledge and language are rooted, and is the argument made by Street (2001). These domains play a key role in perceptions of culture and reproduction of ideologies experienced. Vygotsky claimed, for instance, that the cultural development of each child is through experience and through the guidance of adults.
or more capable peers (1978; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994). If these influences and cultural discourses around knowledge literacy are absent, then the attitudes towards these activities are not propagated. Since Vygotsky argued that an attitude to any action relied on exposure to certain forms of behaviour, it means that there exists "an inherent relationship between the external and the internal activity" (Wertsch, 1985: 63). It also means that attitude is the product or the reproduction of what is experienced in education or in the home, which is a key point of interest in a study of literacy enculturation. My argument is that children reproduce literacy learnt in the home, and part of that learning is developing the attitude towards a particular literacy from home. The learning starts with what and why questions, to reasoning and understanding sequencing through oral or bedtime stories in the home that form part of a familiar literacy pattern. This similar, but familiar patterning is continued in the school, making school-success easier to attain (Heath, 1982). School literacy, in this sense, can be described as contingent upon home literacy, and if the type of home literacy is a prerequisite of school attainment, learning may become difficult if it does not take place. It is therefore significant (as I have mentioned in Chapter 1) that the ongoing benchmarking internationally, that determines the literacy/numeracy standards from country to country, exposes South Africa as having basic literacy levels that are far from satisfactory.

Fleisch (2008) expresses his deep concern about children in South African schools that have received little systematic instruction in reading, and who have read and written very little. Similarly Graeme Bloch (2009) stresses the “toxic mix” of factors locally that have led to the state of disaster in the schools, while the South African political arena, resulting from apartheid, has to carry much of the blame, and, it must be said, that the underlying reasons are historical and deeply sociological (Soudien, 2004; Makubalo, 2007). It is thus not surprising that Bloch expresses his view in this way: “Undoubtedly, the past has influenced the present. The strands laid by Bantu Education – of bad mass schooling, poor teaching and conflicted classrooms – have pervaded much of the present terrain. Apartheid left a legacy of backlogs, structural poverty and inequalities. But there are key areas where human agency can make a difference” (2009: 88). The major provision of the Bantu Education Act Number 47 of
1953 was to enforce racially separated educational environments. The separation was not only racial, but also took the form of the delivery of substandard education, hazardous facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and poorly trained and underpaid teachers. The Act of 1953 was repealed in 1979, and became unconstitutional only in 1994 by means of the Interim Constitution, yet the inequalities have had a long lasting legacy on education in South Africa.

Even though much has changed in providing equal education for all learners, much has remained the same. Blame may be partially placed on the Department of Education that verbalises the ideology to effect change, but has no serious intention of improving existing conditions. These include schools built by the communities themselves (made of mud), poor lighting, little or no electricity, bad ablution systems - areas, which Bloch (2009) points out, are not very inviting places for education, and are not places where teachers or pupils wish to spend their time. Fleisch (2008) corroborates this by linking aspects of children’s lives and classroom experience to low achievement, and Reddy (2005), Rose (2006) and Soudien (2004) identify poverty, lack of resources, poor learning culture, poor language proficiency, and low teacher qualifications as factors contributing to low scores. Conceptually, reading and writing and mathematics, the areas that are measured in benchmarking, cannot be said to be units that are easily definable, and are competencies that are produced by teachers in "multiple overlapping spaces, with diverse forces determining their achievement and meaning" (Fleisch, 2008: viii). Bantu Education, as it was known in South Africa during the apartheid era, is at the root of the current struggle to achieve, and the teachers, who themselves were on the receiving end of substandard education, cannot be expected to prepare the next generation of sophisticated workers, and provide them with the technological expertise for which they do not possess the skill (Soudien, 1998b, 2004; Makubalo, 2007).
2.2.2 The product of the literacy legacy

I argue in this section that the most telling evidence of the inferiority of Bantu Education before 1994 is the literacy legacy that manifested itself not only in the schools and universities, but also in the homes. Since studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between home literacy and school achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Prinsloo & Stein, 2004), the reality of academic underachievement in South Africa is the result of its political history. The Monitoring Learning Achievement study in 1999, which was designed by UNICEF and UNESCO, took examples of Grade 4 learners in a number of countries, including many in Africa. South Africa was bottom in numeracy, with a score of 39% compared to Tunisia with 60% and Mauritius with 59%. Zambia, Uganda, Botswana, Niger and Mali all did considerably better than South Africa. On literacy, with a score of 48% (Tunisia 78%, Mauritius 61%), South Africa marginally outperformed Zambia, Niger and Malawi. A further study done in South Africa was the Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2006, administered by a University of Pretoria team. South African students were a full year older than those in the other countries tested, yet they failed to perform at an achievable level. With this in mind, it is therefore, not surprising that many black students in South Africa lack the basic academic and financial base to achieve academic success (Mji & Makgato, 2006; Makubalo, 2007: Fleisch, 2008; Bloch, 2009; Reddy, 2005).

Even though the demographics of university attendance have shifted dramatically since apartheid, showing a decrease from 37% white students in 1995 to a current 30%, another disturbing factor has come to the fore. Half of all students drop out of university by their third year, and black students fare the worst, with some institutions having dropout rates of up to 80% (Bloch, 2009). The educational dream-turned-to-nightmare must touch many lives of pupils, students and their teachers, also demonstrating that so many factors influence education, not only in basic literacy, but also in further and higher education (Breier & Mabizela, 2008). My reasoning, therefore, in emphasising the large numbers of learners in South Africa that lack areas of literacy knowledge which influences their lives, is to underpin my
decision to study boys’ reading, since the concerns expressed above show the influence of aliteracy on all socio-economic groups. Home and school literacy influence disadvantaged and privileged learners, all races, and both genders, of which boys’ reading literacy forms a subgroup. Even though there are many facets to underachievement, loss of interest in reading for some boys may withhold those opportunities gained by knowledge through this process.

A framework that can serve as a model for changing the present dilemma of substandard reading literacy skills is offered by Martin Carnoy (2008) from Stanford University who identifies three levels that are conceptually and practically separate, but that have high impact on schooling. The first is the level where the learning takes place – the classroom – in which the teacher faces the learner in an educational relationship, ensuring that the educational needs of the child are appropriately met. He identifies the second level of concern as being the structures around the classroom. This is the network from the management efficiency of the principal, the districts, and provincial and national departments. This would also include pre- and in-service training of the teachers, so that they may arrive in class in the best state to teach effectively. The third level is societal, implying the interest by society in general in what happens at schools. It is also the level in which parents are involved in pulling together and seeing that schools are functioning within acceptable standards.

All three of these levels focus on the educational environment of the school; yet, I would argue that the third level could be applied to early education in the home, since home-school congruence is crucial to academic achievement. I suggest that this is an essential strand in the literacy component of every child, for the lack of education affects parents’ understanding of home literacy. Even though poverty is not a definitive cause of illiteracy or aliteracy, circumstances may preclude parents from spending time with their children, or having the resources for enriching their children on a literary level. My study focuses on reading, yet I suggest that the root to literacy development lies within the home milieu. Heath (1983) defines literacy learning as the culture that children learn as they grow up, which becomes the way in which they take from their environment what makes meaning for them. One may
well question whether learning to read is solely part of formal education, or if it is the way that parents provide an example for their children through modelling and instruction in everyday events and occasions – a process which forms part of my argument in Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis.

2.3.1 Cultural capital brought from home

I argue in this study that literacy achievement by a child can be clearly linked to positive literacy exposure on the part of parents and teachers. Empirical research shows that there is strong association between parents’ and young people’s reading in households where parents are observed to read for more than thirty minutes per day, and, moreover, showing that family involvement in literacy is a powerful influence on children’s achievement in school (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Mullan, 2010; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). In an idea book issued for parents and teachers by the United States Department of Education, the following is cited:

> When families are involved in their children’s education, children earn higher grades and receive higher scores on tests, attend school more regularly, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors, graduate from high school at higher rates, and are more likely to enroll in higher education than students with less involved families (Funkhouser, Gonzales & Moles, 1994).

This book was based on case studies of 20 successful education programmes in the USA focusing especially on low-income families and their children. Mullan (2010) corroborates this view by stressing the key role that parents play in assisting children to learn to read through their own reading behaviour. In section 2.2.2 above I argued that many learners lack the basic academic and financial base for achievement of academic success in South Africa. Carnoy (2008) noted, as Mullan (2010) and Funkhouser et al. (1994) likewise did, that the link between home/society/school, such as parents continually engaging in certain literacy activities with and around children, is recognised as an important influence in children’s future literacy lives.

This notion is clearly reflected in research done by Bernstein (1971), who, as an educator, was interested in explaining the poor performance of working-class students in language-based subjects. In Bernstein’s theory he makes a direct correlation between social class and language usage, and he suggests that the way
language is used within a particular social class affects the way people assign meaning to the things about which they are speaking. He states that people learn their place in the world through the language codes that they use, which at the same time symbolises their social identity (Bernstein, 1971). The two types of language codes that Bernstein describes, are the elaborated code and the restricted code. Within the restricted code, speakers draw on background knowledge and shared understanding, and can be said to be an insider’s language. Conversely, the elaborated code works well when more thorough explanation is required. Elaborated code is full of detail, while restricted code is shorter and more condensed, requiring background information. Bernstein (1971) emphasises that one code is not better than the other, yet society may place different values on the order of the coding systems. The location in which a specific code is learnt, is the home environment of parents, family and friends. The way children speak and are spoken to, help to shape them into the people they become, and influences the class to which they belong. In this way the home can be viewed as the location of culture in which the social and political aspects of the child’s identity is formed (Bhabha, 1994). If children are the products of integrated social processes, the focus in terms of learning to communicate, is, therefore, not only on differences between social groups, but also on social factors that may account for behavioural variations within one class, which is the basis for this case study in the domain of high-income families where Bernstein’s (1971) elaborated code is the accepted means of communication.

My focus in this study is, therefore, not only on the way that parents influence language learning, but also the way literacy is lived and the type of literacy that is taught in the home during various literacy events. Literacy events are commonly assumed to be those in which written language forms an integral part, and plays a role in family interactions and participation (Heath, 1983; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). These would include bedtime stories, reading incidental texts such as pamphlets, cereal boxes, television programmes and advertisements, and instructions for games and toys. These literacy events function as rules handed to children by the adults during ongoing literacy practices that act as a socialising mechanism into the
community’s specific way of doing. Implicit in my reasoning that home literacy is a social activity, informed by the culture of the home and society, is that a parent or teacher who has a particular ideology, instigates and drives the process, and each action is underwritten by a rule or reasoning of logic. Bourdieu (1991) supports this notion when he insists that structure and action are necessary components of social life, and these act as a guideline for participants to define themselves through them. Bourdieu’s explanation of habitus further expounds this orientating activity by explaining that the learned habits are acquired through repetition. For people to live in a specific social environment, they require the kind of orientation and guidelines to the action and awareness that habitus provides. In the field of home literacy and education, the child picks up on the rules of the game, which Gee (2011) suggests is the natural way in which humans learn by repetitive actions to create their daily practices. At-home literacy, and the way it is achieved, may make it easier to carry forward and adapt to new fields. Margaret Meek (1982) argues that this process becomes part of the child who is being encouraged by those who give the activity a social setting and group support. She links the social setting directly to reading, by saying that many “things connected with reading are part of a wider pattern of behaviour linked to making literacy a meaningful state” (1982: 161).

The notion of patterning implies repetitive actions that are established over a period of time, which is the key to learning to read (Mullan, 2010). Heath explains the reading process as one in which one makes sense from books and relating their contents to knowledge about the real world, and this, she feels, is as much “part of learned behavior as are ways of eating, sitting, playing games, and building houses” (1982: 49). This urges me to say that the home-adult-child relationship is what is taken to school, and the essence of this can be related to later achievement at school (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004). In Heath’s seminal literacy research in three South-eastern United States communities, she studied patterns of language use associated with books. The one community, Maintown, represented mainstream, middle-class school-orientated culture, while Roadville was a white mill community of Appalachian origin, and the third one, Trackton, was a black mill community of recent rural origin (1982). The three communities had vastly differing patterns of language use, and the
comparative study demonstrated the inadequacies prevalent in the oral and literate traditions, showing the differences in the three patterns of adjustment to school. What this demonstrates is that it is not possible to expect high outcomes from cultural environments that provide little literacy preparation for a schooling system that expects high levels of literacy on entry (Bharuthram, 2006; Pretorius, 2000; Pretorius & Machet, 2004). Even though Bharuthram’s research at the Durban University of Technology was in higher education, it revealed that a major obstacle to students’ success was their limited reading ability (2006). Both Heath (1982) and Bharuthram (2006) found that very little emphasis was placed on reading in the homes of a group of participants whose background could be described as traditionally oral. Story telling was a more common form of interaction, a situation that continued as they entered school since their lower socio-economic condition precluded the purchasing of reading material. Arguably, with no prior literacy modelling or literacy learning in the homes, the need in these children for reading in the school becomes less important, and the motivation to engage in reading is lost. The children from this group were not given the means to develop critical engagement with texts, and as Ralfe (2011) demonstrated in her research within a Grade 9 class at a KwaZulu Natal school, that a critical literacy approach to literacy teaching is difficult to implement if children have weak reading skills and linguistic awareness. The home space, the place, and its culture therefore influence reading practices, and the home in which books and reading are not valued, few of the children read for pleasure, or engage deeply with texts.

Comber (2002) drew on one hundred homes in Australia in her research on the influence of early literacy and what children bring to school. Her belief too, was that what a child brings from home, determines the success and failure during the first months of school. She maintains that children’s home and family life does not simply disappear when they begin schooling, and that the extent to which children take up what teachers make available, is linked to the plethora of practices and knowledge that children already possess. Literacy practices, with which children become familiar, do not exist in a cultural void, and these remain inseparable from individual and social activities (Hilton, 1994; Arnold, 1994; Cassano, Paratore & Schickedanz,
Therefore, the space and the place in which a child grows up, define the way in which a child sees his/her world. The child’s world is perceived according to the way that he/she has learned to think about society and his/her place within this world (Lahire, 2003). The space and place are basic components of the location where a child comes to acquire a particular identity, whilst the identity is further influenced by parents and teachers who orient children towards certain values, language, and actions that have implications for the kind of society and people that these behaviours will produce (Bhabha, 1994; Bachelard, 1994).

2.3.2 Reading logic starts early

Since literacy practices exist only within social activities, one becomes aware that children learn certain beliefs, customs, skills and mores in their early enculturation experiences, and one of these essential habits is bedtime story-telling that helps the setting of patterns of behaviour that occur in Heath’s (1983) Mantown children and adults. Bearne, Styles and Watson (1994) contend that it is within this cossetting atmosphere of the bedtime stories at home that the child becomes attached to books, and that most learning in the majority of settings is a communal activity, and a sharing of the culture. Meek speaks of the “music of the page” (in Bearne et al., 1994: 82), which is a helpful way of understanding how a child becomes a satisfied reader. This is the significant moment at which any child takes on literacy and makes a connection between what the parent reads and how the text speaks to the child. Watson (1994) asserts that these reading moments represent the seeds of future knowledge, of narrative and of future possibilities during which time the child develops an ear for the nuances of language, whilst Bearne et al. (1996) strengthen this contention by stating that the cadences and rhythms of home narratives are the essential, but powerful starting points of the reading process. These views highlight the perceptions of the power of reading with a parent, yet I argue that it is not only the activity of reading, but also exposure to the culture expected in the home, and the patterns of expectation, discipline and discourse around the process that form part of that family practice.
As literary theorists, Watson (1994) and Bearne (1994), hone in on the love of reading rather than the goal of knowledge concerned with reading, since it is the love of reading that ties a child to his/her books, as the child would not pursue it if he/she did not enjoy it. Fitzgerald (1999) thus holds that for children to respond to literature is a very important part of the reading process, yet skills aid understanding which, in turn, leads to enjoyment. These are significant facets of literary theory that demonstrate how literacy education builds the reader up step by step. The goal of knowledge from reading to which Watson and Bearne (1994) allude, however, can only result from older readers who have not lost interest in books, and have ultimately realised what knowledge has been gained from sustained reading.

2.3.3 Enjoyment of books

Enjoyment emanates from the child listening to a story, and since I have argued the significance of the adult bringing a culture of reading to the child, I will now look at the reading process from the eyes of the child. If text exposure has taught the child how to read, the notion may be construed as a generalisation, since not all children become competent readers or writers, or wish to take up a book without being urged to do so. Therefore, despite the knowledge that particular skills and abilities acquired in early childhood years influence both enjoyment of, or proficiency in, literacy learning (Cassano et al., 2011; Kirby et al., 2011), the road to reading pleasure is not trodden by all children. Even though the following recommendations by Cassano et al. (2011) from research findings are most worthwhile and need to be noted, they are not overwhelmingly successful as has been evident in my own classroom experience, yet they certainly work for some children. These include:

- the way that parents, family, friends and teachers use language matters greatly, and that lots of talk is important using sophisticated words, and focus on topics that build children’s conceptual knowledge;
- the way to ensure that these skills are in place is to focus on the types of books that parents and teachers share with the children, and that expository texts that involve more talking, are linguistically more enriching for the child;
- the ways that parents and teachers share books matter since children are more likely to acquire vocabulary knowledge from shared reading, discussions and interaction; and
- the opportunity to develop phonological awareness matters, since rhyming, games and activities around sounds support the development of children’s phonological awareness.

These are measures that effectively bring the written word to the child, yet even with these in place, some children still do not engage willingly in reading. This observation prompts Barton (1994: 24) to suggest that what is evident from studies is "a recognition of the complexity of the idea of literacy and the fact that much of our understanding of it is not obvious". The complexity of this process will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 in order to provide clearer comprehension of the way in which the boys take on literacy in the various domains.

2.4.1 Some are readers; some are not

Children who grow up in a book-reading community, are expected to realise the significance of reading, and are, furthermore, expected to continue the culture learnt from home. Meek (1982: 150) commented that at about the “age of eleven, children’s reading skills and their tastes in reading matter are at their most diversified and individual”. Meek spent much time asking children of this age why they loved reading and what made it easy for them. Most significant about these answers was that they relate to their early pleasure of books, of “being taken out of yourself” or “being in the book as a kind of invisible watcher” (1982: 152). Through reading, whether it is in listening to reading, or the process of reading itself, the reader grows to understand characters as villains or friends, the milieu, the tone of the author, real versus surreal situations, humorous and serious, and these are the subtleties that cannot be taught purely in class.

It is often pointed out that parents are their children’s first teachers (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Dooley, 2010; Padak & Rasinski, 2007; Paratore & Dougherty, 2011; Kirby et al., 2011), and that children whose families encourage at-home literacy, have
higher phonemic awareness and decoding skills (Burgess, in Padak & Rasinski, 2007), and have consistently higher reading achievement in higher classes (Cooter, Marrin & Mills-House, 1999), yet Peter Hunt (2006) stresses that the child is an inestimably varied concept from house to house, and from day to day, and it is thus this interwoven network in which the child subsists, that underpins my study.

It may be argued that children’s reading ages determine what they read, and that most children pick up anything that interests them, if and when they have the time. This may be so, but as shown in Chapter 1, reading lies at the root of education and forms the basis of the development into abstract worlds and knowledge. Without this skill, there is a gap. Peter Hunt (2006) consistently emphasises, or even belabours, the importance of children’s literature as a body of texts, and that it is immensely influential across much of the world – “fundamental to functional and socio-cultural literacy; it is important commercially and creatively; it is inevitably complex and ideologically and politically potent and it is the source of possibly the most formative and satisfying literary experiences in the lives of vast numbers of people” (2006: 1). An academic discipline has become established in children’s literature as a result of its international and cross-cultural nature, thereby implying its importance, whilst at the same time showing that certain aspects of childhood and story-telling are natural, and common throughout the world.

The universality of story-telling to children of all races and all cultures, and the advantages (and joy) gained by the recipients, give literacy a value about which much is written, debated and even theorised. There is not, however, general agreement that a theory of children’s literature is necessary, since writing for children is regarded by society as a childish occupation (Aiken, 2006; Lewis as cited in Hunt, 2006), and writing for children is looked down upon as an inferior literacy to adult books. Yet, just as the media toys make an inordinate fortune for the film companies, so do children’s books. One only needs to refer to the Harry Potter (J.K. Rowlings), and the Cherub (Robert Muchamore) series successes, and writers such as Charlie Higson, Roald Dahl, Eoin Colfer, Anthony Horowitz, Paul Jennings, Rick Riordan, Jeremy Strong, Michael Morpurgo (to name but a few) who are revered by the
contemporary child and their parents. There are thus an increasing number of books available, reviews on these, and research into, and journals on reading, to realise that it is not a genre that can be ignored.

As far back as 1979 Aidan Chambers noticed that children and their parents required greater skills as speakers, readers and writers than they had ever done before in order to live their normal lives, and people were not prepared to accept a minimum functional ability to apply these skills. The standards expected from schools and the teachers have, therefore, risen. Thus, I need to return to the parents as the child’s first teacher, since there is general consensus that the reading child depends on the reading adult (Chambers, 1979; Heath, 1983; Meek, 1982; Comber, 2000; Dombey, 1992; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Hunt, 2006; Mullan, 2010).

2.4.2 Is early literacy mainly language-related?

If there is an understanding that the adult at home has contributed to the child’s literacy world in preschool years, there is also an expectation on the part of the adult teacher at school that, on entry, the child possesses certain competences on which the formal school system can build. Teachers recognise that there are certain achievements that the child brings to school, since the child arrives at school possessing many literacies (Watson, 1994). The term, literacies, as used by Watson, is in my opinion giving recognition to the individual uniqueness of each child’s learning style, and the plethora of literacy strands that feed into individual literacy. The importance of oral language for literacy learning, for instance, is significant, but other areas of preschool learning are relevant to the process, and each child does so in his/her own manner (for further discussion on literacy theory, please refer to Chapter 3).

The specific experiences that children have prior to school may well affect their development in a school situation (Clay, 1991; Heath, 1982; Gregory et al., 2004). Children learn that they can use an adult to help them make sense of their world, and in order to do so, they constantly negotiate with the adult to find out where the
sense lies. This communication allows them to construct a body of knowledge of their mother tongue that they are able to utilise by the time they enter school, and they will learn how to build further on this language base. Progress in school is, therefore, incumbent upon preschool learning (Heath, 1983; Comber, 2000; Meek, 1982; Dooley, 2010) and is vital to progress in reading.

Victor Watson (1994) is of the opinion that if one thinks about children and their reading, one has to think about the language one uses. Language stems from verbal communication, which leads to an ever-increasing vocabulary and a grasp of the articulation of sounds. The more the child practises with an adult, the more mature his/her language will be, and since children love talking about themselves, their toys, their homes, the family and their pets, the conversation allows them to engage in things they know about, providing them with opportunities to experiment with ways of expressing themselves (Clay, 1991). In this regard, the work of Catherine Snow (2002) has been influential, particularly as much of her work deals with comprehension. She suggests that early childhood literary experiences should be such that they prepare the child for the reading instruction they receive on entering school. Her research shows that poor comprehension affects test outcomes and is related to the consequences associated with this later. She further proposes that good comprehension is built on successful initial reading instruction both at home and in school (Snow, 2002: xvi; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). Comprehension does not flow from reading only, but is the product of a general family discourse. Snow and Beals (2006) argue that participation in dinner table conversations grants children the opportunity to use vocabulary, to practise telling stories, to explain, and to acquire general knowledge. This family discourse takes place within the milieu in which the parents guide their children to talk in culturally appropriate ways, as demonstrated by Bernstein (1971) in his language development theory, and these ways are what they carry with them socially and into their school.

For this reason it is not surprising that children who have not had the opportunity to be as active in exploring what they can do with language, should have more difficulty with reading than other children do (Heath, 1983; Comber, 2000; Clay, 1991; Galda &
Since reading is a language activity, I then argue that non-exposure can impinge on usage and application, since written language applies grammar, and without this as a basis, even common sentence structures used in storybooks can elude the reader. Wray and Medwell (1991) itemise a number of concepts that a child requires to relate to print: these include the knowledge that print carries a message, they include being able to distinguish between the functioning of letters, punctuation and words, and being aware of directional rules of reading from left to right, and knowing which is the front of the book. Texts to which the child is exposed become increasingly longer as they progress beyond the one-word-per-page stage, and the child forms connections between words and illustrations, adding a further dimension to language learning, enabling the child to start anticipating what may happen next in a story. This process has often been referred to as the period of “emerging literacy” (Dooley, 2010; Strickland & Morrow, 2000) and is vital to every child since it allows him/her to experience language, and build onto this experience in layers. The environment in which this emerging literacy develops plays an important role, and is therefore relevant to the South African context for many children who are reared in homes where reading literacy does not play a role (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004).

Evidence of this can be found in research done in home literacy practices and in early literacy classrooms in South Africa by Stein and Mamabolo (2005), who did case study research in a semi-urban school in which the teacher went into homes to assess the ways in which learners acquired literacy in early years, and realising the poverty, started a vegetable garden to feed the malnourished students. Prinsloo and Stein (2004) studied teacher pedagogy in early literacy classroom learning by investigating the nature of children’s early encounters with literacy and the implications of these encounters on their later development as readers and writers, while Dixon (2011), researched two preschool and three early primary school classrooms to study the type of literacy that is produced in the disciplined milieu of the school. All these studies indicate a similar concern for early literacy learning that is perceived to be the pivot of development for academic literacy to be successfully employed. For purposes of my research, I regard the home as the root of literacy evolvement, and the site where I will start to investigate the way that the boys in my case study learn their version of literacy.
Since one facet of this thesis is located in home literacy, the concept of emergent literacy is important in understanding how print literacy plays a role in preparing the child for formal school. Wray and Medwell (1991: 65) state that the majority of young children who grow up in literate societies, pick up a great deal of literate behaviour from early in their lives, and this creates an awareness of print and language structures in the children. Dooley (2010) regards emergent literacy as the beginning behaviours and ideas that develop a person’s literacy package, and thus maintains that people gradually interact with texts through story books, songs, computer games, developing knowledge of how to comprehend in ways that are necessary for comprehension development (Snow, 2002). The incidental skills at play include auditory discrimination that provides the child with a perception of sounds, rhymes, and language games, while visual learning aids the child in analysing two-dimensional space, recognising detail and ways to remember them, and assigning meaning to observations in some other way (Clay, 2000). The existing knowledge that is built up, and particularly reinforced by the adults in the home, creates the awareness that reading is a social act (Alexander & Fox, 2011), which finds resonance in, and is influenced by, sociocultural theories of human learning and development (Wertsch, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978). The work of Vygotsky provides a way of thinking about the type of home and school literacy that children receive, which is a notion relevant to my thesis.

2.4.3 Vygotsky and early social interaction

Lev Vygotsky (1978), in his capacity as a social theorist and psychologist, claimed that higher mental processes in each individual have their origin in social interaction, and that, from the outset, the child develops within the atmosphere “provided by a speaking environment” (Rieber, 1997: 125); this being the process of emergent literacy in the home milieu. Vygotsky believed that it is children’s early experiences with literacy in daily activities that are seen to give rise to the intellectual processes of writing and reading and comprehension; a notion which at the same time is reflected in literacy theory as a practice (Street, 2003; Gee, 2000). Vygotsky claims
that there are two lines of development: firstly, the line of natural development which entails growth and maturation, while the second line encompasses cultural development. He regarded speech as the most important cultural instrument - that through gradually learning to speak, a child is aided in utilising the cultural means presented to him/her.

Gee (2005) refers to patterning in these cultural activities as a way of learning the meaning entrenched in an activity, a word, or an idea or value. Vygotsky interpreted the nature of meaning that is placed in sign systems such as a language, as being embedded in the culture attached to it, and this is learnt through repetitive use, or Gee’s patterning of literacy practices (2005). The learning is not constant, since it changes during the child’s development through interaction with parents, family and peers into higher mental functions, enabling the child to reflect and attain the logical thinking that communication and collaboration provide. The logical thinking thus derives from the child’s social life. The adult plays a significantly overwhelming role in this process by mediating linguistic and literary teaching. Vygotsky believed that without adult regulation, the child would speak gibberish. It is, therefore, within Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development that the child is guided to develop potential, and the guidance can only be through an adult or a more capable peer (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1997). Vygotsky regarded the role of dialogue and discourse as a precursor to inner speech, and for him the key issue during development is the relationship between speech and thought. This points to the interaction between adult and child, or parent and son/daughter, that guides the process of single-word communications, to two-word phrases, to simple sentences and beyond. The vocal speech thus begins with associations that are highly context-dependent, since speech cannot be comprehended without knowing the context in which it is uttered. Only gradually does the child’s “meaning come to be more or less directly mappable on his actual utterance” (Rieber & Carton, 1987: 11). Vygotsky concluded that if language operated in this way, the child’s work on a word is not finished when its meaning is learned, and he/she is dependent on guidance in learning the pragmatics of language – the forms and functions and its use. This is the time that the development of higher mental functions allows the child to reflect on
his/her own language and thought, which is a progression from outside in, with dialogue being an important part of the process (Vygotsky, 1978). This process mirrors the literacy evolution in the home, and reveals how intrinsically involved parents ought to be in creating a meaningful literacy lifeworld for the child.

The underlying theme that underpins Vygotsky’s complex theory as it relates to my thesis, is thus the central role of language that is determined and shaped by his second theme, which is the influence of the culture within which the language evolves. Children generate conceptual skills by imitating and participating in the patterned activities that their elders create. It can, therefore, be said that it is speech and the play around it, according to Vygotsky, that starts in social interaction, and is later internalised into inner speech or imagination and the mastery of abstract thought (Das, 1995).

The notion of higher thought processes that develop through scaffolding by parents is what steers the culture of particular behaviours, and in my thesis, the chosen behaviour in terms of reading, or, on the other hand, choosing to be disassociated from books. Home literacy is central to this process – no wonder Cassano et al. (2011) state that “[l]ots of talk is important, but density matters most when talk is rich with rare or sophisticated words and focused on topics that build children’s conceptual knowledge. Moreover, utterances are most helpful when they support elaboration, clarification, and reasoning” (2011: 123). This captures the essence of what happens during bedtime stories, and provides the connection through which I viewed my data in this thesis.

2.4.4 Connections to the book

During the process of language acquisition, the child grows into literacy, and I argue in this section that it is through guided interaction that the child is encouraged to participate in the range of adventures of stories, and the interest in reading develops in the context of his/her own everyday life. Helen Arnold (1994) argues that children’s play can reveal the ways in which they seek to make connections between
their inner and outer worlds: the external world of events and people, and the internal world of the mind. She suggests as an example, books that have engaged her deeply, had in common these two dichotomous worlds. No two texts, however, are alike, which forces the child to employ a new literacy each time, yet, at the same time, the reader pulls in past experiences (Benton & Fox, in Hunt, 2006). Readers relate their own lives to the literacy events, and an identity is constructed through these literacy practices (Cassano et al., 2011; Hilton, 1994) by means of the various texts, and it can be argued that different texts teach readers how to read (Daniels, 1994).

As the above-mentioned research shows, there has been a need to understand the process that leads children to books. Paris (in Cassano et al., 2011) argues that the traditional reading research ignored the differences in the development of reading skills, which now sees literary theory debating, in an effort to clarify, the interrelationships between the many strands of reading and the reader, competencies, readiness, age, adult readers, adult authors, and the many varieties of texts. There continues to be a search for the factors leading to success in reading, having control over the experiences that adults should provide the child in the earliest years, and providing bridging to overcome the differences between home, community and school literacy. Despite this, much is already known about early experiences and their effect on later reading (as has been described in section 2.3.1 of this chapter), yet I contend that there is great merit in both early and recent research on children’s literature, which cannot be discounted.

Amongst these is, for instance, research on literacy events found in the home, administered and controlled by parents. This would involve bringing a sense of story to the child, whilst at the same time bringing meaningful moments to the story, moments that coax the child into wanting the story repeated (Benton & Fox, 1985). There are papers on what the adult brings to the story to develop ideas and abstract thought processes. In other words, there is an emphasis on what is not in the story, and steering the child into various interpretations, to surrender to a story, to think differently, but to enjoy what he/she is listening to (Anstey, 2002; Sipe, 1997;
Dombey, 1992; Benton & Fox, 1985; Cassano et al., 2011). Other papers have presented the opposite view implying that the young child has not learnt “to enter into the book” (Chambers, 1985: 356). Similar discriminatory feelings appeared in a paper by Paul Heins (1970) in which he maintains that criticism of children’s books is more difficult than the criticism of adult literature, as children’s literature is not the concern of children only, but also of parents, teachers, librarians, illustrators and publishers. He believes that children’s books must be judged by the same standards as adult literature, and that a good children’s book must not only be pleasing to children, but must also be a good book in its own right. Bottigheimer (1998), as opposed to Heins (1970), is confident in defining children’s literature as an important system of its own, and urges critics, who still dither about “childist” or “adultist” perspectives, or confusion over the “intended child” or the “actual child” (1998: 114), to accept that children’s literature is dynamic and never a “fully resolvable literary problem, for as one generation defines the nature of children’s identity, childhood’s proper occupations, and children’s reading, its children have already entered a society altered by those decisions” (Bottigheimer, 1998: 125-126).

Many children have the privilege of choosing their own books at bookshops, yet Stevenson (1997) states that there is no adult-free canon of children’s literature. Librarians are aware of what books are popular, educators choose books to suit their pedagogic purposes, and parents choose books based on their knowledge of their children’s preferences – books are therefore mostly purchased by adults. Metcalfe (1997), however, feels that in no century before the 20th century have children been studied so intensely, gained recognition, or been valued so highly, and the same can be said for children’s literature. This has caused a change in that authors, like teachers, have taken up the role of facilitators. The power structure has therefore shifted (Metcalfe, 1997; Hunt, 2006), and so much of today’s children’s fiction presents readers with power and choices.

There is a considerable choice, and the texts are wide-ranging. Hunt (2006) still hesitates to place too much power in the hands of the child. He argues that the added choices in electronic media are not simply changing the way stories are told;
they are changing the nature of stories. He draws attention to the narrative encountered in reading done outside school, which includes magazines, non-fiction, video and TV games; these demand a different kind of perception and concentration than the book. Furthermore, he suggests that what occurs in the 21st century depends to some extent on the relationship between children’s books and schools. How books are treated in education is directly linked to the books that are produced and marketed (Hunt, 2006).

Children are honest in their choice of books (Schultz, 2011). If the cover of the book or the story does not appeal to them, they simply exchange the book for another one; or when listening, they will suggest a change of book. “Narrative theory cannot escape the problem of audience” (Hunt, 1985: 300), and this is the only thing on which literary theorists seem to agree (Chambers, 1985). Wall (2006) states that writers, who set out to write for children, must look further than themselves as they face a barrier of age and experience. Authors must therefore look to a critical method, which will take account of the child as reader. Chambers (1985) offers an explanation as to how this relationship between author and reader is formed. Measures, such as style, (which is the type of language used by the author), the tone of voice that must be unobtrusive and not very demanding linguistically, must serve to entertain the readers. The reader, and his/her appropriate age, are both central to this process, and the writer should acknowledge that children’s literature implies a set of texts in which there is a distinctive relationship with the audience (Hunt, 1985). I could argue here that the appeal of a children’s book commenced with a writer who set out to communicate with a specific children’s audience, and since literature is a way of saying something, it requires a reader to complete the work.

I have stated that the purpose in this study is to consider the social act of reading in the upper primary school boy, with the knowledge that meaning-making emerges in young children alongside other literacy skills. Thus, in order to place the reader in the act of reading, and to receive the story, he/she has to be involved in the process. This is the ideal situation, but what about the readers who lose their connection to reading during the latter part of the junior school phase? At this point it is therefore
pertinent to allude to my subsidiary research questions that relate to the adolescent who just could not care to pick up a book anymore when it used to be part of home and school literacy, and to understand why it is particularly during the adolescent years that this becomes obvious (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

2.5.1 The adolescent reader

There has always been a curious interest in the unpredictability of adolescent behaviour, but increasingly there is also a heightened focus on adolescent readers, which has at its root the growing concern for middle and high school learners who remain at risk with regard to their performance in standardised tests (Alexander & Fox, 2011). One may well question the necessity of looking at adolescents when, in fact, I have just emphasised the importance of emergent literacy where the initiation into the reading process begins.

If the relevant learning is said to take place during the emerging years in the family domain, there would be an expectation that, with the basic education in place, strengthened during the more formal teaching in class, the skills and habits would be carried through into high school. This is, however, not a given in that adolescence has been proven to be an irregular, changeable, impulsive stage of development that can be termed to be neither childhood nor adulthood. This also points to one of the markers of adolescence, namely age. For the purpose of my study, I focus predominantly on the Grade 6 and Grade 7 boys that place their ages in the twelve to thirteen year bracket, even though adolescence is generally perceived to extend to the ages of seventeen and eighteen. It can be argued that it is an extended period in which developmental and character changes occur, and as Alexander and Fox (2011) point out, there is much literature on the transition. In this study, however, I will focus purely on the changes that are pertinent to texts, which means I will not consider physical development, but will briefly look into the categories of biophysiological development that include transformation of the brain structure during puberty, secondly, into cognitive development (which includes the increased reasoning ability), and abstract thought processes, and thirdly, the development in
identity and social relationships, especially those with a heightened inclination to associate with peers (Alexander & Fox, 2011; James, 2007; Levine, 2002; McGeown, Goodwin, Henderson & Wright, 2012). Since various connectors feed into the changing adolescent, and Abigail James (2007: 179) argues that "part of the lack of success of boys from diverse groups in education begins with their gender", this study does not focus only on the significance of socio-cultural influences on development, but also on further biological changes that may change the behaviour in literacy acquisition. An example of this can be cited in a paper by Pottorff, Phelps-Zientarski and Skovera (1996) in which they describe how boys' eyes are drawn to movement, and for this reason their drawings will be of spaceships, rather than the static depictions of houses, families and rainbows as found in their female counterparts. In the same way paper planes, pencils and erasers become projectiles to see where they will land. These physical actions are based on biological differences that may have implications for literacy learning in that the knowledge of their preferences may be incorporated into language learning in class (Zambo & Brozo, 2009). An understanding of the way in which a boy's brain connections are different to that of a girl is therefore pertinent to this study towards an understanding of the boys' development and actions.

Newer brain imaging techniques in recent years have informed on biophysiological development, and new perspectives on adolescent brain development have come to the fore (Greenfield, 2008), demonstrating changes in the white and grey matter density in the frontal lobe of the brain. For this reason Alexander and Fox (2011) suggest that “such changes presumably contribute to efficiency of brain activity in these areas, and may be associated with the development of certain cognitive functions during adolescence, including the self-regulatory functions controlled by the frontal lobes: selective attention, decision-making, impulse control and working memory” (2011: 160). Other aspects of social cognition, such as self-awareness and perspective taking are similarly associated with this area.

Cognitive development in adolescence is described by Greenfield (2008) as a dynamic process, and the maturing brain allows the adolescent to evaluate the world in terms
of what has gone before, thereby increasing reasoning and abstract thoughts. Adolescents therefore benefit from their exposure to literacy experiences, and this period is likely to be associated with the way in which adolescents read, since comprehending a text well demands inferential processing (Alexander & Fox, 2011).

As has already been discussed in this chapter (Section 2.4.4), reading is a social act (Anstey, 2002; Sipe, 1997; Dombey, 1992; Benton & Fox, 1985; Cassano et al., 2011), which helps in understanding how adolescents form a connection between their identity, their social roles, their reading, and the cultural influence on what they read (McGeown et al., 2012). One is also aware that boys engage with texts that describe their hobbies and interests, and that increasingly the girls are drawn to texts that reflect their own particular curiosities. Increasingly too, boys disengage from reading during the adolescent, middle school period (Sokal, 2004; Cavazos-Kottke, 2005; Zambo & Brozo, 2009; Carroll & Lowe, 2009; Clark & Burke, 2012), and that adolescents’ ever-increasing “negative emotions and emotionality, likely associated with hormonal changes, have long been noted” (Alexander & Fox, 2011: 168). Literacy therefore takes on a different form for boys and girls, and this becomes particularly prevalent in adolescence when the physical development of the two genders influences their worldview (Biddulph, 2008). The above researchers have indicated that there is a perception of gendered literacy, and that there is a difference in the way that boys connect and experience their reading literacy – an aspect that is explained in the data in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

This may well beg the question whether literacy is a gendered activity. In order to understand this view, I will deconstruct the perspective in the following section.

2.5.2 Literacy and gender

Our research shows that reading and writing difficulties are a primary reason for male dysfunction in school. If a high school student has difficulty reading, his self-esteem plummets, core identity development is more difficult, and the future becomes frightening. Success in reading turns a young person back to the bonds, attachments, and other social supports that he needs to develop as a healthy person.
In this sense, literacy in high school can be a secret to decoding adulthood (Gurian & Ballew, 2003: 117).

This extract illustrates the widespread concern over boys, which Rowan, Knobel, Bigum and Lankshear (2002) note, arose from a mindset that relates to gender reform that initially focused on girls' educational needs. As mentioned in Chapter 1, statistics from PISA and NAEP testing reveal that boys in countries like Great Britain, the US, and Australia continue to achieve less well than girls in standardised literacy testing. Concern is constantly expressed about boys and their lack of reading and writing skills that leads them to lose interest in what they know enhances their chances of success in time to come (Mostert & Wikan, 2008; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Bottigheimer, 1998; Padak, 2008; Bigum et al., 2002; Clark & Burke, 2012). Issues that come to the fore in this process of development in boys are said to be the difficulties that they experience in literacy performance, the resultant loss of interest that evolves from the difficulties, and the influence of people and circumstances during this development (Bigum et al., 2002).

Rowan et al. (2002: 29) allude to two mindsets in this regard: firstly, the essentialist mindset starts from the belief that there are "some essential and natural (italics in the original) differences between boys and girls. They generally argue that there is something fundamentally different about the way men and women think, feel and act, and that these differences are tied to their biological and psychological make-up". Secondly, the anti-essentialist mindset sees the differences in interests displayed by some boys and girls "as being produced in particular social and cultural contexts, and not as natural" (italics in the original) (Rowan et al., 2002: 29). Underlying this latter view is principally that if behaviour is a natural occurrence, it should be accommodated and the literacy classroom should adapt itself to boys' interests and inclinations. Taking on the essentialist view, Allan and Barbara Pease (1998) recommend that since natural differences exist, men and women are equal and should be regarded in this way. Beyond academic testing and assessment in school, it does, however, seem impractical to regard the genders as equal, especially if one focuses on the subtle developmental differences enumerated by Gurian and Ballew (2003: 9 - 10), which are set out below.
- Girls take in more sensory data than boys (Newkirk, 2002; James, 2007).
- Girls hear better, possess an acute sense of smell, and take in more information through their fingertips and skin (James, 2007).
- Boys are less able to control impulsive behaviour (Newkirk, 2002; Biddulph, 2008).
- Girls tend to self-monitor high-risk and immoral conduct, whilst boys are more likely to show physical aggression (Newkirk, 2002; Dobson, 2001).
- Girls tend to have better verbal abilities and rely heavily on verbal communication (Briton & Hall, 1995; James, 2007; Biddulph, 2008).
- Boys rely heavily on non-verbal communication, being innately less able to verbalise feelings and responses as quickly as girls (Dobson, 2001; Newkirk, 2002).
- Development in certain areas of the right hemisphere of the brain provides boys with better spacial abilities, measuring, mechanical design, and geography and map reading (James, 2007; Newkirk, 2002).

The developmental differences noted above can be seen to be translatable into the different way in which genders approach reading literacy, and how this influences pedagogy. Gambell and Hunter (1999) refer to the differential patterns in males’ and females’ achievement in reading and writing (since females outperform males in all areas of reading and writing at the elementary, middle and secondary levels) as a matter of great concern, stating that this literacy gap does not close with age. Chemical differences similarly contribute to influencing the attitude to literacy in boys, as hormones influence ability and attitude to social interaction (Gurian & Ballew, 2003; Newkirk, 2002; Sax, 2005; Pease & Pease, 1998; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). My contention is that there are places in the school for differentiation, but this cannot pertain to all academic areas, especially literacy and numeracy teaching. In a class-based case study by Maher, Wade and Moore (1997), it was argued that children are already aware of gender issues before entering school. If reading literacy were regarded as feminine by fathers, the sons would most likely have a similar attitude (Maher et al., 1997; Biddulph, 2008), and if a stereotypical gender expectation existed in teachers with regard to boys and their non-interest in books,
the boys could respond to this expectation (McLaughlin, Cody, Kane & Robey, 1989). The genders should therefore have similar exposure and experiences to enable learners to be guided into sustained achievement. In an attempt to promote this notion, I will argue in the following section that much of masculinity is culturally and socially constructed (Newkirk, 2003).

2.5.3 Boys’ lives

Boys arrive at school with already gendering identities due to early developmental experiences and socialisation at a parent’s knee. Kimmel and Messner (1998) suggest that by five or six years of age, the basis for masculinity has already been set, and is reinforced as the child develops, which then explodes at adolescence “obtaining its definitive shape for the individual” (1998: 7). Moreover, hormone levels affect the way in which the different genders handle situations. Because of hormonal differences, a girl is likely to manage social bonds in a group situation in an equitable and sharing manner, whilst a boy tends to “manage social energy by striving for dominance or pecking order” (Gurian & Ballew, 2003: 10), and hormonal and structural brain differences have profound effects on how males and females learn, act and live (James, 2007). Gurian and Ballew (2003) further explain that boys have seven different surges of testosterone per day, and when a boy’s testosterone is high, he performs better on spacial tests such as Mathematics, but worse on verbal tests. Hormones affect not only performance, but also attitudes to actions that can be seen in boys’ ability to be drawn to everything dangerous and risky, making them take a chance if they think the danger is worth the risk (Newkirk, 2002; Dobson, 2001). Yet I wish to suggest that not all boys act and feel the same, demonstrating that not all boys experience problems in the literacy classroom, or react to literacy in a perceived anti-reading manner.

In order to promote this point I refer to research by Gibb, Fergusson and Horwood (2008) who showed that, even though there is a tendency for females to score better than males in standardised tests, and to achieve more school and post-school qualifications, the differences could not be explained by the differences in cognitive
ability, since the genders had similar IQ scores. The teachers in their study, nevertheless, classified the boys as inattentive, restless and easily distracted, and displaying aggressive, anti-social and oppositional behaviour. A study by Maher, Wade and Moore (1997) indicated that boys tend to take over the teacher’s attention by their constant activity and oppositional behaviour, monopolising instruction in class. These studies suggest that in order to reduce the gender differences, classroom behaviour in boys need to be addressed. Another researcher, Lahelma (2012), in explaining female versus male development into adulthood, suggests that gender is culturally constructed within everyday practices – a belief that is corroborated by Kimmel and Messner (1995), in the notion of masculinity being learnt from the father, and that some pursuits are constructed as feminine (Watson, Kehler & Martino, 2010: 360). If masculinity possesses features of learnt behaviour, in an attempt to explain the congruence of maleness and reading, I will provide an account of the development of attitude to literacy in boys.

2.5.4 Understanding maleness

Throughout this chapter thus far, the importance of recognising the differences between the genders has been stressed. The reasoning behind this is to underpin the choice of adolescent boys for this study, and to problematise the various issues relating to their language and reading behaviour. Rowan et al. (2002) cite a study designed to demonstrate that boys and girls have a different predisposition for language use. It was found that different-sex twins from the same household displayed different literacy levels in girls and boys as early as two years old, in that girls out-performed boys on cognitive scores, adding that genes work for language development differently in boys than girls, and that hormones may be the trigger that not only masculinises the bodies, but also alters the brain structure which ultimately will affect the emotional component for boys. A girl will typically discern almost immediately how she feels about an experience. This is attributable to the localisation of language development in the brain, making girls probably more articulate from an early age, as the localisation is distributed on both sides of the brain, whereas for a right-handed man, it is isolated to the left hemisphere of his
brain (Newkirk, 2002; Dobson, 2001). Despite being more articulate, however, girls do not automatically take the lead in the classroom since attitudes influence how children behave and act in school (Maher, Wade & Moore, 1997). D’Arcy (1990) worked with reception and kindergarten classes and found that boys tended to be the louder and more dominant learners, whilst the girls were passive and quieter. She suggests that this was learnt, sexist behaviour viewed at home and in the media that had already established itself.

I wish to argue that there are two aspects to this learnt behaviour – the first may be the gender or sexist behaviour, whilst the second is the literacy discourse in which the gender behaviour is learnt, clearly demonstrating that there are social aspects that influence behaviour in children. Not only the essentialist or natural occurring factors influence being a boy, but also the socio-cultural and psychological components of his environment have a profound impact on his bearing. One that has been scrutinised by the psychologist, Judith Aner (2012), is the psychological effect of parents who are too busy to attend to school issues, or do not have the time for emotional support or physical care. Along these lines Gurian (2003) stresses the need for an ordered environment in which children can learn, suggesting that apart from their need for organisation, children have trouble learning if they do not experience care and nurturing. Gurian therefore indicates that literacy at home and at school has its foundation in relationships. Ackerman, Bowen, Beier and Kanfer (2001) refer to the interaction as bonding, and identify the lack of attention at home or school as being the direct path to emotional stress and feelings of failure. I argue here that behaviour and attitude to learning and reading do not reside in the male body only, but social, psychological and cultural factors combine to influence how a boy may respond to reading. A child learns from someone with whom he/she has an intimate attachment; yet bonding is the least measurable way to ensure learning. Ackerman et al. (2001) point out that a decrease in family bonding causes a student to misbehave in order to incorporate others around him/her for them to experience the stress with him/her. Gurian and Ballew corroborates this notion by stating that “[b]rain-based research indicates that a great deal of intellectual intelligence depends on emotional intelligence” (2003: 37). This is yet another way in which girls differ
from boys in displaying their stress, since girls tend towards passivity, while boys
demonstrate aggressiveness, and their levels of depression increase (D’Arcy, 1990;
James, 2007).

By looking at bonding or relationships in a child’s life, however, I wish to suggest that
one cannot ignore the fact that other bonds exist beyond those with a parent or a
teacher. Bonding is a collaborative affair by the community, and the home and the
school. Unfortunately parents often assume that the middle school boy does not
want his parents around, but James (2007) states that a boy’s cognitive brain
development, psychosocial and physical development need a wide variety of
attachments and bonds, and these bonds provide a sense of safety.

The over-emphasis on boys may seem exaggerated until one looks at the facts on
which this assertion is based. Many children cope adequately; yet Dobson (2001: 33)
warns of a sizeable minority that is “struggling with perplexing social pressures and
forces that yesterday’s kids didn’t have to face. For some, just trying to survive
emotionally can best be described as overwhelming.” His conclusions are drawn
from findings that boys, when compared to girls, are four times more likely to be
diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, six times more likely to have learning disabilities
(Bigum et al., 2002; Newkirk, 2002; Dobson, 2001), and three times more likely to be
registered drug addicts. Dobson (2001) adds that there is a greater prevalence of
alcoholism, schizophrenia, bed-wetting, autism, and all forms of criminal and
antisocial behaviour in boys. Other factors include a 50% higher chance of death in a
car accident, and 75% of delinquency court cases involving males (Dobson, 2001;
Bigum et al., 2002).

The evidence that boys are in trouble is of great concern in both homes and in
schools. It is therefore necessary to look at the threads that run through the boy’s
literacy life. This concept is the basis of this research study in which I will focus on
the primary source of bonding, which is necessarily in the home, and the relationship
between mother, father and child that sets the tone for what is to come. No home
can ever be said to be ideal and smooth-running, but the constant identification with
parents, emulating the behaviour and the demeanour of a parent, impact more deeply than lecturing, bribing or buying favours (Halpern, 2000; Biddulph, 2008). A son who constantly watches his father insulting his wife will treat his mother and other females in the same way, and a boy who is confronted by a selfish and angry father, will display the same characteristics as him (Dobson, 2001:69).

The role that the father plays in the life of his son is life-directional and his presence is necessary (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Mullan, 2010). I therefore argue that the home prepares the boy for the characteristic role he plays in his life, so these literacy moments, together with male characteristics, then place a boy in the school milieu where the teachers further broaden the influence on his life. The experience of establishing one’s own maleness can, nevertheless, not be the same for all boys. In becoming a boy, it is not only in experiencing the physical male body, but also recognising factors such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, race, physical ability and appearance (Biddulph, 2008; Martino, Lingard & Mills, 2004; Watson, Kehler & Martino, 2010). These extraneous factors will determine how the individual boy fits into a gender group with its many variations of masculinities. It is within this view that Newkirk (2002) warns against generalisations about gender, as not every child fits a generalisation all the time; yet he agrees that the anti-essentialist influence on the way boys and girls behave, cannot be discounted. He feels that it is “more useful to view gender roles as social constructions, as tacit social invitations to define oneself in a certain way” (2002: 23). Bigum et al. (2002) concur with this view by ascribing observable differences between boys and girls to natural differences, but suggests that “gendered behaviours are learned” (2002: 44).

This definition serves to undergird my contention that there is an accepted way of being male, but a freedom to be able to create an individual self apart from the influence of the various cultural strictures. Since I endeavour to explain boys’ reading in this study in terms of the home and school literacy influences, I have argued in this section against stereotyping all boys by implying that they all lose interest in reading, for reading literacy is an individual process, wholly contingent upon the learning,
enculturation and interactions with people in life. Moreover, this process takes place regardless of the differences that are implicated in the gender gap.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided the theoretical framework of children’s literacy experiences relevant to this study. Initially, literacy acquisition was placed in the context of the South African educational milieu to explain the literacy that is brought from the home to the structure of the more formal school situation. I argued that one of the factors that determined how a child functioned at school depended on the type of literacy experienced in the home where a particular type of literacy emerged for each individual boy, since parents are their children’s first teachers. In order to reinforce the significance of home literacy, I demonstrated how emergent language acquisition and the connections that are made through literacy practices influence the children in the home. In the final section I discussed the effect that gender has during the middle school developmental phase, which may lead to disengagement from reading and a change of attitude to the literacy process in boys. I have concluded that there are strong determinants that characterise and enhance the acquisition of literacy at home and school, which are underpinned by behavioural and biological connectors of gender (Rowan et al., 2002).

Chapter 3 builds on Chapter 2 by focusing on the cultural development of literacy in the family and the practices that boys accept as the norm at home, and then take to school. I will draw on two related theoretical approaches of study: the first is the New Literacy Studies (NLS) that recognise the nature of literacy as being sociocultural and taking place within social practices of groups of people, and is reflected in the work by literacy theorists such as Street (1995), Barton and Hamilton (1998), Gee (1990, 1991) and the New London Group. The second approach is New Literacies studies which view literacy as continually changing as new technologies appear, using
CHAPTER THREE
THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

“It is what you read when you don’t have to that determines what you will be when you can’t help it.” Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900)

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I began by placing children’s acquisition of literacy within the broader context of the South African political milieu that has had a marked effect on the nature of literacy learning in the country. I set out to explain that in the local environment literacy differs substantively in both the homes and schools of advantaged and disadvantaged children. I explained that, through the type of literacy acquisition in the more advantaged sections of the population, children were able to consolidate opportunities gleaned from home culture, which were then carried into similar school experiences from their homes. I indicated that research has shown that home literacy plays a significant role in developing reading and establishing a view beyond the words in a text. It is therefore my contention that home literacy is strengthened by bedtime stories, literate talk, and exposure to texts of various kinds, and that these factors are further influenced by socio-economic status, gender and race. This demonstrates that various dynamics contribute to making a reader of a child; while at the same time taking a critical approach to reading, I have argued that even with the many facets of reading theory in place, gender still plays a dominant role in the decline of the boy reader’s habits during adolescence. This notion will be further examined in terms of the ways of acquiring literacy as discussed in the following section.

This chapter considers literacy within the sociocultural context, and how literacy has developed over time to accommodate the shift in the concept of literacy. As the concept of literacy underpins this study, it is important to understand the changing ideologies that form the foundation of my research. Within the sociocultural milieu
in which literacy develops, I am informed by two related theoretical approaches to this study of at-home and school literacy acquisition which are mentioned below:

i) The first approach is New Literacy Studies (NLS). This perspective of literacy recognises the nature of literacy learning as being sociocultural and taking place within social practices in everyday life. Researchers such as Scribner and Cole (1981), Street (1984, 1995), Barton and Hamilton (1998), Gee (1990, 1991), Baynham and Prinsloo (2009) have demonstrated how, within the paradigm of anthropology, socio-linguistics and socio-psychology, the NLS have drawn on these resources to study literacy as events that are situated in social practices at a particular time and within a given space.

ii) The second approach is classified as New literacies studies which views literacy as continually changing when new technologies appear, bearing in mind that with new technology, new social practices emerge. Researchers such as Leu (2000), Gee and Hayes (2011), Lankshear and Knobel (2006), Kress (2009), Kalantzis and Cope (2011) have studied literacy practices as multimodal, existing across various media that provide new tools for informing users.

In the sections to follow, I will expand on these theoretical influences from which I draw to develop a conceptual frame for this research by viewing the influence of the multimodal face of technology on family literacy.

3.2 Linking culture, class and literacy

In this section I provide an overview of the process of cultural socialisation and literacy learning in an attempt to explain the strong link between culture, class and literacy that is of relevance in this thesis. Since culture is generally understood to be the customs that the inhabitants of a group, a society, a race, or an area pass on to each generation, it relates to the way of doing within the homes of my case study. It thus makes sense when Geertz (1973) describes culture as being embodied in
knowledge, a way of life, and the attitudes that evolve from this, and Li (2011) defines it as the way in which a social group makes sense of those conditions and circumstances under which they live. Both aspects are wholly pertinent to the local South African environment to which I referred in Chapter 2, since the culture of each social group comprises mores and values that form part of the knowledge learned by the members into organising their behaviour (Makubalo, 2007). Yet, a point that I argue in this thesis is that cultural ways are not entirely prescriptive, and both Erickson (1984) and Street (1995) point out that, even though culture shapes groups, individual members differ in the way that they construct their own behaviours according to their own world view. This is not only seen in single groups, but there are even variables in cultural groups in a society that speaks the same language (Gee, 1999).

There is often the assumption that everyone shares the same meaning for literacy learning, yet literacy teaching encompasses guiding children to communicate through language. This communication is reliant on the culture of the home and neighbourhood, religion, socio-economic conditions, and the education of the parents; and the home space is therefore viewed as the location of culture (Bhabha, 1994). Within this dwelling, individuals are socialised by way of the traditions that have been created in their life histories. What is relevant to this study is the extent to which families, their affections, friendships, schools and political contacts contribute to the socialisation of a child. Of further relevance in this study is that the socialised individual may have internalised a certain number of cultural and intellectual habits, but may not feel the need to activate them (Lahire, 2003). Even though this consciousness is socially produced in language, which critical literacy sees as sites of struggle and potential change (McConnell, 2012), individuals may not deem it essential in their lives. Habits may produce passion in everyday language if these have been part of literacy learning at an early age and under conditions that favour their internalisation (Lahire, 2003), and this may be taken as cultural conditioning that is used in individual ways. This bids the question whether there can be a passion for everyday language if the child is not exposed to conscious literacy learning.
McConnell (2012) defines education as a marker of class and a distinguisher between the haves and the have-nots. The differences in outlook between the two classes may be defined as members of the working class who value physical labour and working with their hands, while the more educated academics value intelligences that comprise abstract and intangible processes. Reading is central to creative thinking and problem-solving, and remains predominantly, but not exclusively, the domain of the academic class. While reading is synonymous with education, learning can be said to be a way of escaping from the strictures of class, and to leave the working class to cross over into the middle class. Language and reading, in this sense, translate into power in certain socio-economic spaces, and the ability to read effectively is important for the development of critical skills. It is therefore noteworthy that Ralfe (2011) found that the learners in her study came from a background where books and reading were not valued, and that few read for pleasure. Amongst most of the members of this class, there was, therefore, no desire for personal enrichment.

Since my study focuses on the discourses that take place in home and school, and the process of conceptualising language as the means by which interaction takes place, language can be described as a social construct not dissimilar to culture. Through the medium of language, literacy is learnt and shaped by the culture of the home and society. This thesis therefore examines the ways in which formal and informal literacy learning constructs the lives of the subjects in their separate environments within similar cultural backgrounds. It is suggested by Li (2011: 516) that literacy be examined within the sociocultural context in which it is acquired. Erickson (1984: 529) likewise asserts that all literacies are “constituted by their contexts of use” and that literacy is further defined by other people, by physical objects such as tools and technology, and by symbols such as words and numbers used by the individuals as they interact.

The dynamics of interactions and literacy practices provide a perspective on the type of socialisation in which learners become competent users. Language and literacy
learning together are part of the process of acquiring different cultural models, and studies of literacy learning in minority and various socio-economic groups have indicated that particular beliefs and values learnt in the home may not always be relevant for school success (Heath, 1983; Comber, 1993, 2000; Goldenberg, Gallimore & Reese, 2001; Compton-Lilly, 2007). While Heath (1983) and Comber (2000) examined the communication of early literacy with children in the home, Goldenberg et al. (2001) and Compton-Lilly (2007) focused on the values and beliefs acquired by Latino and Puerto Rican children. Together their research demonstrated how at-home literacy learning influenced performance in formal schooling. For these researchers, the attainment in school was intrinsically contingent upon the linguistic, literacy and cultural knowledge brought from home. Gee (1989) elaborates on this view when he asks, “What is literacy?” and places it within social practices where discourses are the core of sociocultural learning (comprising writing, saying, doing, being and valuing). Gee (1989) refers to the initial discourse as the primary discourse of the home and the community, and formal discourse as the secondary discourse of the public and in-school domains. The researchers above (Heath, 1983; Comber, 2000; Goldenberg et al., 2001; Compton-Lilly, 2007; Rueda, 2011) similarly draw a distinction between primary and secondary discourse, and at the same time provide insight into the complex process of literacy learning, social relationships, community expectations and school dynamics. Li (2011: 517) demonstrates that there are many layers of everyday literacy activities that take place with the aid of “co-constructors” such as parents, family, peers, teachers and members of the community who all provide a particular knowledge that makes up the values for each member of the sociocultural group.

Since, in this study, I focus on the value that boys take from and place on their own literacy and sociocultural conventions, this framework is particularly relevant to studying the way that literacy is practised in the home. The case study consists of boys from one school, of similar socio-economic status, from graduate parents, and who are all first language English speakers. The home literacy practices that are associated with diverse ethnic groups in South Africa that teach particular cultural models of learning, do not pertain to the boys in this study, since the subjects are all
boys from a single ethnic group and similar background. I thus examine what it means to be literate in their world view (Compton-Lilly, 2008) and how the literacy ways are imparted in their homes and school (Compton-Lilly, 2009; Cassano et al., 2011), and, furthermore, how they value literacy as a “personal investment” (Li, 2011: 518).

In this view of literacy, I examine the theoretical approaches that guide literacy studies in order to find out what literacy events and practices mean to users in their social contexts.

3.3.1 The ever-changing face of literacy

I have demonstrated in section 3.2 that learning to read, write, and interact competently is dependent on the traditions that a community provides in acting as the sociocultural model of literacy learning and literacy acquisition, and this process is therefore embedded in practices. This view has, however, progressed from the initial pedagogical approach of teaching reading, writing, spelling and comprehension as intellectual skills of the 1970s. Gradual changes to the skills approach are evident in a UNESCO literacy programme in Tanzania that recognised that teaching literacy to people who would afterwards have no personal use for reading and writing was futile, necessitating a proposal for the creation of a literacy environment (Street, 1984: 13). In accordance with the UNESCO definition, a functionally literate person must be able to perform effectively within the community by utilising reading and writing for the development of the community in the larger economic and political context (Street, 1984). Crandall (1992) provides further examples of the changes in definitions that have underpinned literacy since then, stating that early definitions relied on direct measures of gauging an individual’s ability to read and write simple sentences, or on indirect measures of completion of school years within four or six years. It was in the latter part of the 20th century that the focus shifted to a broader perspective of literacy as encompassing not only reading and writing, but incorporating the space, values and beliefs in which literacy develops, thereby
leading to an understanding of literacy as a sociocultural practice, or the social narratives that accompany the ways of literacy (Prinsloo, 1999).

3.3.2 Metamorphosis of literacy

The change in perspective that has gradually developed, accompanies a change in the way that literacy theorists view literacy. Barton (2007) traces the history of the term literacy, and its field, through books that have been written on the subject since the 1980s, starting with one or two per year, until the 1990s by which time it had increased to fifteen books all published with literacy in their title. Some of the key books in this field that trace the history of the increasing significance of literacy were Language and literacy: the sociolinguistics of reading and writing (Stubbs, 1980, in Street, 1984), The psychology of literacy (Scribner and Cole, 1981), Literacy in theory and practice (Street, 1984), which then had theory underlying it. Other terms that were linked to, and associated with literacy, related to “socially constructed”, “popular culture”, “emergent in children”, “ideology in discourse” and “ecology of written language” (Barton, 2007: 22). Studies of literacy practices in many diverse communities were published. Some of these were in Liberia (Scribner & Cole, 1981), in South Africa (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996), in England (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gregory & Williams, 2000), in the USA (Heath, 1983; Dyson, 1993), in Senegal by Patricia Greenfield (Street, 1984), in Iran (Street, 1984), and in Australia (Comber, 2000). What the studies had in common was that they focused on particular groups within a society and the way in which they made use of literacy. They looked at everyday life, observing people to see what they read and write, and from these observations questions were raised about the complexity of literacy.

The strands of literacy from community to community, and the way in which the habitants draw from these mores cannot be defined in clear cut terms. To unravel and understand the way in which reading, writing, understanding and communicating take place in different societies, it is necessary to rely on the literacy theories that
have evolved over the last thirty years which have come to be known as New Literacy Studies.

The following section expands on two literacy models of differing orientation that have evolved to become the NLS. These are the autonomous and ideological models of literacy proposed by Street (1984) in “Literacy in theory and practice” in which he examines the traditional autonomous model versus the sociocultural perspective of the latter model. The differences between the two models will be discussed in the following section, since they begin to explain the notion of family literacy that forms the foundation of this study.

3.4 The development of literacy models

3.4.1 The autonomous model

Street (1984) defines literacy, for the purposes of his theoretical stance, as the “social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (1984: 1). He argues that the skills that accompany literacy acquisition are not integrally characteristics of literacy itself, but are socially learnt. This differs from the viewpoint of writers such as Hildyard and Olson (Street, 1984) who put forward a strong version of what Street termed the autonomous model of literacy, which made a distinction between the basic functions of oral and written language. Their conjecture was that oral language is predominantly directed at a particular audience or individual with some specifically intended effect of influencing his/her views and actions, while written language is not limited by time or space, and serves a more logical function (Street, 1984).

Hildyard and Olson’s ideas were supported by Patricia Greenfield’s study of the differences between schooled and unschooled children of the Wolof of Senegal in 1972. She argued that fundamental differences were evident in their use of oral and written language, since oral language relied more on context for communication and face-to-face contact. Schooling, on the other hand, provided skills, and the direct consequences were linked to being literate, more logical, and more rational. The
social anthropologist, Jack Goody, insisted on the importance of writing when he proposed that in literate cultures words accumulate successive layers of historically endorsed meanings (Goody & Watt, 1963), indicating that written language is superior to that of oral communication, in that written language can attain autonomy. This view created the perception that literate people possessed stronger abstract thought and logic, a notion that Labov (1973, in Street, 1984) countered by stating that any user of a language necessarily involves abstraction, since, the act of referring to something not present, is already a separation from the immediate context.

The autonomous model therefore relied on the belief that literacy in itself, in an autonomous way, influences other social and cognitive processes. Moreover, it is based on the assumption that if illiterate people, or, for example, Labov’s New York ghetto youths, were schooled, it would have the effect of developing their cognitive skills, whilst improving their “economic prospects, making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their ‘illiteracy’ in the first place” (Street, 2003: 77) - being qualities that are associated with political development and civilization, and economic progress (Street, 1995). Other writers who harboured the belief that written language is superior to oral language were Havelock (1963), Goody (1977) and Ong (1982). They made a strong case for writing being the pivot for enlarging the potentiality of language and restructuring thought.

The autonomous approach thus claims that literacy is separate from its social context. This view ignores other events that may affect the nature of literacy (Street, 1984; Levine, 1986; Luke, 1988; Gee, 1989; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). For this reason researchers, Prinsloo and Breier (1996), question this view that described literacy as doing “things to people regardless of context” (1996: 17) since it had the effect of raising cognitive skills, enhancing abstract thought processes, and developing understanding and rationality crucial to progress. Similarly Gee (1990) critiqued the autonomous approach as a “literacy myth” since it characterised literacy as having the power to affect not only the thought processes, but also far-
reaching aspects such as wealth and productivity, political awareness, being liberal, having a questioning attitude, and being less likely to turn into a criminal (1990: 32).

The extreme umbrella-attitude of the autonomous belief in schooled literacy gradually gave way to a view that literacy is not able to lead to all these outcomes. This change came about during research by Scribner and Cole (1981) on literacy among the Vai people in Liberia. Their study found only one schooled influence out of the three different literacies studied: the first literacy was the indigenous Vai script, the second one entailed Arabic literacy that was used for religious purposes, and the third was English literature learned in school. Their research revealed that illiterate adults were using skills normally associated with schooled literates, indicating that cognitive properties were acquired from particular social practices that were not the result of literacy learning. This highlights the erroneous view of the autonomous model in ignoring the cultural component in literacy development, which Prinsloo (2005b: 16) argues, is a means for the supporters of the autonomous model, of framing literacy through First World ways of social organisation and communication strategies.

Even though Street does not dismiss the autonomous model, a counter model was proposed that incorporated cultural and ideological assumptions, formerly disguised in the autonomous acquisition of literacy (Street, 1984; 1995).

### 3.4.2 The ideological model

The ideological model is more sensitive to the culture in which literacy is practised. Language is generally used in informal, everyday conversations and writing, and the more formal utterances and ways of speaking, are used in professional and ceremonial spaces. The formal discourse will have its own rules and conventions, making it an academic language that is learnt and used in specific milieus. Brian Street (2003) explains this model as being the ways in which people address the knowledge of writing and reading which itself is embedded in conceptions of knowledge. The effects of this knowledge are dependent on the type of literacy
practices in the marketplace or in the particular educational setting in which literacy is acquired. The particular versions of literacy in these practices are ideological and are rooted in a specific world view and in a desire to pursue that view of literacy (Street, 2003; Gee, 2000). The assumption is, therefore, that to engage in literacy is a social act from the outset, and it is the way in which parents interact with their children, the way in which the teacher fosters attitudes and awareness of literacy in educational settings, that foments ideas about literacy itself in the learners.

Literacy is accordingly a mode of language with its social functions within a particular culture, and the inhabitants of that culture must understand the meaning of the written word (Comber, 2000; Gee, 1998; Barton et al., 2000). Literacy, as perceived in this way, is therefore a set of social practices created and used by the people within specific contexts, whilst the practices in the particular culture inform the ways in which the inhabitants of that culture draw in their daily lives (Barton et al., 2000; Heath, 1983).

In the ideological model, literacy is embedded in a society or a group’s social practices, social structures, economic conditions and local ideologies (Gee, 1990: 61), and literacy that is perceived in this way cannot be separated from the people who use it. Gee (1990) indicates that meaning is created by the cultural knowledge that the users bring with them to the text, and this does not only refer to purely linguistic structures of vocabulary and grammar, but also to contextual and personal knowledge. This perspective of the ideological model is particularly pertinent to my study of home literacy in order to explain the transfer of personal knowledge and literacy culture from parent to child that takes place in the home practices.

### 3.4.3 Literacy events versus literacy practices

The significant concepts in the *ideological model* remain the *literacy events* and the *literacy practices*. The literacy practices to a large extent depend on the ideology of the individual: the feelings, values, attitudes and the social relationships present from situation to situation (Street, 1995; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). The practices have the
function of creating literacy awareness in individuals, the discourses of literacy and the way in which they construct the discourses. It is therefore an event in which the individual applies the learnt practices in specific social practices. The practices are the shared perceptions arising from the participants’ common beliefs and social interaction, whilst literacy events are activities where literacy plays a role.

Events, however, cannot wholly be separated from practices, since events are shaped by practices. Texts, as has been seen in the autonomous model, are an integral part of literacy events, and any one text can be read in different ways, depending on the reader’s perceptions, experiences and familiarity with the social practices in which the text takes place (Gee, 2000). The concept of a literacy event therefore is key to literacy studies, to the point where Heath (1982: 92) described it as any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes. Her research focused on literacy events, which were the instances in which the written language formed part of the interactions in the homes she studied. Of particular interest to Heath (1982) were the activities that accompanied the events that comprised the cultural way of using literacy (Cairney & Ruge, 1998) in the divergent homes in her research, which similarly stressed the situated nature of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

It can thus be said that events and practices carry a sense of repetition or patterning in literacy learning in particular situated contexts. Barbara Comber (2000) resonates the sociocultural view of being and doing by demonstrating how children entering school rely on consistently repeated literacy events that they bring from the home. Her observations focused primarily on the different ways in which children take up the cultural practices experienced in the home, and employ them to scaffold their adaptation into the school culture. An example of this is what a child at school entry level brings to the classroom, and is indicated by a sense of responsibility of remembering to bring a class reader home, for parents to sign records indicating home practice, and for parents listening to the reading. Hence the support and example from home, according to Comber’s interpretation (2000), assist the child in reading the culture of the classroom. The cultural exposure is cumulative, and
develops in the child who is part of a nuclear family, who spends time reading, playing board games, watching television, and communicating, and these events then encourage that child to engage in self-initiated literacy practices. Children’s initiation into literacy predates starting school, and through these activities they develop strategies for getting help when needed (Comber, 2000; Heath, 1983). Enculturation into literacy at home, and the extent of that enculturation, both enable children to use their intellectual, cultural and linguistic resources in the classroom and beyond in ways of being and doing (Bourdieu, 1990). It is thus no wonder that Heath and Comber believe from their research into home literacies, that so much of school learning is contingent on children’s literacy, and so much of children’s literacy is contingent upon what they have already learned how to do and be before they come to school (Comber, 2000; Heath, 1983; Zapata & Roach, 2011; Compton-Lilly, 2009; Compton-Lilly, Rogers & Lewis, 2012).

It is not enough just to accept that all practices are contingent upon the home, however, because more ethnographic studies are needed to provide a description of the way different social groups take meaning from the environment. For the purposes of this study it is important to take into account the types of literacy events such as discourses, group negotiation of meaning from written texts, age and gender preferences, and other types of occasions when books or other written material are employed. These literacy events need to be interpreted in relation to the sociocultural patterns that they reflect (Heath, 1982; Breier, Taetsane & Sait, 1996). Since Street (2003) describes literacy practices as a collection of observable literacy events or values, and the meanings that are connected to literacy in a specific cultural context, it reflects my study which focuses on the different literacies, and the nature of the events that give meaning to the ethnography of the boys and their reading activities. It is thus clear that this study is not only focused on written material, since texts are dependent on spoken activities such as bedtime stories, and on communication, such as discourse around the dinner table, and incidental events that give meaning to literacy moments (Baynham, 1995).
In the discussion above I have shown that the ideological model has shifted from the individual to group culture in which literacy tasks are “jointly achieved” (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996: 19), and this further incorporates the many activities that take place within the groups. This notion of multiple literacies gave rise to the New Literacy Studies (NLS), which recognised literacy as incorporating written, oral interaction and digital technology. Since the NLS forms the foundation of this study, it will be examined in the following section.

3.5.1 New Literacy Studies

If one considers literacy as an activity, this study looks at social activities, the thoughts and meanings behind the activities and the texts used in such activities. This process mirrors the approach that evolved from the ideological model to the study of literacy called the New Literacy Studies over the last several decades. The focus shifted from individual behaviour to a more social and culture-centred interaction, giving rise to a group of researchers from England, Australia and the United States, referring to themselves as the New Literacy Studies Group, who applied social theories of learning to the development of literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). They first met in 1994 in New London, New Hampshire to consider the future of literacy teaching, and initially called themselves the New London Group. Their studies were “based on the view that reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural (and we can add historical, political and economic) practices of which they are but a part” (Gee, 2000: 180). Their thinking was therefore culturally and historically shaped, and reading, writing and meaning, for them, were, situated in a particular social practice within specific discourses (Gee, 1996).

The proponents of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) argued that the term “context” is limiting, and while meaning is situated in context, the user constructs context. The user, therefore, who utters words with personal, social and cultural goals, cannot be left out. For this reason Barton et al. (2000) proffer that any situation is created, not static, and that it is from these situations that people’s social worlds are made, and
re-made. Examples can be found in any clique with its own discourse containing local slang or sayings. These various configurations of meaning-making in specific contexts contain individual elements of discourse that are constantly adapted and renewed. One has to be a member of a group to understand and recognise these words, gestures and deeds that work in a certain way (Gee, 2000), and thus one only needs to look at the utterances of an adolescent, a bully, or look at the difference in approaches of different genders. Literacy itself, therefore, does not necessarily lead to any of the social outcomes attached to it, and the shift for the NLS, moving away from the individual and his/her skills to reading and writing as cultural practices, means that literacy tasks are the product of collaborative activities in particular social circumstances (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996).

Liezl Malan (1996) suggested in her paper, “Literacy learning and local literacy practice in Belville South”, that the effect of literacy depends on what people actually do with it (Gee & Hayes, 2011). She compared the uses and valuations of literacy in discourses of learning around adult literacy classes, indicating that the value of literacy is foregrounded in situations where literacy practices are invested with social power. The women in her study displayed different identities in their male-dominated homes to their worlds of “hidden literacy practices” with other women as these were filled with interesting narratives (1996: 142). Through this research, Malan was able to observe and describe the connection between literacy practices and identities. Hull and Schultz (2002) mention such instances as the role that NLS play in giving researchers the means of observing and understanding how reading, writing and discourse are applied by different kinds of people. And social literacies include research by Barton and Hamilton (1998) in one community in England, worker’s literacies by Street (1995), the nature of young children’s encounters with literacy in three pre-school centres by Prinsloo and Stein (2004), Compton-Lilly (2009) studied reading practices of nine mothers and their children, while Li (2004) explored the intersection of home literacy, culture and schooling of two Chinese-Canadian children, and Bhatt (2012) studied the digital literacy practices of an adult learner in a UK college.
Criticism that NLS have become biased towards localism and that often the research cannot see beyond the immediate local content, and that NLS ignore the larger social processes that shape the local (Prinsloo & Baynham, 2008: 7), is countered by Barton and Hamilton in “Local Literacies” (1998: 9) in which they suggest that “within a given culture” there are different literacies associated with different domains of life. They explain that life can be analysed in a “simple way into domains of activity, such as home, school, work-place” and these localised domains can then be compared (1998: 9). Clarke (2008) concurred with this view arguing that literacy can only be defined when using and engaging with a literacy, thereby gaining an understanding of particular practices. Street (2003: 77) indicates that the view of NLS is that “in practice literacy varies from one context to another and from one culture to another and so, therefore, do the effects of the different literacies in different conditions” and can be summarised as set out below (2003: 77 – 78).

- Literacy is a social practice, and not simply skills-based.
- Literacy is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles.
- The way in which people use the knowledge of reading and writing identifies them.
- Literacy is continually contested in accordance with the users’ world view or the desire of that world view to dominate or marginalise others (Gee, 1991; Street, 1995).

Since this study examines at-home and in-school literacy, this view is significant in applying NLS approaches to my analysis.

In the following section I discuss the new literacies studies which is a theoretical development that derived from the NLS, and I will explain the distinction between NLS and new literacies studies as it pertains to this study.
3.5.2 The New Literacies Studies

Gregory, Long and Volk (2004) applied the term syncretism, as used by anthropologists, in their research on studying young children and the way in which they learn with siblings, grandparents, peers and communities. They defined it as a creative process in which “people reinvent culture as they draw on diverse resources”, pointing out that the focus is on the activity of transformation and not on old cultural forms (2004: 4). They regarded young children as being active members of “different cultural and linguistic groups and appropriating membership to a group is not a static or a linear process” (2004: 5). This notion is relevant to the changing perspective of the New Literacies approach as described by Luke and Freebody (2000), Tierney (2007), Gee, (2010), Rueda (2011), Gee and Hayes (2011) in which learners need to be effective meaning-makers in today’s environment of the screen culture of multiple, digital-based literacies. Researchers and learners involved in the New Literacies Studies are continually focusing on many different aspects of the rapidly shifting landscape of literacy, being conscious of the existence of multiple literacies, domains and genres (Gee, 2005).

Gee (2005) explains that the New Literacies Studies centre around new types of literacy beyond print literacy, and he views digital literacy as tools of technology that create new meanings in the same way that language works as a resource of meaning-making (Gee, 2010: 31). New Literacies involve screens, pixels and code that produce texts as image, sound, and combinations of these, including conventional texts. To accommodate the many aspects of New Literacies, terms such as Internet literacies, computer literacy, ICT literacies, information literacy, digital literacies, media literacy, social networking and multiliteracies have been coined. Accordingly Lankshear and Knobel (2006) have outlined the characteristics of New Literacies as recognising ways of generating and communicating meaning through the medium of encoded texts. It is by sharing and interacting that meaning develops, and this takes place by means of collaborative participation – and is therefore a social practice legitimising a particular way of acting, knowing and applying both oral and written language (Gee, 2010). Since there is constant standardised testing to uplift literacy attainment in education,
schools need to adapt to the diverse pedagogical demands of educating in the information age to attain the skills that function as valued capital for people, business and the economy (Giampapa, 2010). Cummins, Brown and Sayers (2007) describe the new learning as choices “embedded in the economic, political and social interests of groups and that have consequences for the life chances of individuals as well as for the construction of social categories and relations of power” (2007: 416). The relevance of New Literacies on this study is that the syncretic nature of technology in the home and school pertains to the way in which parents, teachers and children engage in collaborative learning, not only in an effort to be enriched by their activities, but also to be defined by them.

3.6 Family literacy

Following this view of New Literacies as it functions in people’s everyday lives, I will discuss family literacy, and home literacy practices to see how the members are transformed through their participation. There are different ways of defining home literacy when viewed from various perspectives, yet there is agreement in terms of orientating family literacy in two ways: firstly, that of describing how parents and children read and write together, and alone, during everyday activities (Paratore, 2005: 394), and secondly, those that focus on how parents and siblings orientate their children towards attaining success or failure in school (Prinsloo, 2006: 17). Family literacy therefore focuses not only on the family itself, but also on the community that supports the early literacy learning of children (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010). The concern of the community arises when, in a diverse society, parents assume the role as their children’s first teachers in varying ways by using various discourse patterns, cultural models, ways of interacting and using books. This was evident in Heath’s (1983) study, which demonstrated that parents with low educational levels engaged in literacy activities for different purposes than those of middle-class parents (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010: 729).

Family literacy has evolved as a field of research since Heath’s longitudinal ethnographic study of literacy practices in the three diverse communities in southern
USA (introduced in Chapter 2) drew attention to literacy influences in homes (1983). Research in family literacy investigated how children acquired cognitive and linguistic skills within the sociocultural milieu of the home, and the role that the parents played in this process (Taylor, 1983; Heath, 1983; Comber, 1993, 2000), the concepts of print, letter acquisition, and the exposure of children to written registers through interaction with parents (Purcell-Gates & Dahl, 1991). Research has thus become increasingly aware of the family literacy practices, and how the culture of literacy determines the success or failure of children in school and beyond (Au, 1998).

The concern in this view is that children from different cultural groups bring different literacies to school, and these are often perceived as deficit in terms of mainstream success in the school situation (Moll, 1994). Kajee suggests that “often schools favour certain groups over others, and the value attached to literacy at school may be different from those held by communities” (2011: 443). It stands to reason that the culture and discourses of diverse groups cannot be ignored and downgraded in a centre of learning such as the school, and therefore Kajee is of the opinion that teaching should occur in a context that is compatible with the culture of the learners who are exposed to disparate cultural influences to that of the school (2011: 444). In her study of Grade 1 children from diverse backgrounds, Dyson (2003) demonstrated how children followed different paths to literacy, mostly determined by the culture of literacy brought from home. Comber (2000) and Paratore (2005) similarly focused on the effectiveness of family literacy on children’s level of performance on school entry. The above examples clearly emphasise the significance of congruent school and home literacy cultures.

The sociocultural perspective on family literacy thus argues that literacy cannot be removed from the cultural practices and the context within which it is learned (Au, 1998; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). This view allows for observation of the way that families share their literacy with the extended family and within the community, and this includes looking at the literacy perceived to be deficient on school entry, which by nature, incorporates the rich literacy lives of families in low socio-economic circumstances (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Kersten, 2007). It is also a perspective that
embraces many facets of home literacy learning that are mediated by family interaction. For this reason Au (1998: 183) regards culture as a stabilising factor that persists over a long time, and, at the same time, as an unstable factor that changes all the time within the home environment. The focus in this cultural hub of the home rests upon the parents who determine the way that culture is defined. In the next section I shall therefore briefly examine the role of the parents in teaching literacy practices within their homes.

3.6.1 The parents as teachers

All children can be seen to benefit from language and literacy activities in a home in which the parents play a pivotal role. Through early exposure to oral language skills, children learn sounds and sense-making at the parents’ knee through language characterised by rhyme, text repetition, rhythm, interaction and activities around stories, and shared reading (Tracey & Morrow, 2006) in employing Gee’s (1996) primary discourses (as discussed in Section 3.2). The research into emergent literacy has shown clearly that emergent literacy learning and primary discourses in the home are dependent on specifically literacy-related skills such as vocabulary, and certain activities that support the development of receptive vocabulary skills, word recognition skills, and mathematical skills (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010: 730). Similarly, written language is a competency skill that functions only with situated linguistic understanding, reflective and meaning-making strategies and socially situated behaviour that develops from more structured or formal teaching of de-coding and coding competences (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004). The assumption of an emergent literacy, which has been dominant in early literacy research and educational thinking since the 1970s (Phillips, 1975; Gregory et al., 2004; Prinsloo & Stein, 2004) is that literacy learning begins when little children realise that drawing and writing make sense in their worlds, and they start asking questions about it. Gregory et al. (2004) point out that the term emergent describes how “literacy knowledge grows over time when human beings are engaged in purposeful literacy experiences” (2004: 14), and that this knowledge is useful and provides access to enjoyment.
At the centre of home literacy is the active and involved parent, and the focus of the parent in the literacy process, determines the nature of literacy generated in the child. A study by Burgess, Hecht and Lonigan (2002) compared the predictive value of six different home literacy conceptualisations which showed that an active home literacy environment was more beneficial to children achieving, while Bennett, Weigel and Martin (2002) used three theoretical models to study the relationship between family environment and children’s language and literacy skills in middle-class families and their children. In their study “Children’s acquisitions of early literacy skills: Examining family contributions”, they applied the following model (2002):

1. the Family Educator Model in which the family is classified as having an educational function;
2. the Resilient Family Model considers how the family organises itself, how the resources are managed, and how the family copes with internal and external stresses; and
3. the Parent-Child-Care Partnership Model in which there is credibility in the idea that parents who support school efforts to teach their children are more successful in enhancing language and literacy achievements.

The Family as Educator Model was shown to relate to oral language and literacy acquisition outcomes as this model was seen to support children’s literacy by providing books at home and having high expectations for their children’s education by assisting them with their literacy tasks. This ties in with research by Padak and Rasinski (2008) who demonstrated that parents, who shared reading with their children as a pleasurable task, were able to produce motivation for enjoyment in their children, while the children became negative if the reading was associated with learning.

Parental attitude to literacy is therefore shown to generate a heightened sense of literacy awareness in their children if they are keen, involved, actively engaged in literacy tasks and are cognisant of literacy standards of school and social institutions. Gee’s discourse framework (2010) has been influential in understanding how
children, through their primary discourse in the homes, have learnt to practise and perform literacy that is congruent with school and societal discourse (secondary discourse), while Moll (1994), Dyson (2003), Paratore (2005) and Kajee (2011) have shown that the opposite is apparent in children from divergent home environments. Home discourse and the nature of language as an aspect of literacy in the home, are particularly pertinent to this study.

3.6.2 The child in the home

The home discourses and social processes comprise multiple elements of literacy that overlap to make up the literacy package of each individually emerging child. The elements are found in the many modes of communication in the life of the child ranging from the sociolinguistic aspects of literacy found, for instance, in the research of Heath (1983), Comber (1993) and Scollon and Scollon (1981) into early literacy and how communities socialise their children into distinct communicative practices. To add to this view is the sociocognitive perspective associated with Vygotsky’s early childhood experiences with language in the child’s daily social activities that give rise to the internal mental processes used to do the intellectual tasks of writing and reading (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1997). Equally important is the sociocultural perspective, as described previously in this chapter, which indicates the cultural activity in social practices (Street, 1995, 2003; Gee, 1996; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996; Barton, 2007). These interwoven strands contribute to the generation of different forms of literacy in the home, yet there are strong commonalities and characteristics found in various forms of literacy, such as oral discourse and storybook reading literacy (Gregory et al., 2004). This causes Gregory et al. to suggest that:

[i]n all settings, data illuminate the act of reading and learning to read and write as social processes; children as active, competent and intentional participants in those processes; and the emergence of literacy from birth. Children are described not as passive recipients of literacy knowledge, but as active seekers of meaning who construct knowledge about literacy as they work to make sense of the literate world around them (2004: 15).
Although Piaget (1975) perceives children to be active constructors of knowledge, which forms the foundation for linguistic and behavioural understandings (Phillips, 1975), Vygotsky (1978) provides a more realistic approach. According to Vygotsky, the nature of the communicative relationship of a child and his/her parent, carer, teacher or peer allows him/her to desire to become part of the world of knowledge and communication. This extends the learner’s knowledge within the Zone of Proximal Development just beyond his/her reach (Vygotsky, 1978), which does not, however, necessarily mean that all children take on board a predetermined world of cultural and behavioural activities, but that there is a selective process in which children will, at least individually, follow their own interests and experiences as they choose what they want to represent, and choose the modes, means and materials for what they wish to represent (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004).

It is within this emergent literacy paradigm of the child imitating experiences and developing interests in what is being taught, that literacy practices are found to provide artefacts, and evidence of literacy engagement in the home (Teale & Sulzby, 1991). Activities take place before the influence and strictures of formal schooling play a part, and artefacts are therefore evidence of writing and reading practices in the home. These practices, according to Teale and Sulzby (1991), were ignored prior to the recognition of emergent literacy as an area of study. Teale and Sulzby (1991) posit that these emergent literacy practices such as scribbling, pretend reading, phonetic sounding, drawing and writing are reproductions of examples from home. To these more commonly accepted forms of literacy I must add the child’s exposure to screen literacy which yesterday’s child did not experience. These all combine to create an informal and unconventional literacy in the pre-school child. This also prompts Ferreiro (1984) to explain that attempts at writing in small children are not mindless activities, but each action has meaning behind it, and forms part of the literacy processes depicted in NLS that are embedded in practices in the overlapping domains in which the child grows up.

Overlapping experiences make up the literacy culture of each child, from emergent literacy to the more formal regulatory school literacy in which many people play a
formative role. Emergent literacy is therefore a significant part of my study, since I argue that children enter school with predetermined dispositions and knowledge about speech, writing, and types of discourses, which in turn, are then shaped by literacies in the school.

3.7.1 Multiple literacies and their connectedness

While emergent literacy focuses on the pre-school modes of acquiring text experience, it does not mean that the out-of-school literacy practices come to an end when a child enters formal education. The nature of, or engagement with, literacy may change, but the out-of-school practices persist, since children remain participants in those practices (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Participants, therefore, seem to find themselves in a position of being involved in many literacies: there is the formal educational exposure, whilst the nature of literacy at home remains impactful, as it includes texts of various types. Prinsloo (2005a: 1) therefore claims that the use of computers and mobile phones has introduced new reading and writing practices that have influenced home literacy practices. This is evident in that more time is spent on these activities at home than at school. This has become part of the young child’s “identity-making”, which includes visual texts, digital, sound, and multimodal texts (Alvermann & McLean, 2007: 5). The term multiliteracies is consequently used in NLS as indicating the many modes of literacies that denote representations other than language in “increasing local diversity and global connectedness” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000: 5 - 6).

Various studies have examined learners’ engagement with digital technologies in home, school and other education spheres. A study by Marsh (2004) provided information on a survey done amongst working class children of two and a half to four years of age in northern England. Marsh found that the children in this disadvantaged community had learned about grapheme/phoneme relationships through their engagement with television and computer games. Kajee (2005: 103) explored the journey of a blind participant in an Internet Literacy English course facilitated at a university in South Africa. The investigation demonstrated how
technology granted the student a means of negotiating meaning in the course, and also gave her the ability to construct identity in terms of her relationship to her worldview. A further study conducted by Kajee (2005: 51) in a higher English classroom in South Africa, set out to establish whether a community of practice is possible in an online environment, while at the same time studying the benefits and challenges of using technology in an under-resourced context. These studies indicate the positive outcomes of using technology at home and school, yet research has also shown that having a computer and Internet access at home does not automatically translate into benefiting the learner who uses the technology.

Prinsloo and Walton (2008) examined children’s encounters with computers in poorly resourced schools in Africa indicating that the practice still had to be effectively developed, while the research of Snyder, Angus and Sutherland-Smith (2002) on families’ engagement with technology in Australia indicated that disadvantaged families who previously had no access to computers, were not particularly advantaged by access when compared to middle-class families who had technology in their homes to which they had easy access. This study did not discount the knowledge of technology that was gained in using technology, but questioned the value of the literacy exposure from these practices. In an article in The International Herald Tribune (1 November, 2012) Richtel comments on results from a teacher survey indicating that there is a widespread belief among teachers that the constant use of digital technology by learners is hampering their attention span and their ability to persevere in challenging tasks. This view is corroborated by the neuroscientist, Greenfield, (2008: 122) who describes how our inner world (or consciousness) becomes the “vehicle for our modern identity” since it is influenced by the space and the culture in which it happens. It is interesting that Prensky (2001) suggests that learners today think and process information differently from their predecessors, saying that “[t]oday’s average college grads have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours playing video games (not to mention 20,000 hours watching TV). Computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives” (2001: 1). Although there is increasing research on technology, and on the effects of digital literacy on
the users, there is also acceptance that young people are empowered in an increasingly digital culture that grants them instant access to knowledge by means of technology (Hague & Payton, 2010), but the reality exists that parents and teachers have very little information about how to put this to use.

The studies, therefore, indicate that with the implementation of technology, a shift in the nature of communication has taken place, not only for the child, but also for the parents in the home, and the teacher at school. This urges Alvermann and McLean to point out that:

the new literacies are having a considerable impact on contemporary education and schooling. Faced with challenges such as conceptualizing learning and the production of knowledge from multiple perspectives and definitions of literacies, classroom teachers are becoming more important than ever; at the same time their roles are changing. Specifically, the new literacies are making it imperative that teachers guide students in navigating and learning from the Internet and other information and communication technologies (2007: 4).

The new technologies may at times allow the learners to have the same access to resources as their teachers, and they may know as much as them about particular topics. Teachers could change their traditional perspective on class teaching, for instance in English studies the shift could be from pure literature to incorporating the media, “and hence from literary culture to popular culture” (Green, 1998: 180). Traditional modes of assessing learners may now overlook knowledge structures that are not traditionally obvious, which indicates that learners are differently literate in the new literacy classrooms. What used to be a purely “print-centric environment” (Alvermann & McLean, 2007: 10), is now being supplanted by digital and visual literacies in which a book can be read on the Kindle, the Internet is accessed on the iPad, and PlayStations and BBMs are at hand, and all these activities can take place without a parent or a caregiver being present. Written texts are part of this culture, but reading is just one of several textual practices vying for young people’s attention in their out-of-school learning (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003).

Young people are spending much of their time on their social networking, immersed in their own media culture with its ever-flowing and ever-changing visual images and
information. The way in which they utilise language, write messages, and what they read, must have an impact on their literacy culture, a culture that demands to be understood and endorsed as their own practices. Therefore, as Alvermann and McLean (2007) indicate, the ability to analyse media messages from a New Literacies’ perspective, “presumes that one is at least visually (if not auditorily) literate. Becoming visually literate involves expanding print literacy skills by developing a greater awareness of how things come to have the meanings that they have and why those meanings vary from one individual to the next” (2007: 12). This is a view that is emphasised by Kajee (2005; 2008) in encouraging the use of technology in language teaching and learning contexts, since she suggests this type of learning facilitates participation and interactions between learners and learners, and learners and educators – a view that Gee (2003: 23) describes as active learning by children as they experience the world in new ways by innovating in a particular domain and preparing for future learning.

Several studies have explored the changes to literacy that have been created by new technologies and the practices that have evolved from these. New information technologies such as the Internet (Leu, 2000), instant messaging and MXit chatting (Walton, 2010), e-mail (Labbo, Reinking, & McKenna, 1998), and online gaming worlds (Downes, 2002; Gee, 2003; Kajee, 2013) are new interests in the context of literacy, but Leu et al. (2004) maintain that few of these literacies can be found in the classroom. Practices alter the nature of literacy (Coiro et al., 2008) and the way in which young people conceive of literacy, and being literate in this era, is different to having only the print-knowledge of the previous century (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003).

3.7.2 The effect of technology

Since people’s lives change in the ways in which they become literate, the most profound change in terms of the nature of literacy can be ascribed to information technology. The changes are significant in that information access is at hand, communication is instant and the nature of discourse has altered. In line with this I
shall review the various facets of technology applicable to *New Literacies Studies* as they pertain to my research.

### 3.7.2.1 Multitasking:

New literacies for today’s children mean multitasking in ways that the previous generation was not doing (Tierney, 2007). Downes (2002) revealed in his study that children used the computer as both a toy and a tool, and as a tool, it was conceived as a playable item, which generated opportunities for playing, practising and performing. These approaches were events that occurred in the home when families played computer games and used other software. Even in my own class situation at school, the boys are seen to engage easily in a project on the iPad. It may start with one learner typing in an instruction, and soon there is a group of boys around the learner giving instructions, helping, communicating and inhabiting his space. They feed off one another, giving the impression that this social interaction over the iPad leads to higher mental functioning, and that the ideas and communications are modified as a group effort. This process enables the learners, employing digitally-based technologies, to use many lines of thought and perspectives, and this seems to satisfy their need to explore the media. It provides a generative power switching from one task to the other, and at the same time picking up the tools necessary to pursue the meaning of the text at hand (Kress, 1997; Tierney et al., 2006; Peppler & Kafai, 2007).

### 3.7.2.2 Reading and online comprehension:

Coiro et al. (2008) defined five significant functions in their quest to understand how students become adept at online reading, and how they acquire the skills and strategies to comprehend online texts. The first entailed the easy accessibility of the Internet in identifying important questions, then locating information, critically evaluating the usefulness of that information, synthesising information to answer the questions, and then communicating the answers to others. Rowsell and Burke (2009: 106) suggest that online digital reading “involves a different logic and set of practices governed by multimodality” since different modes of communication such as visual, acoustic and spatial, work together to create understanding. Kress (2003) noted that the linear path of printed texts is well established, but digital texts seem to be a co-construction
of the reader and the text since one does not know where one will end up at the end of the reading event. Online reading comprehension is therefore not only around the purpose, or the task, but also by a process of self-directed text construction (Coiro & Dobler, 2007) as the readers search for paths through informational space to construct their own versions of the online texts they read (Leu et al., 2007). The reader uses online and off-line skills to comprehend the text that is constructed from searching and navigating; and Leu et al. (2007) express great concern over the lack of teaching strategies that exist, other than exchanging reciprocal tactics of learning between users.

3.7.2.3 Video and computer games: Computer games are found to be wholly engaging for learners, to the point that they do not realise that they relate to classroom learning since players participate in their game’s world as a form of social practice (Kajee, 2013). Kajee describes video and computer games as a new literacy that has a greater potential to build new learning systems than much of the conventional learning in school can do, since they “offer players an opportunity to explore their literacy practices in multiple and ideological ways. People construct their identities in relation to the communities in which they participate, and move along a continuum of learning, from legitimate peripheral participation, to full participation” (2013: 1).

By the constant reinvention of new literacies and new practices, the definition of literacy is by virtue of the ways in which the game design involves a multimodal code that incorporates actions, words, sounds, images and movements, which players interpret according to game rules and risk-taking. Gee’s (2003) contention is that when humans imagine an experience, they can prepare for action towards achieving their goal. This has the same function that the imagination plays when reading a book. The video, like the book, has words that are displayed in situated contexts, and the experience is using literacy as the interpretive skill. Other researchers who have expanded on video games as a new literacy used in home and school are Sanford and Madill (2007), and Rowsell and Burke (2009). In their research on two adolescents who engage in online videogames, Rowsell and Burke (2009) documented a special-
needs boy and an A-student’s interests, motivations and practices in literacy learning. The special-needs boy’s understanding of new literacies astounded the researchers, particularly in terms of his advanced vocabulary and reading of informational texts. He did, however, have difficulty understanding the underlying meaning of texts such as William Golding’s *Lord of the flies* which related to school, showing his skills fell outside of the school model of reading and writing. Both learners, nevertheless, engaged actively in the multilayers of virtual space, and used the semiotics of digital text to guide their understanding (Kress, 2006). This particular understanding is important for educators who are looking for a means of teaching literacy beyond the traditional as a way of engaging learners of varying abilities.

The notion that visual technology teaches the user at a different level of literacy reflects the belief of the New London Group (1996: 64) that multiliteracies create a “different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other forms of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve various cultural purposes”. Diversity is therefore embraced, which includes acceptance of different linguistic, visual and aural modes of acquiring knowledge in a particular area (Rowsell & Burke, 2009; Toscano, 2011). Downes (2002: 26) concurred with the claim that children learnt from playing computer games in which they used a “trial and error” approach. Further research described video games as complementing the use of other written methods, or as Gee (2010) contends, the effects of literacy depend on what people actually do with it. Literacy and digital media can therefore be used as tools for informing people, liberating them, and giving them a sense of control and self-worth (Gee & Hayes, 2011: 22).

**3.7.2.4 Texting:** There is an implicit understanding in texting that certain meanings can be shared. Young people incessantly share instant messaging, commonly known as SMSing (which is the Short Message Service associated with mobile phones), BBMing and WhatsApp, with their own condensed codes that reflect their identification (Lewis & Fabos, 2005). Research on the new mobile uses of literacy has shown that access to SMS has been particularly significant for low-income communities since this mode is more affordable than voice telephony (Attewell &
Winston, 2003; Walton, 2010). It has become an everyday literacy rooted in the way that people organise their society, indicating that teaching digital literacy in schools has to do with preparing pupils for future participation in an evolving society (Casey, Bruce, Martin & Reynolds, 2009: 21). Warschauer (2007) identified key skills that digital literacy can promote in the user in much the same way as Leu et al. (2007) defined online reading – not purely for its purpose, but through a process of “self-directed text construction” (2007: 43). Warschauer (2007) identified traditional literacy as successful entry into the world of new literacies for those who use it, and noted that the limited reading ability of the less-affluent learners reduced the possibility that they would use information literacy.

In South Africa mobile phones often serve as shared devices for young people in low-income areas (Walton, 2009; Kreutzer, 2009). These play a significant role in their literacy lives as one of the few means of communication available to them. These young people employ digital literacy in the same way as that shown in a study by Attewell and Winston (2003) on computer usage by eleven to fourteen year olds in New York, in which they established that children from affluent families whom they described as typically good readers, had little difficulty posting messages on bulletin boards and reading text online, while those learners from less-affluent homes, whom they classified as typically poor readers, used multimedia to avoid reading texts used as a means of expanding knowledge (Casey et al., 2009). The implication is therefore that the digital divide lies within the differences in learners’ reading ability in traditional literacies rather than on access to digital media (Casey et al., 2009: 22).

Since Snow (2002) regards basic literacy skills such as word identification and recognition as an important prerequisite for reading successfully, it is difficult to see how digital texts could enhance print reading skills for children who are struggling with learning to read (Casey et al., 2009). Arguably, parents who portray reading to their children as a source of entertainment and in so doing, engender a positive attitude to reading (Wasik & Hendrickson, 2004), may be parents who harbour similar views on the new media by promoting their usage. In order to elaborate on this notion, since it is a point of analysis in my data, it is interesting to note that in a
study by Karchmer (2008) on how the Internet influenced literacy in their classrooms, the findings indicated that the teachers viewed the Internet’s influence on reading as an extension of traditional literacy skills. Primary teachers reported an increase in the learners’ motivation to write if their work was published on the Internet, yet they found that this did not apply to secondary school learners.

It is therefore my assumption that children from literate homes pursue the same literacy culture as their parents do, which relates equally to digital technology and print-reading. This pertains to language development, interest in reading, using the media, and the children receiving the support and guidance in digital literacy. This is a significant aspect in my investigation, which will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

3.8 The convoluted home of new literacies

It is not only the reading skills that are modified in this technological milieu, but also the switching from one task to another using various tools to construct the meanings and texts being pursued (Tierney, 2004), giving the impression that there is an underlying ease with which children approach the different digital technologies (Kress, 2003). The skills that are used and assimilated are not trivial, but are stored as meanings upon meanings that build up, and are created socially, even if those meanings are connected across spaces. It is therefore not surprising that there is a concern for teachers and how they prepare learners for today’s forms of literacy “in that we need new strategies for new times and a view of learners as inquirers, designers, and public intellectuals” (Tierney, 2007: 29). Tierney (2007) indicates that learners now have to be able to engage in texts across a range of materials, digital media and their integrated connections, but that they require certain inquiry and dissemination skills to be effective. It does mean being literate is no longer just connecting with the right books or magazines, or writing a perfect essay, but also understanding the collaborative literate exposure across a plethora of media. These literacy skills are part of local ways of living, and these practices are supported by talk that is determined by place and time. Prinsloo and Breier (1996) reflect on this notion by stressing that literacy is not a single unitary phenomenon attached to
education, but that it is embedded in a variety of social practices that emanate from the home and the environment within a particular culture (Gee, 2000; Street, 2001) (please refer to section 3.4.3), even if it has now taken on the wider global culture.

Today’s screen culture is very much part of home life, and is increasingly part of school life. If either at home or in school this culture were to be ignored, it would mean removing essential literacy skills and practices from education and social functioning. Screen literacy is so embedded in literacy learning that it is even important for teachers to be attentive to what the new technologies and their participant learners teach those who are teachers. Leu et al. (2007) contend that no individual such as a teacher can keep up with the many new literacies that incessantly appear online. This is where collaboration is required to keep up with updated literacies of online reading. Leu et al. (2007) continue by illustrating that online reading is typically reading of informational texts, not narrative texts, and that the Internet is the ultimate source of information that is used to answer questions and solve problems. In order to find the information, new skills have to be learnt to do so, whereas a book simply provides an index to locate information. The concern for researchers such as Hague and Payton (2010) is, nevertheless, that many teachers do not have the skill to assist the young people in an increasingly digital culture, as there is relatively little information about how to put this into practice. By recognising this aspect as a shortcoming in education, yet viewing it as a means to collaborate with students and learners, teachers may have to look past the technological aspects of the Internet and look to the activity as a social practice that has become another way of reading, writing and communicating. In this view technology can therefore be seen in New Literacies Studies as a practice (Lankshear & Knobel, 2002, 2006; Leander & Zacher, 2007; Street, 2003) in which new discourses evolve (Gee, 2003), and new strategies are increasingly used to master online reading and comprehension (Rowsell & Burke, 2009; Leu et al., 2007) in a milieu of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996).

The different worlds of multiliteracies that children carry with them in which they draw on diverse cultural, social, pedagogical, and technological resources, allow them
to negotiate their social places through their discourses laden with their own particular histories (Dyson, 1993). In order to adapt, children make use of their entire symbolic repertoires and not simply their talk or their tools (Mills 2010; Dyson, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978). The development of such a symbolic system was critical to Vygotsky’s notion that higher mental processes in the individual have their origin in social processes such as negotiating meaning-making in the home and classroom; and what is even more significant is his claim that mental processes can be understood only if it understands the tools and signs that mediate them, which in this instance, refers to digital media. For him, by far the most important cultural instrument was speech, and he believed that children’s development was to a great extent equivalent to the mastering of these various cultural tools and using the internalised cultural means in an instinctively cognitive way (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Wertsch, 1985), and in this respect the children seem more adaptable than their parents and teachers in learning digital literacy.

The particular world created by a child can thus be said to embrace different socio-cultural traditions that are brought in. This world of new literacies is practised in unique ways in different homes, which serves as the motivation in this study for my examination of the ways in which parents organise literacies to suit their family practices. While my work is framed in a theory of literacy as social practice, it will rely on the NLS to explain on the rapidly growing influence of technology, both recreational and informational, in providing a literacy history of each boy reflecting the practices, the events and the texts used in their worlds (Barton et al., 1998; Gee, 2000; Street, 2003). Since their worlds at the adolescent stage are still a guided stage of development by various mediators from whom children draw in order to piece together their collage of experiences that make up their literacy history, the many connections must be considered. The childhood initiation into literacy and ongoing support from many mediators, whether parents, grandparents, teachers, role models, more knowledgeable peers, siblings and mentors, the process is regarded as a “collaborative group activity” (Gregory & Williams, 2000: 11), rather than one between parent and boy only. It is within this interrelationship of people and places, and events, practices and texts, that the boy defines his identity, and it is in these
domains of home, the school, and his peers that the study will seek to understand the boys’ reading practices (Compton-Lilly et al., 2012), or as Greenfield describes it as a development driven by unique experiences (Greenfield, 2008).

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter the different notions of emergent literacy, home and school literacy were presented. The path of changing literacy perception over the last four decades was traced starting with the early characterisation of the autonomous model in which literacy was seen to produce particular universal characteristics. This model assumed that as people acquire literacy, so their cognitive functioning enhanced abstract and logical thought. In other words, regardless of the context, literacy was felt to influence people, raise their cognitive skills, and to develop a rational outlook that aided their progress. The research has, however, shown that this notion of reading and writing providing upward mobility in society, looks at the significance of these particular literacy skills through western lenses by imposing schooled literacy as being superior to literacy in a different culture. The autonomous model, in other words, disguised the cultural assumptions. The more culturally-orientated ideological model challenged these claims by offering a more sensitive view of the literacy practices of groups of people who give meaning to situations, and for whom meaning is derived from the social context in which reading and writing take place.

Even though the ideological model reflects the culturally-orientated stance I take in my study, this model alone did not adequately frame the habits evolving in adolescent boys’ reading experiences. I consequently turned to New Literacy Studies whose proponents expanded on the ideological model by incorporating, firstly, new social practices such as those that produce popular culture in a multimediated manner, and those that use social networks by means of a range of technologies, and secondly, the changing social process of participatory activities around technological problem solving, and resourcing and utilising information. This view is significant for research, as the nature of traditional literacy learning has been shifted through the time spent on technology and the way in which interaction with the screen culture
has influenced the participants. Technology has become an integral part of the learners’ habitus, which has changed the child/teacher interaction when incorporating screen learning in classroom situations, since often the learner is more learned than the teacher in this particular area. The relationship thus changes to collaboration in order to attain the goal of information seeking and learning.

The time spent on various technologies has to be considered, and in order to obtain a better understanding of the process by which the adolescent boys indulge in certain practices and develop certain habits of reading, I discussed the deep interrelationship between home and school practices, and scaffolding by parents and teachers. I, nevertheless, noted that the different worlds that make up the realm of each boy may be affected, since literacy and technology, converge on the Internet. Understanding of the nature of reading, and for me, specifically reading in the adolescent, must follow the lines of the New Literacies Studies as pursued by NLS, by looking not only at book-print as reading, but the influence of screen technology and digital literacy on their literacy habits.

In the next chapter I will introduce the research methodology and the philosophy that guided my research and choice of design, highlighting the ways in which this case study of eight boys draw on the methodology. The domain of study and its context will be outlined, followed by an explanation of the research process and the means of data collection.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN, APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

“One cannot read the world without reading the word.” (James Britton, 1908 – 1994)

4.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters I outlined the literature that informed the domain of home and school literacy that underpins my study, demonstrating how a particular culture generates the type of literacy that emanates from its sources. I have concluded that the literacy practices in homes and schools have the function of creating literacy awareness in the individual, but taking on particular ways of literacy depends on the ideology of that individual – in other words, feelings, values, attitudes and the social relationships present from situation to situation. In this sense literacy practices are regarded as the shared perceptions that arise from the participants’ beliefs and social interaction (see for example Street, 1995; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996). I thus argued that all literacy tasks and deeds are jointly achieved and are the product of collaborative activities, yet the issue that begs questioning in the literacy enculturation process is as follows: what influences the different ways of making meaning in the participant’s personal domain? Increasingly the contained domains of literacy learning stretch beyond the traditional spaces where youth have seldom received formal instruction in their quest to explore technological pathways, and this is certainly an area that extends beyond the customary literacy practices. Therefore, even though I argue that children enter school with predetermined dispositions and knowledge about speech, writing and different types of discourses, school situations and peer influence create conditions that shape attitudes moulded in line with a particular social world (as described by Dyson, 1993) in which participants find themselves.

I begin this chapter by introducing the research philosophy that guided my research and my choice of design, highlighting the ways in which my study draws on the methodology. The study takes the form of an ethnographic case study that focuses
on eight boys from one boys’ primary school in Johannesburg, and in this chapter the tools and the relevance and the limitations of this methodology are discussed. A question to be addressed is the investigation into the reading habits of these boys in their homes, in their out-of-school, and in-school activities and practices, by debating the value of the home-based and school literacy influence, and, on a more practical level, the dilemmas and difficulties arising from researching boys at home. The research questions are therefore formulated in the following way:

- How do home, family and school literacies influence sustained reading in boys?

The secondary questions are:

- What are boys’ in-and-out-of-school reading practices?
- What literacy practices and events in the home influence the boys to read?
- How do these practices influence boys’ reading?
- What formal and informal school literacy practices influence boys to read? How do these practices influence them?
- Why do some boys lose interest in reading as they reach the upper primary school stage?
- How can an understanding of home literacies contribute to school reading curricula?

Furthermore, the domain of the study and its context are outlined in this chapter, followed by an explanation of the research process and the means of data collection. Even though the design allows for the narrative to be told, it is only on reflection that one realises how, when cautioned by many research handbooks about the pitfalls, one has to adjust to dealing with children, their parents, class teachers, and the idiosyncrasies of all of these people.

4.2.1 Research philosophy and design

This research study aims to understand the epistemological perspective on the increasingly changing world of adolescent boys and their attitude to reading. The ideological literacy model as set out by Street (1995) (as discussed in detail in Chapter 3), which arose from the constructivist perspective of the world, is drawn on as a
framework in which this study is located. The research uses qualitative case studies because the literacy practices of eight boys in their home and school locales were studied and compared. The design of this research thus had to find ways of illuminating those specific characteristics followed by each participant in his literacy development, and therefore the ethnographical route taken by each boy had to be determined.

As a researcher, I needed to understand, what Merriam (1998: 4) refers to, as the participants’ “lived experience”. The process of the investigation was aimed at explaining the meaning made by each participant in this study within his world, thereby interpreting the realities of his environment (Dyson, 1993). With this in mind, my study had to enter into and examine each boy’s milieu. Just as interpretive studies assume that people create their own subjective meanings as they interact with their own environment, so the interpretive researcher attempts to enter that world in order to understand phenomena that carry given meanings which participants have assigned to them (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Even though I adopted the interpretivist stance to guide my research, I had to allow for a smattering of doubt that this paradigm was distinct from a critical assumption, in that, despite the knowledge that my access to the participants’ reality would be via linguistic, shared meanings, I had to acknowledge that these shared meanings are historically constituted by being produced and reproduced by people (Myers, 1999).

I do not fully conceive of these two underlying epistemologies as being wholly opposed to each other, but accede to my dominant philosophical perspective as the interpretive view. Interpretive qualitative research assumes that reality is socially constructed (Andrade, 2009; Myers, 1999) and must focus on the complexity of human sense-making (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). The sense-making, in other words, pertains to the meaning the boys in the study have attached to “lived experiences” (Merriam, 1998: 6) or otherwise qualified as a direct concern with experience as it is “lived” or “felt” or “undergone” (Sherman & Webb, 1988: 22).

Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people, but at the same time the researcher’s interpretations play a key role in reproducing a sincere account of the analysed phenomena (Mingers, 2001). This necessarily means
capturing not only the participants’ way of life, but also the interpretation of their feelings and behaviour in various situations. Silverman (2007) highlights the importance of naturally occurring instances and settings, and thus data collection, in essence, has to take place in natural spaces which cannot be manufactured or contrived (Bryman, 2001; Andrade, 2009; Merriam, 1988). Qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research in which numbers talk, reflects a rich record of what people do and how they live their lives (Silverman, 2007). The key assumption, on which this study rests, is therefore based on the boys’ perspectives, or an emic view, of this process. The process is thus, by nature, emergent. I had to investigate their experiences in the reading process, realising that these were firmly embedded in their home, peer and school culture which inevitably structure their attitudes and behaviour. Whilst the culture of the three domains – the home, the school and the peer group’s social expectations – are the experiences that determine their behaviour, it follows that it is the culture that is to be investigated. The focus of the study is to understand what the boys experience and to explain the causal process that determines their attitude to reading. If the aim of the research study is to understand and to explain the process, these are the characteristics of qualitative research (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995).

4.2.2 The qualitative focus

Having focused on the interpretive paradigm that is used in this study, it is necessary to make a distinction between the interpretive approach and qualitative research. As explained, interpretive research assumes that the epistemology of reality is gained only through social construction; in my study for instance, it would be the home-world and the school-world (Dyson, 1993) of the boys, the shared meanings built up by them, their tools and their artefacts. Qualitative research on the other hand is a broader term. Andrade (2009: 43) qualifies it as referring to:

a study process that investigates a social human problem where the researcher conducts the study in a natural setting and builds a whole and complex representation by a rich description and explanation as well as a careful examination of informants’ words and views.
This infers that qualitative research is not necessarily interpretive and depends on the philosophical assumptions of the researcher. As I have explained above, the reality that is being explored in this study of the boys is both socially constructed and societally embedded (Grbich, 2007; Gee, 2000), but since reality is not static, there must be an understanding of the various realities which are experienced differently from person to person. Those multiple realities, at the same time, are passed on and taught differently by parents and teachers who come into contact with various persons, or in this study, each boy. The interaction between me, as the researcher, and the parents/teachers/boys will thus serve to produce a constructed reality by means of the various facets and domains from which data were gathered. I contend that the interpretive explanation of the analysis, therefore, is undergirded by the habitus of the parents, teachers and boys, since the boys’ world spans across the domains from which they have been drawn. Qualitative research, therefore, assumes that these multiple realities within the habitus of the boys are a function of personal interaction and perception that need interpreting, and that “[b]eliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception” (Merriam, 1988: 17). A further perspective on the process of analysis is that it cannot only be from the participants’ point of view, as the researcher presents it as his/her construction of reality as experienced by him/her (Neuman, 2006; Andrade, 2009). In other words, within this qualitative study, the ethnographic unravelling of the data necessitates a rich but rigid interpretation to explain how people make sense of their lives in which the researcher remains the primary instrument for data analysis.

4.2.3 The ethnographic route

Ethnography has its roots in anthropology, which similarly draws from the way a social group lives and makes meaning from that culture (Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 2009; Gordon et al., 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). It essentially studies the norms and mores of a community, and it is called a community for its shared, common structures, behaviours, and expectations. Furthermore:
for something to be cultural, it must have the potential of being passed on to new group members, to exist with some permanency through time and across space (Andrade, in Merriam, 1998: 14).

The pointers above provide the reason for adopting the method of ethnography for this qualitative study. Gobo (2011: 15) describes ethnography as a “methodology based on direct observation”, yet whilst this is inherently relevant to research, it remains but a partial perspective of a “thick description” (Geertz, 1993) in the ethnographic process. It is not, however, crucially observation of the sociocultural context that will provide a “thick description”, but also listening to conversations and getting to understand the interactions of the participants within the particular culture and the moment. Since actions and communication from culture to culture function on a subconscious level, “[n]otions of how other people construct their world normally emerge only after many months (or years) in the field” (Guthrie & Hall, 1984: 91). Certain critics of ethnographic methods do, nevertheless, not regard time spent with participants as adequate research. This perception is evident in the view that Guthrie and Hall put forward (1984: 91):

Ethnographic studies are interesting, but questionable. They are considered to be little more than curiosities because of perceived problems in reliability and generalizability. From the perspective of mainstream educational research, ethnography is basically a method that relies on a small sample, observations, note taking, and a lot of intuition. Because ethnographers generally do not employ statistical procedures, their research is regarded as more anecdotal than scientific, and as lacking in rigor.

The term “ethnography” consequently remains a contentious subject. Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) state that some scholars refer to ethnography as a philosophical stance, while for others it is an instrument to be used in research. I argue that an ethnographic study is a means of explaining portions of life that cannot be measured through statistics, and the way to understand what is being observed, can only be done through rigorous interpretation. Gobo (2011: 16) points out that:

[s]ince the 1980s the meaning of ethnography has been expanded to such an extent that it encompasses forms of research extremely diverse from a methodological point of view. Everything is now ethnography: from life stories to analysis of letters and questionnaires, from autobiography to narrative analysis, from action research to performance, to field research lasting from a few days to several years.

Further criticism is expressed by anthropologists such as Wolcott (1999) and Spradley (1980) regarding the definition of the term used by other social scientists, yet Gobo
(2011) points out that the birth of ethnographic methodology commonly dates back as far as the late nineteenth century. During this time it split from traditional anthropology, to ethnology which was more concerned with studying people and their cultures. Information was gained from “statistics, the government offices and missions, documentation centres, accounts of journeys, archaeological finds, native manufactures or objects furnished by collectors of exotic art, or they conversed with travellers, missionaries and explorers” (Gobo, 2011: 17). Gobo continues to explain that the English anthropologist, Malinowski (1884 – 1942), is generally regarded as having been the first to set out the methodological principles of ethnography, “which is to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world” (2011: 18). Ethnographic methodology has, therefore, been incorporated into sociology since the 1920s. Given the controversy over this methodology and, despite this, its sustained prevalence in research, it may lead one to focus on the tenets required in ethnography with the intention of demonstrating how this relates to my study. Since this study draws on the shared norms, values, behaviours and practices of a particular community, it provides the reason for adopting the method of ethnography to interpret the culture of the community.

The first crucial part of ethnographic research is that proponents of this methodology enter “the field with an open mind” (Guthrie & Hall, 1984: 93), endeavouring not to impose their own cultural categories on the study. The second tenet outlined by Guthrie and Hall (1984: 93) is that the research methodology is “open-ended” in the sense that the researcher actively pursues information to get into the mind of the community under study. The ethnographic methods to be utilised will change from study to study, and I elaborate later in this chapter on the variety of techniques employed. An essential part of ethnography is having multiple perspectives on the subject in order to validate the research, yet when the techniques are used in isolation and are not contextualised, the research according to Lutz (1981, in Gobo, 2011), is no longer ethnography. Arising from this is the realisation that the ethnographic researcher sets out to be taught the ways, the language and the expectations of the group under scrutiny, and to understand the categories being studied from within their culture (Emond, 2000). Examples of such studies are
several seminal ethnographic studies in education in terms of reading and literacy that have been conducted by entering into other people’s worlds: the study by Heath (1983) of language use related to books in the three literate communities in the South-eastern United States in which the inadequacies of the dichotomy between oral and literate traditions are demonstrated. Snow et al. (1991) studied the language and literacy development of bilingual children, informing teachers on practices for teaching dual language learners. Fritz (2001) conducted research on how an urban school community in Johannesburg experiences social political change, while Prinsloo and Stein (2004) studied children’s early encounters with literacy in South African classrooms, and Comber (2000) produced work concerning early literacy on children at four homes in Australia. The works of these ethnographers reflect the notion outlined by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) that “detailed accounts of the concrete experience of life within a particular culture” are used as resources within research (cited in Greene & Hogan, 2005: 10). The ethnographer becomes absorbed in the process, but at the same time stays detached enough to analyse critically the behaviour of the participants within the context.

The question to be asked is why ethnographic methodology, with a long history in research, has suddenly become increasingly well known? Gobo (2011) presents an interesting analogy between Atkinson and Silverman’s (1997) contention that one lives in an interview society in which interviewing has become an inherent part of one’s activity, and, moreover, Gobo’s own view that this forms part of an “observation society” (2011: 25). He does not present a clear distinction between interviewing and observation, placing these activities under the same umbrella, saying that one finds oneself in:

a society in which observing (as interviewing) has become a fundamental activity, and watching and scrutinizing are becoming important cognitive modes alongside the others, like listening, feeling, hearing and eavesdropping, typical of the “interview society” (Gobo, 2011: 25).

People’s ways and habits reflect this in the sense that they not only have cameras at hand to immortalise their actions, but also have mobile phones that are always at hand, video recordings and webcams taking moments in action, and photos containing personal situations that are displayed openly on Facebook visited by
unknown persons. All these pose a reason for Gobo (2011: 25) to suggest that as a society we are observing, and since ethnography relies predominantly on observation for information, it stands to reason that ethnography is being used increasingly as a research methodology in modern times.

If the essence of ethnography lies in its setting, which in my study pertains to the literacy history of eight boys, and in understanding the behaviours behind their reading habits, my thesis is therefore embedded in traditional ethnography. A further characteristic of this methodology is that the group of adolescents from one boys’ school in Johannesburg resembles the “clearly identifiable” group which Henning, Smit and Van Rensburg (2004: 42) classify as an ethnographic study. In line with this view Guthrie and Hall (1984) stress that ethnography is a method that relies on a small sample, observations, note taking and a great deal of intuition. Ethnography therefore provides an opportunity to go behind the scenes of everyday people and their everyday lives, and relies on a sociocultural interpretation of the data gathered (Merriam, 1988). Silverman (2007) does, however, remind ethnographers of the difficulty in describing unremarkable daily activities of a group of people, whilst urging that research studies must remain “empirically rigorous, theoretically alive but with an eye to practical relevance” (2007: 6). This view finds resonance with Katz (2001) as he debates the necessity for ethnography as a legitimate method of research. He points out that questions such as “So what?” or “Who cares?” may well be posed if the ethnographic researcher describes what all the participants that were studied, already know. Influential ethnographic case studies by researchers such as Fox (1993), Mostert and Wikan (2008), and Comber (2000) (please refer to Chapter 3), have demonstrated, on the other hand, that the ordinary daily routines in homes and families may not always reflect mere common knowledge, or may not be as predictable as one may expect it to be. These authors explained how the communicative culture of a particular home determined how a child would learn school literacy successfully on entry. The success of these ethnographies lay in capturing mundane features, in natural settings of everyday life, and in explaining how people acted. Varying actions influence linguistic use and
behaviours, and the above narratives argued that meanings are not stable, but symbolise characteristics of individuals that reflect the shifting role of language.

The studies, to which I referred above, constituted ethnographic narratives in particular communities. The communities are a sociological reality, whereas an ethnography concerning these is undeniably a textual exercise in qualitative research. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 1) contend that there is a considerable overlap of definition in qualitative inquiry, fieldwork, interpretive method, case study and ethnography giving each “fuzzy semantic boundaries”. In the same way Bryman (2001) expresses unease about the way in which the terms ethnography and qualitative research are sometimes treated as a synonym. He suggests that engagement with a social group in superficial, semi-structured interviewing and examination of documents-only level, does not justify ethnographic research, and he puts this in the following way:

Drawing attention to the lack (italics in the original) of even moderate engagement in the social lives of those being studied by noting the absence of participant observation serves as a useful reminder of the fact that ethnography entails such immersion (Bryman, 2001: XI).

What is evident from the ethnographies by Heath (1983) and Comber (2000) is that they were studies of accurate description rather than explanation (Babbie, 2008) in which they became part of those cultures (Delamont & Atkinson, 2001; Guthrie & Hall, 1984) in order to understand them fully. The key for the ethnographer is in observing day-by-day events that seem familiar; yet this, for the anthropologist is different in that he/she interprets clues in situations that are out of the ordinary. Home and school, as they are understood, are wholly familiar settings in which it may be difficult to explain what is regarded as different in such an ordinary situation, placing it in Hammersley and Atkinson’s “fuzzy semantic boundaries” (2007: 1).

Yet the case study design helped me to define the space and time of my research, pointing to the unit of analysis (the primary school boy), and further defining the sub-units of study in terms of the domains of home and school (Yin, 2003). Ethnography, on the other hand, allowed the capturing of data on how the participants involved explained their actions, and those of others, and the context in which the action took place (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2009; Andrade, 2009).
My research therefore takes the form of an ethnographic case study in this sense, as it seems the appropriate method to analyse the cultural context of this small community of eight boys from one school, and the focus, which for Merriam (1998) is characterised by its sociocultural interpretation. Merriam (1998) states that it is the concern for culture that aligns this type of qualitative research with anthropology, especially when cultural interpretation is its aim. The ethnographer must think like an anthropologist when constructing a body of knowledge on people’s beliefs, ways, attitudes, and intentions (Delamont & Atkinson, 2001; Guthrie & Hall, 1984; Merriam, 1998; Henning et al., 2004), and this takes place through the sociocultural interpretation of the data that are gathered. It is in interpreting the recurring patterns, sayings and symbols from which the ethnographer can provide a description of practices and beliefs, having garnered a deep understanding of the culture of the group under study.

4.2.4 The ethnographic case study as a system

The various areas of focus in the study at first seemed to contain too many locations and situations that were fairly diverse and multi-faceted. Stake (1995), however, regards the irrationality of the initial stages of a case study as parts “that do not have to be working well”, yet still remain an integrated system, or single case. He continues by describing the case as an “entity” that has a “unique life” (1995: 133) that contains both problems and relationships, and the intrinsic nature of the case assists researchers in defining data sources. The ethnographic case study is therefore of interest to me as a teacher in seeking to understand the context and circumstances that feed into the literacy culture of the case (Borgnakke, 2012; Vannini et al., 2010). Stake (1995) classified a study in which one needs to learn about a particular case, and in which one has an innate interest, as an intrinsic case study. This study is therefore an intrinsic study, and I had to look beyond the various facets and areas of the study into issues that were pertinent to the case. I had to select criteria that would help me understand the culture of reading in the boys’ world, and this world spanned their private and school lives (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh,
Their private/home life is one aspect that is unique to each boy, incorporating their home situation, economic circumstances, parental input, religious exposure, sport or club participation, and their cultural experiences and friendships. The school, to me, is regulated (from the perspective of the boys’ participation in a similar domain) with nuances permeating different classes, classrooms, different teachers and friends. The purpose for me as the ethnographic entering researcher entering into the bounded day of each boy in his private and academic domain, therefore consisted of a system to be understood and interpreted, and I was there to find out how each system works, and how it is practised and experienced (Woods, 1996; Wolcott, 1999). This notion concurs with Borgnakke’s view that the data collection in the ethnographic case study covers the concept of learning as a lived and complex process (Borgnakke, 2012), and learning as situated and contextualised (Borgnakke, 2004).

4.2.5 The case study of eight boys

An ethnographic case study, as described by Silverman (2007), encompasses the group studied, the setting, the occurrences or instances that pertain to rituals or routines, and the behaviours that take place within them. Yin (2003: 13) adds a temporal facet to her definition, describing the ethnographic case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”.

Merriam argues that it is the interest in the process, and not the outcome, in the case study, since the case study design “is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (1998: 19). The schoolboys and their environments that form part of my study, make up a single group, or in a sense, a cultural community, whose literacy culture is under scrutiny. It is within this bounded system that their culture of reading is examined, and hence the research study takes the form of an ethnographic case study during which I, as the researcher, look for observable connections, or patterns [or Silverman’s (2007: 23)
"occurrences", "instances" or "sequences"] that may guide my understanding of the reading habits of the eight boys under scrutiny (Henning et al., 2004).

The domain of my ethnographic case study spans the daily movement of a group of eight boys. By daily, I am inferring that the focus is on all facets of their habitus, and not on certain compartmentalised sections only. It commences with the waking up of each boy in his home, thereafter going to school, followed by afternoon and evening activities, and then returning home. My initial instinct was that this might not be a case study in education, as I felt that most of the research would consist of out-of-school data. By observing, however, their enculturation into reading literacy in the entire domain, and realising that the “occurrences” or “instances” or “sequences” (Silverman, 2007: 23) that influence each boy are the sources of information and enlightenment, it transpires that these together are tantamount to education. A child does not only learn in class, but is influenced by the broader impact of school culture, the culture of the home and by experiences with friends, family, clubs, church or sport that are all part of their daily customs and exposures.

The group of individuals in my study is bounded within one educational place, comprising an urban primary boys’ school in Johannesburg, at the time of their adolescent Grade 6 and Grade 7 years, providing the case study with a definitive boundary (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Helbig, 2012).

As Henning et al. (2004) state, the emphasis in a case study is on the unit of analysis as this directs the boundaries, and that one would not examine themes outside the bounded system. Issues are complex and within a qualitative research study, and specifically a case study such as this, “rich data are a prerequisite for a ‘full’ case” (2004: 33). My choice of design logic was undoubtedly influenced by the multiple facets located in the boys’ living domain that had to be explored, and the purpose of this ethnographic case study is to use the range of evidence that emanates from their living world and to do exploratory research on what their active ties are all about, to describe how these put meaning into their lives, and then to explain why things are the way they are (Merriam, 1988; 1998; Neuman, 2006; Wolcott, 2009).
4.3 The research methodology

4.3.1 Locating the research site

The school chosen for the case study is an urban boys’ school in Westcliff, Johannesburg. Johannesburg’s suburbs are the product of urban sprawl and are regionalised into north, south, east and west, and generally have different personalities, the biggest sprawl being to the east and north. The eastern suburbs are relatively prosperous and close to various industrial zones. Traditionally the northern and northwestern suburbs, in which Westcliff is located, have been the centre for the wealthy, containing the high-end retail shops as well as several upper-class residential areas (http://www.joburg.org.za/unicity/index_regions.stm).

Parktown and Westcliff are two of the oldest suburbs of Johannesburg and are home to the historical mining magnates from 1896 until today. “The concentration of power and money, combined with the exuberant and extravagant taste of these pioneers, is reflected in the homes they built on the prominent ridges which lie north of the city centre” (www.parktownheritage.co.za).

The days of the rich Randlords and Empire builders are gone, but the residents of present day Westcliff maintain a high standard of living that is reflected in magnificent gardens and opulent homes in this established residential area located on the Westcliff and Parktown ridges which are prominent landmarks in Greater Johannesburg. Even this secure area dating back to the discovery of gold in 1896 on which the rich history of South Africa was built, was not immune to the taint of politics in the 1960s. There were two decades of “ruthless destruction” and many houses in Parktown were demolished to make way for the “ugliest buildings in Africa”, and this underpinned the determination to destroy this “stronghold of ‘English Liberalism’” which meant that properties were expropriated for massive government institutions (www.parktownheritage.co.za). The Parktown Heritage Trust was established to curb the destruction of old buildings for new developments and “to combat public indifference by making the houses more accessible” (www.parktownheritage.co.za) to the public.
There is a concentration of independent and public schools in this area, of which The Hilltop School [pseudonym] (established in 1919) is but one of the independent schools. The school grounds comprise nineteen acres which are located on Westcliff ridge, overlooking Parktown and the surrounding suburbs. The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 established a national schooling system and recognised two categories of school: the public schools that are state controlled, and the independent schools which are privately governed. The public schools write the school-leaving National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination which is different to that of the independent schools who write the Independent Examination Board (IEB) examination (http://www.isasa.org/content/view/306/176/). Hofmeyr and Lee (in Du Toit, 2004) suggest that the fee categories of schools serve as the best indicator of socio-economic status, and the motive for highlighting this seemingly arbitrary fact is evident in the following paragraph in which I clarify my choice of school.

The reason for the choice of school is twofold. The first is that I, as the researcher, am a Grade 3 teacher at The Hilltop boys’ school which is situated in the suburb of Westcliff, Johannesburg, South Africa. The boys who attend the school are predominantly from the suburbs around Westcliff as it is a day school with only twenty boarders who are drawn mainly from Soweto, a suburb in the south-eastern part of Johannesburg. The second reason for my choice of location is that I could be assured that there were access and easy availability of texts in the boys’ literacy environment, which drew learners from well-resourced, “print-rich homes” (Guzzetti et al., 1997). I regard the access and the constant encouragement these boys get to utilise the texts, as well as the proximity for me as the researcher to capture a detailed day-to-day picture of the processes, events and activities, as important towards understanding the culture-sharing patterns of the boys.

The research setting itself motivated my study in the sense that it was the situation in which I found myself that lead to the research question: How do home, family and school literacies influence sustained reading in boys? The school provided the environment in which there was easy access to readers, books, magazines, computers; and the same can be said of the homes from which the learners came. There was, however, a change in their reading patterns that developed from the keen
interest in their attitude to reading in Grade 3 (the grade when I taught them) and their need and interest to read in Grades 6 and 7. This I observed in the preparation classes I supervised after school during which time the boys had to read a book of their choice. Many of the boys had become reluctant readers and had changed their attitude to reading for pleasure. Iser (1978) indicated that less proficient readers read more slowly and less accurately than the better readers. Making meaning from a text is therefore a tedious process for the slower reader, and meaning is received instead of constructed (Wilhelm, 2001). This results in the reluctant reader taking little interest in the story. The boys in the group which I observed, however, could not be classified as non-proficient readers, and other factors thus contributed to the negative attitudes towards reading. The following figure illustrates the pattern of change that takes place in the adolescent boy, together with the influences that may affect that transformation.

Figure 2: The change in reading patterns of the adolescent boy.

In tracing the line of development of literacy in the eight boys within my case study, I discovered such interconnectedness and connections in the ways and values of the boys and their parents, that these reflected Holliday’s (2007) notion of culture learning in that he holds that “only a small culture can provide the network of meaning for the social phenomena found as data” (Holiday, 2007: 34). This makes it possible for me to say that, even though the environment of the boys was bounded, the patterns that emerged from their actions in events and practices, in their beliefs and icons, their habits and discourse, provided rich data within this qualitative
paradigm. The multiple strands of data from this core setting are crucial and necessary for providing a perspective, which in turn are also informed by peripheral observations for understanding the particular culture in which the boys operate and create (Dawson, 2006; Holliday, 2007). I needed to be aware that this setting of a small/bounded home and school culture was constructed and structured by me as the researcher in which certain behaviours selected for study, may be understood, and that I had to utilise the opportunities to explore the resources as widely as time allowed (Holliday, 2007).

4.3.2 The participants

In an effort to understand the ways in which gender impacts on literacy utilisation (as discussed in Chapter 2), the gender gap and biological effects on behaviour were described. As these factors are inherently part of the genetic make-up of a boy, they are termed irrelevant for the focus in this study on social practices, yet they have relevance when considering the stance and attitude of the reading boy. While issues around gender and class are pertinent to reading and literacy acquisition, my focus was on boys from a boys-only school, and girls were not considered. The domain in which the boys grow up is key to their literacy learning, and all eight boys in the case study come from a background in which reading and literacy are valued. The boys are therefore from a similar class, which necessitated the procedure of purposive sampling, and the findings can therefore not be generalised to a population.

The participants were not randomly selected. The school librarian, who teaches each upper school class once a week during the library lessons and has exposure to the reading habits of each of these boys, assisted in drawing up a list of readers and reluctant readers. The final sample consisted of four keen readers, and four reluctant readers. The criteria attached to the selection were not only based on library records, but also observation of participation and attitudes during the library time. The boys’ teachers who conduct the free reading periods in both the morning and afternoon preparation classes also gave input. The sample was drawn from the three Grade 6 classes at the school and the eight boys were studied during 2010 to 2011 in
their Grade 6 and 7 years. Each boy was given a pseudonym to protect his true identity and these pseudonyms are reflected in the table that follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of participant boy</th>
<th>Reading stance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Leon</td>
<td>Reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Brian</td>
<td>Reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mark</td>
<td>Reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sean</td>
<td>Reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Kevin</td>
<td>Reluctant reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Barry</td>
<td>Reluctant reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. William</td>
<td>Reluctant reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Simon</td>
<td>Reluctant reader</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3: Participants in the ethnographic case study.*

The learners turn twelve in their Grade 6 year and thirteen in Grade 7. This places them in what Tyre refers to as a “problem stage” (2008: 142) in which their emerging masculinity infuses their attitudes in all their actions. Social institutions socialise the construction of different kinds of masculinities which determine the way in which interaction takes place in sport participation, girl-crazy behaviour, assertiveness, and reading or not (Kimmel & Messner, 1995). The interest in this study is in the way in which each boy is socialised into his stance toward reading literacy, as literacy development cannot be constant from one boy to the next, based on the varying home influences and life experiences.

### 4.4 Data collection techniques

The methodological tools of data collection were primarily by means of observations and interviews. These were supplemented by utilising artefacts such as photographs taken in the homes as explained in the following section.
4.4.1 Observation

The everyday lives of the boys were under scrutiny, and in the study their daily world is explained and interpreted as it emerges when observed (Dyson, 1993). Observations were therefore a primary means of collecting data since they provided an effective way of following the day-to-day behaviour and trends within the classroom and home situations. The observation sessions at school were set up with the various class teachers in varying subjects throughout the year, whilst those at home were by appointment with the parents of the boys.

As discussed earlier, I was mindful that my presence in both the classrooms and in the homes as an observing outsider (even though I was a familiar teacher at the school), might, firstly, influence the boys’ behaviour, and, secondly, might give me a biased view of the boys that are familiar to me. I was aware that despite my status as a non-participant observer, my observation could influence their actions and create bias (Cresswell, 1994). Even though the boys were aware of my presence and demonstrated this by initially glancing in my direction, they seemed to accept the situation and settled down to their normal routine. Their attitude reflected an acceptance of my presence and it seemed as though, having an extra person in their classroom or their home, did not impinge on their actions, since I played no participatory role in their setting. I would argue that in this instance, ethnography allowed me, as the researcher, to enter the children’s domain in order to undertake my task (Harden, Scott, Backett-Milburn & Jackson, 2000), yet I needed to remain cognisant of the fact that children are not passive receptors of situations created by adults, but are active social agents managing their own experiences. Fundamental to ethnography is the need to rely “on children taking control over how researchers are included in their interactions and on researchers granting children their rightful position as ‘experts’” (Emond, in Greene & Hogan, 2005: 123).

My feeling of discomfort in the role as observer in their domain made me look critically at commentary on observation in literature. Here I found resonance in a description by Scott and Usher in which they identify the four roles of a participant observer in educational ethnographic research (Scott & Usher, 1996: 145). The first is
the “complete participant” in which the researchers conceal their identity or purpose, yet, by its very nature, this covert role may restrict free participation. The second role is that of the “participant-as-observer” in which they are open about the purpose of their presence, and access to settings is negotiated. The third role to which Scott and Usher refer, is where the observer adopts a more “detached stance” and the researcher will not experience the activities for him/herself; yet contact is maintained between the “observer and observed”, but close and detailed field notes are taken. The fourth role is a totally passive one in which the researcher concentrates on minimising the “contamination” of the setting. For me as the researcher, a teacher on the staff who is familiar to the boys, but is not their class teacher, I placed myself in the role of “participant-as-observer” who actively remained passive in order not to contaminate the setting. I thus set out to be an observer in the classrooms, and only communicated with the boys during the interviews and the preparation classes after school. In this view it is therefore fitting that Wolcott (2009) likens participant observation to experiencing, but admits that it is too encompassing and wide a term not to be defined in any piece of qualitative research.

Participant observation is inherent in ethnography, in fieldwork, in interviewing, and in a case study where a researcher is present. The researcher seeks to find the broadest viewpoint from which to combine strategies using a wide range of techniques to gain the perspective he/she can get (Wolcott, 2009; Henning et al., 2004; Gordon, Holland & Lahelma, 2008). This entails penetrating deep into the events of everyday life of the subjects under scrutiny, which, in my study, are the boys in their school milieu and home environment. In these domains there was the sensitivity of the involvement of the researcher that varied according to the activity on particular days. Classroom observation was non-participant, and non-intrusive, with no involvement in the class activities in order not to unsettle the natural atmosphere in the classroom. I entered the various classrooms having gained permission through prior discussions with the class teacher concerned. Class teachers were aware of my intention, and this was explained to the boys after I had been greeted and given a seat from which to observe. The observation was therefore
intentionally non-intrusive and non-participant as I was an onlooker, merely watching.

During the observation sessions I took field notes describing the interaction between teacher and learners, and between the learners themselves. I commenced each session of my note-taking by considering the organisation of the classroom, and the interconnectedness of discipline and structure that affected the milieu in which literacy took place. I was particularly cognisant of the literacy strategies that the teacher employed to engage the boys as receptors of this lived experience (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2005). I took note of the type of questions that were asked by the teacher, and the type of question that provoked excitement or motivated the boys into self-discovery or interaction on the topic. I focused particularly on how the boys were involved in the process, whether the discourse was oral or written, and how this contributed to negotiating meaning. My field notes also reflected the questions asked by the boys, and the reasons for their probing.

I discovered that the different teacher personalities constructed differing learning environments in which the learners reacted positively or passively in their classrooms. I therefore endeavoured to capture such idiosyncrasies in my note-taking since the same learner acted differently in another teacher’s class. I set out to interpret these moments by writing down as much as I could glean from class to class. I took the decision not to take photographs during the class time in order to limit my intrusion into their space, and to make them less aware of my presence. The photographs are therefore of the homes, once I had interviewed the parents, and the fieldwork in the context of the school predominantly took the form of observation and interviews with teachers and learners.

4.4.2 Interviews

The degree of participation, on the other hand, was different during interviews. In order to enquire about the boys’ literacy histories, I had to encourage them to share their stories and experiences. Consequently I set up interviews with each of the eight
boys. On reflection, I realised that I endeavoured to negotiate a comfortable, casual sharing of views during the interviews (Emond, 2000; Greene & Hogan, 2005). Even though the interviews took place in school where the learners were used to the educational teacher-initiated questions to which they know they must respond, the conversations were intentionally conducted in a relaxed mode in which each boy was allowed to participate freely and share his opinions and experiences. The context had to be meaningful for both the researcher and the learner, and the narrative style and approach to questioning was crucial to the outcome. I attempted to place myself in the position of the boy being interviewed and used humour to put him at ease. In doing this I wished to avoid what Locander, Sudman and Bradburn (2003: 336) term “question threat”. Dean and Whyte (2003) suggest that it is difficult to interpret subjective data, and the difficulty increases when:

> the informant is reporting not his present feelings or attitudes but those he recollects from the past. This is because of the widespread tendency we all have to modify a recollection of past feelings in a selective way that fits them more comfortably into our current point of view (2003: 352).

This belief reflects my personal experience in class during information gathering sessions with pupils. In formal situations learners do not seem to be forthcoming with truths, but try to mask reality in order to create a positive image of them. Once one jokes or pretends to find the situation funny, he/she is swept up in the enthusiasm and will not hesitate to express his/her own point of view (Emond, 2000; Dean & Whyte, 2003). In using humour I attempted to relax the participants and to get closer to their real experience.

I was constantly aware that as a teacher, I was in a position of power, and, similarly, was in alliance with the parents and fellow teachers; yet I was never aware that this was a threat to natural behaviour from the boys. Even though it is a boys’ school, the first 5 years of education (from reception to Grade 4) are formative years during which time the boys have only female teachers. From Grade 5 to 7 the status changes to predominantly male teachers, while females teach some subjects. Since there is a gradual transition, the boys in the school do not overtly express an attitude of hegemonic masculinity and anti-femininity. Morrell (1998) explains that masculinities are socially constructed, and that a culture constructs masculinity
differently within the working class and middle class neighbourhoods. He refers specifically to the urban middle class who organises a version of masculinity around leadership and expertise. In these homes, such as the 8 homes in my case study, masculinity is honoured in sport, and in the academic field, and the parents perceive reading literacy as an avenue that they can enrich and encourage their sons to enact this masculinity towards attaining certain levels and rewards (Morrell, 1998).

With the aim of constructing an epistemological perspective of each boy’s history, I had to understand the way that the boys understood their experiences, and getting to know their way of life. It would therefore have been too one-dimensional only to interview the boys. Silverman (2007: 58) noted, in his stance against interviews in which direct questioning may “influence what people say and are not usually a useful way to investigate a phenomenon”, that triangulation is needed to make the data more reliable. This meant that I had to interview the parents of each boy, their various class teachers, and the librarian at the school, in an effort to achieve the goal of understanding “multiple realities” (Henning et al., 2004: 20). The same notion finds resonance with Robert Stake (1995: 12) in which he urges the qualitative case researcher “to preserve the multiple realities” (italics in original), and to achieve this, it means not disturbing the “ordinary activity of the case” and ensuring that one is unobtrusive, “non-interventive and empathic”.

I had to bear in mind that the “multiple realities” are those phenomena that provided validity for me as an interpretive researcher (Henning et al., 2002: 20). It was the way in which I had to observe and describe the values, the intentions, the reasons behind actions and thought-processes of both the boys and the adults surrounding them. I had to interpret the metamorphosing adaptation of the boys’ world view, and their feelings about these changes. Furthermore, I had to build up an understanding of the social context in which their attitudes developed, which can only be done by what Gobo (2011) terms as an intense role of close observation. Gobo further defines ethnographic methodology as having the following characteristics:
1. the researcher establishes a direct relationship with the social actors;
2. staying in their natural environment;
3. with the purpose of observing and describing their social actions;
4. by interacting with them and participating in their everyday ceremonials and rituals; and
5. learning their code (or at least parts of it) in order to understand the meaning of their actions.

(Gobo, cited in Silverman, 2011: 17)

What this means to the researcher is necessarily understanding the culture of those under observation. It thus entails entering into and grasping the boys’ point of view and their understanding of their way of life, and this underpins the goal of ethnography and guides the stance of the researcher. Ethnographic methodology furthermore gives priority to observation: about how the participants and actors speak about their actions, and what they say about their behaviour captured during interviews, and this is intrinsic to the explanation of their world view. During this process of making sense of adolescent attitudes, I wondered if the literacy culture observed in the home, and developed in the school situation, influenced the attitude of the boys observed, or whether the attitude was unique to each of the individuals. This made me look more deeply into their actions and their reality, rather than deeply considering their opinions, which may be a reflection of the careless attitudes still in the making in the adolescent boys. I found reassurance in Gobo’s view that “what an ethnography mainly observes are behaviours (rituals, routines, ceremonials), and these are much more stable over time than are attitudes and opinions” (Gobo, 2011: 28). It can therefore be argued that ethnography can be interpreted as subjective when looking at the sensitivity of the researcher’s perceptions.

Subjectivity may well be part of this methodology, but it may also be found in quantitative questionnaires and interviews in which there is likelihood that a similar reply could be elicited. Field notes written down by one ethnographer would not be similar within the same setting to those of another ethnographer, since each one will see different things (Merriam, 1988), and to this end Gobo (2011) suggests that the
research design then makes a greater contribution to discovery than the researchers themselves. Hence deep, direct observation, supported by field notes during the process, together with unstructured and semi-structured interviews, are techniques used in writing the living history of a particular case study.

I thus had to enter the various domains of the boys in order to familiarise myself with the context within their homes, their classrooms, and the library. The boys from The Hilltop School were predominantly from the suburbs around Westcliff (described earlier in this chapter). The boys in this study all lived at home and are bound in home literacy practice, since I needed to eliminate variables that may have influenced their literacy learning. The bounding of the study in this way was consistent with case study design in which no model was available for assessing the reading patterns of adolescent boys. It was further bounded by time in that the selected boys were studied during their Grade 6 and their Grade 7 year. Consistent with case study design, I interviewed not only the boys, but also their parents, whilst observing their class teachers, and their librarian and by sitting in their homes. I also included photographs taken of the bookshelves within the homes, of incidental magazines/newspapers found in the home, and of notice boards, literacy displays and lists that served as multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2002). These observable data are in keeping with Street’s (2003) view that all literacies are indicative of social, lived practice, and making these photographs visual conceptualisations of literacy events that take place in and form part of the home culture (Barton et al., 2000). This visible ethnography reflects Bourdieu’s *habitus* that is described by Calhoun et al. (2007: 261-262) as “a set of loose guidelines that orient actors” in capturing literacy events that are integral to social practices. Hamilton (in Barton et al., 2000: 18) agrees that:

Literacy practices can only be inferred (italics in the original) from observable evidence because they include invisible resources, such as knowledge and feelings; they embody social purposes and values; and they are part of a constantly changing context, both spatial and temporal. It is only some visual traces of literacy practices that are captured in still photographs – observable, but frozen moments of dynamic process.

The “purposes and values” of the photographs taken in the various homes, therefore, function as a tool for developing a narrative of the boys’ culture to which they are
exposed. Even though there is no interaction with the artefacts at the time of photographing them, the availability of literacy material “still signify the existence of the practices and purposes that have generated them” (Barton et al., 2000: 29).

This demonstrates that the study is wholly context-dependent and the design emerged through the observations and conversations with the interviewees in their own environments. The interviews with the parents were conducted in their homes, and not at school, and were semi-structured in nature. Six questions served as guidelines during the interviews:

- What was your role in bedtime stories when your child was young?
- What are your reading habits in your home at present?
- How much talk is there around books in the home at present?
- How do you think you have influenced your child to read?
- What other literacy influences do you think your family literacy has had on the child?
- Is it important to you to have a reading child?

Figure 4: Questions used as guidelines during interviews with parents.

The chief reason for a qualitative study is that it is exploratory, and the "researcher seeks to listen to the informants and to build a picture based on their ideas" (Creswell, 1994: 21). Subsequently, in order to capture as accurately as possible the nuances and exact wording of the parent/s, I used tape recordings which I transcribed using the Dragon Naturally Speaking speech recognition software. The tape recorder was running during the interviews, and this afforded me the opportunity to take interview notes in my journal.

Interviews with the boys, on the other hand, were totally unstructured as their responses were at first mostly monosyllabic, and most of the boys (but for two) did not have the verbal confidence to elaborate much on their thoughts and to provide
any detail on their opinions. They were keen to talk about more tangible aspects such as their books and their habits, and were inquisitive about my obsession with their reading habits. The narrative of their tellings became a story that unfolded with descriptions and explanations, and for me, as the researcher, a picture to reflect on and to interpret.

4.4.3 Structured observation

By following a number of classroom-based studies (Mostert & Wikan, 2008; Wikan et al., 2007; Padak & Rasinski, 2008; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Cavazos-Kottke, 2005), I also set out to observe the interactions and activities that took place in the various classes. I attended selected Grade 6 and 7 classes once a week in various subjects during the two years, focusing particularly closely on the type of interaction that was elicited by the teacher in each class, the depth of the questions, the involvement that was expected, the way in which the boys were engaged in higher-order thinking, were asked for their opinions and were immersed in research. Throughout these visits I was a non-participant observer passively looking to find patterns of behaviour that strengthened literacy activities as these patterns developed in their classrooms and thereafter in their homes. To be able to capture detailed observed activities in the class and at home, I compiled a field journal to inform me at a later stage.

The class visits were formal and structured, precluding casual conversations and interactions. I therefore went to afternoon preparation sessions earlier than required to observe the boys in relaxed discourse. Their ideas, thoughts and social interests were data that I was able to record in my journal, and these sessions once a week, contributed to a richer understanding of the adolescent culture through their discourse with their peers. This was a general observation of the class as a whole and the focus was not particularly on the eight boys in the case study. Those particular boys were not in my afternoon preparation session, but I needed to observe the group as a whole in order to gain understanding of their world view. As a researcher I regarded the process as inductive in that I gained access to their experiences, albeit as a listening outsider on my part, in an attempt to understand how this age group
makes sense of their social and academic lives through their language, their sport talk, discussions about girls, and the discourse on the articles in their magazines that were being read.

There were often tensions in combining the teaching/researcher role in the confined time space of the school day. An example of this was attending observational lessons within my teaching day when my own class attended sport or other cultural lessons. I periodically lost valuable observation time between dismissing my own class and reaching the class to be observed. A further tension of which I was aware during observation in the homes, and a situation that I felt hopelessly inadequate to change, was that I was often addressed by “little brothers” during home observation even though I set out to be a non-participant observer. It does seem inevitable, however, especially when there are small children in the household, and when one considers that the observation is taking place in a relaxed home environment in which the strictures about ignoring visitors are, in a sense, alien to their behaviour, especially to a teacher of the school that they attend. These were some aspects that reminded me of the line of reasoning of Spindler and Hammond (2000) that, during educational research, it is often difficult to do objective observation in situations of involvement and familiarity. I had to address this problem by being ever-cognisant of distancing the subjective teacher/learner relationship and the observer-researcher, and often had to ignore an approach or address during these sessions by purposefully focusing on my field notes rather than answering directives at me. I was, however, comforted by the view of Spindler and Hammond (2000) that ethnography is an appropriate genre for educational research since it allows teachers to interpret their own stories. Therefore, having taught the boys in my study in Grade 3 and observing their development into adolescence in Grade 6 and 7, I was able to tell about my research from an emic, or insider perspective in this ethnographic case study.
4.5 The process

4.5.1 Objective observation

I took a decision to address my initial fear of being involved with the pupils and being on the staff at the school where the research was being done. Even though I was a non-participant observer in the classrooms, I needed to ascertain whether my presence had altered behaviour in the class as a whole or in certain individuals during those periods. I therefore made a point of asking for feedback from each teacher whose class I had observed at that particular time, and these I recorded in my field notes.

4.5.2 Field notes

I was intent on recording field notes while observing the classes, yet I often felt that I did not want to miss out on their body language or gestures, and this frequently jeopardised my note-taking. Ross and Mirowsky (2003: 329) suggest that “people everywhere are in some way dependent on the positive evaluations of others and cultivate the everyday virtues or their appearances in order to win social acceptance”. I argue that there are two counter-points to this suggestion when pupils find themselves in a classroom: firstly, there is a culture of openness and speaking-your-mind at The Hilltop School which is not in line with the belief of winning “social acceptance”; secondly, within a class or group situation one soon perceives how individuals feel about what is being said by reading the gestures and facial expressions of those observing the speaker. Faces often tell their own narrative of dis/approval, enthusiasm, distaste or boredom. The observation process thus provided me with insight into the boys’ attitude and stance towards certain situations, questions, challenges and work projects in classrooms. This was of particular interest in the library periods as these tended to be interactive with the library teacher for the first part of the lessons, before the boys pursued their own search for books. The reason was that these classes were by nature not academic, but substantially more spontaneous and non-threatening for individuals. During
these sessions I felt that my field notes should be written after the class since the dynamics in the classroom itself warranted close observation. This, I found, was not always constructive enough since not all events could be recalled.

While I was doing observation in each of the homes, on the other hand, I was seated outside of the interactive circle of conversation, and this made it easy to take notes.

4.5.3 Photographs

I considered videotaping home and classroom observation, but decided against it. The reason for this was, that I did not think it an appropriate tool in the homes and the classrooms in which I already appeared the encroacher on a family, or a close-knit class. I did not want the natural dynamics to change for a camera/videotape, even though videotapes and cameras are valuable data collection instruments (Spindler & Hammond, 2000). The ethnographic case study lends itself to understanding a central phenomenon (in my study it is literacy and the adolescent boy), and I therefore considered photographs to be a worthwhile signifier of literacy practices and a means of “identifying the elements of literacy practices more closely” (Barton et al., 2000: 16). Taking photographs meant that I could capture literacy moments that could not be incorporated in the interviews. The parents willingly allowed photographs to be taken of their living and sleeping areas in which incidental books and artefacts could be found. The aim was to capture the environment in which the boys could pick up reading material, and to ascertain the availability of the material. The parents guided me through their homes and I selected the areas in which I took photographs. In line with Street’s (1995) interpretation of practices as being undergirded by cultural ways, the need to capture visually the artefacts of the literacy surroundings in the various homes was valuable as an additional source of data. For me it formed part of the home literacy narrative, or the ways in which literacy acts as a resource (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) for different homes, or the physical traces that helped to construct an account of the boy, and the plethora of puzzle pieces that together made up the history of each participant. The photographs as data served as evidence of how literacy “activities are supported,
sustained, learned and impeded in people’s lives and relationships, and the social meanings they have” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000: 12).

4.6 Confidentiality

In order to construct each boy’s history, I essentially invaded many of the areas of his private day (Stake, 1995). I spoke to him and elicited feelings and attitudes from him, I sat in on his class, observed his relationship with his teacher, I watched him with his friends during pre-preparation time, interviewed his parents in his home, and took photographs of his room and living areas. These are not normally areas for public (or teacher) consumption, and it emphasises how essential confidentiality is in research situations. As Emond (2000) suggests, confidentiality in any social setting does seem to be an elusive concept as it depends on the nature of the information and how it impacts on the participants’ lives. The longer the time spent with the people in their various domains, the more one realises that they build up a trusting relationship with the researcher, and whatever they share during the interviews may not seem to be of much importance to anyone else, but when printed or retold, these may expose sensitivities and feelings that they would prefer to have kept private. Even though risks to the learners, their parents, the teachers and the school were minimal in this study, I had to remain ever-aware of divulging any detail from both the interviews and observations that I felt was part of their personal and private lives which I had entered.

4.7 Validity versus reliability

The aim of any research project is for other researchers to trust the results of the study and be confident that the study is reliable and valid. Merriam (1988) points to reliability of the instrumentation or appropriateness of the data analysis techniques and the conclusions drawn, which, in turn, demonstrates how findings remain true to
the reality of the captured data. That reality is nevertheless subject to interpretation by the investigator. Babbie (2008: 344) suggests that being aware that one’s interpretation needs to be reliable, allows one to have “some control over the impact you have”. By its nature, in qualitative research, understanding is a key rationale for the investigation, and this reality will differ from one researcher to another. Yet, there must be constant awareness of how the participants construct their own world or their own reality, and the trustworthiness of the study lies in the investigator showing that his/her understanding is rendered honestly.

In order to present an honest rendering of the informants’ world and how he/she conceives of his/her experiences, the aims of my research had to be transparent to them. There were thus four strategies that were followed towards attaining this goal, and these are discussed below.

1) It was of paramount importance to inform the participants about the goals of the study. This was done through the introductory letter to the institution and the parents of the eight boys, during which time I was able to stress how necessary their knowledge was for research into boys’ reading habits.

2) As they were informed, participation was wholly voluntary, and there was no indication of reluctance from their side to be part of this process from the boys, their parents, or the school.

3) A further strategy towards achieving validity was that on completion of the interview with each boy, we discussed our conversation with the view to understanding their attitude and feelings when they expressed themselves in the interview (Emond, 2005). I found this process particularly relevant for my research as I drew from a study by Ruth Emond (2000) in her research on two groups of young people in residential care in homes in Scotland. She, by necessity, had to be sensitive to the vulnerability of each child, attending carefully to the types of questions she posed the youngsters, explaining her aim in detail, setting each one at ease before an interview, and then deconstructing the interview afterwards. These steps enabled her to assess whether or not she was on the right path towards gaining an understanding of their world, and I deemed this a necessary aspect in my own study.
4) Another strategy to gain validity in my study was employing triangulation in using multiple sources of data gathering. To obtain a more holistic view for valid explanations, I used not only interviews with the eight boys, but I also interviewed the parents at home. On separate occasions I observed the family interaction in their home situation, observed their teachers while teaching at school, did observation of the boys in pre-preparation instances and within the library, and interviewed the librarian in the school library. In an endeavour to ensure that the results made sense, I took my interpretations to the librarian at the school to ask if these were plausible. Olson (2004) deemed this action a significant step towards attaining another person’s viewpoint or standpoint to cast light upon a subject - a notion supported by Creswell (2002). To this end I have specifically relied on the librarian since she had exposure to the whole school and is not as subjectively involved with individual classes as the other teachers who become protective over “their” boys. She was also able to express her objective opinions on my interpretations when I submitted the data analysis of the school data to her for member-checking.

4.8 Ethics

As indicated above, the researcher does not only shape the interpretation of the data, but also puts a personal stamp on the data analysis. This reflects the dangers of non-rigorous data interpretation and insensitivity to participants, especially children. In this sense it is vital when using the ethnographic approach to decide what sensible practice is. This meant consciously building a relationship with each of the eight families, both the adults and the boy, and to put aside my own value judgments in dealing with them; here I refer to events when comments such as “We always go to the library” or “He reads all the time” were part of the conversation (Hammersley, 1998). These definitive adverbs “always” and “all the time” necessitated a closer analysis of the conversation as a whole, instead of taking the individual codes at face value.
The emergent nature of a case study, furthermore, obscures potential harm to the boys and their families. It was accordingly important to obtain informed consent from the school and parents before interviewing the children, and the unstructured nature of the interviews allowed little opportunity of feeling pressurised to answer, or embarrassment about lack of opinions (Merriam, 1988). Yet another ethical concern over data collection and analysis is the knowledge that data could be filtered to suit my research aim. I was very careful to consider all the relevant data in order to ensure an unbiased view during analysis. A further concern was the anonymity of the participants, and each boy was given a pseudonym to preserve his privacy for publication.

4.9 Assembling a personal history: Analysing the data

An ethnographic case study for Merriam (1998: 14) involves a “sociocultural interpretation of the data” or “reconstruction of participants’ symbolic meanings and patterns of social interaction”, and this process emphasises the need for sensitivity in data-gathering. Brozo (2010: ix) contends that many of the struggles that boys face, originate from their failure to become fluent readers, that they come to school with fewer words than their girl counterparts and fewer literacy experiences from home. Since this pointed directly to at-home literacy experiences, it also defined the initial domain of research for my enquiry, which is an area that had to be approached with sensitivity as I was researching parents and their sons in their homes. Once I had defined which boys would form part of the case study, I followed Barton and Hamilton’s (1998) method of ethnographically gathering and analysing “local literacies”, using their experience of entering private homes.

Step 1: I interviewed parents to get a sense of their views on literacy in the home. This was followed by interviews with the boys to see how their views reflected on those of their parents. I then undertook transcriptions of these interviews.
Step 2: I conducted interviews with the librarian, did observation in the library, and observed various class teachers during their lessons. Further observation was done in preparation sessions at school and at each of the boy’s homes.

Having gained data in this way, I had to rely on various means of analysis to make sense of the information I had accrued, and I drew on ways of discourse analysis as set out by Parker (1999), Wolcott (1994) and Potter and Wetherell (1987). Since discourse at times pertains to patterns of meaning that organise the various domains in which humans form their lives, Parker points out, for instance, that “a ‘familial’ discourse will describe relationships as revolving around a nuclear family structure as if it were natural and universal, and as if all the other ways we live in the world must be measured against it” (Parker, 1999: 3). I therefore had to look beyond purely language in my transcriptions, and focus rigorously on the practices that emerged from these. With this in mind I proceeded with steps 3, 4 and 5 of the process:

Step 3: This involved reading and re-reading field notes on observation, and data of transcriptions of interviews to pick up patterns, habits, contradictions, and identifying the themes or patterns that came to the fore.

Step 4: Here I selected data, then re-read and made notes.

Step 5: This involved making connections between different parts of the data. These included formulating the relationship between the data from home surroundings and those from school.
| Preliminary phase | Gaining permission from the school. | May 2009
| | Gaining access to parents. | February 2010
| Phase 1 | Interviews with parents followed by interviews with each boy. | February 2010
| | Transcriptions of the interviews. | to December 2011
| Phase 2 | Interviews with librarian. | 2010/2011/2012
| Phase 3 | Reading, re-reading field notes on observation, transcriptions to identify patterns and themes. | October 2011 to
| | | February 2012
| Phase 4 | Note-making on selected data. | March 2012 to September 2012
| Phase 5 | Making connections and collating data. | March 2012 to December 2012
| | Report writing. | |

Figure 5: The ethnographic journey and time frame.

4.10 Data analysis

Informed by my research questions, I embarked on analysing the data accumulated during my fieldwork. The volume of data gathered enabled an approach in this ethnographic study to categorise patterns that reflected behaviour, interactions and thought patterns that related to reading and literacy from the empirical phenomena gained at school and in the homes. Since literacy and reading were my main concern, I was able to reflect on the accumulated data, which further guided interviews and observations that were still ongoing. Following the method of data handling of Barton and Hamilton (2000), I also drew on the suggestion by Harden et al. (2000) that the most helpful means of approaching ethnographic data is sequential analysis, the initial stage being to gain understanding of the setting in which the problem is embedded. Beyond the location, however, care had to be taken to be mindful of both observable and unobservable empirical occurrences that form part of the data. Bergman and Coxon state that:

identification of presences and absences, as well as similarities and differences between empirical phenomena is the foundation on which meaning and understanding is based. The process of (re)creating categories, their content, their boundaries, and their relations to each other is central to thought and actions (2005: 7).
Questions such as “How does one assign meaning to seemingly everyday phenomena, or, what is the right meaning?” emerged. This was, in part, answered by referring to the research question and sub-questions that had already filtered meanings into the intent of the questions. In this way I began by following the step-by-step ethnographic analysis of Barton and Hamilton (1998) to interpret occurrences and actions of the participants under study. I highlighted important aspects in the transcriptions of the interviews; these were summarised into categories of attitudes, approaches and beliefs that emerged. These constituted forms of making meaning for the group of boys, the parents and the school in the case study, which is described by Fairclough (2001: 122) as “discourse as a moment of social practices”, indicating strongly that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an analytic process of the relationship between the elements of social practice, language usage, body language, visual images, the political, cultural and economic spaces of everyday life. It can therefore be argued that people can be identified by their performances in the position that they assume in a practice, or furthermore, by the differing actions within that position. Jäger (2001: 33) posits this position as the type of knowledge that has been passed on to participants, and the type of content, which makes up the consciousness shaping their surrounding reality. Hence CDA aims to identify both the knowledge and its context, and to critique this information. Since discourses serve particular ends, there is more knowledge underlying utterances and actions than participants are aware of. In order to understand the ideologies of the participants in this study, the discourses had to be viewed as taking place in a particular time and within a specific space. The discourse patterns that emerged were categorised and then correlated with the patterns that became evident in observations and were reflected in artefacts. Every new source of evidence was recorded, organised and analysed for recurring themes that explained the participants’ attitude to literacy and their way of enacting the basics of literacy in the homes and schools. In particular, these themes pertained to perceptions and meanings in their conversations and the way in which the participants lived literacy.

Thomas and Harden (2007) suggest that qualitative research is often described as not generalisable, as such research is always specific to a particular context and
participants, yet when recurring patterns emerge as a “reasonably ‘researched’ chunk of reality” (Henning et al., 2004: 107) that have been identified by the researcher, this viewpoint changes. Content and thematic analyses, in this view, assume the status of “findings” (Henning et al., 2004: 107) because the themes can be analysed and argued to make a point. Dixon-Woods et al. (2005), however, warn against the limitations of purely summarising themes, and argue, like Thomas and Harden (2007) that a theme should be discussed by going beyond the content for analysis of the data. Context for CDA can therefore be said to be critical to any understanding of the social reality of persons such as the case study group of boys, since CDA, as applied in this study, referred not only to linguistic factors, but included their culture of doing, and the social influences affected by the political and ideological stance of their worlds (Meyer, 2001).

4.11 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have shown how this ethnographic case study has drawn on the underlying epistemology of the interpretive stance. Since a case study design is based on the nature of the research problem, I argued that this was the most appropriate means of investigating multiple social units. I thus adopted the position that knowledge of reality is a social construction by people, whilst at the same time a co-constructive process of making meaning exists within that particular group of people (Walsham, 2001; Emond, 2000). Since an understanding of the literacy practices of the participants in the case study is the aim, I concur with Prinsloo and Stein who argue that literacy “is seen as a social practice which is mediated by language and other cultural tools and artefacts ... in a context in which social actors position, and are positioned by each other in social semiotic interaction” (2004: 4). The different means of data collection to reflect this aim were described in this chapter. These included interviews, observation, field notes and photographs, and the outline of my data analysis. The research settings were briefly defined as background in which the case study takes place.
Chapter 5 takes the form of situating the eight boys within their home domain. I set out to describe the homes, the events and practices that take place within this space, and the effect the practices have on the boys within these spaces. This is done with the intention of answering the questions such as: What literacy practices and events in the home influence the boys to read? How do these practices influence boys’ reading? Why do some boys lose interest in reading as they reach the upper primary school stage?
CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS

EACH BOY’S STORY

“If you are a parent, you already have the major ingredient to infect a child with the reading bug

— love.” Paul Jennings (The Reading Bug, 2003: 3)

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter, Chapter 4, described the research design and domain of study in this ethnographic case study of eight boys. The social context within this domain was outlined, followed by an explanation of the research process and the means of data collection. I then discussed the various steps taken in my ethnographic inquiry into the home, family and school literacy of the primary school boys who comprised my case study. I have concluded that the acquisition of literacy is dependent on social practices, and I draw on the framework of the New Literacy Studies’ (as in Street, 1995; Gee, 1996; Barton, 1994) notion of all literacies being “positioned in relation to the social institutions and power relations which sustain them” (Barton et al., 2000: 1). These social relationships and practices are pivotal to the principles of the New Literacy theorists, placing importance on the data analysis to provide a clear understanding of the way that literacy develops in the spaces of home and school (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1991; Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009; Compton-Lilly, 2009).

This chapter serves to introduce the eight boys in the case study by providing an ethnographic vignette of each participant. Because the main aim of this study is to understand how home, family and school literacies influence sustained reading in boys, I deemed the space in which literacy enculturation takes place to be key to the analysis. The vignette thus offers a brief characterisation of each participant within his home milieu in an effort to understand his particular literacy history within his
sphere. Each description is derived from my fieldwork in their particular homes with their family, and tells of the research experience in their private literacy domain. It does not, however, serve only as an introduction, but also presents a view of the research settings that provided some common themes for analysis (as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7). The home journey, through this description, therefore addresses the following two subsidiary research questions of this thesis (also addressed in Chapter 6):

- What literacy practices and events in the home influence the boys to read?
- How do these practices influence boys’ reading?

The following question will be discussed in Chapter 6:

- What are boys’ out-of school reading practices?

Chapter 7 will attempt to answer the following research questions:

- What are boys’ in-school reading practices?
- What formal and informal school literacy practices influence boys to read? How do these practices influence them?
- Why do some boys lose interest in reading as they reach the upper primary school stage?
- How can an understanding of home literacies contribute to school reading curricula?

Chapter 5 is located in the home environment in which each individual boy experiences his own literacies (Gee, 2010). The focus on home literacy in this domain, as described through the interviews with the boys and their parents, provides the means to reflect experientially on the home aspect of their daily lives. At the same time, the observation and field notes enable a holistic conceptual framework of literacy culture to be drawn up in the ethnographic process. In my data analysis in this and the next chapter, I explore the central links between home, school literacy and reading habits (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004), and I aim to provide a thematic and content analysis of the data with the parents, boys and the teachers (Anderson, 2007) as discussed in Chapter 4. While this chapter delves into the home locale,
Chapter 6 draws on interviews with the boys and parents, and on observation data in the homes in order to focus on the production and nature of engagement with literacy, and how this cultural knowledge impacts on the participants. The following chapter, Chapter 7, concentrates on the school experiences of the participants to look at the interaction of their home literacy and their continued literacy enculturation within the structured academic day.

As explained in Chapter 3, I draw on the notion of multiliteracies existing in specific times and spaces as represented in the New Literacy Studies (Street, 1998, 2001; Gee, 1999, 2000), and on the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1986) in relation to his belief that the child and an older teacher/parent/family member, communicate and interact within a relationship, creating an innate desire within the child to become part of that "communicative world" (Gregory et al., 2004: 16). I will argue in this chapter that knowledge, the spaces and the practices to which the boys are exposed in the home, position them to develop their particular stance or attitude to reading.

The transcription of the interviews have been left in their original form, and the quotations have been taken directly from unedited interviews in order to preserve the tone and specific vocabulary of the boys. Chapter 5, therefore, consists of a description of the literacy locale of each boy, serving as background to the analysis that follows in Chapters 6 and 7.

### 5.2.1 Leon’s story

Leon fascinated me as a Grade 3 pupil. I had never before taught a learner who had been so enamoured by books, and reading for him was pure pleasure. He was not anti-social, or a loner; he loved reading and used every opportunity to do so. He mingled easily with his friends and played the customary ball-related games during break-time at school. Once he was back in the classroom, however, he would get to his desk and take out his reader, even if it were only for five minutes before the lesson began. He willingly shared his stories, or his discoveries in science magazines
or any interesting article from a newspaper with his friends in class. He read widely, and read anything.

At the beginning of his Grade 4 year he often visited my classroom during break-time to relate his latest story-reading. I started tape-recording these moments to establish the type of books he was reading and to research the reasons for his interest in these books, enabling me to use this information in my own literacy teaching. He would describe the characters in the book that he was reading, and would draw analogies between books within the same series, or writing by different authors. An example of this can be seen in the following extract:

**Extract 1:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>Why did you prefer Percy Jackson?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leon:</td>
<td>Percy Jackson is like ... I don’t know ... I like Greek myths more ... I like the thing where he can control water. I don’t prefer it to Artemis Fowl. Definitely, Artemis Fowl is EXCELLENT (shouts out).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>The best?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon:</td>
<td>The best. (He says this animatedly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>But why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon:</td>
<td>Mmmmmmmmm ... It’s modern day, and it’s got like modern day feelings and stuff, but he includes everything - Colfer ... Eoin Colfer. He includes it from different people or theories’ point of view - even if the same thing’s happening. If Artemis is using a special phone to make a distraction, he says that it shows it from Artemis’s side and then like Holly’s side. He’s making the distraction - the distraction for Holly, but at the same time ... it’s not ... it’s not just after. But with Percy Jackson it is just ... just from his point of view all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Oh, okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon:</td>
<td>You have to find out what happens from the other characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Like different dimensions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon:</td>
<td>Kind of ... also ... it’s better. I think Artemis Fowl is better written ... kind of. Percy Jackson I like better than Charlie Bone though. It’s like all the ancient Greek myths are real and they use, like, the same method and stuff and ... it’s also got a little bit of humour - Artemis Fowl has.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Interview, October 2008)*
In relating his book experiences to me, I became aware that even at the age of nine, Leon was able to identify the aspects that he appreciated in stories. His comment that “Artemis Fowl is better written” demonstrates his early discernment in the value of good writing; something he could only do by comparing the many books he has read, and the insight he has gained from the style of different authors. Similarly, he was able to indicate his preference for a multi-dimensional approach to a story rather than a linear story-line from the mouth of one character only. Leon seemed to live through his books and became one of the characters, to the extent that, as the extract above shows, he excitedly shouted out his favourite book. These communicative situations clearly reflected how his reading functioned in shaping his knowledge, and in providing enjoyment from his immersion into books (Van Dijk, 2001). He was most definitive about his likes and dislikes, representing the little steps that this Grade 4 boy was taking in constructing his ideological perception of real-world concepts (Jäger, 2001). He expressed this developing ideology in instances such as his preference for Eoin Colfer’s Artemis Fowl series of eight science fiction novels in which Artemis, as a teenage criminal mastermind, was a cunning character with a strong sense of morals, who demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice his life for his friends. To reveal the reason for his partiality, Leon compared Artemis’s strong character with that of the demigod, Percy Jackson (a pentalogy written by Rick Riordan). Leon was able to articulate the details in the stories that appealed to him: these included the humour that was prevalent, the modernised Greek myths, or which book was better written. The events, comparisons and opinions expressed by Leon at this young age implicates family discourse that, according to Ruth Wodak (2001), provides the “strategies of perspectivation” (2001: 27) that have empowered him to analyse and compare stories. His passion for books is intense, and is patently evident in the following extract from an interview:

**Extract 2:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leon:</th>
<th>Guess what? Guess what I’ve read? Mmm .... I’ve just read the one about a yellow cat which is one of the Black Cats.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>A good one?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leon: Good.

Researcher: And the writer?

Leon: Paul Stewart. He also ... no, not Paul Stewart, Chris Riddell, he writes ... he illustrates Vox and everything. I’m also reading one by Chris Riddell one of their books now called Hugo Pepp, but Ottoline and the yellow cat - Ottoline is a girl and she likes ... she collects stamps and shoes and postcards that her parents send her ... because they go all over the world and they collect stuff like butterfly hacker nests and four-pouted tea pots and tiny, minute pictures and a whole load of stuff. And they found Mr Munro, this big shaggy creature, in a bog in Norway. He hates getting wet so he hates the rain ... and he hates having his hair brushed. The thing he hates more than having his hair brushed, is brushing someone else’s hair, but he still does his best to keep Ottoline happy. And Ottoline ... these people that look after her, they’re like lampshiners, doorknob shiners, lamp people, pillow puffers, a whole load of things.

Researcher: What did you like about this story? The animals?

Leon: No, I like ... I actually like the imagination of, like, Chris Riddell and Paul Stewart and everything. They think of characters and it is so well illustrated. This book has, like, a picture on every page.

Researcher: By Riddell himself?

Leon: But it’s got so much detail and it’s so like ... there’s double umbrellas and her parents are always sending her postcards as if they know what’s happening and things like that.

Researcher: It sounds somewhat macabre.

Leon: What does that mean?

Researcher: Weird and eerie.

Leon: No, not in an eerie sense, but in a fun sort of way. But the lapdogs, they’re like always gambling and stuff at the end of the day and ... at night the cat goes and steals jewels from famous people ... the rich people they’ve run away from ... umm ... and in the end Ottoline catches the cat. And Hugo Pepp is by the same people. And it’s like this theory. First they ... this crane ... it’s got a winged horse and a boy riding it. You’ve seen that before?

Researcher: Uhuh. Very diverse characters, and very diverse inventions ...

Leon: Ja, it’s just amazing, I think it’s amazing how ... how they actually, kind of, like what I thought of Harry Potter... how they actually, like, think of it and the illustrations are so brilliant.

Researcher: Now previously you said that you didn’t like the pictures because it spoilt your own picture in your own head.

Leon: No, but these guys, these guys, I like their pictures ... they’re detailed and it’s imaginative. I don’t think I could imagine it better... it’s got so much detail ... even though it’s not colour.
Leon began his communication with a "Guess what? Guess what I've read?" His excitement is evident in the repetition of "guess what" so that he can engage me in his pleasure. There is a large quantity of emotion that underlies these “discourse fragments” (Jäger, 2001: 47) reflecting strong interaction with the stories that make meaning for Leon. He was in Grade 4 during this exchange, and he had to walk from his classroom in another building on the campus during his break-time to get to the Grade 3 classroom to share his readings with me. In The Hilltop School, the Grade 4 boys are conceptually distant from the junior section which consists of Grade 0 - 3, in that they are regarded as senior boys. They line up with the senior boys, attend the same assemblies, have the same sport and academic routines and extra-mural activities as those of the upper part of the school. In other words, they regard themselves as bigger boys who are treated in a less nurturing manner. His enthusiasm, however, was so palpable that he disregarded the psychological gap between senior and junior spaces. He would stand in my classroom with his packed lunch in his hands, gazing at the ceiling and sharing his book readings. He lived through his narratives, and described the detail that fascinated him in the stories. His unadulterated joy resonated in the exclamations: "EXCELLENT!", "the best", "good" and "so brilliant". These linguistic markers of intensified utterances punctuate Leon’s discourse in both Extracts 1 and 2 from interviews that were four months apart, indicating sustained pleasurable attitude to his reading hobby. He personalised the books, and experienced the tales and the characters, sometimes likening their feelings to his own.

(Morgan, 2008)
Leon sometimes struggled to relate his ideas as he could not express them all simultaneously; yet his expanding literary knowledge put meaning into his own world (Dyson, 1993), granting him insight into characters and the situations in which they found themselves, into the dynamics of relationships, the narrative of their actions, and enabling him to recognise different registers in the discourses. Without reading exposure, he would not be able to compare authors, identify humour, or marvel at the authors’ imagination in conjuring up the diverse characters: “I actually like the imagination”, “they think of characters”, “I think it’s amazing how they ... like what I thought of Harry Potter ... how [...] they think of it”, and finally expressing his view: “I don’t think I could imagine it better”. Leon, in contrast to his class friends, has an acute understanding of people and places, suggesting that his embedded literacy involvement cannot stem from school literacy teaching only (Snow et al., 1991), since his peers share the same school education. His reading, by implication, can therefore be strongly linked to his home literacy practices that have fed into his interest prior to formal education (Gee, 1996). (This will be further discussed in Chapter 6).

I enjoyed the literacy experiences with this boy. While he was in my class during his Grade 3 year, he seemed to inspire his friends around him to read his books as he shared the stories with them. His friends often commented on the way he used “big” words, or words that he had gleaned from his reading, that his peers had not heard. At this early age the boys were already aware that knowing “big” words gave one knowledge and power, and that it was cause for admiration (Wodak, 2001). There were many moments during class time that we came across a strange word in a text. When no-one in the class was able to work out the meaning, he would jump up from his desk with excitement while making connections in his attempt to decipher it. This activity provoked a liveliness in him. He felt words, and relished his possession of knowledge created through his reading, using this knowledge to shape a moment in his day, and making his literacy practices wholly relevant to the class situation (Jäger, 2001). This knowing and possessing made him eloquent and needy for more information. He, nevertheless, willingly helped anyone in class who asked him, and demonstrated patience even when he was busy, exuding modesty and an eagerness to share his knowledge. The literacy immersion that was evident in this boy urged
me to start my research in literacy, since I wished to understand his love of books. It was therefore important for me to find out what his enculturation into reading entailed in his home environment. Leon’s home environment clearly influenced the type of masculinity that is desirable in the urban middle class in which he lives. He was comfortable to express his interest in books, and to share them with a female teacher, even though he had already entered the senior phase in his school in which the intensity of masculinity was encouraged. Leon’s actions reflect Morrell’s (1998) belief that masculinity takes on different meaning in different cultures, and can therefore be said to be socially constructed. Leon embraced the culture that was important to the actors in his home at the expense of hegemonic masculinity or a common pattern of conduct that is expected of boys and their aversion to reading books during adolescence.

Leon is the eldest of five boys in his family. The youngest two (who the parents said they hoped would be girls) are twins who require much attention. Despite the intrusive demands of a large family, the parents seem to find time to answer the children’s questions in detail. The mother explained that she was concerned about not reading to the twins as much as she had done to the older boys. A transcript from an interview with Leon, however, reflects a different literacy enculturation for the little ones which entails peer reading:

**Extract 3:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>You had lots of bedtime stories when you were younger, but obviously not anymore.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leon:</td>
<td>No, there are too many people in our family now … so I do some stories to my younger brothers now when my dad or mum are busy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Interview, November 2010)

In the same way in which Leon listened to bedtime stories when he was young, he perceived that his smaller brothers needed to have the same literacy experience as he did. Leon’s parents made him aware of the importance of routine bedtime reading, and he often spoke of the impact that reading had on his life, saying that: "I don't like reading, I love reading!" (interview, November 2010). He therefore
emulated his parents' input in his passion, by reading to the twins when his parents were unable to do so. It was important for him to have that time with his parents, and he attempted to make it equally important for his little brothers, knowing what he had gained from his own literacy experience. The family reading ethos was continued through Leon in which he endeavoured to create a similar ethos to the one that he had come to expect as the norm, comprising a culturally appropriate framework from which he drew to give meaning to his world and that of his brothers' world (Dyson, 1993; Atkinson et al., 2008). It was a ritualised pattern that was significantly important to the family, and one that was repeated by an older peer (Gee, 2000).

Both parents work, the mother as a medical doctor and father in the legal profession, yet it was apparent that they interacted meaningfully with their children, despite their time constraints, and it was obvious that literacy played a significant role in the family milieu. The children were not allowed to watch television during the week, but were able to do so at the parents' discretion during weekends only. The family spent much time around the enormous dining room table which was situated in an open-plan kitchen and family room. On one wall was a notice board on which were pinned school schedules, notices, sport fixtures and clippings from newspapers. The father explained that each boy pinned up an article of interest from newspapers or magazines, and often these were discussed during their mealtime. Once the older texts had been replaced, they were retained in a file as the parents found the children frequently referred to these, which they then had at hand. The filing of these articles is not an arbitrary action, but suggests that a conscious effort is made by the parents to engage the boys in contemporary texts and discourse on these (Heath, 1983; Snow, 2002). I learnt that their discourse extended to books too - books were everywhere. A bookshelf that stretched from floor to ceiling, and had a ladder to reach the upper levels, graced the wide passage that lead from the family room to the lounge. This artefact signifies the existence of the practices that have generated it. The father seemed to have a special kinship with this enormous bookshelf which he described in this way:
Leon's father has an intense affinity for his books, finding it emotionally desirous: "That's what I want. That's what I want." He uses the bookshelf as a device that defines him as a person and his literacy interest, and one that culturally organises his preferred habit of possessing books. In our conversation about books, it emerged that he found great satisfaction in sharing his passion with his sons and needed them to take part in his activities and experiences. Atkinson et al. (2008: 129) aptly describe this "collection as an inert assemblage of objects, but as something that is incorporated into the taken-for-granted extensions of selfhood that surround ordinary social actors". The books are more than a mere collection; they symbolise the father’s priorities within his home. His discourse reveals not only the value he places on the material books, but also the implied ideological value that they bring to the family literacy practices, which reflect Jäger’s (2001) belief that “[d]iscourses are not phenomena which exist independently; they form the elements – and are the prerequisite – of the existence of so-called dispositives” (2001: 56), explained as the evolving knowledge contained in speaking and thinking. This sentiment is mirrored in the way Leon’s father spoke of his bookshelves, affirming the value that is implicit in individual books and their associations for him. He related the story of his book collection that was temporarily stored in an unused shower while the shelves were being constructed. Leon (as a three year old) went into the room, turned on the tap, realised that he had just done something wrong, and closed it again. By the time the parents retrieved the books to place them in the book case, these had turned into a mouldy pulp.
Leon’s mother laughed when she described her husband’s obsession with his bookshelf: “And [father] reorganises it every now and then. It needs to be organised in alphabetical order, then [father] organises it into categories” to which he answers, “Well, there is some sort of semblance of order here so that when somebody says, ‘Where is…?’ I can say ‘Ah, I know where it is’” (from interview, November 2010). There is another bookshelf in the lounge laden with books including countless first editions, and each bedroom has bookshelves in which the boys keep their own books. The parents’ bedside tables are further storage areas filled with books and poetry magazines that they are currently reading (as discussed in Chapter 7). Their enjoyment of books has infused the psyche of their children since reading forms part of their discourse, and their home routine. Bedtime stories are part of their custom, and stories are often read to the little ones when the parents are home during the day.

When I asked Leon during an interview whether he liked reading, his answer was:

**Extract 5:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leon:</th>
<th>I don’t like reading. I love reading. I can’t get a book out of my head until I’ve finished it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Which books do you prefer reading: fiction or factual or reference books?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leon: No, I love my stories. Definitely fiction. But I don’t mind reading about how things work. We have a subscription to a science magazine at home and I like reading that.

Researcher: Are there enough books at home for you to read, or how do you access books that interest you?

Leon: We have many books at home, but we also spend a lot of time at Exclusives [a book shop] to buy books that I want to read. My dad normally takes us there, because he also wants to browse.

Researcher: And he allows you to choose your own books?

Leon: Oh, definitely!

(Interview, November 2010)

Reading has become a passionate pastime for Leon which is an activity that he seems to have adopted from his father. This is evident in Leon’s comment: “My dad normally takes us there [the bookshop], because he also wants to browse” indicating the chain-linking from father to son. For this family the involvement in reading seems to be an immersion in an activity valued by all members of the family. They seek out all opportunities to obtain books. They not only buy books, but they are members of the library. The boys are often taken there in the afternoons by the au pair who takes care of the boys until the parents return from work. Verbal literacy is important to the family. They discuss their day around the table giving each boy a chance to talk – even the twins are made to keep quiet while an older brother shares his experiences. Bedtime stories are a daily ritual, yet stories are not only read to the boys, but the father is often asked to tell his stories about the fat man and the thin man and farmer Bob and his tractors (my field notes, November 2010) which he makes up as he goes along. The older boys read on their own, and at times read to the twins. There is one computer which the boys share, but the father is adamant that no computer games are to be played, and that the computer is to be used for schoolwork only. Leon has attained his literacy habits in a close-knit family that has high regard for the written word (Comber, 2000) as the data analysis attests in Chapter 6. The literacy practices have orientated him to pursue a habit that his parents deem important, having ritualised reading events and discourse events that have become an accepted and pleasurable practice for every member in the home (Barton et al., 2000).
5.2.2 Leon’s literacy

Leon’s literacy has deep roots in his home where his parents have infused their love of reading into their children. Their literacy habits comprise strict patterning from bedtime reading to library visits and story-telling (Gee, 2011). The discipline in the home is evident in no television being allowed during the week, or the fact that the computer is used for project work only. All extraneous digital media are excluded from home activities. There is, however, constant interaction between the parents and the children during which time they are encouraged to express themselves. All five children are guided into the family ethos of reading and thinking about literacy, and are encouraged to participate in pursuing their own and common interest. The participatory artefacts are evident in the visible bookshelves, and in the bulletin board on which each boy places articles of interest, and which they discuss, since the board is on a wall adjacent to the family dining table where they gather for meals. Leon’s literacy has unfolded from the family’s habit of sharing in books, stories, talking, interacting, but the predominant influence seems to be the attitude towards reading that very clearly has become the accepted norm for the children (Heath, 1983; Comber, 2000). There is not only verbal encouragement for all the boys to read, for they are presented with an example of reading parents, and this is coupled with an unmistakable air of challenge into a Vygotskyan Zone of Proximal Development (1978) to think, discuss and disseminate what they read and talk about. The learning experiences and cultural practices for these boys are reliant on parental influence, and I argue that the parental-infused practices are undergirded by discipline and consistent guidance. Data from the home, that expound on this, are analysed in Chapter 6.

5.3.1 Simon’s story

Simon, the second boy in this case study, is one of two children. He lives in a modest, but cosy home with his parents and a sister who is four years older than he is. The
material layout of the house reflects their lifestyle: the comfortable couches arranged as chatting areas; the big table where they gather for both breakfast and their evening meal in the open-plan kitchen; the reading corner where the father has a bookshelf containing his hobby books; and the TV room with a comfortable couch and large bookshelves laden with children’s and adults’ books. Both children have bookcases filled with books in their bedrooms. There is nothing ostentatious about this home in terms of the décor, creating the impression that it is a middle-class family home in which they make an effort to spend time together. Both parents work full time, and my field notes (24 August, 2011) suggest that an organised and structured milieu is maintained to cope with the daily routine.

Simon is a quiet, well-mannered boy whose demeanour echoes the structured characteristics of his home and his school work. He is a high achiever academically, a strong reader, and takes part in sport, causing him to arrive home late in the afternoon on at least four days per week. On returning home in the afternoon, his ritual involves completion of his school homework, dinner with his parents and sister at the dining room table, TV from 7:30 and bedtime at 8:30. If he has a good book, he will read for a half an hour before switching off his light. He loves books and has been a keen reader since the age of five. His mother recalls:

**Extract 6:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simon’s mother:</th>
<th>I distinctly remember him looking at billboards and making sense of the words, and he was about five, so, in Simon’s case he almost learned to read by osmosis, but I do remember his absolute love for the Asterix books.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Interview, 24 August 2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By using the word "osmosis" Simon's mother attempts to communicate his ability to create meaning informally through experiencing literacy in the media. Billboards enabled him to comprehend the visual message, and furthermore she perceives that he started to decipher writing and to understand how letters formed words. The implication is that she did not formally sit down to teach him phonics, but visual exposure aided him to learn to read and make sense of the words used in the
advertisements, words that he was able to recognise and apply in different applications. Graphic illustrations were illuminating to him, and a way for him to use literacy, which is evident from the fact that he still loves reading comics, even though his favourite books are fictional stories. He does not like to read factual books, which is the genre that his father likes, and he, therefore, never shares his father’s books, but may read his mother’s fiction if the book interests him. There are no newspapers or magazines in the house other than his father’s fly-fishing and birding magazines that he receives monthly. The family spends a considerable amount of time in bookshops, especially while the mother is buying groceries, but they do not purchase many books from there because of the expense. There is the presupposition that ideologically this family would rather be exposed to books than accompany mother. Simply being in the bookshop as a family implies that there has been discourse about this event, and probably interaction as they pursue their own interests. These actions reflect Habernas’s notion of cognitive interests which describes the strategies that people use to acquire knowledge (in Calhoun et al., 2007). In this instance each member of the family is pursuing his/her own interest in the time and space available to them. Even though the family lives frugally, they nevertheless have access to reading material in ways different to the habits of Simon’s peers who buy books at will. The family belongs to the public library, and the mother often borrows books from the library for Simon as he does not have the time to do so after school. He borrows more books from the public library than from school as the selection is larger.

Technology does not play a big role in Simon’s life as he has an old computer with no Internet connection in his room on which he plays computer games at times, but the novelty of such games has worn off and he spends more time reading. Yet he reads only when he gets into bed. The mother and father are both readers, and Simon’s mother notes (Interview, August 2011):
Extract 7:

I have always said that why [father] and I get on so well - we are from a very similar background. That is in terms of reading. [...] You know, I have been reading avidly all my life, and when I met [father], his family were all the same. We all used to sit there, the five of us, my two older sisters and my parents, would sit in the lounge with the TV on and be reading like this (demonstrates with hands held up replicating a book).

The mother’s words reflect her strong conviction that the family is, and historically comes from a strong reading family. Her words “we are from a very similar background” and “his family were all the same” denote the value placed on book-engagement. I noted with interest, however, that Simon’s sister used to be averse to reading. The family played CDs of the first three Harry Potter books in the car on a long journey. They were unable to finish the third CD, and on returning to school the following day, she got the book from the library in order to complete the story. She started with Harry Potter, and has now turned into a reader. What is particularly evident here is that a family literacy event has triggered reading literacy in a non-reader, and that even switching from the audio medium to written texts remained irrelevant. It does, nevertheless, characterise the extent to which literacy moments can shape particular literacy practices, which, I argue, stem from parental actions (Rogers, 2004).

5.3.2 Simon’s literacy

This occurrence made me reflect on the jigsaw puzzle of family literacy lives, indicating many strands that feed into an attitude to reading. The physical and material evidence of a book culture exists strongly in this family. The smaller signs such as discussing books on a regular basis, or becoming involved in stories and living literacy, is, nevertheless, intrinsically absent. Even though books are important for this family, the activity seems to be a functional one that has its space in their busy lives. This is evident in the fact that the father reads only his hobby magazines and books, and Simon reads when he has time. There is, therefore, encouragement and guidance towards evoking a culture of reading in this home, but the members seem
to pursue their habits as individuals, and intense discussion and interaction do not take place as a family. The parents in this family are deeply aware of the importance of academic achievement for their two children, resulting in their focus on home practices that prepare their children adequately for success at school (Purcell-Gates, 2000; Paratore, 2005; Paratore & Dougherty, 2011). The literacy experiences include library visits, bookshops and story CDs in the car on long trips. This view is consistent with the view of the community in which they live and are schooled, since the expectation of the larger community is one in which ongoing engagement with books means knowledge, and this is the way in which the children are apprenticed through family and social practices (Gee, 2000).

5.4.1 Mark’s story

I sat at the dining room table to interview Mark’s mother. I looked at a cupboard situated behind her, and was struck by the neatness of the many cookery and gardening books on display. She told me of her love for her garden in which she was able to spend time as she was a stay-at-home mum. On the wall next to the cupboard was a notice board with school schedules and family events displayed on it. The room in which we sat was an extension of the family room that had big, but cosy couches draped with blankets and cushions. It was obvious that the family enjoyed this area, as a lived-in atmosphere permeated the room. There were wall-to-wall cupboards on one side of the room, of which the top half consisted of bookshelves crammed with books. There were files, dictionaries, magazines, note books and pencils on the counter area next to the telephone. The sun streamed onto the couches, and this was where I observed Mark and his mother cuddling together to read one of his Afrikaans books (one of the three languages taught at The Hilltop School) during an observation session in their home.

It was a modest, but homely home in which the two boys were accepted and treated at different levels by their parents. The mother explained that the elder boy has “remedial issues” and expounded on his reading in the following way:
Extract 8:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>I suppose your husband reads technical books?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark's mother:</td>
<td>No, not even. No, not if he can help it. No, [husband] doesn’t read. He will tell you he reads an enormous amount of books, but he listens to audio books ... but all the remedial issues that [brother] has, [husband] has ... and remember, reading is hard work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>So, it doesn’t appeal to him?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark's mother:</td>
<td>Ja, and that is why [brother] doesn’t, because reading is hard work. It is an effort for [brother], but for Mark it isn’t. And that is also interesting why Mark has got so far is because reading is a skill, a skill that you practise – without a question. It comes more naturally to some than others ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>I agree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark's mother:</td>
<td>But once ... but once you’ve got it, it becomes a skill. If [brother] read more, he would get better at it, but the problem is that I can’t get him to break into that habit (she laughs). He hates it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Interview, December 2010)

This vignette serves the purpose of demonstrating how home literacy practices do not influence members of the same family in similar ways if there are disabilities. The comment by Mark’s mother that "all the remedial issues that [brother] has, [husband] has ... and remember reading is hard work" illuminates her efforts at making a reader of Mark’s brother. She has come to understand what it means when Smith-Burke et al. (1991: 58) suggest that:

[c]hildren are reduced to their disabilities; language is reduced to fragments; learning is reduced to the performance of subskills to be individually mastered in a sequential way. Also reduced, however, is the chance for these children to function in an environment where language and literacy are used in meaningful ways to communicate and learn.

Even though Mark, as the reader, is the participant in this study, I am deliberately drawing an analogy between the two brothers, for whom the mother harbours similar aspirations, in order to understand the literacy interactions within this home. The mother has consistently encouraged and guided both sons, yet she has come to realise that literacy in the form of story CDs and computer games is an appealing way of engaging Mark’s brother. The limitations of her efforts are evident from a study by Snyder and Downey (1991) in which 93 normally achieving subjects were compared to 93 reading-disabled children between eight and fourteen years of age. The results
revealed that the two groups differed substantially on the time and accuracy of word retrieval, the ability to produce appropriate syntactic structures in sentences, retelling stories and making inferences. The "remedial issues" to which Mark's mother refers, pertains to the time it takes to retrieve linguistic information during the reading process, which downplays the pleasure that a normal reader gains from reading, but becomes "hard work" for the brother. Shany, Wiener and Feingold (2011) note that the reading-disabled person becomes preoccupied with his/her disability which furthermore hampers his/her engagement in reading. Mark, on the other hand, is an exceptionally fast reader, and this may promote an already negative attitude to reading in his brother. Both boys in this family were exposed to bedtime stories and were encouraged to read from the library. Books of their choice were bought for them, and they saw their mother read prolifically. Mark is, nevertheless, the only reader. During my interview with Mark (January 2011), he proceeded to name six series of books that he had completed (discussed in Chapter 6). He takes any opportunity to indulge in this habit of reading both at home and at school, during holidays, weekends, during preparation time or in class when he has finished his work at school. Both boys have computers and Mark admits that he plays PlayStation and online games. I asked him during our interview:

**Extract 9:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>And computers ... how much time do you spend on computers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark:</td>
<td>Much more than I should.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Why is your mum not a happy bunny that you spend so much time on the computer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark:</td>
<td>But I also read much more than I should.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Interview, January 2011)

This interview with Mark demonstrates his view of his own habits. There is a clarity of thought - Mark perceiving that he is in control of his actions. He is motivated by his love of books, yet maintains a sense of balance so that reading is not the overriding feature of his life. His reading is not an irrational obsession at the expense
of all other activities, but he is aware that he organises his own brand of culture in his home environment. His comment in response to being questioned about the amount of time spent on his computer is a defensive one: “[b]ut I also read much more than I should” implying that he is aware that he spends much time on the computer. At the same time, Mark is also cognisant of the fact that he reads prolifically. Reading and sport and family times are important for the family. There is much discourse on books by Mark and his mother. They lie reading in bed on a Saturday afternoon, they discuss authors and effective writing, and regularly use the dictionary which lies on the kitchen shelf. She bought him a Kindle for Christmas in order to save on having to buy so many books in the bookstore.

5.4.2 Mark’s literacy

Literacy is most evident in this home for the half of the family that reads. The father and the son with “remedial issues” are not essentially averse to reading, since Mark’s father listens to audio books (which he classifies as reading). The boys are well-spoken and articulate – skills that they acquire from family time and the discourse around the big dining table in the family room where they have their meals. The level of literacy engagement has therefore encouraged and guided Mark towards achieving success in school, and at the same time he has developed a love for reading from his mother who admits to indulging consistently in reading. In examining the mother-son relationship, it is evident that their discourses mediate particular conceptions of literacy that serve as instigators of reading behaviour and ideologies (Gee, 1996), at the same time urging Mark to identify strongly with reading and talk around it. Their constant talk is representative of the wider discourses that exist and circulate within their social world (Dyson, 1993), and is symbolic of the mother’s expectation of ultimate successful performance in school (Atkinson et al., 2008). Her encouragement lies not only in supplying books for Mark, but also in setting an example and creating in him an attitude to books that is in line with hers. Her actions are both personal and public, not because of self-interest, but function as a consciously appropriate construction of Mark’s socialisation into the adult world.
Mark too is clearly conscious of the cultural importance of his reading habit, but sets time aside for his computer games which he monitors, since he maintains that the time he spends on computer games does not impinge on his reading time, giving the liberal impression of a child culture opposing the adult culture, and expressing his adolescent need for self-indulgence.

5.5.1 Sean’s story

On the advice of the school librarian, Sean was originally selected as a non-reading participant in my case study. During the course of this study, in his Grade 6 year, however, he metamorphosed into a reader when he became interested in a particular genre of books (as discussed in Chapter 6). As a Grade 3 boy in my class he was one of the reluctant readers, but in Grade 4, he sought to attain the 50-Club and 100-Club status. This is a reading impetus practice at The Hilltop School for the Grade 4 boys in which the boys get a 50-Club certificate and a slab of chocolate (once a boy has read 50 books). The 50-Club reflects the importance of the prestige that is gained by the boys through their efforts in reading. They enjoy the recognition as the prize-giving takes place during assembly time when the whole school meets twice a week. This event can be seen to highlight the power that reading holds for the learners and teachers at the school, for it is essentially a private activity that is afforded public acknowledgement. The librarian at the school similarly makes presentations to the boys for reading at these general gatherings since she believes that public acknowledgement encourages non-readers to read more (my field notes from my interview with her on 12 May 2011). Sean started reading more in Grade 4 and 5, but became an avid reader only in his Grade 6 and 7 years (please refer to Chapter 6 for a detailed explanation).

On entering Sean’s home, one is immediately conscious of the lived-in feeling of this family home. Care has been taken in the layout of the big garden, overlooked by a veranda with a dining table and comfortable garden chairs. The kitchen seems to be the heart of the house. Sean’s mother has filed her collection of cookery and garden books in a shelf next to the large dining table situated perpendicularly to the kitchen.
counter. It is a cosy room with large windows, pot plants and comfortable chairs. There is a shelf filled with files which, according to the mother, contain recipes that have been given to her, or that have been cut out of magazines. She loves cooking, and they often entertain friends or clients from her husband’s work. She works part time, whilst her husband is an investment banker. At the time of our interview she had baked scones for me, and had recipe books scattered about the table as she was searching for appropriate recipes for a dinner for clients (Interview, January 2011). There are other bookshelves in the kitchen that hold fiction books, atlases, reference books, decorating books and magazines. Sean and his sister have bookshelves in their bedrooms containing their own books. The shelving and pin boards are restricted to the bedrooms and kitchen areas where literacy events take place. Work and sport schedules are pinned to the board, and reminders of meetings and get-togethers are displayed below the daily school schedules of the two children who are at different schools - Sean at The Hilltop School which is a boys-only school. His sister attends the girls’ school in the area.

From the conversation I understood that Sean, his sister and father were clearly interested in reading, but the mother admitted to not being an in-depth reader as she often paged through books when a story became too gory or boring. She is a slow reader and reads mostly fiction that she gets from the book club to which she belongs. Her taste in books is reflected in her choice of movies:

**Extract 10:**

I can’t watch anything that is too gory or scary ... because I’m there. [Unclear] ... but once I start a movie, I’ve got to finish it. That is why I like happy endings. I’m quite careful ... I like the lighter side, no not lighter ... (um) ... so *The girl with the dragon tattoo* ✴ is not for me.

(Interview, January 2011)

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✴ *The girl with the dragon tattoo* is the first of a trilogy written by late Swedish author and journalist, Stieg Larsson. It is a crime novel in which a deeply troubled surveillance agent, Lisbeth Salander, and publisher, Mikael Blomkvist, are embroiled in the intrigue of the influential Vanger family while searching for a girl who has been missing for 40 years.
In my interview with her (January 2011) she told me how her husband reads anything from technical magazines to fiction. He was busy with *The girl with the dragon tattoo* by Stieg Larsson, and she described his reading in the following way:

**Extract 11:**

... obviously bought at the airport. So if he could ... he would go away and take the book with him, and we don’t see him until he has finished reading it. He won’t move until he’s finished with it. Whereas I would read, then I will do this, and then I will have to do that, which is much more [unclear] ... I wish I could just sit still.

(Interview, January 2011)

This family reads, but there does not appear to be a submersion in literacy discourse, book comparisons, dictionary referencing or newspaper reading. Sean and his sister watch TV for an hour or two each evening, but computer games and Internet browsing are restricted to Tuesdays and Thursdays. Bedtime reading, however, was a daily routine when the children were younger. This habit has continued in that both children read in bed each night before putting off the light.

The mother is organised and caring, and addresses the children calmly. She makes an effort to show how interested she is in the children’s daily happenings during their daily talk sessions around the table. She switches from holiday talk to Sean’s creative writing effort, to overseas trips and menus, but she ends her chat with each child on a note of praise and encouragement:

**Extract 12:**

Have you finished writing your story yet for Literacy Class? I was so impressed with the way you began that story.

(Field notes, September 2011)
She expresses her delight at the way in which Sean has organised his work telling him that it is a good trait not to leave anything to the last moment. There is a close bond between the mother and son, and he is aware that he is appreciated in the home environment; an environment in which he is able to further his reading habits since his mother buys him any book that he wants to read. She bought him a Kindle for quicker access to readers, and encourages him to swop books with his friends at school.

5.5.2 Sean’s literacy

Despite parental example and the literacy context of the home, Sean did not initially respond to the literacy practices in terms of reading. He ignored the culture of reading that is important to his parents, which he did not appreciate as having significance in his lifeworld (Dyson, 1993; Fairclough, 2001). Even while teaching him in Grade 3, I found that he engaged with a book for only a short time before he would lose interest. His language skills, on the other hand, were strong, which readily reflected the influence of the home discourse. During my observation (September, 2011) Sean’s mother consistently talked to Sean about their activities, questioning him about his school day, his sport, and his work. There was strong verbal interaction and a close bond between parent and son. He showed no reluctance to respond to her communications. Heath (1982) and Gregory et al. (2004) single out these parent-child interactions as orientative means towards establishing the shared family culture. Implicit in the mother-son discourse was strong encouragement, reflecting the mother’s intention to steer Sean to heightened performance (Atkinson et al., 2008). The exchange of talk is part of a multilayered literacy and cultural socialisation into the expected knowledge base of the family and the wider society in which they live. Even though Sean does not often see his mother reading books, her interest in his reading and writing replaces the lack of example which he does, nevertheless, see in his father and sister. The literacy practices in this home set the example for Sean, yet he had to decide for himself how important it was in his world, which happened at a different time for him. Even though Sean shows obvious passion for reading now, literacy for this family appears to be functional rather than an immersion into literacy and in-depth language experiences (Meek, 1982, 1988) as found in Leon’s
home. Similar characteristics to those in Leon’s home, however, are the adherence to the rule of two-nights-per-week-only of TV, and discourse and turn-taking at the dinner table - features that are significant to these middle class families in constructing the mores and principles that are the cornerstone of their culture. This process contributes to each individual’s socialisation in a certain number of cultural and intellectual habits (Lahire, 2003).

5.6.1 Brian’s story

Brian is a serious boy who is the youngest of four boys in his family. He is extremely talented in both sport and in academics; he is a serious musician and plays chess at national level. He is a modest boy who is always ready to assist friends in class who need help. On arrival at their home, I was instantly alert to the energy that feeds into the children in this home. Brian’s mother welcomed me in a most embracing manner, obviously comfortable with my intrusion into their domain. It is a formal home, with enormous pieces of furniture in large-windowed rooms. Everything is organised, neat and structured - from the kitchen to the bedrooms. Each boy has a big bookshelf in his bedroom filled with books of his choice. The study and family room walls are adorned with shelves that display books of interest to the whole family – these include coffee table books, sets of encyclopaedias, reference books, and scores of fiction books. This pattern is repeated in the TV room just off the kitchen in which there are more books, a PlayStation, newspapers, magazines and dictionaries. Brian’s mother pointed out the dictionaries (one of which was even found in the kitchen) that she places in every room, since she was of the opinion that if questions were asked by the boys, they had to be answered immediately, for if they had to go upstairs to source the words there, they would not do so. She was proactive in her efforts to get her children to read. She pointed out that the boys did not like reading when they were small “but we read to them every night … it was a bit of a routine every night” (Interview, September 2010). She expounds on this:
Extract 13:

I think it starts very early when you make it a cuddly time. It would start with ... they were there, and we were here, and everybody would get ready for reading in bed. And actually, most of the time [father] would be reading more to the boys than I did. I was often with the younger ones. And they did lots and lots of reading.

(Interview, September 2010)

The parents bought numerous books and the bookshelves were so laden that as they outgrew the books, she donated them to the library near her in order to make space for new ones. She was careful in her choice of books for each boy, and explained that they did their utmost to source books that the boys wished to read by ordering them online from Amazon or Kalahari.net if they were unable to find specific books from the local bookstore.

Both parents are university graduates and together run their own construction business. Brian’s mother maintains that she has always been a keen reader, yet her own mother only became a reader in her dotage. Her brother only reads for information and not for pleasure. Brian’s father comes from elderly parents in rural America, and he was the first one in his family to attend university. She explains:

Extract 14:

Brian’s mother: Um, out of [husband’s] family he’s got one sister that is quite an avid reader and a broad perception, and you can see it in her children – how they’ve gone on and studied further – it seems to make a big difference.

(Interview, September 2010)

Both Brian’s parents are ardent readers as demonstrated in the following extract:

Extract 15:

Brian’s mother: ... yeh, each night we’ll read, we’ll read ... We get a lot of newspapers ... we have, um ... the daily things: *The Times, The Citizen, The Star, The Business Day*, on Sundays ... depending on the time. So once we read all of those, we collectively ... um ... but we read books every night. It is very seldom that anybody goes to bed without reading a book.

(Interview, September 2010)
In these excerpts Brian's mother implies strongly that the reading culture in their home and family has contributed to making literary beings of the various members. The practices have helped to redefine the individuals within the group, and the group "collectively". "[H]ow they've gone on to study further" provides an example of her conception that reading and the knowledge associated with it have afforded opportunities in life that are sustained by family practices and ways of living (Alvermann & McLean, 2007). Her notion of family ways similarly provides insight into an understanding of what people do when they act together and the means they utilise to attain their goals (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006), and how the family comes to value the knowledge that reading literacy brings; and finally, the way in which this shapes their own identity.

Even though the parents do not watch TV often, the boys in the house can spend hours watching or playing PlayStation. Brian's mother is not concerned about this as they all read an enormous amount and she considers it important to relax after a busy day, since she is of the opinion that reading takes more effort than merely sitting and staring at the television set. She suggests that reading must be perceived as a positive event in one’s day, as she believes that Brian lives through the characters in his readings. She found evidence of this during a time that Brian was difficult and angry, but his story books helped him work through his anger by giving him perspective on his own world of feelings. During that stage Brian became introverted and would not communicate with the family. His mother plied him with books that carried positive messages, and through their discussions of the experiences of the characters in the books, he slowly began to communicate with the family again. Brian’s mother astutely uses the power of literacy to give him different lenses on his difficulties. Reading is his passion, and she manipulated his association with narratives as a strategy of “perspectivation” (Wodak, 2001: 27). There is a clear message that this family relies strongly on literacy events and practices in the home to construct their experiences, regulate their emotions and to organise the home culture of immersion into books (Atkinson et al., 2008). There is much discussion about reading and books in the house, being an activity that they enjoy doing. The
boys see the parents reading, and the many literacy events in this family have developed into practices that the children enjoy, as seen in the following extract from our interview:

**Extract 16:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brian’s mother:</th>
<th>I remember when he [referring to Brian – my insert] was in Grade O, they had the little place in the corner of his class ... the boys and I were lying in the corner reading books to him. And that was quite nice. I remember that ... um ... everybody wanted to read a different thing, but enjoying lying down next to one another reading the books.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Interview, September 2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**5.6.2 Brian’s literacy**

Reading and books seem to have bonded this family into a cohesive unit. Through literacy the family members have built their relationships with one another, being home events, unrelated to the structured influence of the formal school influence (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). There are decisive attempts to gain literacy exposure, initially from the parents to the children; and now those have become literacy habits for the individuals (Gee, 2010). It can be argued that literacy frames this household as the parents have cognitively equipped their children with devices to construct their particular world into a culturally organised unit in which the boys have the freedom, gained through knowledge, to justify strong opinions and preferences, and to choose academic success (Atkinson et al., 2008). Even though schooling plays a particular role in inducting pupils into written discourse (Stephens, 2000), this family has made deliberate attempts to strengthen that culture by having dictionaries everywhere and buying books that interest each individual, and by their literacy involvement on multiple levels.
5.7.1 Kevin’s story

Kevin was, similar to Sean, incorporated into this case study as a suspected non-reader, but there were several series of books that triggered the reading bug in these boys (Jennings, 2003). Heath and Thomas (1984) suggest that the early influence of the parent-children interactions is powerful in teaching children the uses of literacy which they carry with them. Therefore, even if children remain non-readers, or become readers later in their lives, the literacy awareness is aroused. Kevin’s mother remembers reading to him and the older sister as soon as they could understand her. This was borne out by an inner need as “reading is such a passion of mine that I had to share it with them” (Interview with Kevin’s mother, October 2010). This became a ritual and bedtime stories were the norm, until Kevin’s sister learnt to read and wished to do so on her own. According to her, she loves reading and has never slackened in this habit. Kevin took longer to learn to read, but still did not like it once he was able to. Kevin’s mother explains (Interview, October 2010):

**Extract 17:**

| Kevin’s mother: | For a long time he was not a reader, he loved stories; he loved to be read to. I was always reading Nicholas and honestly, I would say ... until ... for me he has only turned into a reader this year. He has always read, but it has taken a lot of me buying books, me reading and find something that he liked. He loved the Nicholas series ... I would read a chapter to him and he would read a chapter. His preference was still rather to be read to rather than to read himself. Also his preference would be if he read to himself, it was to read factual stuff ... Guinness book of records or something like that. |

During his Grade 6 year, Kevin was exposed to the Cherub series of books authored by Robert Muchamore. He was so enthralled with the story of two children, orphaned during World War II, who became spies, that he could not stop reading until he had completed all twelve books. Kevin has not ceased reading since then, and his mother describes him as having an “obsession” with his books. She prefers buying books to borrowing them from the library, and justifies this by suggesting that there is more interaction and advice from people working in bookshops, than there is from the librarians, who do not come forward with suggestions. She is not concerned with the cost of books as there is much sharing of these with his friends at school.
The love of reading and indulging in books are very much part of this home, yet there is not obvious evidence on display in bookshelves or magazine racks. It is a large, modern home, tastefully decorated in sleek lines, overlooking an expansive garden, tennis court and swimming pool. It is pristine and formal, containing no untidy newspapers or notice boards. Both parents are university graduates: the mother as an architect and the father in finance. Literacy is very much part of their culture, but not in an obvious way. The father reads newspapers, work-related magazines and “very little fiction in a work year”, but on holiday he reads:

Extract 18:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kevin’s mother:</th>
<th>… something like David Baldacci – that kind of thriller stuff … and those of <em>The girl with the dragon tattoo</em>. He is very much a holiday reader … as a child he said that he read very much and read the whole time … he read a lot …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Interview, October 2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though there is acceptance that reading is important, reading literacy does not permeate this home. There seems to be a clear balance of work, school, sport, travel, and entertainment. Kevin admits to playing PlayStation whenever he is able to, particularly when his father has brought him a new game from his travels. His mother does not limit TV watching or TV games, since he does not spend much time on any of these. She does not mind him watching TV when he is tired as he is an active boy at school and takes part in sport, music, and clubs, and is a high academic achiever. Despite his high achievement, he is contained, quite shy and did not elaborate on any topic during my interview with him. He gave mostly monosyllabic, answers – quick, curt and to the point. I gleaned some narrative from him regarding his reading habit, however. Since the Cherub series he has started reading widely, and reads anything he can find. His mother buys the books he wants to read, hence his non-attendance at the school library where he only takes out Afrikaans books (one of the three languages learnt at The Hilltop School). He is a popular boy claiming that he is not intimidated by his friends who do not read, demonstrating acceptance of his masculinity and the expected behaviour associated with it. He does not seem perturbed about having to fit in with the non-reading in-group. He admits that his new reading habit has made a difference to his academic confidence,
indicating that as his literacy exposure has afforded him a higher level of abstract thought, his reading has impacted upon numerical reasoning. He explains this in his inimitable terse manner:

**Extract 19:**

| Well, I understand more words, so it helps with English more and Maths problem-solving. | (Interview, June 2011) |

5.7.2 Kevin’s literacy

Kevin is a capable young person who participates in all activities at school, and excels at all of these. He has gained inordinately in confidence since his time in Grade 3 when, in class, he responded to guidance only. He has developed into a reader which, up until the time that he bonded with reading through the Cherub series, he only did when he had to. Now he is addicted to his books, but still finds time to participate in his other activities. The literacy guidance and encouragement were always prevalent in the home, however, and the inherent expectation that reading is important for success was clearly relayed to the children through the mother’s actions and the father’s success in business. It can be reasoned that Kevin is encouraged into adhering to behaviour and beliefs into which a particular literacy is inserted. Street (2001) argues that if literacy is a social practice, then it varies with social context, and within the context of this upper-class home, reading literacy is an indelible means towards achieving long-term success. Kevin, unlike his sister, started reading in his own time, demonstrating Heath and Thomas’s (1984) notion that powerful early home literacy influence taught the boy the uses of literacy. The family discourse around the table and within the house is structured and functional, and literacy as a literary tool (Wodak, 2001) is seemingly regarded as necessary, but not a
minute-by-minute lived experience as found in Leon’s home (please refer to 5.2.1 in this chapter).

5.8.1 Barry’s story

I entered Barry’s home and found myself in a palpably creative space. The intensity of design was manifested wherever the eye travelled. It was ornate, over the top, and filled with energy and colour. I was ushered into a cosy room with oversized chairs. An entire wall featured books ranging in subject from architecture, to gardening, travel and children’s books. There was a decorative cupboard, and interesting artefacts were displayed on the walls and in niches and on tables. While waiting for Barry’s mother, I reflected on the feeling Atkinson et al. (2008: 5) had when interviewing an artist: “The notion that an interview should merely make respondents ‘responsive’ in a methodologically sound and ethical manner, in the pursuit of data collection, glosses over a form of interaction that can be an illuminating experience for the ethnographer.” The ambience in this home was overpowering visually, but I felt that it was so much part of the creative character of Barry’s mother (who is a dress designer, having given up work to spend more time with the two children), that the setting could not be overlooked. This was the location in which Barry and his older sister lived and were encultured into their particular type of literacy, and the environment played a role in this process, resonating in Atkinson’s (2008) notion that “[t]hings have social lives”, and that they are collected and displayed, yet they permit social activity (2008: 119). I am of the opinion that it would be impossible to understand Barry’s actions without the contextual information that characterises his home literacy (Wodak, 2004).

Barry’s mother was interested in my reasons for focusing on boys and their reading, and an intense debate ensued before settling into the interview mode. She recalls pondering on the subject after I had phoned her to make the appointment. She had observed her own son losing interest in reading as he approached adolescence. She waved her arm towards her book case, pointing out the three sections, from the bottom row to the top row, which contained children’s books. She started off by
reading to both her children at bedtime when they were small children; then they read by themselves, and have read all the books in the shelves. This was her sentimental corner that even contained books from her childhood. She asked Barry to show me those books, but urged him to be careful for they were fragile. She loves her books and demonstrated this by saying:

Extract 20:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barry’s mother:</th>
<th>Yes, you know ... you know there is a culture in this house of reading ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Interview, March 2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the family to engage in books was important. Barry’s mother was concerned, however, that he had not pursued this habit, and admonished him for his lack of reading - as per their conversation:

Extract 21:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barry:</th>
<th>Well, actually, I want to read ... but I run out of time and then it makes me bored.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barry’s mother:</td>
<td>I understand, but it’s part of a self-commitment to finishing reading a book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Field notes, November 2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Barry and his mother have similar views on reading in that they both deem this process to be important. Barry notes that "I want to read" whilst his mother describes the home as having "a culture in this house of reading". They are aware of the value of their literacy practices that have become less important during Barry’s adolescence. Barry has made the choice to escape what is culturally accepted as the politically accepted way of behaviour in this middle class family. He is unable to realise the importance of strong literacy skills that are valued in his particular space and prepare him for success in later life (Bhabha, 1994). It is evident that Barry likes
reading, and wishes to read, but the passion to commit to the process is lacking. Nevertheless, his statement that "it makes me bored", can be construed as a reflection of his world view at the moment. His particular group of friends at school do not read and this does not motivate him to engage in a habit that is not part of their norm (unlike Kevin who is not perturbed by the views of his friends. Please refer to Section 5.7.1 of this chapter). It is consequently my contention that there exists a combination of factors such as Barry wanting to fit into his social group, being unmotivated to read as it is not important for him, and the culture of the home that the family does not embrace the idea of reading literacy with much enthusiasm.

There is no intense discourse on books and authors (notwithstanding William Golding’s Lord of the flies that Barry’s mother urged him to complete), there is little discussion about linguistic application and word nuances, and dictionaries are not at hand as they are in Leon and Brian’s homes. During my observation of the family (November 2011), Barry’s mother attempted to extract information from Barry about a test he had written at school. He, while lounging on a couch, was reluctant to provide her with the detailed information that she was after, saying "[w]hy are you asking me all these questions?" The family wishes him to achieve well at school, hence the enquiry into his assessment marks, yet he avoids close encounters by answering dismissively, again demonstrating his indifference towards commitment. If he is pushed into reading, such as the 50-Club and 100-Club reading impetus in the Grade 4 class, he attains these, but reverts to non-indulgence thereafter. He was regarded as a non-reader during Grade 3, and read only the required books set out for that standard. He admits to having lost interest totally in his Grade 6 year:

**Extract 22:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barry:</th>
<th>… I just read a little bit [in Grade 5 – my addition]. In Grade 6 I started socialising like … I got into that group. Before I wasn’t really with the social butterflies … <em>(laughs).</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>So, are you still with the social butterflies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry:</td>
<td>Ja.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry’s mother:</td>
<td>But I also think there is something else there … It is not only the socialising … it is also the techno-gadgets, and I think that boys, and this is not a generalisation, this is very specific to [Barry’s sister] and Barry. [Barry’s sister] likes techno, but has never engaged addictively into games, and it seems to be very much a boy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Even though Barry's mother suggests that he engages in technology "addictively", she seems to condone it by allowing him the opportunities to play his computer games and other "techno-gadgets". She elects not to have control over his activities by allowing him to indulge in his preferences despite her negative attitude to these gadgets. During my observation in the home (November 2011), Barry ascribed his lack of reading to a lack of time and "then it makes me bored"; he nevertheless has enough time to engage "addictively" in computer games. Luke and Luke (2004) point to a particular anxiety over new forms of adolescent identity, referring specifically to instant messaging and social networking, and Greenfield (2008) expresses concern over the anti-social effect this has on the participant. As this study is grounded in New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995) that informed my view on the social nature of home practice and the role that different modes of literacy play in the home environment, this view illuminates the dynamic political context of Barry’s experiences. The way in which he uses texts is different to the traditional print-reading textual engagement that his mother regards as important, and this adapts the literacy practices in the home. Within this context he takes up a different identity position to literacy (Leu et al., 2004) which may not be a permanent position, but one that he has assumed at a given time (Moje, 2004).

Barry is a passionate boy, and enjoys what he does. He loves telling stories and kept us intrigued by relating an episode at school in which he had been involved. He is most eloquent, yet while lying on the couch during my observation session at the home, he did not appreciate his mother asking questions about his school schedule. His sister had a mature conversation with her mother about her reasons for not attending a school camp during the forthcoming holidays. I was captivated by her articulacy and rationalisation. I noted that she and her mother have a close bond, and ideas flow easily between them, unlike Barry who wants to be part of the conversation, but once he is, does not like to be cross-questioned. Barry’s resistance to belong to this ordinary relationship, contains elements of an opposing ideology.
about conservative literacy practices. Wodak (2001) suggests that language can be used to challenge power, yet Barry demonstrates his antagonism more vehemently in his dismissive attitude than in his language. Barry appears to be constructing his own reality, and uses his opposing ways as a tool to experiment in the creation of his own world.

The multi-layered discourse in the home provided the impetus for entering into an ethnographic encounter and making sense of the strong visual layout of a creative home, linguistic eloquence of the female part of the family and the reticence to communicate wholly from the males. Barry’s father made a brief appearance and left for the TV room whilst waiting for dinner to be served once I left.

5.8.2 Barry’s literacy

The view that “there is a culture of reading in this house” is interesting because it alludes to the literacy aspirations of the members of this household. It was not a site where interactive literacy strongly existed in a written form, but this home was filled with creative spaces that existed in the imagination, and this functioned on a different level to a pure literary process. The home featured a different level of home literacy that produced varying thought processes and complex layers of being. This made me reflect on this family’s way of seeing, way of talking, feeling and interpreting. Atkinson et al. (2008: 9) experienced similarly dichotomous emotions after an interview:

In many respects this brings to mind the way in which interviewing “at home” raises a number of issues that needn’t be methodologically problematic but may rather be useful resources in appreciating the complex character of social worlds.

The home stands apart from the world beyond it, yet it feeds into the outside world. (This interaction is discussed in Chapter 6). As Gee argues (in Rogers, 2004), learning to act out a particular identity in certain activities is more than just a linguistic act. The semiotic system from which Barry draws, functions as an instrument in developing his cognitive activity which he carries into the larger community. From this sociocultural perspective, the implication is that the home discourse can be
understood as a resource in shaping social relationships such as Barry seeking to defy the strictures that book reading places on him (Rogers, 2004). The non-verbal actions are defined by his perception that a more variant orientation to being different provides him with a status of his choice, and that this steers him to his own ideology (Wodak, 2001). His discourse reflects Gee’s (1996) notion of “discourse”, pointing to specific group identity which is the way that the members think, speak and act, and are recognised by others in relation to that social world. Barry expresses a pride in being different, and actively pursues this road.

5.9.1 William’s story

William lives with his mother and younger sister in a large, rambling home not far from the school. He is a likeable boy, is popular with his friends, is highly talented in sport (having his national colours in golf), and is a strong academic. He is involved in all spheres of school life and has been part of the inter-schools science exhibition, the school play, charity outreach, and he also represents the school in most of the sport first teams. While I interviewed his mother, he was playing soccer on the lawn with friends who had arrived. She reminded him not to play too long as they had to join friends for dinner that evening.

William’s mother works fulltime while his father is at present not working and does not live with them. Both parents, however, are supportive of William and his sister, attending presentation ceremonies, sport matches and school functions. The house is comfortable and homely with features that echo constructive family time. Some of these are found in the family room with bookshelves covering one wall, and large couches flanked by comfortable wingback chairs, and the enormous dining table in the open-plan kitchen area. William’s mother had been working at the table as her computer and some drawings were on one side, while I sat next to some books and her shopping, sipping a glass of wine and eating a home-made snack. The table had already been set for the three members of the family to have their meal there. While observing William and his mother in the kitchen (his mother was cooking while he stood next to her catching up on their day), I was aware that I was looking in on a
family literacy moment providing me with an opportunity to understand what shaped their literacy enculturation. She plied William with questions such as: “Where did they stay?” and “Why is that ...?” and “What are you going to ...?” and making comments periodically: “So interesting ...” and “You need to work on it.” She urged him constantly to make decisions to sort out his busy life. The two members of the family in the kitchen were confident speakers who had little problem in expressing themselves clearly. Their eloquence must flow from constant interaction as they were doing at that moment, or constantly organising their hectic lives to be able to fit into their day as much as they do.

This discourse was significant in facilitating the organisation of their lives, sharing values and cultural cues (Fairclough, 1995), and clearly formed part of a regular family practice. My field notes (October, 2011) reflect the way in which William’s mother used strategic questions to help him in organising his schedule: “Do you need to be there all the time?” and “You have a problem with timing; what do you want to do?” She consciously provoked him into making his own decisions during these discourse moments. Even though the mother was busy preparing dinner, she met William’s eyes when speaking to him, and listened attentively as he spoke. These were meaningful discursive moments in which William’s opinions were valued and encouraged.

The sister was in her bedroom doing her homework. The TV was not switched on, but William’s mobile phone rang incessantly. William’s mother laughed when she explained that the phones were taken away from both children at night to prevent the endless messaging to and from friends when they were supposed to be doing homework or sleeping. William and his sister do not often watch television, but may if the opportunity arises. There is no restriction on TV time, or on time spent on computer games as they always seem to rush through their day to cope with all the events, leaving little time for lazing in front of the TV.

There were no newspapers or magazines lying around the house, but during my interview with William’s mother, she communicated her love of books, which was evident by the number of books on her bedside table. She comes from a family of
readers, telling me that her father of eighty three would read three books at a time. The grandparents have a profound effect on the two grandchildren as William remembers his grandfather’s story-telling vividly, and when visiting them in their home, the children still join the grandparents in their bedroom each morning to read stories. The children have, however, progressed from bedtime stories. William’s mother stated that William was indulged with stories much more that his younger sister, as the mother did not have the time to spend with her daughter. Yet the sister has become a reader, whilst her brother reads when he has time. Reading is, nevertheless, an important aspect of this family’s day and they fit it in where they can in their busy days.

Their busy lives affect the whole family, and this is revealed when William’s mother switches from one subject to another in an attempt to justify these positions as normal features of everyday life for their household (Alldred & Burman, 2005). As described in Barry’s home, the understanding of a reading child is a subject that implies power conceptually in their social positioning, yet the account of William’s reading routine and his constant reference to one book, namely Lord of the flies, can be seen to create an effect rather than a true perspective on what reading happens in their home (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

5.9.2 William’s literacy

Literacy learning, interaction and guidance are innate in the family literacy culture. Central to this stong family discourse practice are elements of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus that act as guidelines to orient actors (Bourdieu, 1991). Habitus is acquired through repetition in discourse and the interaction evident in the conversations between William and his mother. She provides the orientation to action and awareness that will enable him to live effectively in a social world, and therefore these daily events have become literacy practices within this home in which the mother imbues William with particular ways of thinking and doing (Street, 1998). The conscious awareness of the effect of literacy is apparent in the way that William’s mother promotes the reading of Lord of the flies, and the way in which constructive
interaction takes place between mother and son. My interview with William revealed the eloquence of this boy who is able to employ mature linguistic structures without a moment’s hesitation. I have, nevertheless, explained the significance of the discursive practices in this family for whom reading literacy is apparently important, yet I argue that to hold that view, does not translate into active participation in reading. William does not read often enough to call him a reader, since other events and interests in his busy life override this action.

5.10. Conclusion

The eight vignettes in this chapter serve to explain the subsidiary research questions in this thesis, namely:

- What literacy practices and events in the home influence the boys to read?
- How do these practices influence boys’ reading?

Drawing on the observation and interview data, this chapter has explored the milieu in which literacy learning takes place in each of the homes. I have demonstrated how each home has translated its practices into the type of literacy that each boy carries with him, and how in each family there are a many ways that inform the actions of the participants through interaction with family members, taking part in domestic tasks and family events. I have argued that within Leon and Brian’s home, the family is wholly focused on creating a strong literacy environment in which the parents cognitively engage in book sharing, discussions on books, and family discourse around their dining tables, and also both families have distinctive rules about reading, TV and computer times. Dictionaries are placed in strategic places around the house for instant usage, magazines, newspapers and books are available, and each family shows intense interest in their boys’ reading. Both boys have been avid readers since their early years, and it is clear that their passion for books developed not only from the family bedtime story practice, but was also strengthened by observing their parents reading.
I have also demonstrated that Sean, Simon and Mark had only one reading parent, yet the literacy learning from that parent, and the culture of literacy that existed in these homes, still influenced these two boys into becoming keen readers. In five of the homes, the parents supplied books to the boys as often as they required them, while Simon’s mother borrowed books from the library. I contend that the availability of reading material has a profound effect on children’s reading habits, especially if there are books that interest them. I have concluded that the families that lived the literacy process, produced boys who loved reading, while the homes in which literacy is regarded as a significant factor towards attaining success, but not enjoyed as an immersive process, have produced boys that enjoy reading, but read when there is time available. William is one of these boys, while Barry cognitively rejects books.

The situations or contexts in all eight homes have been created and sustained as literacy-building domains, but the data show that energy has to be put into these practices continually to transform them (Gee, 2000). I am therefore convinced that interactions, symbols, ways of speaking, listening, writing, reading, feeling, believing and thinking only acquire value and meaning through discourse and deeds. Studies that mirror this are those done by Heath (1983) and Comber (2000), that revealed how specific home literacy practices influenced a heightened literacy awareness in children. Gee (1990) concurs and refers to this as social language that includes a set of values and norms that are influenced by parents and the community in which they live.

In the following chapter I explore the actual practices in the homes, using the interviews with parents and sons. This chapter will focus on the “literacy knowledge that families already possess” (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010: 728) and the contributions they make to their sons’ literacy learning. My intention is to demonstrate how the parents’ view of literacy is reflected in their sons’ views, and how parents model literacy behaviours or engage their children in meaningful activities into learning through the literacy practices of their homes (Dyson, 2003; Gee, 2010).
CHAPTER SIX
DATA ANALYSIS
THE BOYS IN THEIR HOMES

“When you sell a man a book you don’t sell just twelve ounces of paper and ink and glue - you sell him a whole new life. Love and friendship and humour and ships at sea by night - there’s all heaven and earth in a book, a real book.” Christopher Morley (1890 – 1957)

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I looked at the environment in which literacy learning takes place for each of the boys in this study. Through my interviews with the participants and parents, and observation data in the homes, I demonstrated how the home practices determine the way in which literacy habits arise from the example set by the parents in these home spaces. It is my contention that the home life is crucial to building the type of literacy perception and attitude to reading that the boy harbours (Heath, 1983; Comber, 2000). I have argued that, even though boys may not automatically emulate the home culture at a certain time, the early influence of the parent-children interactions is powerful enough to trigger a reading habit at a later stage. I have also attempted to demonstrate that a particular home milieu may use texts that are different to those of the traditional print-reading textual engagement, and that the literacy practices in the home are adapted. Within this context, the child takes up a different identity position to literacy (Leu et al., 2004) which may not be a permanent one, but one that he/she has assumed at a given time (Moje, 2004).

Whilst in Chapter 5 I focused on the literacy spaces in which the boys grew up, Chapter 6 will, firstly, examine the parent mediation to provide an analysis of their perceptions of reading and the way in which they implement their ideologies in these home spaces. This will be followed by examining the boys’ attitudes to reading for pleasure in an attempt to correlate their view with those of their parents. The second section will investigate the means by which the elders (grandparents and parents) influence the boys to read, whilst the third section will provide a discussion
on how the practices influence the boys to read. In my analysis I draw mainly on interview data with parents and the boys, and field notes taken during observation sessions in the homes. According to Gee (1996), primary “discourse” is acquired at home, and within the community, by means of practice, exposure and immersion, and gradually they learn the ways of performing literacy. My analysis will thus focus on the discourse practices in the home settings to begin to understand what power the family generates in promoting literacy ideology.

The family can be described as being one of the most important institutions in society, since people live in families, and as explained by Williams (1998), it is a critical determinant of how they live, their response to situations in their daily lives, and what their life chances (for instance careers, incomes, health) are, and will turn out to be. This resonates with the research done by Fox (1993, 1996), Comber (1993; 2000), Paratore et al. (2010), and Heath (1983) in families developing cultures of their own, and yet borrowing from cultures that surround them and are available to them as they organise and manage their daily lives.

As was expected, the experience of doing observation in the homes of each of the eight boys in the case study, entailed experiences of a very similar nature, but by reflexively analysing and critically searching for meaning in their interactions, facial language and discourse, the “sensuous personal and social identity by which we recognize ourselves across situations” (Vannini et al., 2010: 339) could clearly be recognised. It is not an easy or comfortable journey to enter the private zones of family homes in order to observe their intimate discourse which they are unconsciously performing, knowing that the researcher is observing with a sensitive but critical eye, and that he/she will proceed to analyse the family’s actions as soon as he/she departs from that home. Yet within this discomfort, there was a uniform willingness on the part of the various household members to have me present and be part of their community (Vannini et al., 2010). As the key aim in this study is to understand and explain the reading culture and literacy habits adopted in each family, it is in particular the uniqueness of the culture contained within each family unit that requires interpretation. One recognises from any sociological perspective
on interactions in the home, that many communications are subconsciously part of the mould, but other actions are consciously decided upon, enacted and enforced. The latter pertains to choices that are made. Reading is not instinctively an important factor in the home, yet culturally it is an accepted “must” in the milieu from which these case study boys derive their education. There is a reverence that is attached to reading, and the habit is encouraged as it is perceived to enhance knowledge – yet a further reverent attribute. It is, nevertheless, a habit that is dependent on choice. No household is obliged to have bedtime stories as part of its evening ritual, or any literacy activities such as language teaching, correcting pronunciation, writing activities, songs or even spending money on books for decorative bookshelves. There is nothing that stops parents from choosing to have their children watch television, and not to talk to them.

The point that I am making, is that I will argue in this chapter that much of the culture in the home rests on the choices that a particular household makes. Choosing to read, therefore, forms part of the way in which a family wishes to live their lives. Social acceptance in a particular society may rest on socio-economic achievement, academic qualification, consumerism and consumption in an indulgent way, on where one lives, what car one drives, and the places one visits. I place the emphasis on ‘may’ as I am not insisting that it is a normative prerequisite for the boys in the case study. Aspirations to achieve, however, are part of the value systems of the households (and in the suburbs in which they are situated), and, I must suggest that the ethos of The Hilltop School reflects the same expectations of the boys from these homes. Intrinsic to this choice of life is knowledge and academic achievement which are primarily attained via literacy. Literacy is partly dependent on reading; hence the reverent attitude to this pastime within this echelon of society, rests on the quality of reading in the private spaces.

In order to develop an understanding of the cultural practices and values which result in the formation of literacy habits, I follow an interpretive (and critical) approach (as discussed in Chapter 4) to the subject matter which will allow a perspective on the people in the eight homes where the significance of reading literacy is enacted in
everyday life. The process of analysing people’s interactions by the interpretive researcher is described succinctly by Kotarba and Vannini (2009) as referring to:

> the ability to connect, by way of reflection, seemingly unconnected individual and social forces, and in particular biographical and historical issues. Sociology attempts to foster in all its publics ... a sociological imagination by getting them to reflect on the greater relevance of personal problems as social issues (2009: 13 – 14).

The focus on home literacy is therefore located in the intricate domain of individual and social thinking of the home, and in the interviews with the participants which enabled the parents and the boys actively to reflect on this aspect of their daily lives. At the same time, my observation and field notes enabled me to draw up a holistic conceptual framework of literacy culture in this ethnographic case study. In my data analysis in this and the next chapter I explore the central links between home, school literacy and reading habits, and I aim to provide a thematic and content analysis of the data with the parents, boys and the teachers. In exploring the home domain, the research questions to be addressed are:

- What are boys’ out-of-school reading practices? The analysis in this section relates, firstly, to the parents’ perception of reading, followed by the boys’ view.

- What literacy practices and events in the home influence the boys to read? This section draws on the influence of elders in the community and family.

- How do these practices influence boys’ reading? I discuss the effect of chain linking notions of literacy from elders to youngsters through example and guidance by the more knowledgeable parents.

- Why do some boys lose interest in reading as they reach the upper primary school stage? I focus on the way in which some boys pursue reading literacy avidly, whilst others begin to place different value on the process.

As explained in Chapter 3, I draw on the notion of multiple literacies existing in specific times and spaces as represented in the New Literacy Studies (Street, 1998, 2001; Gee, 2000), and on the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1986) in relation to his belief that the child and a capable peer/teacher/parent/family member, communicate and
interact within a relationship, creating an innate desire within the child to become part of that "communicative world" (Gregory et al., 2004: 16). I will argue in this chapter that knowledge, the spaces and the practices to which the boys are exposed in the home, position them to develop their particular attitude to reading.

6.2 Mediation by elders

6.2.1 How the parents perceive reading

The data accumulated in the interviews with the parents of each of the eight boys studied, reveal that all the parents were graduates for whom reading was important. This did not necessarily imply that all these parents engaged frequently in reading at home, but that they viewed reading as an essential skill for success in academic achievement and for their children's future careers. Only eleven of the sixteen parents were avid and regular readers who read for pleasure, one was a slow reader who chose feel-good books from her book club (as opposed to the thrillers that her husband read), three of the fathers read mainly work-related magazines and newspapers, yet would take up books during holidays, and one father had a reading disability, but often listened to audio-books. The slow-reading mother, however, indulged in gardening, home decorating and reading magazines, whilst two fathers subscribed to monthly flyfishing magazines, birding magazines and the National Geographic, and yet another received the London Review of Books for poetry and information on books.

With this in mind, I aim to demonstrate that the literacy background in each home extends beyond the parent's reading habits to practices that they wish to see not only in their own children, but also in their extended family and friends. It is thus essential to note that a further indication of the parents' attitude to reading is found in four of the mothers who regularly give books as gifts to family and friends, while four of the boys have Kindles that enable easier access to purchasing books, and seven of the eight families buy books for the boys as they ask for them. The members of these eight homes are not disadvantaged in any way since reading
materials are at hand, and are purchased with the perception that reading feeds into knowledge, thoughts, language use and imagination. This is illustrated by the following conversation:

Extract 1: "...and Leon would use proper words and he expressed those words properly and used them in context"

| Leon's father: | ... they always had quite a good vocabulary at an early age and were able to express themselves quite well from an early age, where Leon's friends for example, would be talking in fairly simple baby type language, and Leon would use proper words, and he expressed those words properly and used them in context. And they've all done. |
| Researcher: | And that's amazing because he is the firstborn ... the second ones you can understand ... |
| Leon's mother: | Ja. When (2nd brother) was first born, we think, he couldn't hear until he was 10 months old ... so periods of not hearing, and still he had a good vocabulary. Then (the twin boys), you'd expect twins with older brothers would do everything for them ... I was expecting them not to talk early or have a very good vocabulary, but they speak well. And people comment and say they speak well. And I picked up (twin) the other day and he said, "Mum, a lady came to school today with a ... with a curious face." (laugh). Curious ... and actually the teacher said that she did have a funny face ... (laugh) “A funny face and a black coat”... |
| Researcher: | It comes from the reading. |
| Leon's father: | It comes from the reading. They see the words in context and they understand them. When they were little, the stories had pictures, and then when they were old enough we would read The Famous Five and The Secret Seven and that had no pictures. And there was the main light off and just a little light on ... we went through a phase where we would switch the light off and sit in the passage with a torch on and read to them ... (laugh) ... but that was just imagination. |

(Interview, November 2010)

Extract 1 points succinctly to the parents’ view of the function of language. The view that “they had quite a good vocabulary at an early age and were able to express themselves quite well” alludes to a number of ideologies in terms of engendering language competence in their boys at a young age, and implicit in the discourse is the understanding that the parents listen attentively when the boys speak to them.
particular there is a deep concern about employing suitable vocabulary in the appropriate context “from an early age”, with the knowledge that this is predominantly attained through family discourse - in other words, by “seeing the words in context” when they read to boys and interaction during these literary moments. Leon's father points out that there is a process through which the boys were guided from pictures-only to words-only stories, and thus created pleasurable moments in which their imagination was stretched while they "went through a phase where [they] would switch the light off and sit in the passage with a torch on and read to them". Each literacy event is purposeful and adapted by the parents, making the interaction age-appropriate. Just as Kulick and Stroud (1993) indicated in their study on new literacy practices that missionaries brought to New Guinea, the local people made these practices their own; so too may home patterns to which children are constantly exposed, be adopted and adapted. These parents are aware that particular literacy events and practices that are important to them and practised by them, become ingrained as a resource for each child. This concurs with Vygotsky’s (Wertsch, 1985) claim that mental processes can only be understood if the tools that mediate them are understood, and this, in turn, occurs by taking account of the interrelationship with others (1985: 3). I am therefore of the view that the parents conciously create an awareness of vocabulary, linguistic structures and context within their reading practices. The New London Group (1996) argues that it is impossible to view literacy without taking cognisance of who is using it, and their purpose for doing so. Hence literacy moments are voluntary and conscious actions that carry premeditated messages, and Extract 1 demonstrates how Leon’s father interacts and bonds with his boys for the specific purpose of passing on ideas to them (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000).

A study by Henderson and Berla (1994) has demonstrated a correlation between increased academic achievement and parental involvement, saying that parental influence commences at birth and continues throughout school-going age, and indicating that the home environment is more crucial to learner achievement than socio-economic circumstances. Street (2003) expands on this perception by taking a more culturally sensitive view of literacy in the home environment. He suggests that
literacy is embedded in socially constructed values, as found in Leon's home (please refer to Extract 1), and that it is "about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading, and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being" (2003: 77-78). A world-view is therefore created from the influence of particular contexts, and Gee (1990) proposes that patterned experiences from these situations create a desire for the participants to emulate that view of literacy. Leon's parents regard reading as an important pastime in their home, and an essential skill that undergirds the cultural make-up of their daily routine. Leon's father admits that the bedtime story routine was created by the parents, but that this gave rise to an expectation in the boys that this is a daily occurrence. He laughs when he describes how "they demand it" and that "they just can't go to sleep without a story". It is evident that this binary mix provides pleasure for the boys who listen to the story and the parents who wish to instil literacy knowledge in their sons. There is the presupposition that both parents are acutely aware of the value of knowledge and that they engineer their lives to incorporate the ingredients and tools towards attaining success (Williams, 1998). The pleasure experienced in this process is expressed in Leon's mother relating the incident when her four-year-old son said: "Mum, a lady came to school today with a curious face". This example builds on my earlier argument that literacy experiences with parents both expand vocabulary and provide a means of placing conceptions in context. This example of a “curious face” is taken from a bedtime story that is code-switched to fit a real-life person in school as experienced by this four-year-old boy. The parents are therefore shown to be curious about the effect that literacy has on each of their boys, not only in terms of the boys expanding their vocabulary, but also the effect that narrative tales have on their thinking. Consider the following extract from an interview with Leon's parents (November 2010):
Extract 2: "I said to him that he can read it on condition that afterwards we talk about it."

Leon's father: ... and what I've noticed now is that he is moving from purely children's books to young teenage books, and he is finding it difficult because there'll be some books that you will read and he'd say, “But, Dad, it’s disturbing”. And he is not quite emotionally ready for the mature themes. The themes that involve dying - like The boy in the striped pyjamas.

Leon's mother: We know that he read it, and finished it ...

Leon's father: He came to me and asked if he could read it. He had somebody come to the school to talk about books, one of these librarian days, and they had said that this was a suitable book, you know, for the older grades. I said to him that he can read it on condition that afterwards we talk about it. The rule is that you could read anything on the bookshelf, but he has to ask us first. And if it’s something that is not yet appropriate for him, then he has to wait until he is 18. It’s a bit of a trick, but he has brought books and said ... um ... some that he has read, he said, “good” and others were “ooooh”.

The extract is significant in that it provides insight into the kind of choices that the parents deem essential for literacy guidance in the home. The fact that the boy is encouraged to read, does not imply the freedom to read indiscriminately. This household reflects traditional norms of no-TV, no-computer games during the week, with further restrictions, as alluded to in the above extract, to unsuitable content in books. The parents are generous in their provision of books and reading materials, yet guarded in their selection of those topics and subject matter to which they expose the boys. They are realistic in allowing Leon to read The boy in the striped pyjamas (2006), but urge him to have a conversation with them once he has done so. I am of the view that this action by the father is not a controlling factor, yet is rather a position of perspicacity in which he is cognisant of the effect of a disturbing message within the book, which may affect Leon's reading habits. He acts from a position of power and knowledge, and it is clearly a position respected and valued by his son. Discussion aimed at attaining a wholesome understanding of topics, situations and fostering healthy family interaction is important to the family. Discussion has had a further effect of the eloquent rendering of ideas and thoughts by this family, even for the four-year-old twins who confidently converse at the dinner.

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2 The boy in the striped pyjamas by John Boyne (2006) is a heart-rending account of the young son, Bruno, of an SS officer in charge of Auschwitz during World War II who befriends a Jewish boy, Schmuel, in the camp. Bruno crawls underneath the camp fence to help his friend find his father, and they unknowingly join a march to the gas chambers.
table while the family members listen patiently to them. These literacy events provide the children with a belief that their ideas are valued and that they are able to express these in a register and syntax that are understood by the other members of the family.

In another home, Brian's mother similarly regards vocabulary-building and meaning of words as relevant to her home literacy. As Leon's parents did, so too did Brian's parents read to their children every night. Brian's mother says that even though her eldest son did not like it, they read to the boys as "it was a bit of a routine every night" (Interview, September 2010). This culture of bedtime stories was found to be prevalent in each of the eight boys' homes, and the routine became a daily pattern in each home. Kevin's mother describes her moments with her two children (Interview, October 2010):

**Extract 3:** "... but for me reading was the passion and I needed to share it with them."

| Kevin's mother: | ... but for me reading was the passion and I needed to share it with them. So if I came home late, I could sit with them and sit and read to them. That was always the night time ... moments that I could be part of them. I think it was a combination of a time to bond ... I always read at night so it was almost a tradition that was pursued ... it is a continuation of a tradition ... you go through stages ... you read those little boxes of books, and then they start wanting things ... requesting books and reading those over and over again ... |

This extract, in conjunction with Extract 1, illuminates the fact that the parents deem it important to spend time with the children through the medium of a story. Here it becomes clear that these events are not only about the stories, but about linguistic and physical interaction, while at the same time creating a tradition that forms part of the child’s literacy knowledge. Kevin's mother worked full time, yet the reading at bedtime was "non-negotiable" no matter what time she came home. His mother professes that she read to him even when she knew he was too old for bedtime stories. These actions are important enough for Meek (1988: 193) to suggest that storybooks themselves give readers more powerful reading lessons in how literacy works than the controlled texts of many schematic approaches ever can.
The bedtime stories played a significant literacy role in the eight families. Yet it was not restricted to the immediate family, as the grandparents of three of the boys have continued to be part of the literacy activities of their families. William says that he is surrounded by people who read frequently, even his grandfather of eighty three will have "three books on the go ... and my grandma reads all the time, always ..." to which his mother answers, "All the time. Dad will always refer to things ... we have a family dictionary ... a thick one ... and he will go and sit with William on his lap, and they will look up definitions" (Interview, June 2011). Simon’s grandmother "read to all the children, and there is always this joke about how she read all the ... um ... Lord of the rings books to them, and he still has nightmares about Gollum*3n (Interview, August 2011). Mark’s mother tells her story of granny: "My mum has always read to them ever since they were young. Mark still likes to be read to. If he can convince somebody to sit and read to him, he will. My mum is a sucker, and she will come, and he will say, 'Granny, please.' And she will take any book and read to him for hours and hours" (Interview, December 2010).

The focus on language, bedtime stories and the times spent together illustrates how the families conceive of reading literacy in their own homes. Meek (1982: 18) contends that "[t]he way children are taught to read tells them what adults think literacy is". This reflects clearly the way of living literacy in the home. Each of the homes in this study aspires to having a boy who reads well, but the adult reasoning of ultimate success, for instance, does not impress a small boy or girl. As small children they learn by watching adults, and doing what the latter are doing. This means that if there is no example of opening a book, that example of non-reading may be perpetuated. What was particularly interesting during the interviews with the parents involved in this research, was their infatuation with reading and that each of them endeavoured to transfer this habit to their children. Despite the wish for a reading culture to exist in the household, and bedtime stories that have been read, and books bought, one home lacked what I can term “living literacy”. Barry’s mother

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3 Gollum is a hobbit-type creature from both The hobbit and The lord of the rings by J.R.R. Tolkien. The name Gollum was derived from his disgusting gurgling, choking cough.
describes their home as one in which reading is important, but the way of “living literacy” has not engendered a lasting reading habit to the adolescent son:

**Extract 4: “... a culture in this house of reading ...”**

| Barry's mother: | Yes, you know ... you know there is a culture in this house of reading ... |

Barry was then asked by his mother to point out the children’s books on the bookshelf that covered the one wall:

**Extract 5: "... and those books that have all been read ..."**

| Barry’s mother: | Ummm, I mean you can see ... those are all the children’s books (points to bookcase). Those are all children’s books from the bottom row to the top row, one, two, three and down to the second last shelf, and those books that have all been read, either by Barry, or mostly by his sister, and by me to the children. So I haven’t actually got rid of any of their books and a few of them are actually my books from when I was a child ... |
| Researcher: | Which you read to them when they were small? |
| Barry: | A classic example of this is what you've just said, that many of these books are yours from when you were a child. |

(Interview, March 2011)

This vignette is interesting in that Extract 4 highlights the ideological perception in the home that formed part of the children’s milieu before they could read, yet the point I wish to advance is that despite the reading tradition from the mother’s youth, and her extending that to her own children as shown in Extract 5, the essence of a reading culture in this home has been adapted to what Tierney (2007: 22) terms the ways of making meaning in an “ever-expanding world of ideas 24/7”. Barry’s home does present suitable ingredients for an intense literacy culture to develop, for despite the the desire of reading in this home, it seems that not enough literacy events are created to promote that culture within the home (Field notes, November 2011). This does not mean that there is a dearth of literacy in the home; it points to a different type of literacy in which they engage, which places emphasis on tools and
symbols, rather than on literacy symbols. Barton and Hamilton (1998: 11) expound on this perception by saying that literacy "can act in different ways for the different participants in the literacy event; people can be incorporated into the literacy practices of others without reading or writing a single word. The acts of reading and writing are not the only ways in which texts are assigned meaning." In analysing data on home literacy, therefore, there has to be perspective beyond mere book reading, especially in Barry's home in which visual creativity is so powerful. The affluent creative surroundings in which he is developing his type of literacy via digital technologies have enabled him to become a capable information user (Tierney, 2007) and confident communicator.

Arguably the actors in his home do not live literacy in a conventional way. In Leon's house, on the other hand, there is a conscious literacy reasoning by the parents for each action in their discourse. In Barry's home reading literacy is a by-product of their daily interaction. It does not mean that literacy does not exist in this home, but a different "configuration" (Gee, 2000: 191) prevails as reflected in my observation (November 2011). Discourse revolved around international travel, the President's awards challenge (a youth-empowerment organisation), river rafting and their travel plans for their holidays. The conversation was mostly between mother and daughter whilst Barry lay stretched out on the couch making negative quips about their plans. During my interview with Barry's mother in March 2011, she challenged Barry to complete his reading of Lord of the flies. He still had not done so at the time of my observation in their home in November. He was, nevertheless, not reprimanded or chastised for his laid-back attitude or discourteous comments during the family moments that I observed, and it seemed as though he interpreted this as acceptable behaviour. He was constructing his own social reality of a slight aloofness, and lack of interest in serious commitment.

All eight parents, even Barry's parents, regard the practice of reading as important enough to urge their boys to read as much as possible. Consider the following extract:
Explicit comments such as: “[H]e wants to read, so let him read. So I buy” in the above extract point to the passion that books evoke in the parents who are attempting to fan the reading flame, and for whom book-buying is a perceived determinant of knowledge. It is evident that Sean is encouraged to read by both parents and they go to great lengths to supply him with his reading needs. There is a sense of solidarity and bonding in father and son sharing the same magazine, *Popular Mechanics*, whilst Sean's mother proudly describes his entry into reading. In order to demonstrate her pride, she took the reading certificates that he had received in Grades 4 and 5, and "I actually scrap-booked it for him" which now adorn his bedroom. Her noticeable pride in her reading son is resonant of the reverence attached to the habit that is a cultural requisite for this boy and his peers (Fox, 1993).

During my interview with William's mother, she stressed her ongoing engagement with books which she had attempted to pass onto her two children during literacy interactions when they were young. As in William's home where two members of the family of four read, so too in Mark's home - only he and his mother are keen readers. The reading bug was passed onto him by his mother who describes the home reading habits in the following way (Interview, December 2010):

**Extract 7:** “I read a lot. I have always read a lot.”

| Mark's mother | I read a lot. I have always read a lot. |
| Researcher | And you come from a home where you read a lot? |
| Mark's mother | Ja, my sister reads a lot, I read a lot. My little sister doesn't read as |
In answer to the theme in this section: “How the parents perceive reading”, the findings thus far correlate with my conception that home literacy is dependent on the reading parents. Comments of: “I read a lot”, “and those books that have all been read”, “and for me reading was the passion”, and “so I buy” support the view that the parents in this research study place value on books, and enjoy the activity enough to engender a similar passion in their sons. The mothers of Kevin and Sean continually buy books, yet Mark’s mother attempted to communicate the cost of his habit to him: "I said to him ... you are reading me out of house and home ... he thinks it is a terribly embarrassing idea ... to suggest sharing books with friends”. Mark’s father asked her how much she was spending on books, to which she answered: "I'd hate to know". It is clear that books and reading are important enough for Mark’s mother to ignore the cost and provide her son with material. It is an example of a literacy choice that is made by the mother at the expense of other material needs. I therefore argue that implicit in home literacy learning are aspects such as the choices made by parents, their attitude to reading, and the way in which they bring reading into the culture of their daily lives. Chambers (1979: 41) suggests that “[y]ou cannot begin to read what you have not heard said”, and this is a notion that strongly echoes home literacy and discourse on reading. It symbolises the role that discourse and interaction have on understanding the way in which language functions, and the way that the users apply their understanding.

6.2.2 Comment

Central to the data analysed in this section lies the parental attitude to reading in the homes. Conceptualisations of the home literacy domain include activities such as shared book readings, beliefs, routines, legacy patterning, and interactions between grandparents, parents and children (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010: 733). The emergent learning through shared book reading occurred daily within each of these homes, a family bonding act that each boy relished. In two of the homes this habit is still
pursued at the adolescent stage (Mark and his mother reading his Afrikaans book, and getting his grandmother to read to him; William reading with his grandparents). It was, however, not only bedtime story readings in the homes that commenced as a daily routine, that set the example of an active home literacy environment, but also the focus on language. The use of language and using the “words properly and ... in context” are evidence of the determination of Leon’s parents to achieve excellence in their boys’ linguistic knowledge, so are the mothers who constantly buy books or borrow from the library as their boys want them, and the dictionaries in every room of Brian’s home. A study by Snow and Paez (2004) concluded that the types of linguistic knowledge learned in the home, which include vocabulary, phonological awareness, and understanding print concepts, are important for later literacy development. Research by Raikes et al. (2006), in establishing what the effects of book reading and language skills were over time, suggested a correlation between the availability of books and the frequency of book reading at home, and shared reading was strongly related to the language skills applied by a child. The home domain for each of the parents in the case study represented a literacy space in which they relayed their own reading legacy from their own parents to their children.

In the next section the focus will fall on the boy to describe the way in which he perceives reading, since literacy learning cannot be separated from the context and culture in which it develops (Reuda, 2011).

6.2.3 The boys' view on reading

In his book, *Raising boys*, Steve Biddulph says that "[b]oys don’t grow up well if you don’t help them. You can’t just shovel in cereal, provide clean T-shirts, and have them one day wake up as a man!" (2008: 7). Even if this comment could be construed as frivolous, there is a more serious literacy thread that runs through it. Having just journeyed through the parents' view of reading literacy, this thought from Biddulph links the influence that parents have to the way in which their children practise the legacy they receive. Reuda (2011) suggests that a shift has taken place relating to how cultural issues have been treated in literature in the way that the
focus is not on school only, but on school, home and the community; on multiliteracies; on situated processes and not only universal processes, and on matching the culture of teacher and learner. These shifts indicate an increased sensitivity to cultural knowledge emphasising the significance of the literacy orientation of children in their homes. In this section I will therefore explain the reading practices in the home from the boys' everyday-life perspective. As I recorded in section 6.2.1, each of the eight homes under study considered bedtime reading as being essential in their boys' upbringing. The same was reflected in their efforts to pursue the reading practices by supplying the boys with books, either by buying these or by visiting the public library. By a process of literacy enculturation from each of the parents, the boys experienced intense literacy exposure, and this section will discuss the cognitive considerations as they have influenced each boy.

Simon's mother holds that his reading "undoubtedly" started with bedtime stories, and that he never stopped reading after that. Previously I indicated that the mother has stopped buying books because Simon reads too quickly, and she takes out books for him from the public library. She claims that: "[h]e's one of those people that when he starts a book, he will finish it. It doesn't matter how thick it is, he will block everything else out and read that book until it's finished. Completely engrossed ... " (Interview, August 2011). Simon confirms his mother's perception of his indulgence by describing his reading in this way:

**Extract 8: "Yah, I always like reading ..."**

| Simon:            | Yah, I always like reading ... not caring about anything, getting lost in that world even if it was a book that long (shows with his fingers) ...
| Researcher:      | Totally engrossed.  
| Simon:            | Yah.  
| Researcher:      | You say that there was one stage that you took a dip?  
| Simon:            | It was at the beginning of this year, because we were really, really busy ... Mum did not give me any books for about the whole first term and then I started again, so ...  

(Interview, August 2011)
I begin with a remark from Simon that “I always like reading” and that he has the capacity to get lost in his book “and not caring about anything”. To all appearances he is an active reader, and it is an activity that he enjoys as the process takes him into worlds in which he has no control, and by ”not caring about anything" the story evokes in him a reality of a different social world to his own lived one. Barthes (1975) describes getting lost in that world as a powerless feeling of being manipulated by the text just as people are manipulated by advertisements in the media. The known cultural world is taken to a different dimension into which other layers of meaning stretch beyond the text. Crago (1985) suggests that one can never know exactly how an individual experiences a story or picture book, but the act of articulating one’s experience already changes that experience. For this reason the narrative engages Simon to the point that he is unable to put down the book until he has completed it. Reading is, however, not an all-encompassing activity for Simon, and he fits it in as the time allows. There seems, however, to be a dichotomy between his comments in Extract 8: “I always like reading”, and not reading “because we were really, really busy”, and “Mum did not give me any books for about the whole first term”. There is evidence that his love of reading does not translate into self-directed action to borrow from the school library that is so easily accessible to all Grade 7 boys. He seems to rely on his mother to supply him with books from the public library when she has time to go there. The following extract testifies to the ambivalence of his actions (August 2011):

**Extract 9:** "... if I didn't have anything on, I'd probably read."

| Simon: | Well, apart from the holidays and weekends, on weekdays, with homework and sport ... if I didn't have anything on, I’d probably read. It’s either between that or playing outside, or playing something electronic, but, otherwise, most of the time even if I have activities, I will only read when I get into bed. |

It is important to point out that even though Simon likes books, the home literacy is not a lived experience and operates on a functional level. This is reflected in Simon’s words: “If I didn’t have anything on, I’d probably read” and “I will only read when I get into bed”. Even the adverb “probably” indicates the uncertainty about taking up a book if he were given the choice. The message implicit in this communication
seems to be shaped by the surrounding reality in which his mother directs his book supplies – if she is busy, he does not have a book to read (Wodak, 2001). This data discussion introduces a key point in literacy enculturation about how Simon’s view of reading mirrors that of his mother. They are both readers, and perceive themselves as being avid readers, but it happens only when they have a book at hand. The passion to acquire a book (when they have run out of reading material) at all costs in the case of Sean, Mark, Brian and Leon - as their data revealed, is lacking in Simon’s family. Despite being an intelligent high achiever at school, Simon appears to become acquiescent to his mother’s power by falling in line with her dictations. The anxiety that underpinned her conversation with me during the interview was most palpable in that I was reminded that she could only fit me in early in the morning before work, and that there was a time constraint. This unease never dissipated during the interview, and I perceive this to be the key to Simon’s submission to her choices of books. It is evident that her hurried nervousness permeates the actions and attitudes of the members of the family.

It is quite different for Sean, however, who is inseparable from his books. An example of his engrossment during school time was him reading a book in the stands at a swimming gala while he waited for the proceedings to start. He read amidst the ear-splitting noise of his team singing and waving banners. My initial reason for selecting Sean was, in fact, that he was a reluctant reader (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), but as I explained in Chapter 5, it changed, however, when he looked at his cousin reading one of the Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordon in his Grade 5 year. He explains this during our interview (February 2011):

**Extract 10:** "... so I picked it up and read the back, and I thought it would be quite a nice book, so I started reading them."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sean:</th>
<th>Weeell … I first saw them in the shops and I didn’t really like the cover, but then they brought out the new cover which was quite a lot better, so I picked it up and read the back, and I thought it would be quite a nice book, so I started reading them. And some of my friends said they were pretty good, so …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Okay … and just because they were the stories they were?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean:</td>
<td>Yes, but I’ve also grown to like myths.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There seems to be a multilayered influence in Sean's reading life. The bedtime stories of his babyhood days must have triggered an interest in narratives which previously had not played an important role until he became wholly intrigued with the *Percy Jackson* series that caused his reading to start. Crago (1985) refers to bedtime stories as powerful experiences where the response patterns are laid down, while the experiences in one story, provide meaning in the next story (Dombey, 1992). This relates to the perceptions of the reader response theorist, Rosenblatt (1994), who distinguishes between two stances readers may assume when reading literature: the efferent stance is when the reader takes information away from the reading (what happens after the reading is finished), whilst the aesthetic stance is when the reader wants to have a lived experience, such as Sean’s discovery of reading enjoyment (what happens during the reading itself). Rosenblatt (1994) asserts that one’s initial experience of a literary text is aesthetic (Sipe, 2006: 97) which is evident in the way that Sean had to finish his story even during the swimming gala. He lives the experience which creates an enjoyment and the resultant hunger for the next book – a habit appreciated by his parents.

The early stimulus from Sean’s parents reflects the value that they place on his reading and provides the reason for their support, especially his mother, who proudly buys him books as he requires them. This, together with her verbal encouragement, infuses him with a positive orientation to books. It is interesting to note that he did not wholly engage in reading during his Grade 3 year in my class. At that time he was not as fanatical as he is at present. When I asked him "... are you going to carry on reading in high school? Or do you think you will be influenced by sport and being too busy?" he was emphatic that he would always have time to read once he went to bed. The reading habit has embedded itself in his daily routine and he plans to pursue it.

Another late starter is Kevin, who, like Sean, was a reluctant reader. Kevin's mother says that "[f]or a long time he was not a reader. He loved stories; he loved to be read to. I was always reading *Nicholas* (by Goscinny & Sempe, 2006) and honestly, I would say ... until ... for me he has only turned into a reader this year." During my
interview with him (June 2011) he supplied the reason for starting on his reading journey:

**Extract 11:** "I started to enjoy them, so ... and then I just got into it."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>What made you change?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin:</td>
<td>I started reading the Cherub books. I started to enjoy them, so ... and then I just got into it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Was it purely the Cherub books, or was it general reading?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin:</td>
<td>No, I read the Cherub books to the end of the series, and then other books written by him. And then any other book I could find.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Mostly fiction, or...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin:</td>
<td>Fiction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *Cherub* series (Robert Muchamore) has intrigued three of the eight boys in the case study. The underlying theme of child spies challenges their imagination especially since the narrative has a sense of probability within their own worlds. When reading these stories one can associate with the extraordinary brave characters who plan and perform intelligent tasks. The author, Robert Muchamore, has created Cherub agents that are all seventeen and under, and appear to be regular children, yet they are trained professionals, sent out on missions to spy on terrorists and drug dealers. Kevin admits that the child spies, who were able to hack into computers, bug homes and download crucial documents, fascinated him. Like Sean in Extract 10, Kevin experiences his stories in an aesthetic way (Rosenblatt, 1994) and incorporates the literary characters into real life associations. The central ideas in the Cherub books are from an adult world, yet the happenings, the characters and the descriptions exist in an adolescent world. The readers make connections between reality and possibilities, between narrative and the real world, and understanding their own reality as opposed to the reality found in the text. The Cherub series inspired Kevin and Sean to start reading not just to the extent of the series, but beyond - and both have become keen readers.

Mark’s favourite genre is fiction, yet he has only read one Cherub book. He explains: "I didn’t really like them. I read the first book, but found it a bit boring ... everybody
had a craze on them, but, I don’t know ... I never really got going with it.” He is, nevertheless, emphatic about his choice of books. During our interview in January 2011 he describes his selection:

Extract 12: "My favourite books so far are the Eragon ones, which are actually brilliant, um ... I can’t wait for the fourth one to come out."

| Mark: | I like fiction books, like, like, Eragon4 and the Lord of the rings5 and stuff ... Right now I’m reading The Lord of the rings and stuff ... |
| Researcher: | But that is not your favourite book, is it? |
| Mark: | My favourite books so far are the Eragon ones, which are actually brilliant, um ... I can’t wait for the fourth one to come out. |
| Researcher: | And what makes them so brilliant? |
| Mark: | I don’t know. I like the story. It is fiction. Um ... they’re like, I don’t know, but they are, like, really cool. It is about ... it is, like, set long ago. Not in this world. There is this boy; he finds a dragon egg, and becomes a dragon rider ... like ... Before that ... a series of books called Gone, and what is after Gone ... Hunger, I think, and Liar... there were those three, and Plague, a really good book. I liked it very much. And what else did I read? Oh, Harry Potter ... the Harry Potter series. |
| Researcher: | You loved the Harry Potters? Did you read all of them? |
| Mark: | Yes, they’re very good books. |

The above extract represents one in which Mark explains his preferences, and his aesthetic stance in this process: “I can’t wait for the fourth one to come out”. He expresses not only his excitement about the stories, but implicit is the understanding that his mother will supply him with the book when it is published. Mark has read a wide selection of titles, and clearly does not read a story that has no appeal for him. He enumerates the titles such as Gone, Hunger, Liar, Plague (saying: “I liked it very much”) and the Harry Potter series (J.K. Rowlings) (“they’re very good books”).

During my interview with Mark’s mother (December 2010), she describes some of his choices as "big reads". She continues by saying that he does not only focus on fiction, but was at that moment reading a horror trilogy (Chaos Walking by Patrick Ness). He is passionate about reading and when his mother is unable to get to a bookshop, he takes out books from the library. Mark lives his stories and enjoys relating them

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4 Eragon is the first of four fantasy novels in the Inheritance Cycle written by a 15 year old boy, Christopher Paolini.
5 Lord of the rings is a high fantasy novel written by J.R.R. Tolkien as a follow-up to The Hobbit.
when asked to do so. This, Meek (1988) suggests, testifies to the powerful lessons that readers glean from storybooks that feed into their desire for reading and taking in the knowledge narratives. Literacy is internalised and the reader finds out how narratives work and how this enriches their own imagination. This demonstrates how children’s literature as a body of texts is complex, since texts span many age groups; yet each reading child is exposed to international and inter-cultural events that enrich their view of the world. Hunt (2006: 1) refers to this process as “ideologically and politically potent and it is the source of possibly the most formative and satisfying literary experiences in the lives of vast numbers of people”. Mark’s bookshelves are laden with books that he has read, and the stories lying on those shelves have become part of Mark’s imagination. Similarly, Brian’s and Leon’s bookcases in their bedrooms groan under the weight of the books that have been read. Both Brian and Leon, however, do not mind re-reading books that they have read - as Brian explains: "I was a bit younger when I read them and didn't remember a lot of stuff that happened", while Leon re-read two of the Harry Potter books before his father would buy him the new one that had come out. His father provides details during an interview in November 2010:

Extract 13: "Are you re-reading it?" (laugh). And he said, 'Yes, I have to.'"

| Researcher: | But, I remember during the ... um, the Harry Potter phase I asked the class what they were reading, and whether they liked Harry Potter. Only a few of them were reading them, but I remember Leon saying, “My dad said that I had to read the first one again before I got the new one.” I asked him, “Are you re-reading it?” (laugh). And he said, “Yes, I have to.” |
| Leon’s father: | Well, I just thought it was a bit advanced. I read the whole of the first Harry Potter and then got into the second one, and there was a scene in that one with Aragon and the spiders, and they were being dragged down, and I thought, you know, this is not really age-appropriate for them, for an eight-year-old and a six-year-old, or for whatever they were ... and there was big “snot and trane” (Afrikaans metaphor for crying) about it when I said, “You know what, we are not going to read this anymore. I said, no, when you are old enough to read these books properly, you will be able to understand them.” And that is why, when his friends were all reading number three, I said to him, “Go back and read number one and number two.” Then when the last one came out, I said to him, “Why don't you read the sixth one and you'll be ready for number seven?” |

There are layers of significance in this extract. While Leon’s father did not deem the Harry Potter saga as age-appropriate for his six and eight-year-old boys, his view was
in keeping with his sense that his sons were at an age in which they could not make judgements for themselves. The parents grapple with the dichotomy of keeping their sons interested in reading literacy, yet not allowing them to read any material they want. They are nevertheless cognisant of the impact that negative images in narratives may have on their boys. The home literacy practices can therefore be said to incorporate a code of behaviour prescribed by father and mother. The children grow to understand that the parameters exist to protect each of them. Leon respects this, and therefore his comment, "[m]y dad said that I had to read the first one again before I get the new one", emanates from an accepting stance, but at the same time a resilience to get-on-with-it as his desire to read the new book is strong. Underlying his re-reading is the hidden urge to want to read the new Harry Potter; not that he is forced into doing something against his will, or succumbing to power.

The wish to read is equally strong for William, who says "I read in bed at night". I asked him during our interview in September 2011:

**Extract 14:** "I struggle ... quite often ... to find time to read ... but when I do get a book I like, I read it very quickly ..."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Researcher:</strong></th>
<th>If you had to look at your reading, and put it on a scale like those bookworms that we used to use with a scale from 0 to 10, how much do you like reading ... from nought to ten?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>William:</strong></td>
<td>Um, I guess about six or seven. I struggle ... quite often ... to find time to read ... but when I do get a book I like, I read it very quickly, um, <em>Lord of the flies</em> ... <em>Andre Agassi</em>'s autobiography, a book that [teacher] gave me called <em>Flyaway Peter</em> ... So when I do find a book that I like, I read it quite fast. Often, unless it's a good book, I would leave it because it is quite time constraining, so I won't read it if I don't like it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This extract represents William's perspective on reading: he regards reading literacy as important in his life, yet he is realistic about the time available for him to indulge in this pastime. The book has to hold an interest for him and he requires encouragement to complete it. Unlike Leon, Brian and Mark who actively seek out books to read and are impulsively driven to do so from a desire to read, William waits for opportunities and suggestions from his teacher or his family. He explains that "if I go to the library, I very rarely go to like a section and I would ask [librarian] 'What is a good book?' or 'What book do you think is good in the library?'" It is not an overriding passion for this sportsman to sit with a book, "and, you know, if I've got a
good book or the last day of the Masters' Golf, I would watch the golf", therefore makes sense in his chosen world (Dyson, 1993). Reading competence is his aim, but reading is not one of his preferences and priorities in his world. There is an explicit suggestion from William that interest and guidance from a more knowledgeable person such as the librarian, teacher or his mother are required to get him reading. I argue, just as Simon allowed his mother to choose books on his behalf, and William similarly requires encouragement, this innate reluctance stems from an instinctive aversion to engage willingly with a book. The implication is therefore that despite book-buying and book-borrowing, a disinclination towards reading can be ascribed to busy lives, hurried parents and anxiety connected to lifestyles.
While the aim of this section is to discuss the boys’ view on reading, I want to highlight the fact that every boy’s room had a plethora of bookshelves, of which Figure 7 is but a small sample. An array of books in a boy’s bedroom does not automatically translate into making a reader of the boy. I, nevertheless, want to suggest that the presence of these books, their availability, and their proximity may well be a coaxing phenomenon. In an obscure way it may also send a visual message of the significance that books hold for the family who has supplied them, and the way to care for them.

6.2.4 Comment

In this section I endeavour to emphasise the links between the way in which parents live out their brand of literacy in the home and how the boys pursue this patterned inurement to the sociocultural ways in the home. The patterning to which I refer begins with the repetitions in teaching little children to master specific linguistic structures. Repetitive patterns are also prevalent in the routines created in the
homes, such as rituals at the dinner table, discourse around activities and bedtime stories (Gee, 2011). Bedtime stories may well seem remote from the reading literacy practices of a Grade 7 boy’s attitude to reading, but his situated social thinking begins gradually with rituals that one takes for granted as just an everyday occurrence in the home. These occurrences are the subtle mediating processes that become part of the imaginative home of a small child as described by Vygotsky (1986). Gee (2000) therefore refers to situated contexts as constructs that, within New Literacy Studies, are perceived to be “actively created, sustained, negotiated, resisted, and transformed moment-by-moment through ongoing work” (2000: 190). The “constructs” that are clearly “created” and “sustained” are found in the moments when stories were read by torchlight in Leon’s home, or when Mark and Kevin read alternate pages from a book with their mothers, or when reading became a “cuddly time” when Brian and William were small. A further “construct” for Gee is found in negotiation, which strongly takes place in Leon’s home in terms of the suitability of certain books or the types of stories, and the age-appropriate content that elicited discursive discourse between parents and son. These examples are distinctly positive markers that transform literacy practices, yet, for Gee to include “resisted” into this list, seems to be an anomaly. It nevertheless conjures up the view that Barry’s opposition to reading, William’s view that “unless it’s a good book, I would leave it because it is quite time constraining”, and Simon’s reliance on his mother for getting his books from the library, exemplify the ongoing transformation in their literacy world and the way that they view book-engagement. The literacy environment of the boys are in line with the way in which children of different classes are socialised into the acquisition of language and knowledge to participate in a given community (Brice Heath, 1983). Ongoing work therefore takes place in the practices of home literacy in which each boy configures his own connections and way with literacy practices: whether it is in starting to read through some stimulus, or re-reading Harry Potter for the purpose of earning the next book in the series, having very specific tastes in books, or just loving reading, or choosing to watch the Master’s golf in preference to reading - these actions are relevant to the research question that seeks to explain boys’ out-of-school reading practices.
In the section that follows, I focus on the particular practices and events that encourage boys to read.

6.3 The social rooting of literacies

In this section I argue that the experiences in these home domains determine the response to what is being taught, and how these responses are perpetuated. This stance seeks to explain what literacy practices and events in the home influence the boys in this study to read. To put it in Meek's words: "To learn to read a book, as distinct from simply recognizing the words on the page, a young reader has to become both the teller (picking up the author's view and voice) and the told (the recipient of the story, the interpreter)" (2006: 42). This is wholly relevant to the literacy enculturation in the home; and in the home, the parents are the pivotal forces within the domain. I am, however, by no means suggesting that parents are the only influence on reading children, and I am aware that so much can take place between bedtime story and linguistic education, and ultimately in adolescent behaviour. I am implying that if parents invest time in reading aloud to their children on a regular basis, they are aware of the value that literacy played in their own lives, and perceive the value of passing on that knowledge. Crago (1985) goes as far as to say that it is clear that parents who are interested in furthering their children's literacy interests are mostly professional people from a specific socio-economic, middle-class context, or women. For them it is essential to encourage literacy in their own family for their ultimate achievement in their careers, and their daily lives. This ideology relates to research by Kajee (2011) and Volk (in Gregory et al., 2004) in homes where English is the second language, but the language in which the children are schooled. Both researchers demonstrate that the family members in their study showed that they had funds of knowledge that were relevant to literacy learning, and that literacy events were “co-constructed by multiple participants” (Volk, 2004: 37). Different literacies were created in these homes, and skills were learnt to adapt to the expectations of a schooled literacy. The point I advance is that the families in my case study may be said to be English first language speakers, but their discourses,
interactions, their expectations from their children, and their literacy practices are varied, and are rooted in the culture of the home (Kajee, 2011). Language is therefore not the only aspect that shapes learning, and it may be the vehicle that assists interaction, but the way that members of a family use and appropriate literacy practices often determines the way in which they experience and enjoy that practice, and sustain it.

With reference to this I will seek to analyse the specific data from home that relate to positive practices and events that occur in the boys' social reality. On this subject Wise (2009: 373) referred to literacy as the “cornerstone of student achievement” implying that few things could be more advantageous than developing reading and writing skills that will promote success in school and in the wider community, but that the process must be underpinned by interest.

6.3.1 Rooted in grandparents

By referring to the events and practices in the home that encourage engagement with books, the extended family can certainly be identified as sharing in the literacy events of the home. I have discussed in section 6.2.1 how each family has a culture of bedtime stories, has a culture of buying books for the boys when and as they need them, or a culture of frequenting the library in their search for books, and engaging in discourse on literacy events, books and authors. I begin my discussion in this section by focusing on the value of the grandparents participating in their grandchildren's reading. Their influence may seem remote enough to disregard, yet four of the parents were adament that their legacy of reading was derived from their own parents who were readers, and by example encouraged them to pursue the habit. Kevin's mother began her interview with a reference to her reading family. Consider the following comments during our interview in October 2010:

Extract 1: "... my parents read an inordinate amount ..."

| Kevin's mother: | I have two children and I come from a family of great readers. Reading came almost instinctively ... umm, ... my parents ... my parents read an inordinate amount ... they were almost forceful about it ... you were almost forced to read every day. I almost got it in the neck if I didn't read the newspaper every... |

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day, but having said that, I have a younger sister who doesn’t read at all. There were three of us close together and then a big age gap ... you almost wonder what happened as it is very interesting ... the three older ones read a lot ... there was the old Afrikaans argument – “there was no debate; you had to read”. It possibly also proves the point that when you force someone to do something, it becomes habit.

There was an expectation in this family that each person had to read. Each member of the family (the men and the women) has a professional qualification, and one may well see a pattern emerging as expressed by Crago (1985) in the previous section. The repeated exposure to reading gives the participant the impression that this is important in their family milieu and the process carries an air of expectation. This expectation is passed on to the recipients' families who equally perceive the activity to be important. The recurring pattern is not an absolute given, however, in that Kevin's mother says that "I have a younger sister who doesn't read at all", and Kevin did not read much until he was exposed to Robert Muchamore’s Cherub series. Kevin's older sister, nevertheless, has always read avidly, and Kevin, having only started reading in his Grade 6 year after "kind of having to be coerced into reading or my having to read the first chapter of the book and then trying to get him into it ... and now he sits and I have to beg him to stop reading to do his homework" (Interview, October 2010). The pattern of daily reading lay dormant in Kevin until he followed the trend of the family way of using literacy.

Reading grandparents formed part of William's literacy enculturation too. His mother refers to her eighty three-year-old father and mother who still read widely, and play word games with the grandchildren:

**Extract 2: "... and they will look up definitions."**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>William’s mother:</th>
<th>All the time. Dad will always refer to things ... we have a family dictionary ... a thick one ... and he will go and sit with William on his lap, and they will look up definitions. Always, always.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Interview, June 2011)</td>
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</table>

Even though reading is not an all-encompassing habit for William, he does not mind being part of a literacy moment with his grandfather when they examine word definitions. This particular literacy event, even though it may seem insignificant in a
more holistic perspective, forms part of William's everyday life and feeds into his view of family literacy. The grandparents read, his mother and sister read. I may assume that the habit has been instilled through the example set by the family, yet it lies dormant, ready to be unearthed when he has more time available. The same patterning is prevalent in Simon's home. Both his parents came from reading parents. Simon's mother explains during an interview (August 2011):

**Extract 3:** "... my mum always read to us; my dad used to as well ..."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simon's mother</th>
<th>You know, I have been reading avidly all my life, and when I met [father], his family were all the same ... my mum always read to us; my dad used to as well ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

When Street (1984) argued that the meaning of literacy depends on the social situation in which it is embedded, and that the particular practices of reading and story-telling and writing are taught in that context, this helps in explaining what reading goes on in the home, and how the family use it. Both William's and Simon's parents were influenced by their own parents, a trend that is reflected in the homes of Barry, Matthew and Leon too. Refer to the following comments during an interview with Barry and his mother (March 2011):

**Extract 4:** "My granny reads a lot to me."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barry</th>
<th>My granny reads a lot to me. She also tells me stories. Remember, Mum, she always had this story of the tree fairy. And she had to tell it over and over.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barry's mother</td>
<td>That was from my youth already. There was this big tree on the farm, and there were many stories attached to that tree. And she continued with the children. They loved her stories. Ja, she is a good story-teller.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These special memories reside within a legacy passed down by Barry's grandmother through the story-telling and reading events that formed part of his early experiences. It seems that it is not only applicable to Barry, for his mother too carries the memory of Granny's "tree fairy" and the "big tree on the farm" with her. Their literacy basket is filled with special moments, characters and events that emanate
from Granny, resulting in daughter and grandson thinking about these and recalling the events.

Mark's granny still reads to him even though he is in Grade 7. She takes part in a literacy event that he enjoys, and, at the same time, she must find fulfilment in doing so since Mark's mother notes that:

Extract 5: "My mum has always read to them ever since they were young."

| Mark's mother: | My mum has always read to them ever since they were young. Mark still likes to be read to. If he can convince somebody to sit and read to him, he will. My mum is a sucker, and she will come and he will say, “Granny, please”. And she will take any book and read to him for hours and hours. |
| Researcher: | How interesting. So Granny is part of the literacy programme. |
| Mark’s mother: | Ja, she doesn’t mind that at all. I find it terribly tedious reading all those books to him. |

(Interview, December 2010)

What is particularly significant in these events is that the grandparents wish to be part of the literacy education of their grandchildren. They seem to display patience and pleasure in spending time with the children, and promoting their own belief in the necessity of the literacy process in which they participate. In this particular home space, the members of this middle class family feel the need to share leisure activities with the children, and have the access to time and facilities to read and play with their children (Bhabha, 1994). Heath (1983) demonstrated the impact that this type of interaction had on children’s achievement in school. Parents and grandparents from middle class families actively pursue and support literacy practices that benefit children from these homes. Special relationships are being constructed around literacy moments. There is a sense of togetherness, sharing ideas and time and space, developing a common interest critical to building family literacy and linguistic enrichment. The interaction is mutually cherished, and influences an attitude of reading-is-fun; from this grows a notion of wanting to repeat what the family values. In the same way the bulletin board in Leon's home, for instance, is representative of interaction by the extended family. Interesting articles that Leon's father prints out are placed on the bulletin board situated on the wall above the family dining table in
the kitchen. The entire family enjoys the display as described in the following extract (Interview, November 2010):

Extract 6: "Plus Granny and Grandpa will come to bring things along. They are into it as well."

| Leon's father: | Yes, that’s when it started ... the best part of the newspaper was comics because it was funny. |
| Researchers:  | ... to share as a family ... |
| Leon's father: | Yes. We started to read comics ... then, um, and from that it has spread. “Are there any comics in the paper, Dad?” “Yes, Hagar on page 3”. |
| Leon's mother: | Now Leon starts telling us about things he read in the paper. |
| Researchers:  | Is that where they get their bulletin board news from? |
| Leon's mother: | Yes, [father] normally prints out interesting articles ... or he thinks they’re interesting, and thinks the boys do too. But they do, they all do. Often they cut things from the newspaper. |
| Leon's father: | ... and they have done cartoons and all sorts of things ... but um, they would walk in the mornings and say, “Oh, there’s something new in the columns” and they’d walk ... walk up to it and read it. It doesn’t just blend into the background ... they do it. |
| Leon's mother: | And it is part of the decor. And we have kept it. There are lots of amazing ones, um, I will show you. They spent ages looking at it. Plus Granny and Grandpa will come to bring things along. They are into it as well. |

The parental interaction in Extract 6 demonstrates the intricate links between the multifaceted threads that feed into the family literacy in Leon’s home. Both parents display a consistent approach in their view of home literacy. This interview reflects the parents’ turn-taking and mutual respect in the discourse and discussions that were similarly evident in the boys’ turn-taking at the dinner table. They work as a family to create meaningful literacy moments in which Granny and Grandpa also take part by bringing interesting articles for the bulletin board. The parents can only have derived their home literacy knowledge from the grandparents, as the children are gaining from the parental guidance now. The literacy ways can therefore be interpreted through historical lenses that shape the reality for Leon’s family, and for this reason value is placed on the literacy contribution of the grandparents.
6.3.2 Comment

In this section I have explained the role of the grandparents in the literacy events; not only the events, but also the practices created by them. As described above, Leon’s mother demonstrates how the bulletin board clearly forms a key literacy attraction for the entire family. These events have not only encouraged the boys to take an interest in the newspapers and magazines, but they also incorporated "Granny and Grandpa" who "bring things along". The grandparents can therefore be seen to be a binding and linking factor in literacy generation. If the boy’s action is greeted by an enthusiastic "Granny and Grandpa", and the he realises that his efforts are endorsed by them, he may set out to recreate another such event. At the same time the grandparents bear similar sentiments wishing to fulfil this burgeoning habit of which they are part. None of the eight parents indicated a negative literacy influence from the respective grandparents. Each of them seemed to embrace the impact that reading had on their lives which they were endeavouring to pass on to their own children. It is accordingly relevant to suggest that literacy is socially rooted and mediated by the more skillful elders in the community (Gregory et al., 2004), but I argue that the extent to which the family is involved, determines the attitude that a boy has to his reading. A parent’s attitude to a process becomes the child’s attitude, in the same way that the child follows the example set by father or mother.

6.3.3 Rooted in parents

In the previous section I depicted the significant role that the extended family plays in fostering the type of reading literacy they wish to create in their family. This section will focus on the events created by parents who influence their children to commence reading and then to pursue the habits that the parents have helped to foster. I am purposefully not focusing on the range of popular culture in multimediated ways, but amplifying what Tierney (2009: 330) defines as "the interactions around texts" and the social practices attached to them. The diverse
type of exposure that the boys in the home in Extract 6 experience, highlights the reason for the discourse around the texts, and the initiation into contributing to events. The intersectionality of literacies in this home is not accidental or random, since the parents employ several types of literacy to engage their boys. The bulletin board contains both visual and textual literacies that afford discourse and interaction, whilst there is intense focus on reading texts, which happens often in this home where TV and computers are not allowed during the week.

Leon's parents enticed their boys into participating in the bulletin board by creating conversation pieces. Several types of literacy are employed by the family to engage in their literacy practices which includes oral, visual and reading literacy (Leu et al., 2004). The events that unfolded into a family practice read like a story: The parents subscribed to *National Geographic Kids*, *Scooby Doo* and *Horrible Science*. They perceived this to be the children's introduction into reading as a pleasurable pastime and gaining knowledge. Reading to Leon's family cannot be construed as being devoid of enjoyment, as Leon's father explains: "... the best part of the newspaper was the comics because it was funny." They wanted their boys to enjoy reading the paper, and as Leon's father indicates, their engagement with the newspaper began there. As a family it meant more than merely reading the newspapers - it was a
means of sharing, of powerful discourse in their car, and around the table at night (my observation in their home, October 2011), and a means of identity-making for the family. It is necessary for this family to be informed on current affairs and to build on knowledge. Their discourse is the “flow of knowledge” (Jäger, 2001) that characterises the yearning of this family to be well aware of the type of societal knowledge that provides power. Information is critical to the parents’ work in the legal and medical worlds, and information means powerful control. Their perception of what political power means to the individuals of the family in the long term, is a consideration that directs their actions in the home.

It is not the same, however, for all the families in this case study. There are only four of the eight families who subscribe to the daily newspapers. Leon and Kevin's parents get the daily papers, but the members of Brian's home are fanatical news readers as the following extract indicates (Interview, October, 2010):

**Extract 7: "So once we read all of those, we collectively talk about them, but we read books every night."**

| Brian's mother: | ... each night we’ll read, we’ll read even in bed. We get a lot of newspapers ... we have, um ... the daily things: The Times, The Citizen, The Star, The Business Day, and others on Sundays. So once we read all of those, we collectively talk about them. But we read books every night. It is very seldom that anybody goes to bed without reading a book. |

Extract 7 highlights the discursive practices that have developed around the presence of newspapers, and the collective discourse on this goes a long way towards understanding how children become subjectively located in this culture. The parents of both Leon and Brian have the will and the means to draw their boys into their newspaper and magazine reading for discursive and communicative purposes, yet the communal gestures in these two families seem to be twofold - firstly, these parents take up a supportive position where textual events are concerned, by urging their children to take notice of articles that are relevant to them, and which lead to discussion on the content; secondly, the parents subconsciously sow the seeds for out-of-home success which the boys learn through talking and reading with their
parents (Dyson, 1993). This notion is substantiated in the research done by Liezl Malan (1996) in which she studied the discourses of learning around adult literacy classes in Belville South, South Africa. She argued that the use of literacy is context specific and that the value of literacy is amplified in work places, church and situations in which "literacy practices are invested with social power" (1996: 142). Neighbourhood literacies, in contrast, had no special status attached to them apart from playing a supportive role. Both Leon and Brian's parents are aware of the implications of their literacy guidance, and are steering their boys to positions in which they will be comfortable in situations of social power. Bhabha (1994) explains that individuals are products of their social processes, and that literacy behaviour and discipline are implicit and lie at the root of its implementation. This occurs in alignment with the notion that the home can be viewed as the location of culture, where a class structure develops through active stimulation towards achievement, indicating a close relationship between space and behaviour (Gallagher, 1993) as found in the homes of Leon and Brian.

In order to look at situations beyond the text in these homes, I aim to understand the different customs that parents practise to entice the boys into reading. Each of these eight boys has no shortage of books since they get whatever books they require from a bookshop or a library, over and above what is already available, and four of them have a Kindle. Mark uses his Kindle at home only because he does not like taking it to school, and reads from it only when he runs out of books to read. Kevin and William do not like theirs as they both prefer to feel and turn pages, whilst Simon was excited about his as it was new. The Kindle is therefore not entirely a successful means of persuading the boys to read, yet it provides easy access to reading matter. Mark's mother considered getting his cricketing magazines on the Kindle, but he objected saying that he would not be able to peruse and mull over articles as he does when handling pages. The Kindle is merely part of the enticement into reading. There is another way that Mark's mother influences him to read, and that is by example. Consider the following extract from our interview (December 2010):
Extract 8: "So, he likes us to do it together."

Mark's mother: ... and what he does do, and it is his best - especially on a Saturday afternoon, because it's like my time, he is allowed into the bedroom if he sits still and we will lie in bed together and we will read. Yes, he will read his book and I will read my book. And he ... he ... he is as good as gold. If I fall asleep, he doesn't mind, he'll be as quiet as a mouse. He just carries on reading. I will wake up after a while and I'll say, "Ahh, you're still here?" And he will say, “Yes”. So, he likes us to do it together.

This literacy event has as strong an impact on Mark's reading as bedtime stories did when he was much younger. It has created a close camaraderie between reader and reader, and as I have already mentioned in section 6.2.1, Mark has developed a close-knit bond with his mother. Part of the bond hinges on reading for which they both have an affinity. During my observation in another home (February 2012), I detected a similar affinity between Brian and his mother which she ascribed to much sharing of books: "I think it starts very early when you make it a cuddly time." Not all boys, however, continue "cuddly time" as Mark does with his mother, but there exists a closeness between Brian and his mother, and a mutual respect for their reading habits as his mother explains: “There are often times that the whole family are just lying around reading a book, sitting around reading; so very early that is what he became accustomed to”.

I argue that the example set in a family is an important indicator of literacy interest and learning. It is significant that each of the four boys in Brian’s family has become readers. Brian's mother expresses no surprise about this as she suggests that "that is what [they] became accustomed to". The example of the entire family reading has created an expectation in them to do the same. Reading literacy has taken on different proportions in this family and "one of the things that is quite nice, is that when someone else has read the book and they talk about it, it is a shared experience - I see that with Brian and [brother], some of the things they read, they share". Literacy has framed the identity of this home into a cohesive and interactive group. They are intensely involved not only in reading for knowledge, but also reading for pleasure. They communicate about literacy and share their reading experiences.
Yet a further book communication in Kevin's home is expressed by his mother during our interview (October 2010) when she debated the value of bookshops versus the local library and the reason for her buying rather than borrowing books:

**Extract 9: "... reading is talking to people and finding out and getting references"

| Researcher: | Isn't it funny ... library visits don't seem to be in vogue anymore. Is it because the libraries don't seem to have the funds to buy what the children are interested in? |
| Kevin's mother: | It may be that, taking an example, I'm not sure that I'll try to go there. We went a few times to that one in Mountview (fictitious name), and I don't know if it just didn't suit them ... now that I think back, we did have library cards ... but I think they just didn't like it because things were not well presented and often you couldn't find things. For me the bookshops that really stand out are Love Books because the owners, the girls that work there, love reading and have got children ... reading is talking to people and finding out and getting references ... that a lot of what to do is that you look at the covers and you talk about it; if you go to a smaller bookshop, like Books Unlimited which we used to go to as children ... it was the same thing ... there was an elderly couple who owned the shop and who read the books. And nowadays I think of those ... those books that ... that we love, somebody has recommended ... the owners or the person working behind the counter. That is also another thing with the library, you don't always get somebody there who can say that this is great series, a good read, or it's fantastic, try it ... |

Just as Brian's mother justified buying books for her sons, so does Kevin's mother. She values communication about books when buying them; in fact, she expects that service in both the bookshop and the library. For her it is not merely placing a random book into her son's hands, as she wants to know what type of book she is buying. Her purchases are carefully considered and "you talk about it" and rely on recommendations from knowledgeable readers. Implicit in this view is that she similarly values communication about books with her son and daughter. The communication is necessary for her to understand what their preferences are so that she can aid her children in their reading effort. She notes that her daughter has never relaxed her reading habit, and has always been keen on books. Kevin, like Mark, loves someone to read to him which indicates that he enjoys stories, but he did not actively participate in the activity for a long time. (I will discuss this in the following section 6.4.1). Of relevance to this section is the way in which Kevin's mother perceived that she could entice him into reading, by reading his books as well
as her own. She describes his present bookish attitude as "a bit of luck", yet she admits that "there is definitely something about getting involved".

6.3.4 Comment

There is a plethora of principles hidden in the latter statement - "there is definitely something about getting involved" - a comment made by Kevin's mother once she had expressed her relief that her son had started to read. She firstly acknowledges that she had had a hand in Kevin’s transformation from reluctance to fanaticism, and that she needed to be involved for this to happen. She did not achieve this by only reading to him far beyond the age that could be classified as bedtime stories; she persisted in finding appropriate books, doing research and seeking out references until she discovered the Cherub series which appealed to him. She read some of his books, not only demonstrating her interest in his pastime, but at the same time sending him a covert message of the value she places on reading. She identified with his needs, communicated with him, elicited his preferences from him, and by being the exemplary reading mother, slowly won him over to fanatical reading.

With reference to the previous comment, I argue that the events and practices in the home that influence boys to read are encompassed in the mother's attempts to get Kevin to read. It depends on the intensity of interest that the parents take in bringing literacy to their children, in not only buying books and magazines, but also in subtler ways of transferring the mental image of the significance that reading literacy holds in the family domain. The data reveal that all the parents value literacy and lead by example, even if it means reading feel-good books or hobby/interest magazines. For some of the families the grandparents take an active interest in participating in the literacy activities, yet it is a habit that has been passed down through them that they are encouraging in their grandchildren. I described above how Mark's granny still reads to him, and Leon's grandparents contribute to their bulletin board. Further data concern talking about books and articles, thereby inspiring an interest in the
text. An explanation of the discussions are particularly relevant to Kevin in determining his preferences, in Brian and his brother sharing books and ideas, in Leon’s family engaging in newspaper articles which lead to the bulletin board, in Sean’s mother who tries to find out from him which books she should buy for him, and in Simon relying on his mother to get suitable books from the library. These discourses lead to questions being asked, preferences expressed, ideas transferred and the more knowledgeable elders stimulating a type of literacy development in their boys that provides what Malan termed "social power" (1996: 142). This notion is in alignment with Vygotsky’s belief that, through parental mediation, development takes place from lower functions of attention and memory to higher functions of logical memory and intellectualised functioning (Wertsch, 1985). The stimuli received from and discussed with parents in these literacy moments, become the fodder that the boys intellectually feed off explaining what influences the boys to read. Not all the children from these homes, however, turn into readers even though they experience the same literacy enculturation within the family. The non-readers (or reluctant readers) are, nevertheless, not illiterate and possess strong literary and literacy skills as evidenced in their academic achievement at school. This will be discussed in the following section (6.4).

6.4 Literacy chain linking

6.4.1 Boys making sense of literacy

In my discussion on the influences of literacy on the boys, I have predominantly directed my attention to the positive effects of literacy that emanate from the home. During my initial choice of readers and reluctant readers for this case study, I selected four keen readers and four reluctant readers. This ideal sample, however, changed from the time I made the selection to the analysis of the data. The four keen readers remained readers, but two of the four non-readers changed their habits in Grades 5 and 6, namely Kevin and Sean. Kevin started reading the Cherub series (as mentioned in Chapter 5), while Sean became fascinated with Percy Jackson and the Olympians by Rick Riordon in his Grade 5 year, and read the entire pentalogy of
adventure and fantasy books. The story, set in the United States and based on Greek mythology, is narrated by Percy in a witty adolescent manner which deals with themes such as coming of age, love and teenage angst. Refer to the following extract (Interview, February 2011):

Extract 1: "... that is when my reading really took a huge incline, because I started the Percy Jackson series ..."

| Sean: | In Grade 5 and 6, that is when my reading really took a huge incline, because I started the Percy Jackson series in the first term and finished it near the end of the second or third term or so. |
| Researcher: | Okay ... and just because they were the stories they were? |
| Sean: | I also like myths. |
| Researcher: | And factual stuff? |
| Sean: | Ja, for general knowledge. Like for history and things. |
| Researcher: | If you go to the library now, what would you choose? |
| Sean: | The fantasy section. (Laugh). |
| Researcher: | And there’s a big choice? |
| Sean: | There’s quite a lot because most writers aim at young kids who like fantasy and stuff ... and it gradually goes on and on. What I think is that they try and inspire a series so that kids can buy their books and ... and then they get richer. (Laugh). |

Sean was launched into reading when he discovered this particular fantasy series. He is now able to admit that "I also like myths" which is his first choice in stories, is able to select the genre that he prefers, and furthermore is able to express his opinion on authors who write series of books. Galda et al. (2000) make a distinction between preferences "which indicate what readers might like (their italics) to read", and interests that "indicate what they actually (their italics) are selecting to read" (2000: 367). It differs from person to person and from book to book, yet they suggest that the phenomenon develops from the sociocultural expectations of the home and the environment. The parents in the home may well understand what a child will discover in the books they read, as I described above in section 6.3.3. Kevin's mother studied the books offered in the bookshops to find out what type of book she was
buying, yet she was incapable of pinpointing and capturing the books that would hold permanent interest for her son. In the same way that *Percy Jackson* triggered Sean’s interest, so too the *Cherub* series started Kevin reading. In both these series the stories move at a fast pace, offer much action with which the boys can identify, and the conflict is resolved in the end which are aspects that appeal to these adolescent boys (Lehman et al., 1994). It is not simply by luck that the parents in these homes stumbled on the right book for their sons, but through trial and error the mothers determined their sons’ preferences which gave them an avenue of choice. Both Kevin and Sean are now well able to tell their mothers which books interest them, something they could not do when they were not readers. During an interview with Kevin’s mother (October 2010) she describes her book-seeking journey:

**Extract 2:** "For a long time, because I’m such a reader, I worried about the fact that he didn’t want to read himself."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>To what do you attribute his taking up reading now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin’s mother:</td>
<td>For a long time, because I’m such a reader, I worried about the fact that he didn’t want to read himself. So you think, ”Well ... is there something wrong in that I read to him too much”. And was that spoonfeeding? Yet it was only when he hit on a series that appealed to him. This is a genre, I would say, not just one. But he found the genre of books that he liked. And that is, in my mind, what switched him from a non-reader to reader. It’s ... it is ... he’d tried all sorts of books like the <em>Harry Potter</em> ... he didn’t like the mythical ... he tried the <em>Percy Jacksons</em> ... he didn’t like, um, there was that one little boy ... with the funny hair and slightly mythical ... he read it more, once I had started it. This was a <em>Cherub series</em> that was about kind of spies. It was based on little children that they used as spies in the Second World War ... And I suppose his interest still remains, so he wants some factual basis to the story, not mythical or future dated stories where he loses interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>And it’s based on reality ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin’s mother:</td>
<td>Yes, based on reality. And he went from there. There are four or five different series, and I would almost say, umm, it is touch and go, because you never know at this age, he buys books, he reads, he reads more widely and different things.</td>
</tr>
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"[H]e reads more widely and different things" seems to fill Kevin’s mother with a sense of satisfaction that her efforts have paid off. Her wish to get Kevin to read has been amplified in the intensity of his engagement with books. His increased reading is in line with the study by Rosenhouse, Feitelson, Kita and Goldstein’s (1997) of a group of Grade 1s in which they explored the effect that the type of book has on
children's independent reading. They compared a group to whom a series of books with the same characters by one author was read aloud, to a group who listened to stories of varied texts and authors. The group who was exposed to the series showed an increase in their interest and attitude to reading for pleasure (Galda et al., 2000). Arguably, increased reading provides an increase in linguistic understanding and usage, and the means to make meaning, which in turn enhances understanding of the varied texts that are encountered. A book has the capacity to open up different worlds of fact, fiction and reality and to transform the reader into sensing that he/she is experiencing the event personally. I do, however, argue that there must be a person who provides the impetus for a reader to pursue the habit fervently. The above excerpt highlights the effort that Kevin's mother put into her endeavour to engage him. She, like Sean's mother, does not sit back now that they are readers, as both mothers actively seek out and willingly provide books when the boys require them.

The members of the families in the case study do not only focus on guidance and encouragement of their boys, but instigate or maintain other reading practices in the home that do not relate directly to books. Tierney (2007: 22) suggests that literacy "is tied to meaning-making across a range of texts as readers and writers become involved in ongoing engagements", and many of these engagements incorporate screen, image and audio technologies that most adolescents find much more vibrantly engaging than a page filled with words. Technology is changing the nature of literacy in the home as it affects the way people communicate and view information through rapid access to knowledge, reading, listening and writing messages (Tierney, 2009; Street, 2003). The term New Literacies is ascribed to the way that a 21st century child is involved with digital culture and has become skillful in a multiliterate way. Twenty first century children are comfortable in a range of technologies to which they have access, and this has resulted in a change in communication and contact. For this reason New Literacies cannot be confined to interactions around texts, but must incorporate relationships and social practices, and here I am referring predominantly to the home spaces. In their study of young children and the way in which they learn with siblings, grandparents, peers and
communities, Gregory, Long and Volk (2004: 4) refer to the creative process of reinventing culture as they draw on diverse resources such as technology. They focus on transformation which incorporates the changing perspective of the New Literacies approach as described by Luke and Freebody (2000), Tierney (2007), Gee (2010), Rueda (2011), and also Gee and Hayes (2011) in which children need to be effective meaning-makers in today’s environment of the screen culture. In reinventing the culture of the home space (Gregory et al., 2004), however, parents cannot divorce themselves from the activities, since they drive the literacy process. Into the conversation can be brought the concern of the neuroscientist, Susan Greenfield (2008), over young people who show evidence of shortened attention span, avoidance of eye contact and inability to read others’ emotions, and impatience when their needs are not met at a particular moment. Much of this, she suggests, can be ascribed to the time spent on social networking and digital engagement where interactions are impersonal and non-private and instant. Therefore, despite the enhancement of knowledge through the Internet, or instant information from a Blackberry, it is important to have social spaces in which there are conversations and sharing of ideas. Greenfield further contends that deep thinking does not take place while engaging with a television or a computer screen. She proposes reading as the way of solving non-communication, and of promoting abstract thinking. Similar notions were expressed by the parents of some of the boys in the case study.

One non-reading boy, Barry, spends much time on technology. His mother expresses her concern in the following excerpt from our interview (March 2011):

Extract 3: “Yes, he’s had PC games and he’s played PlayStation games, he’s played X-box games.”

| Barry’s mother: | But I also think there is something else there … it is not only the socialising … it is also the techno-gadgets, and I think that boys, and this is not a generalisation, this is very specific to [daughter] and Barry… [daughter] likes techno, but has never engaged adductively into games, and it seems to be very much a boy thing as opposed to the girl thing. She doesn’t like gaming, and generally, I don’t think it’s a girl thing. It is a boy thing. |
| Researcher: | Is the gaming the online games? |
| Barry’s mother: | Yes, he’s had PC games and he’s played PlayStation games, he’s played X-box games. So you will find [sister] reading in her spare time, whereas Barry will be gaming in his spare time. |
Barry's mother compares her son's technology habits to those of her daughter. For her it seems as though it is a gender issue rather than his personality or age. He is the younger of the two by four years, and during my observation in their home (November 2011), I was constantly aware of the daughter's resolute determination to make a success of her school experience and her plan to achieve this. Her conversation with her mother was constructive, whilst Barry constantly proffered baneful jibes to derail the camaraderie between mother and daughter. His attitude during these interactions with his family translates accurately into his aversion to being guided or encouraged into being a reader. His mother's challenge for him to finish *Lord of the flies* during my visit in March 2011 was ignored, and his excuse was that there was no time. He does, however, have much time to spend "addictively" on games. It is evident that there is no restriction on the time he is able to spend on his various gadgets, and this includes watching television. Barry, like his sister, takes part in sport and extramural activities at school, yet he, unlike his sister, does not find time to read. I thus argue that the extraneous activities that Barry uses as an excuse for his non-reading, form part of a defensive front, similar to that of William.

William’s mother explains that he is "extraordinarily busy with his golf" and he participates in a wide range of activities at school that take up much time. William tells that he has not "read for a while this year, only a bit at the start of the year. I read *Open* (by Andre Agassi), *Airman* (by Eoin Colfer), but the last couple of months, you know, with exams and trying to fit in golf, and, so you know ... so I read for the first five months but now I struggle to find time" (Interview, September 2011). It is not "techno-gadgets" that take up his time as they do for Barry, but his sport.

William has access to technology, and uses it when necessary for projects and pleasure, but because of his excessive participation in sport, he is not compulsively involved in "gaming". His mobile phone keeps him busy, and his mother elects to confiscate his phone at night time. He expresses the sentiment that he likes reading, "[s]o when I do find a book that I like, I read it quite fast. Often, unless it's a good book, I will leave it because it is quite time constraining, so I won't read it if I don't like it ..." (Interview, September 2011). Despite there being a time factor that keeps
him from reading, the implication in his comment is that it is a choice that he makes, and being too busy is a way of justifying his actions.

The focus here is on the way that Barry is allowed to spend as much time on his technology as he wishes, and the fact that William's mother needs to put constraints on his mobile phone at night. This provides a picture of the type of literacy worlds that these two boys are creating for themselves by spending much time on technology or sport, and substituting their will to read by these activities. Their peers, on the other hand, (Simon, Sean, Kevin, and Mark) are similarly allowed to watch television each night. There seems to be an unspoken rule in their homes, that if they spend too much time on it, the television would be turned off. Because of this expectation, none of these boys seem to abuse the privilege, or use it as a reason for not reading. A conversation with Simon revealed that he could only watch TV between 7:30 and 8:30 at night, while the following extracts also demonstrate restricted times for Sean and Kevin:

Extract 4: "I am allowed to watch certain programmes for a certain amount of time. Usually about an hour, but if I am lucky, an hour and a half or two."

| Sean:           | I am allowed to watch certain programmes for a certain amount of time. Usually about an hour, but if I am lucky, an hour and a half or two. That is only once I have done my homework, practised sport and I am really tired, or I have just come back and I'm very tired from baseball. It is really tiring. |
| Researcher:     | And computers? |
| Sean:           | I'm allowed to play ... Tuesdays and Thursdays - I don't really get to it, but usually up to 7, then I watch a little bit of TV, then we go to dinner, then I read a little bit. I don't really play a lot on Tuesdays and Thursdays. |
| Researcher:     | So you don't really waste your time on TV, or do it at the expense of reading? |
| Sean:           | No. (Interview, February 2011) |

The curt “no” indicates a decisive answer to a question about sidelining reading for either TV or the computer. There seems to be an innate sense of self-control displayed by Sean, who like Kevin in the next extract, is able to regulate his behaviour by balancing his chances of watching television in future, and the wish to read at bedtime (Interview, October 2010):
Extract 5: “I guess if they had sat there the whole time, I would not have allowed it.”

Kevin’s mother: I have never limited the amount of time they spend on the TV ... although Kevin does watch or PlayStation and then getting bored and then going off to his room and finishing his book ... and maybe I should say no to TV time during the week. I have kind of allowed it ... having said that, I guess if they had sat there the whole time, I would not have allowed it.

It is clear from these conversation interactions that Kevin and Sean have elected to read. The sense derived from their choices is that there is an unspoken, restrictive rule set down by the parents about the time spent on electronic media for both boys, but there is also a mutual trust between boys and parents that they will not overstep that tacit mark. Considering the comments made by Brian, Sean and Kevin’s mothers about their sons relaxing in front of the TV after a long day at school, it appears that the mothers even encourage these events because of their perception that the boys ought to rest. Underpinning this, however, is the explicit understanding by the mothers that these boys are readers, and the need to read for all three of them is overpowering, and represents a pastime that is not supplanted by distractions such as the computer or television. The boys not only have the capacity to organise their time, but also exercise discernment whereby having a taste of each important activity in their lives without one being dominant, is important to them.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Mark when he was asked about his computer and TV time during our interview (January 2011). Because the issue of how the boys make sense of their literacy is central to my discussion, it is crucial to reflect on the way that the boys develop and perceive their literacy activities (Gee, 2011), and in this instance I focus on Mark who does not proffer his sport and extramurals as excuses not to read, since he says: “I also read for, like, an hour a day ... a lot ... and on weekends I also read for an hour and a half per day”. He balances his activities by playing online games such as First person shooter and 1042 for “an hour a day, and on weekends, I’ll play three or four hours per day”, but “I don’t watch much TV”.

Mark, like Kevin and Sean, has an intense infinity for reading. His mother, even though she limits his computer time, does not seem to enforce the rule rigidly as she is aware that he reads daily, he is diligent about his homework and completes tasks
that are given him. The mothers of these three boys are cognisant of the role that technology plays in their lives and, as long as the activity slots in, and does not usurp reading time as it has in Barry's world, it is an acceptable practice in their homes. I argue here that by placing unspoken constraints on television and computer time, these parents are providing opportunities for their children to read. There is an unwritten expectation in these homes that reading must take place and therefore both parents and boys need to make time for this habit.

The most extreme technology restraints in the home can be found in Leon's home. Ever since he was a small boy, the parents have not allowed him to watch television. In fact, the father tells me during our interview (November 2010) that "I remember the first day that Leon watched TV was the day that [brother] was born and he was two and a half, and he got so anxious ... you would have to sit with him - so he never watched TV." In this home television is "banned" during the week, but the five boys are permitted to watch at weekends. A further feature of their home is the lack of computer games, PlayStations and blogging all of which may take them away from family time. It is significant that each of the five boys reads keenly, yet there is a distinct difference in approach to reading for the different personalities. The home literacy practices are in place, yet each boy reacts with his own level of interest. Leon's father explains during the interview (November 2010):

**Extract 6: " And I would say to him that he had missed out on reading, and he would go, 'Aaah, not fair, but I wanted to read"."**

<table>
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<th>Leon's father:</th>
<th>They would do their bedtime, toilet routine, and then they would be allowed to read. I would wander into Leon's bedroom, and he would go, “Please, another five minutes”. Whereas I would walk into [brother’s] room, he would be rolling around and playing with things. And I would say to him that he had missed out on reading, and he would go, “Aaah, not fair, but I wanted to read”. And I would give him five minutes. Then it was a big rush to get everything done so that he could get five minutes’ worth of reading.</th>
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The father and mother are aware of the necessity of strict routine in this home with five boys of varying ages. The rules are in place at bedtime which include time for reading (by the older ones) and bedtime stories (for the younger boys). Leon shows
great reluctance to stop reading at lights-out time, reflected in the comment: “Please, another five minutes”, whereas his brother who has been day-dreaming and wasting time, then expresses regret about not having had time to read: “Aaah, not fair, but I wanted to read”. What is significant in this extract is the underlying knowledge of structure and discipline that accompanies bedtime, the expectation that each boy takes time to read, and that the parents are involved in the process. These practices are important in defining this family: the discourse practices that are undergirded by strong guidance and discipline, foster a strong sense of understanding in each family member of the cultural expectations implicit in these practices (Gee, 1996; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1995). The family literacy practices are in place, and these have generated a need in each boy to participate as can be seen in the brother’s reaction when he has lost out on his opportunity through day-dreaming. There is therefore a strong indication that the practice of not having television during the week, and a scheduled bedtime slot each evening, influence the boys in this home to read.

The other features in Leon’s home that significantly serve as encouragement for the boys to engage in literacy, lie in a foundation of support. The television does not act as a babysitter, or the computer as a period for the adults to have time-out from a stressful day; there is a sense of passionate involvement with each of the five boys in the parents’ effort to create literacy-aware children. These efforts are in line with the Socratic notion that there is a method of doing that leads to wisdom by not merely functioning on a static, superficial level (Doll, 2006). Leon’s parents have set out on a journey of experiencing reading literacy with each child, and this process takes place on many levels, from the way they talk to the family, their attention to small details in communication, and attentive involvement in literacy encounters. The photograph that follows is one taken of Leon “enjoying” a story at six weeks of age:
Even though the boy is ostensibly too young at six weeks of age to understand anything of the story of *The cat and the hat* by Dr Seuss, the literacy engagement is on a sensuous or spiritual level. The little boy learns at this early age that he is experiencing a cosy moment with his mother via the medium of a story. Every time that this activity is repeated, his sense of togetherness with parent and book grows in value within his little world, and every time this experience increases his sense of knowing, which Doll (2006) explains as knowledge that a participant in an activity experiences differently to a mere observer. Reading literacy for Leon and his four brothers is personal, experiential and is woven into the family's social fibre. The children begin living for these literacy moments and carry the imagination and stories beyond the text. Refer to the following examples (Interview, November 2010):

**Extract 7:** "And you would read them and re-read, and re-read them again and again ..."

| Leon’s father: | But Leon also, we would just read to him. [Mother] would be sleeping, or I was sleeping, or one of us ... one way of keeping quiet would be to read him books after books. And you would read them and re-read, and re-read them again and again ... |
| Leon’s mother: | Like *The jumbo and the hen* ten times just to keep him quiet ... and *Ferguson Marigold* ... (laugh). |
| Leon’s father: | And *The sorcerer’s apprentice* ... we went into a house and Leon was about 13 or 14 months and we got our helper for the first time, and we ... and Leon would walk down the passage ... and there’s a scene in *The sorcerer’s apprentice* when he points at Fantasia, and he points his finger to the broom... |
and the broom moves and he'd say, “Stop, Broom”... and Leon would walk down the passage and he'd point his fingers at Lizzie and he'd say "Stop!" (laugh) ... and his magic never worked. And what if they did, it could never work the magic ... but he knew that book backwards as well.

There are clearly both literacy time and literacy space invested in this child, and in the same way, in his younger brothers. The emphasis is, however, not only on the reading but on the experiential activity of the child who lives the stories in real life by giving instructions to the house cleaner's broom to stop moving as it did in his magic story. C.S. Lewis (2006) said that stories allowed him to become a thousand persons, yet to remain himself, and this idea is echoed in the "broom" episode. This is further exemplified in Leon's home in his four-year-old brother shouting: "Daddy, look I'm Obelix" while he pulled his pyjama pants up to his chin (my field notes, October, 2011). The ideas, experiences and thoughts gleaned from the books are carried in a sense of knowing. These become understanding, and transfer into a desire to learn more (Heath, 1983). The stories have patterns of behaviour attached to them which act as stimulus for speech and self-expression and have value for this family unit.

Self-expression too, is part of the sociocultural domain of this family in which each boy must be heard. During my observation at their dinner table (October 2011), I was acutely aware of the value that the family placed on listening to each person speaking. Both parents patiently directed the discourse involving the different characters with their varied ages (from the four-year-olds to the parents), their turn-taking and their means of communication. It did not happen in a forced or structured this-is-now-your-turn manner, but an unspoken turn-taking took place and each member respected this. The conversations ranged from talking about each one's day to questions such as "Did you play with [name]?", "Did you ask him if he can come and play here next week?", "Did you see the article on trees in the newspaper?", "What is this called?", "How would you explain that?", "Were you happy with that?", "Tell Dad about your Science experiment". There was eye contact with the speaker and comments to support their ideas; ways of reflecting the Socratic method of doing that feeds into knowledge (Doll, 2006) and a realistic self-esteem fostered by the supportive family literacy interactions. The interactions, furthermore, are not casual
or matter-of-fact activities, but a source of knowledge and learning (Snow & Beals, 2006). The kitchen-table culture of chain-linking is seen emerging whereby sociocultural values and norms, ways of doing, and family ideology, knowledge and learning are all passed on from parents to children. This happens in a participatory way where turn-taking teaches listening skills, emotions are noted through discourse, and the sharing and experiencing of joy, sadnesses and the values attached to the family are life lessons. The interview with Leon’s parents revealed a conscious co-operation in creating a strong literacy immediacy available to each boy. A case in point for Leon is the way that the parents work together to help him understand the message behind a story (Interview, October 2010):

**Extract 8: “I don't know ... [husband] and I are going to read it to help him through it.”**

| Leon's father: | They are doing the *Lord of the flies* at the moment, and I ... I ... [wife] and I are a little bit disturbed by it, especially for boys in an all-boys school. |
| Leon's mother: | I don't know ... [husband] and I are going to read it to help him through it. |
| Researcher: | Yes, I agree. There are issues there. I don't think the Grade 7 boys are mature enough to handle it ... especially the bullying theme, because ... I think that it teaches them about bullying; they become aware of it. |
| Leon's mother: | Yet there is nothing we can do about it as boys are born like this and there is nothing they can do about it. That is the lesson that they take away from it. |
| Leon's father: | That was the lesson from *William Golding* ... that we have this tendency to violence, to ... to go down to the lowest common denominator. That is no positive message. |
| Leon's mother: | That is why [husband] will help him through it ... |

Of significance in this excerpt is the intense sense of co-operation between mother and father in terms of their goal for Leon. The comment, "[husband] and I are going to read it to help him through it", accentuates their common ideal with its concomitant values to which they strive. With this in mind they will not hesitate to prevent him from reading a book (as demonstrated above in 6.2.1 during his Grade 3 year when he was not allowed to read *Harry Potter*) which they deem unsuitable, and the parents co-operate in guiding him to mores and attitudes that are in line with their family expectations. It can be argued that this lack of freedom and restriction could well discourage readers taking up books, yet I argue that it is these parents'
strong sense of involvement that encourages the boys to speak, and seek answers and read for fulfilment, rather than inappropriate material that may steer individuals away from that pleasure.

A similar culture of encouragement supported by strong parental control is evident in Brian, Kevin and Sean’s homes, whereas Barry and William’s parents, in contrast, trust their boys’ instinct in their likes or dislikes in a less controlled manner, as shown in the following interview with William’s mother (Interview, June 2011):

**Extract 9: "He was terrified, but he was riveted. He identifies ... "**

| William's mother: | William suddenly got all immersed in it, in writing and just loving it and he started reading every day. He read *Lord of the pigs*, and, of course, his *Lord of the flies*, and completely loved it. He read that in about a week and a half. He re-read books, and it just makes me think now... |
| Researcher: | Had you read those books to him? |
| William's mother: | No, I find them terrifying quite frankly. |
| Researcher: | But for boys it’s different. |
| William’s mother: | He was terrified, but he was riveted. He identifies, and he identified situations going on around him and related them to what went on there, and how behaviour can change because of the pack mentality and go off the rails as a result of that. He was also terrified about a World War I book. |

It is interesting to compare the stance adopted by Leon’s parents, believing that they want to be part of the decision on choice of books that may adversely affect their son’s emotional well-being, and that of William’s mother who left the decision-making to him. Engaging in the book and conversations about the underlying message were not important factors in the homes of William and Barry. The understanding gleaned from the interviews with these two parents pointed to the importance of reading *Lord of the flies* rather than the emotional impact the book may have on the boys. One may advance the question whether this is a subconscious act to get their boys to read, even though the boys may be affected adversely by the adult content, rather than seeing them not reading at all. Encouraging Barry to continue reading *Lord of the flies*, serves as an endorsement of this sentiment by Barry’s mother since he said it was a book that he "loved", yet never completed. The
non-involvement, or encouragement without taking an interest in the literacy activities, has clearly not influenced either Barry or William to read many books.

Both these boys, however, are eloquent and reflect what Gee (2005) terms as the strong primary ‘D’iscourse that exists in the family. The traditional print-based literacy is, therefore, not intrinsically tied to the social practices of these two families who embrace a different way of being literate in other semiotic domains: in William’s case it would be his involvement and discourse on sport, and in Barry’s world computer games take up much time. If one takes reading as providing understanding in the context of texts, then literacy fills a different semiotic position for William in watching golf on television, playing it, reading about it, and his general discourse on his involvement; and a different literacy exists for Barry in his computer and video games (Gee, 2005). The equivalent meaning that Leon, Brian, Mark, Sean and Kevin derive from reading literacy, William and Barry take from their sport and technology. For Barry and William, technology and golf represent new literacies with associated skills attached. In their particular social and cultural spaces, their challenges and outlooks are different from pure print-based literacy, yet these motivate the boys enough to persevere since their actions are endorsed by the parents, just as the readers are supported by their parents (Tierney, 2007; Stein & Slonimsky, 2006).

The data analysis from a few homes has indicated that there is strong evidence of the boys' wishing to follow in the parents' footsteps, or as I referred to it earlier as chain-linking, when they observe the habits routinely practised by them. One of these include seeing the parents reading for both pleasure and business. The following excerpt clearly demonstrates the view taken by Leon's father during our interview (November 2010):

**Extract 10:** "But, um, reading is a quiet activity; it lends itself to other people reading as well."

| Leon's father: | The one thing about it was as well, is [mother] is quite active over the weekends and she’ll do things, whereas I will lie on the couch and read, and um ... and, to an extent, the boys ... because reading is something that is happening, the boys read ... in the sense that you must either fit in or go away. They all did. But, um, reading is a quiet activity; it lends itself to other people reading as well. |
Leon's father is wholly aware that if he sets the example, the family will follow him. Even though he suggests that "the boys read ... in the sense that you must either fit in or go away" as a tongue-in-cheek remark, there is the inherent trust that the underlying practices in the home will be incorporated into the ways of doing in each of the five boys (Heath, 1983). He firmly believes that "it lends itself to other people reading as well", and his expectations have been realised, as all five of his sons are avid book lovers. Setting an example is a stronger lesson than instructing, as in the study of Barry being challenged to complete Lord of the flies, since reading is not an overt literacy practice in his home, and the expectation is not enforced, but merely verbalised.

6.4.2 Comment

With reference to literacy studies and reading theory, it is clear that parents' practices at home cannot be separated from reading and writing in the context of the home (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). From the data on the perspectives of parents and boys, it is evident that a strong correlation exists between the set of practices, and the symbolisation of, and value given, to practices in the homes, that reading holds for each family. The subtle differences in the way each family applies reading literacy for specific purposes feed into the kinds of attitude of each boy. I argued that the foundation of reading is integral to the initial bedtime stories at a very early age where family togetherness developed around a book, but despite each of the eight parents having this as a daily routine, the practice did not necessarily translate into enthusiastic reading for all the boys (Dombey, 1992; Comber, 2000). This caused anxiety for both Kevin and Sean's parents who attempted to rectify the situation by supplying books to the boys until they had discovered the genre that appealed to their non-reading boys; but of significance is that the parents have continued to encourage them, and have not let up on providing books.
Yet a further influence that encourages reading is not having free access to television and computers (Kaufman, 2001; Karchmer, 2008). The homes in which these activities are restricted, seem to have had success in encouraging reading as a pastime, knowing that video or computer games can easily take up reading time. In Leon's home the television and computer are out of bounds during the week, whereas there is an unspoken law in the remaining homes that too much time spent on the computer may jeopardise future freedom. There is an expectation by the parents that daily reading routine should take place. In Leon’s and Brian's home, where the routine is strictly monitored by the parents, there is never a sense of needing to break away from the mould, in fact, Leon's day-dreaming brother expresses regret at not being able to read at bedtime when he has wasted his time.

The literacy moments that seem to encourage reading most of all can be said to revolve around subtle family practices that were evident from the data. The data indicated that time spent on families experiencing times of talking, discussing, reading together, reading and re-reading books, creating space in which self-expression is permitted, resulted in valuable practices that the boys emulated. The family mealtimes, for example, were shown to be a valuable practice during which time the children were encouraged to talk, and these seemed to create moments that in some families are less likely to occur in any settings other than at the dinner table (Snow & Beals, 2006). The mealtimes were evidence of moments of turn-taking, interaction, applying language skills, and learning to become a member of the larger family culture (Weizman & Snow, 2001). Furthermore, the data relating to parents exercising control over unsuitable reading material, and, at the same time, encouraging healthy ideas, revealed a beneficial response to the parents' involvement. The parents who read passed on valuable lessons, subtly encouraging the children to emulate their actions, and these established literacy occasions that could create discourse on reading and books. I wish to suggest that the role that each parent plays, can socialise a boy into the way in which he values literacy, and the influence this has on his attitude to reading literacy. The social practices in the home are, therefore, those cultural ways that parents utilise written language which they draw upon in their lives, and what they do with literacy (Gee, 1996; Barton &
Hamilton, 2000; Street, 2003; Li, 2011). The social practices reflect the way that the culture in the home guides members to think about society and their place in it, and, furthermore, the members’ literacy practices evolve from their particular economy that has granted them certain opportunities of thought, power and financial worth (Bhabha, 1994). At home literacy therefore allows children to pick up on the rules of that space, its culture, and its values, and by the parents repeating them, they become natural. The way in which parents tender these rules may make it easier to carry forward and adapt to new fields. The dwelling, in which the boys in the study find themselves, is the location of their particular culture, which Heidegger (1993) argues, allows them to internalise civic norms, behaviour and ideology as part of that relationship. Even though the boys in the case study are members of the same class, it is impossible for all the members to have had the same experiences. Yet it can be said that they have been confronted with similar situations that have lead them to a sharing of a worldview attributed to their singular practices.

6.5 Conclusion

With reference to literacy theory, it is clear that what takes place in the home reflects profoundly in the actions of the boys. Gregory et al. (2004: 13) note that young children entered school as "active members of specific language and literacy practices". These practices are the ways in which children are encultured into home literacy patterns of action (Heath, 1983; Comber, 2000). I have demonstrated that the home is a complex social place in which the parents have influence over their children's reading practices through family discourse (Snow & Beals, 2006). I have argued that practices in each individual home remain reliant on choices that are deliberately made by parents in terms of an action towards, or attitude to, a specific literacy moment. I have also argued that a boy's inner world is subtly influenced by the literacy on offer. I have concluded that influence can only emanate from the spaces one frequents and the people that occupy them, surrounded by the culture in which it happens (Street, 2003), since a social practice is about knowledge and the way in which it is generated (Bhabha, 1994).
In this chapter I have, firstly, explored what the boys’ out-of-school reading practices are by looking at both the parents’ and the boys’ perceptions in terms of their reading. I have shown that the evidence of intense focus on emergent learning of language, acquiring linguistic knowledge, the strict routine of bedtime stories, book buying and home reading by parents, all reflect the literacy beliefs, habits, and need for interaction that the families have constructed. This echoes Street’s (2003: 77 - 78) premise in the ideological model that literacy is a social practice embedded in knowledge, and the way in which people address reading and writing. The “way” incorporates the parents’ knowledge of how they wish to guide their children to fulfil their potential by strong mediation, as described by Vygotsky (1986). The “way” may, at the same time, be seen as the embodiment of the critical pedagogy of the homes in the upper middle-class (Ralfe, 2011). I indicated that, despite the increased pressure for boys to conform to hegemonic masculinity and the associated behaviour typical of their gender, the diverse experiences that contributed to the socialisation of each individual were overriding factors in the boys’ real behaviour. The external reality of the family group, the power of the parents and their literacy ways, and the home rules became embodied in the boys (Lahire, 2003). I suggested that the 8 boys from this upper-middle class group had internalised in a durable way a number of cultural and intellectual ways that influenced their literacy, and carried the knowledge of their importance with them. Only 2 of the 8 boys did not consider reading literacy an obligatory necessity in their lives, whilst the reading routine produced a passion in the other 6 boys.

I have, secondly, examined the literacy practices and events in the home that influenced the boys to read. The analysis revealed that the parental input into stories, literacy interactions with grandparents and parents, showing both an interest in and guiding their son’s reading, all linked into the ongoing family literacy culture. The boys pursue in their own literacy what they observed in their parents’ and grandparents’ practices. The insight is similar to Heath’s (1983) analysis of 3 communities in the Appalachians in which she contributed home literacy as a pivotal marker in the behavioural approaches in each of the 3 class structures. Focused
intellectual literacy in the home situation produced children who were receptive to schooling and ultimate achievement.

In the third section I explored the way in which the boys’ reading was influenced by these family practices. The data included bedtime reading, parents imposing restriction on time with technology and unsuitable books, discourse about these restrictions, and, moreover, the boys being exposed to parents who themselves read or supply them with books. This data revealed how each boy from the different families configured his own connections with literacy as guided by the example of these literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). The discourses on literacy and family politics are certainly intrinsic to the type of socialisation that is associated with upper-middle class people who endeavour to send their children to private schools in order to achieve the success that they themselves pursue.

I demonstrated that some boys lose interest in reading in the upper primary school stage when they perceive themselves as having the freedom of choice in terms of books (even if the content is unsuitable), and the freedom to engage with screen media at the expense of print-literacy. Disengagement seems to occur when strong interaction and discipline from parents give way to casual parental management, and as Gregory et al. (2004) argue, parents drive the literacy process. The lack of leadership creates in the adolescent a sense that self-regulation is acceptable, which clearly evokes an aversion to guidance. If, as the data reveal, parents drive the literacy process; implicit in home literacy is parental power and discipline that regulate discursive moments, encourage literacy learning, and develop self-esteem through the kitchen-table-culture discourse. I have also explored the issue of parents creating a strong foundation of support not only on the linguistic level, but in terms of ideology and knowledge. The example set by parents in the home through their actions and discourse presents itself as the core of an invitation of book-reading for boys, since the literacy process is co-constructed by parent and child towards finding out where the individual child’s interest lies.

Leading on from this notion, I explore the formal school practices in the next chapter to show how home literacy influences the culture of everyday reading in the eight
boys within their school day. I intend to demonstrate the extent to which school literacy practices build on home practices to steer the learners to particular ways of doing, and the way that this determines the direction that each adolescent takes.
7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I sought to understand the home literacy events and practices as they unfolded through the interviews with parents and their sons, and via the observations in their home domain. The key to my data analysis in Chapter 6 was, therefore, to explore the interactions, relations and social rules that underpin the social practices of the boys. I have argued that the home is a complex social place in which the parents influence their children's reading practices through family discourse, and the choices they make in relation to literacy learning and exposure. I have shown that enculturation into reading is not only through exposure to print, but also by the particular discourse that the parents choose to employ. The boys identify with the literacy practices that they experience, and perpetuate the habits gleaned.

The focus in Chapter 7 is located in the pedagogical domain, and reflection on these data provides information for building a description of the emerging literacy process in school. In this chapter I draw on the observation of boys and teachers during class time, and the interviews and resultant field notes made during that time. There are four sections to this chapter. The first serves to describe the boys' in-school reading practices in answer to the research question:

- What are boys’ in-and-out-of-school reading practices?

The second section concerns the research question:

- What formal and informal school literacy practices influence boys to read? How do these practices influence them?
The third section will provide an explanation of the factors that influence boys’ reading in order to address the question:

- Why do some boys lose interest in reading as they reach the upper primary school stage?

The fourth section will explain the research question:

- How can an understanding of home literacies contribute to school reading curricula?

The four sections serve to illustrate my argument that the types of literacy practices from home leave an imprint on the persons taking part in them, and this chapter concludes by explaining the findings of how formal school literacy is dependent on these home literacy practices.

### 7.2 Being a teacher in the school

During the research process I constantly sensed that being involved in the school and knowing the boys as a teacher, I had to guard against being subjective. On reflection I had to concede that I could not stand apart from my feelings or my intuitions, as these were the qualities that influenced my understanding of a social world constructed by us as parents and teachers, defined by a culture we teach, and ways of making meaning within it. I, nevertheless, was reminded that the norms implicit in research analysis are judged by being impersonal (not subjective), being disinterested (putting aside personal prejudices), and by public sharing and scrutiny such as peer review (MacCoun, 1998). The ethnographic nature of this case study does, however, lend itself to a measure of subjectivity since I, as the researcher, became part of the text in analysing the meaning embedded in it. I found some comfort in the fact that the subjective nature of ethnography is debated by various authors as they, for example, elaborate on interpretation of other cultures (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994), reading the positions of the researcher and the researched, of the ethics of translation, and relationships that are constructed within parameters of meanings amongst them (Emond, 2000; Parker, 1999; Humphreys, 1999; Goodley, 1999). In order to formulate an understanding of a particular ethnographic exploration, therefore, requires the
interests of both the insider and the researcher to be in line. To this end Halfpenny (as cited in Goodley, 1999: 204) suggests that researchers must show:

... how their interpretations are bound up with the study of a culture by detailing descriptions of activities, verbatim accounts of talk, key illustrations of their interpretations and a chronology of research experience. In doing so, a reflexive account can consider to some extent the interplay between the researcher’s subjectivity, cited incidents of the culture and the analyses that are made.

This quotation illustrates, that despite the knowledge that the researcher is not independent of the research process or data collection or, for that matter, the analysis, there are means of interpreting collected data, and as a starting point, it means becoming more and more involved with, and developing sensitivity to the context under investigation (Goodley, 1999; Charmaz, 2006).

With this in mind, I set out to depict the case of the eight boys at The Hilltop School as rigidly as possible. I use the word *rigidly* since I set out to transcribe ethically the people, their practices and the events in this study; but more than that, my aim was to problematise the ethnographic process in which the relationships inherent in the discourses, their backdrop, the reason behind these, and the creation and implementation of practices as the prime focus, unfold. Humphreys (1999: 179) explains these everyday events as ones that people engage in all the time as human beings, and that it “involves activities such as reading signals and ambiguous messages in confusing circumstances, while maintaining a network of relationships”. This chapter, therefore, is the story of the research in the school of the eight boys whose reading habits are under scrutiny.

7.3 Formal reading experiences

7.3.1 “Reading is important, heh?”

The disquiet that prevails over reading, or not enough reading in schools, particularly with boys, is a major focus of attention among schools and their educators everywhere in South Africa and elsewhere. This is demonstrated by abundant research and implementation of reading strategies and skills to uplift literacy levels (Fleisch, 2008; Bloch, 2009; Schwartz, 2005; Hurry & Sylva, 2007;
Jenkins et al., 2003; Rashotte et al., 2001; Pretorius & Machet, 2004; Prinsloo & Stein, 2004; Dixon, 2011; Kajee, 2011).

On a more pragmatic level there is, however, a different message. Phonics and reading skills are core teaching routines at school entry level, and research tells us that phonological awareness is an important predictor of reading ability (Fox, 1993). Never a day passes at school without applying these basic skills in language acquisition and in the core reading books. By the time learners reach Grade 3 level, they are able to read for pleasure and are not reliant on endless decoding and pictures to guide their reading. They have moved beyond the word to the sentence, plot structure, characterisation, and have come to understand the structure of discourse. Carol Fox (1993) describes this age of reading as significant in fostering those properties of imaginative play described by Vygotsky (Wertsch, 1985) that incorporate desire and self-discipline, since it is this kind of imaginative play that reflects learning which has already taken place in the home, and generates more learning, especially through reading. Fox’s research on literature and storytelling in young readers finds narrative competences developing through pretend reading, imaginative play and making up spontaneous poems. She points out that these are narrative skills that are moving into a form of poetry of “rich and complex form” (1993: 191), and education should build on these competences, as literacy itself is what these school-entry children are already doing. Story-telling, or story-reading, is essential and this is where the joy of reading classes takes an even more pleasurable turn because of increased perception of innate linguistic nuances through independent reading. The reading periods at school are therefore important. So what happens to reading in the school day?

7.3.2 Reading in school

The reality of any school management is inevitably not straightforward. All too often there are unscheduled activities that override the expectation of the daily routine of school days. These occurrences seemingly become more important and often carry more weight in the day, thereby supplanting periods that are classified
as not being core subjects, of which literacy and numeracy are the most significant ones. The events inevitably replace non-examination subjects such as reading, library periods, music, or art, and this has the potential to create the impression that these activities are of lesser importance. This constantly happens at the school where I am a teacher. Even though there is intense focus on improved reading, or the good intentions to focus intently on it are ever-present, the introduction to a new technological gadget and its application, concert practices, new systems, and guest speakers all seem to shift the so-called less important periods of the day into the background. So too time and energy are consumed by moments spent on neat appearance in school uniform, lost property, the organisation of sports teams, concert/choir practices, and writing scholarships and Olympiads since much value is placed on achievement in these more tangible and visible areas. These events can certainly be construed as definitive markers of attainment of power and prestige that are intrinsic to the private school culture.

On reflection, taken all together, however, the events also form part of the enculturation of school habits and disciplines, and are accepted and remain standard school practices that help educators function in class. Dixon argues that within a given domain in society, such as a school, where discipline is implemented within a space, it is interlocked with time, even though social theory “has a tendency to make distinctions between space and time, treating them separately or privileging space over time” (Dixon, 2011: 35). It is therefore unfair even to take the routine time-taking example of disciplining or managing learners and their time, as time taken from academic learning, for it is the mission of the school to create a particular type of citizen within it, and the examples above are part of that mission. My argument, however, is that time-taking seems to favour, and thus displaces the lesser important subjects such as reading periods.

Educators generally focus on not only imparting pure academic knowledge, but also on other disciplines that enable learners to survive in a society that cannot function on pure academics alone. Literacy is not a narrow academic slot, and so

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6 The Olympiad is an annual Mathematics competition for South African learners in the primary and high school. It serves as a benchmarking exercise for skilled mathematicians.
much depends on children’s ability to read and write (Dombey, 1992; Heath, 1982; Comber, 2000; Fox, 1996; Meek, 1988; Snow, 2002; Dixon, 2011). Yet, if reading is constantly relegated to an it-doesn’t-matter-if-we-replace-it slot, then surely this creates a perception that it-doesn’t-have-to-play-a-role-in-my-life. This makes me ponder on my research question:

- How do home, family and school literacies influence sustained reading in boys?

By looking critically at the practices in The Hilltop School literacy, one finds competent, goal-directed, daily teaching of reading skills at core level from Grades 0 to 3, but beyond that, it appears that reading is accepted as inbuilt knowledge in the higher classes, and that language teaching, grammar, spelling and vocabulary extension and creative work become the areas of focus. I am aware, too, that all these areas of literacy involve reading, but here I am specifically referring to reading for pleasure, having a book in one’s hands, and reading a story.

7.3.3 In library time

Dixon (2011) indicates that so much rests on a child’s ability to read and write, and with lesser skills, understanding and comprehension are severely impeded. So much is contingent on what happens in the classroom, and this is where I conducted my school fieldwork in order to collect data on the way in which children are schooled, and how literacy is taught. It became most evident that reading, by being included in the weekly pedagogical schedule, is important in the school, and that it was part of the life in this milieu. The assumption that reading, in fact, takes place effectively because it is time-tabled, is, however, not adequate. To be able to form an idea of what was taking place in these time-tabled slots, life as it was taking place in this area had to be studied.

The potential for effective reading was evidenced in the reading periods and the well-resourced libraries. The libraries are exciting and stimulating places for the boys at the school. There are two libraries available to the boys: the first one is the Junior library (serving Grade 0 to 3) which is a state-of-the-art room with displays,
a reading tower with cushions, there are benches and tables, ottomans that can be moved, and a soft, fluffy carpet on which to lie and enjoy a book. Posters, drawings and colourful pictures adorn the walls, whilst fun books are displayed in angular shelves. The bookshelves have been designed for the little boys to be able to reach all the books.

The second room, the Senior library, serves the upper section of the school comprising Grades 4 to 7. This is a more formal space consisting of a computer section for referencing, the display area, and an enclosed workroom with tables and chairs, display tables, shelving and a television. The main library section consists of three offices, a storeroom and demarcated u-shaped shelves with work tables in between, and two further sections containing sofas, comfortable chairs and big cushions. The bookshelves are well stocked with a wide range of reference books, factual and fictional literature, and magazines on sport, science and hobbies on the coffee tables. The books contained in this library seem to cover most of the demands and interest required in the school. If there is in any way a shortage or a need of other books, the librarian brings them in to satisfy the teachers’ and the boys’ needs. On entry to the Senior library at any given time, one finds boys busy reading or browsing, or just being there.

Figure 10: Boys interacting and focusing on reading in the Senior library.
My time in the Senior library reflected this perspective. Charmaz (2006: 21) suggests that “research participants allow ethnographers to see their worlds and their actions within them”, and this was prevalent during observation in the library. I was part of the class, but at a distance. Once the librarian had explained my presence, I was left to study their world, looking at the boys’ and the teacher’s actions, and their interactions.

There was seating at the reading table for each boy and they knew that they were expected to sit down as they arrived in the room. The librarian was softly spoken but had an air of discipline about her. The boys waited and listened to her information about the new books that had arrived that week. My field notes (Senior Library, August 2011) indicate “Aah, cool!” and “Ja, I want that one first” responses before they were allowed to browse and take out their own books. Once they were walking around the bookshelves, there was much chatter about the books. They shared ideas about what “looks nice” to “I’ve read that one. It’s okay”, to “Can I have that one after you?” The more reluctant readers migrated to the graphic novels, paging through them. The librarian asked one of the boys to come and tell her about his book once he had finished it since she had not had time to read it. They all settled down at the table where she continued the story she had been reading aloud to them. Some sat listening to her, while others paged through their books while doing so. I perceived that the boys would have enjoyed more time in the library as they were quite intent on listening to the story that was interrupted by the bell indicating the end of the period.

Literacy teaching was taking place in the library. The librarian put great effort into information for all boys who come there. It was not only in the setting out of the library, but also in the displays and types of “advertising” that caught the eye as one walked in. Four book covers adorned one board, together with the title “STEAMPUNK” GENRE, with a question: “WHAT IS IT?” The explanation followed in smaller writing: “Stories set in an era where steam power is still used but where science fiction or fantasy or futuristic innovations feature”. There were book covers of new books on the display boards, there were maps, newspaper cuttings of natural disasters next to their reference books, people in the news such as sport
stars, political figures, music performers, and an area for commentary by boys on these displays. At the entrance was a board with information on the last two children’s laureates in the UK. Part of the display contained the dates of their tenure, the names of their books, and some interesting facts about them. On a wall in the workroom were quotes from *Freak the mighty* by Rodman Philbrick. Included were the following:

> “Nothing is a drag, kid. Think about it.” *Loretta to Max.*

> “Every word is part of a picture. Every sentence is a picture. All you do is let imagination connect them together. If you have imagination, that is.” *Freak to Max.*

> “Books are like truth serum – if you don’t read you can’t figure out what’s real.” *Max to Freak.*

These quotes are thought-provoking and inspired me to borrow the book from the library. I read it and realised why the librarian would read it to the Grade 6 class, who could clearly relate to the two boys in the story of similar ages to the twelve-year-olds listening to the story. In the story Max was an aliterate neighbour to a severely disabled, yet most able Freak. Freak gently lead Max into believing that he could be helped into reading, while a symbiotic relationship developed in which Freak was transported on Max's shoulders around their neighbourhood and into a number of experiences.

A further quote that was displayed in that section of the board in the library was by Andre Agassi on his biography, *Open*:

> “I was late in discovering the magic of books. Of all my many mistakes that I want my children to avoid, I put that one near the top of my list.”

These displays are read by the boys and are a source of discussion amongst them. William indicated during our interview that he had read *Open* after seeing the display in the library. Another poster (scattered not only in a few places in the room, but also around the school walls) gave information on the latest reading competition called *The black cat* that was run by the librarian. During a conversation with her earlier in the term, I asked her how she inspired her boys to read. This was how she explained it (Field notes, May 2011):
Extract 1. “Competitions are powerful because the non-readers are encouraged.”

Librarian: Competitions are powerful because the non-readers are encouraged. In competitions they are not allowed picture books ... graphic books, yes. It empowers them to read simply because of the recognition publicly, and I feel that recognition is important. They like competitions on travel, cricket, and now, of course, the World Cup Rugby because they are so involved in it. Competitions are so worthwhile.

When asked how she runs and controls what is happening in these competitions, her answer was as follows:

Extract 2: “The competition starts by each of them registering a page in my file.”

Librarian: The competition starts by each of them registering a page in my file. I used a famous person to come and introduce the competition, for instance, Christopher Spence, who coaches basketball. He also writes poetry, which is a great encouragement.

In the two extracts above the librarian justifies her strong ideology on reading competitions that serve as a drawcard for non-readers who, she believes, are “empowered” by the public recognition they receive during assembly time. The extent that she goes to in her effort to entice reluctant readers to be part of a competition, is evident in her choice of sport’s hero (who “writes poetry”) to introduce the event. Implicit in her actions is the intention to break down the traditional perception that it is not acceptable for sporty boys to read or write poetry. Further examples are the ways in which the library has been set out, the book displays, posters and displays on the interest boards, the librarian’s attempts to persuade resistant readers to read, and readers to remain engaged, are ways of enticing boys to the library. The encouragement is subtle and the boys respond to the unspoken urgings. They stop at the interest board, share the information with a peer, compare information at the shelves, or merely sit and read. One may argue that this could be termed a prescriptive time within a school period during which pupils recognise that they have to conform to the subject taught during that time. They may not like being there, but they have to get on with it, in the same way in which they have to learn Geography during Geography lessons, History during the History periods, or any subject that may not be appealing to them. Within a class,
however, negativity is most contagious, and often a lesson is unsuccessful when one or two pupils express displeasure at the content being taught. There is, however, no sign of reluctance to be in the library by any of the twenty boys. The encouragement and guidance by the librarian subtly engender a constructive attitude. It is significant that there is constant discourse on books, and reading is happening at this time. Within the context of the library, participating in literacy activities can therefore be viewed as literacy events scaffolded by deliberately constructed literacy happenings from the librarian (Vygotsky, 1986).

Furthermore, one may argue that the adolescent boy is too old to indulge in oral literacy such as listening to stories read in class, yet my observation proved the reverse. Every pupil around the table sat acquiescently absorbing the story that the librarian read at the end of their library time. The overlapping experiences that constitute the library period once a week, which include book chats amongst the boys, and with the librarian, browsing amongst the shelves, reading the new items on the bulletin board, listening to a read-aloud story (Field notes, August 2011), add to the literate culture of each boy (Brandt & Clinton, 2002), and each one takes from these experiences in his own way (Gee, 2000).

The librarian lives her passion for books and attempts to instil the same keenness in the boys with whom she has contact. During one of our conversations I asked her what her approach was in getting her boys to books. Her answer was that (Interview, May 2011):

**Extract 3: “I talk to them about books ...”**

| Librarian: | I tell them about books; I remind them about the new books that I have bought; I get them to talk about books – their likes and dislikes; and I let them browse and chat. |

The example in Extract 3 shows the way in which the librarian involves the boys in engaging with books in her space. She added that she was buying fewer magazines in order to get them to read more books, and the boys had not “agitated” for these easier graphic reads at all. During one of my sessions when I was looking for books
in the Senior library, and was therefore not in the library for official observation, I noted what the librarian was referring to. My field notes of November 2011 show that the boys did not sit around the coffee tables paging through the magazines. The Grade 7 boys who were in the library at the time, seemed to congregate in small groups looking for specific books, and discussing the books, some were singly browsing, while others were reading on the cushions. Comments from that session that were written down in my journal demonstrate their animated book talk while they were walking amongst the shelves, clearly indicating that one of the key element of literacy is its communicative component (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996). Conversations ranged from “Cool book”, to “Naaa, didn’t like that one much”, to “Have you seen the movie of this book?” These comments told me as the observer that there appeared to be no reluctance on the part of the boys to be in the library, and their conversations certainly reflected their enjoyment of these periods. This is consistent with the notion of Prinsloo and Breier (1996: 20) that the social meaning that these boys take up within the library domain is contingent on the means by which literacy is socialised by the librarian, which, in turn, exerts a “profound influence on the choices individuals made about acquiring and then using (or not using) their literacy skills in certain settings”. Literacy, and not only reading, is therefore an integral part of the library sessions, and part of the reality of this group of boys. These findings speak to a positive response from literacy guidance and encouragement to read, yet the library is but a small facet of the school domain, and by observing in further domains of the school, served as a way of triangulating to ascertain whether the findings elsewhere reflected the strong literacy culture created in the library.

### 7.3.4 In reading periods

The weekly thirty minute library period time-tabled for each standard, Grade 0 to 3 in the Junior library, and Grade 4 to 7 in the Senior library, bears testimony to the value that The Hilltop School places on reading literacy. Further, there is a reading period of thirty minutes after school each Monday after lunch break when the
whole grade is placed in a class for “silent reading” until the time that the guest speaker of the week addressed the boys in the hall. During “silent reading” as it is generally called, the boys are expected to bring their own reader to the class that is supervised by a senior staff member. The following extract from my field notes gives insight into the impression gained during observation in one of these classes:

**Extract 4: “I don’t see serious reading being done...”**

| The Grade 6 classroom does not have enough chairs for all the boys this afternoon since there is no choir practice and the number of boys in “silent reading” is larger than normal. There is jostling for space on chairs, and bags are used as cushions to lean against. There is a constant hum and mumblings while the boys share magazines. Others are being ushered out of the classroom to get a book from the library. I don’t see serious reading being done fifteen minutes into the half hour period. Some boys dribble back from the library while only six boys are wholly engrossed in their tasks – these boys (as I can recall from Grade 3 reading classes) are naturally keen readers. |
| (Field notes, October 2011) |

The overarching feeling during my observation of the Monday reading was that it was a “non-reading” period and it did not work out as it was intended to do. The choir boys, who comprise approximately half of the boys in the room, were not supposed to be there but their practice had been cancelled. On the occasion that this happens, however, they need to be accommodated in desks as this is a prerequisite for discipline, and an occurrence that often takes place. The constant interruptions, and coming and going of boys, did not lend itself to concentrating on books, which left me with the impression that it was a time-wasting exercise for the period until the next event, which was the guest speaker of the day who came to address all the boys each Monday. My field notes (17 October 2011) reflect the “non-seriousness” of these occasions: “There is no urgency in terms of getting down to reading ...” and “[t]wo boys are milling around chatting to mates” and “there’s a constant coming and going from music, or library since some have lessons, and others brought no books.” The limited engagement in reading during these lessons, and a milieu that is not conducive to conforming to an event that is consciously time-tabled, raise questions about lip-service being paid to the reading periods. The fact of having a reading period in a compulsory time slot during school attests to the noble intention; yet by not implementing reading effectively, the pedagogical intention is watered down.
Reading is integral to the learning process whilst research has shown that there is a strong link between reading and academic success (Pretorius, 1996), and these goals are essentially part of the academic culture of the school. The school prides itself on the vast number of scholarships that are won to prestige high schools by the boys at The Hilltop School each year. Academic achievement is ingrained in the fibre of the school, and the parents expect this. I thus suggest that a modicum of complacency or non-urgency unintentionally constitutes part of this goal, which constitutes a missing puzzle piece in encouraging a reader who wishes to read. This view demonstrates that literacy practices are embedded in discourse and the cultural context in which it takes place. Prinsloo and Breier (1996: 25 - 26) explain that the level of literacy use and acquisition not only show “how cultural mediation processes operate to effect particular literacy practices, but also the processes of informal literacy acquisition and use that characterise literacy practice”.

7.3.5 In the structured class time

A further reality that exists is the classroom experience for these learners whose literacy day and literacy journey are partly determined by their academic encounters. This is reflected in Erickson’s (1984) perspective that literacy:

> as knowledge and skill taught and learned in school, is not separable from the concrete circumstances of its uses inside and outside school, nor is it easily separable from the situation of its acquisition in the school as a social form and as a way of life (1984: 525).

The classroom is socially constructed since that is where the learners speak, read, listen and write, and this social place forms part of the cultural literacy that each boy carries with him. This grouping encapsulates Bourdieu’s habitus where there is interplay between the structure of the classroom (or school) and the practices that are indulged in (Bourdieu, 1991). I reason that the habitus is acquired by repetition of practices and events that provide the framework within which each boy is able to function, and each one brings to this framework his own experiences, keenness or reluctance. It is important to take into account the space, which does not only denote, for example, an empty classroom, but actually comprises the social
relations and interactions in the literacy classroom. These are the social spaces that are features in understanding literacy practices (Dixon, 2011).

The classroom is the physical and material structure, which as a fixture, houses a group of learners. What is in question in this study, is what is being done to accommodate the learners that inhabit this classroom, and what they, as the learners, do with it. Schooling is an enculturation process into literacy, and, as Gee (1989) contends, the classroom is an active apprenticeship towards reaching this goal. Gee (2000), therefore, views discourse (and in this case he terms it secondary discourses that take place in institutions like school as opposed to the primary discourses of home and family) as a combination of the literacy acts of saying, writing, being and valuing, which, in fact, is a function of doing in class. This, apart from being lead into the culture of a particular discourse, encompasses the social practices that form part of it. In order to view and understand what happens in the classroom to make a learner think and talk and do things in a certain way, I set out to observe the literacy teachers in Grades 5, 6 and 7 at The Hilltop School. The reason behind observing all the literacy teachers in the upper section of the school was to find out what practices shape events: what social conventions teachers apply, and what they habitually do in their classes (Goodley, 1999).

As much as I am studying the world of young adolescents, I am fully aware that adults, both in and out of the school situation, regulate much of that world. Even if this is so, and as erstwhile adolescents ourselves, we as adults may think that we understand the adolescent practices and shared meanings, we need to recognise that it may be naïve to harbour a purely adult-centred view of a child’s world (Emond, 2000). Yet, the central problem concerning research with young people is that they are part of the wider reality that informs them, and that reality consists largely of adult voices. These adult voices are ever-present in the classroom from teachers who rule and direct them for most of their day, until parents and caregivers take over after the academic day, thereby continuing the guidance at home. For this research to be worthwhile, the adult input had to be considered as an influence in the experiential shared realities of each child (Parker, 1999).
In order to unravel the research problem into viewing the literacy acquisition of boys, I did observation in their classes with the aim of observing literacy transference from adult to learner (please refer to Chapter 4). I focused on lesson experiences, and searched for the impressions that the lessons would leave on particular learners, or what type of sway these lessons would have over their reactions. Because of my own class-teaching schedule, I was unable to choose particular subject lessons for observation. The classes I attended, were not only literature or linguistic in nature, but covered the whole spectrum of language teaching. As discussed in the methodology chapter, my aim was to observe the various teachers in English and Afrikaans (one of the three languages taught at The Hilltop School) lessons in the senior part of the school. In order to glean an understanding of the pedagogical imprint on the learners, and towards attaining this goal, I sat in on various classes of seven different teachers during 2010 and 2011. Part of the experience also entailed looking at the teacher-boy interaction and the relationships that were formed in these situations.

My initial notion that my presence in the classroom could influence the natural conversations in class was short-lived. I wondered whether, if I had been an outsider in the school, they would have been more conscious of my presence, yet, I felt that, as a member of the staff, I was just there as another teacher. Once I was introduced, greeted and my presence explained, I disappeared into the background, even when walking around during group sessions in some of the classes. The young boys accepted my position.

7.4 The classroom ethos

Being in the class during another teacher’s lesson was an important lived experience for me in the ethnographic journey (Dyson, 1993). It was not a function of “spying” on colleagues, but an enriching process of looking at what the boys were exposed to, and looking at lessons through their eyes and not through the lenses of an adult teacher teaching. The teachers appeared to be comfortable with my presence in their domain, and frequently discussed events during or after the
During the varied lessons from venue to venue, I realised how different the material surroundings were as each reflected the personality of the class teacher through input and display attempts (as reflected in my field notes). Based on my classroom data that follows, I shall argue that it is the teacher’s specific personality and type of guidance in class that embodies the way that learners take on the language culture and develop particular attitudes to literacy. As will become evident in this chapter, the way a lesson is presented in class, is a clear determinant of the effect that a literacy event or practice has on a learner. As explained above in section 7.3.3 and 7.3.4, a key role in shaping attitudes rests within the discipline and the ways of transferring ideas in a class situation, which is reflected in the data from the class reading and the library lessons.

Teaching is not just transferring information or pure lecturing. There is more to successful meaning-making in handling children, no matter what age; and successful connection rests on the arrangement of opportunities that learners follow (Stake, 1995). My data discussion mirrors this notion, and key themes about understanding reading literacy practices in the classrooms of the seven language teachers that were observed are discussed. In this sense I attempt to analyse the range of literacy approaches to which the participants were exposed in the lessons that I observed. I wish to argue that it is the practices in each of the social spaces that create the basis for their interest in reading literacy. It may appear to be an obtuse way to generate ideas about reading, but I regard these discourse moments as the essential ingredients for creating an interest in words and ideas that may influence a wish to read in some of the learners.

7.4.1 The Afrikaans class

The first literacy approach that I explore is that of the Afrikaans (one of the eleven official South African languages⁷) teacher who controlled the learners by means of her persuasive manner of teaching and discipline. The boys appeared to respond

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⁷ The eleven official languages are: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Pedi, Sotho, Swati, Tshonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu.
easily to her organised methodology, while her urgings throughout her lessons were positive and encouraging, and this seemed to embolden the boys to provide answers to her questions even if they were unsure of them. An example concerning this is taken from my field notes (November 2011):

**Extract 5:** “Give him a minute. He will find it.”

| Teacher: | Look at the whole sentence before you answer. *( Interruption by another boy.)* Give him a minute. He will find it. Remember, Abdul (fictitious name). ‘Lees weer’ (Afrikaans for ‘Read it again’). *(Abdul answers).* ‘Jy doen dit so mooi.’ (Afrikaans for ‘You do it so well.’) |

and

**Extract 6:** “Yes, definitely, clever boy.”

| Learner: | Mevrou, nog ’n lekker woord is *(gives word).* (Afrikaans for “Ma’am, another beautiful word is …”). |
| Teacher: | Ja, beslis, slim kind. (Afrikaans for “Yes, definitely, clever boy.”) |

It is significant that the boys seem to regard the learning process within this classroom as pleasurable. Afrikaans is a compulsory subject throughout high school for these boys, and the coaxing in an amusing way by the teacher to eliciting answers has a twofold purpose: firstly, she regards the pedagogical significance of the language as key to the boys’ achievement, and, secondly, by fostering a wholesome attitude to learning Afrikaans may rule out a reluctance that could easily develop when learners find a subject difficult.

Further events that communicate a similar message were revealed in an Afrikaans oral class (Field notes, November 2010). During this lesson the boys were urged to use only key words for their oral on their hobby, otherwise they were sent back to their desks to prepare more thoroughly. They could choose when to present their talk, which had been corrected by the teacher prior to their presentation. The teacher was constantly asked about the pronunciation or meaning of words, to which she responded patiently and clearly. When I asked her if she always exercised exemplary patience, her answer was: “I do, because I really want them to
understand what they are saying in Afrikaans.” By being patient and approachable in class she perceives that the learners may associate a particular linguistic behaviour with Afrikaans that may engender confidence in mastering the language in high school. The Afrikaans class therefore serves as a milieu in which the boys are socialised into a different speech community, scaffolded by an interactive relationship with the teacher who still maintains strict control of behaviour and of the pedagogical content, but, at the same time, maintains a positive ambience. In essence, the literacy approach contributes to building up a belief and an attitude to learning the language, and learning to value the knowledge attached to this process. My aim in observing this class, which essentially may not promote reading in the boys since it is a second language, was to understand the way that the educator guides literacy skills learning. This guidance forms the basis of knowledge in a child with the intention of creating enough ammunition to understand the language when reading does take place - as shown in the turn-taking between Mark and his mother when reading his Afrikaans book at home (please refer to Chapter 6). In this multifaceted educational space of the Afrikaans class, there are layers of new understanding, of exposure, of guidance towards understanding, and encouragement to engage on a deeper level, and I argue that the latter level aids the flow of knowledge that shapes the learners’ attitude to working with words, which involves reading.

7.4.2 The English classes

Each English class offered a different experience that was not dependent not only on the character of the teacher, but also on the nature of the topic being taught. The four classrooms, in which I did my observation, were expansive rooms with large windows and blinds, and along one wall of each classroom was a bank of lockers that contained the boys’ sports kit and books. Each class had an interactive board mounted on the front wall, and a teacher’s table with a desktop computer on it. It was noteworthy that only one of the four classrooms was tidy. Since the
boys remained in their own rooms, they did not seem to be overly concerned about their untidy spaces.

The lesson that took place in the tidy classroom was an inspiration on many levels. The boys were divided into four groups, and unlike boys in a group, these groups worked attentively at their tasks while only asking questions intermittently. The book under discussion in this Grade 5 class was *Mellow yellow* by Jenny Robson, and the work done in each group related to this story. These were structured groups - the first worked on individual rhyming poems, which they wrote on their iPads. There was a dictionary on each desk which some of the boys used. The rest were deep in thought, scribbling on paper and listening to their friends’ efforts. The teacher attended to each boy in turn, discussing their poems with them, and my field notes (May 2011) reveal him addressing these questions to the boys:

**Extract 7: “I want to hear what you’ve done.”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher:</th>
<th>I want to hear what you’ve done. Do you want to share any of that with us?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learner:</td>
<td>Yes, Sir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher:</td>
<td>Talk me through this ... what are the stand-out ones?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conversation between learner and teacher constituted an array of social and pedagogical interactions crucial to literary learning. The teacher coaxed the boy in layers of encouragement into sharing his thoughts with him. On one level the comment “I want to hear what you’ve done” was a flattering invitation for the boy to engage with him. It was a comment that both uplifted, and made the boy feel at ease to talk about his poem. The teacher, however, did not give the boy the chance to respond, but his follow-up question “[d]o you want to share any of that with us?” magnified his sense of involvement with the boy. The latter question highlights a different level of engagement. The teacher was aware that having indirectly praised the boy, he would not refuse to share his work with him. This was followed up with a further exhortation to “[t]alk me through it”. The boy was being lead into verbalising his thoughts and ideas which in this social setting paved the way for the learner to develop confidence and self-expression. This interaction formed the essence of literate behaviour in this formal setting in which the teacher
provided a stimulus for speech and a platform on which the child developed a literary understanding of what is laudable, or unacceptable, writing. The teacher not only praised the boys’ poetry efforts, but guided them by means of comments such as: “Jack (fictitious name), I need something better than this”, and to another: “Too many syllables; your rhythm is spoilt”, and “Did you say in your poem how it makes you feel – warm inside; does it make sense?” Through this questioning the boys sensed what was required of them, and they were challenged to play with words (as in Extracts 5 and 6) to produce writing that found approval with the teacher.

One boy approached the teacher and said that he kept a piece of paper and pencil next to his bed so that he could write down ideas that came to him during the night. This constitutes more than “boundaried classroom practices” (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004: n.p.) which clearly resonate in the Vygotskyan socio-cognitive perspective of language and speech in everyday activities giving rise to higher mental processes (Wertsch, 1985). The literacy experience for the boys in the class, through interaction with, and guidance by, the teacher, is an in-school social practice, strengthened by the inherent mutual interaction of teacher and boy. The boys were exploring their ability to write and communicate, and were at the same time shaped by their participation – a notion that relates strongly to the research question seeking to understand the boys’ in-school reading practices. The focus of this study is on literacy as a social practice and the omnipresent influences that feed into the process. Prinsloo and Breier (1996: 24) suggest that it is not only “what people do with literacy, but also their understandings of what they do, the values (italics in original text) they give to their actions, and the ideologies and practices that encapsulate their use and valuing of literacy”. I argue that the boys in this particular English classroom are being guided into understanding the value of their mutual literacy experiences.

I mentioned above that the boys in the classroom were divided into four groups of which the first was poetry writing. Group two had to identify the various nouns from a certain passage in the book, Mellow yellow, while group three used their nouns to set out sentences from words cut out of magazines and placing these on
posters, and group four used their iPads to research emotive words that would “make a difference” to the poems they had to write. These words were written on rectangular strips of paper that were hung on a bare branch situated in the window of the classroom. When the teacher asked: “What word did you find?” he got an enthusiastic “ferocious” from the boy, to which he answered “exquisite”. The boys seemed to warm to their teacher using language at their level of speech. He approached a group asking: “Are you guys cool?” and their answer of “Yes, Sir” reflected respect rather than taking advantage of the situation.

There were various means employed by the teacher to engage the boys in the literacy activities during this lesson. The teacher wanted to be clear about his objectives by commencing with a discussion on the process and the following visual graphic design as illustration was placed on the board:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Rotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awesome adjectives (magazines &amp; iPad)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 11: Display on the interactive board in the classroom.](image)

Further literacy pointers employed in the pedagogical process were verbal: “Sir, is *impatience* a noun?” The boy had to write the word on the board while others stood around and helped him to identify it as an abstract noun. What is significant is that the teacher did not provide him with an immediate answer, but encouraged discussion amongst the boys until they worked out the appropriate answer. The input from the group enabled them to share their opinions and knowledge until they solved the problem. The discourse around words and meanings was a wholly enriching literacy activity for the boys in this class as demonstrated in the following interaction (Field notes, May 2011):

**Extract 8: “You tell me.”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boy:</th>
<th>Teacher:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is <em>lonely</em> an abstract noun, Sir?</td>
<td>You tell me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similar to the preceeding Extract 7, the above example reflects a strong sense of negotiation and communication in this interaction, and other interactions during periods that I observed this teacher in his class, where talking and self-discovery characterised the extent to which pedagogy evolved through literacy engagement. Locating the participants in positions of sense-making empowered them into using knowledge that they grew more and more confident to employ. Atkinson et al. (2008) suggested that any speech act is a form of social action as well as a linguistic action, but since it is both social and linguistic, it is underwritten by cultural conventions that need to be scaffolded by the teacher towards effective performance. This was achieved through his constant performative urgings of “[y]ou tell me” and “[t]alk me through it”. The telling evidence from these classroom experiences is the way that the learners are being coaxed into self-discovery and expression that take place through verbal communication, interaction and reading, and these actions feed into the way that these individuals associate with, and participate in, literacy.

Similarly through the mediation of the teacher, the learners in this class were given the opportunity to construct the meaning of their texts through technology. Karchmer (2001) indicates that her research has shown that technology can help to make literacy teaching more effective, but its value depends upon the thoughtful implementation of the particular technology to enhance reading instruction. The iPad was used for referencing purposes in this lesson, enabling the boys to look up definitions of words, to find emotive words, and to write up their poems. When a boy asked if the poem had to be copied into their books from the iPad, the answer was: “No, that is as good as in your book”. The implications that can be highlighted here are that the teacher is at hand to guide and correct the process as it is happening, and that the feedback to the boy remains verbal, unlike deferred red-pen comments in exercise books. This has the potential to build on the learners’
desire to pursue similar activities as it seems less cumbersome and, may I add, less formal – something that appeals to boys.

Using digital media at home and school has become second nature to the boys, and is a way of connecting with texts in various ways. Alvermann and McLean (2007: 15) take a strong stand on the effect of technology on adolescents, particularly pointing to the “impact of texts of all kinds (visual, print, digital, sound, multimodal, performance) on young people’s identity-making practices and, especially, on how texts mediate young people’s perceptions of themselves as literate beings”. This may seem rather melodramatic, giving technology too much power in terms of defining the user, rather than focusing on specific media that allow access and provision of various types of texts to users. Therefore, the statement that “understanding what literacy is doing with people in a setting is as important as understanding what people are doing with literacy in a setting” (Brandt & Clinton, 2002: 337), merely situates the work on the iPad in the classroom in a more progressive learning mode. The act of typing their work on the iPad, and having the immediacy of referencing tools at hand, is simply a different way of doing their work in class, and like anything that is new and different, it provides excitement in those moments. It is certainly not an “identity-making” process during which one perceives oneself as different to the boy who is writing in an exercise book, but merely a different mode of applying learning in a class situation.

In another English class that I observed, technology was used as an analogous backdrop to analysing the poem *O captain, my captain* by Walt Whitman. The film, *Dead poets society*, was shown on the interactive board in the classroom, while the boys were silently watching. At a certain point the teacher stopped the film to ask the question (Field notes, August 2011):

**Extract 9: “To express ourselves.”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher:</th>
<th>Boys, why do you think we are watching this movie?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy 1:</td>
<td>Because we’re reading <em>O captain, my captain</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher:</td>
<td>It is just a poem, but what happens when you look beyond the words? The teacher in the movie ripped out the instructions on how to write a poem, and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The boys appreciated the significance of the analogy that the teacher endeavoured to portray, but only once they had been guided into looking “beyond the words”. The significance of this teacher/boy encounter is the realisation that the learners at this age have to be led into recognising the many layers of meaning in words and sentences. The poem was therefore used to guide these Grade 6s into focusing with different lenses into acknowledging divergent interpretations. The discourse around the poem and film may seem quite elementary, but the discussion re-orientated the boys into another culture of viewing language. They came to look at language use as a shared phenomenon that allows them many interpretations that are both personal and social. I thus argue that any linguistic action influences participants’ engagement with texts, and more so if they can associate with the level of engagement. In their out-of-school experiences it was parents who promoted an interest in texts in the homes; in class the teachers take on that role.

7.4.3 Comment

This section highlights one of the key questions in this study about the in-school reading experiences of the boys in answer to the research question: What are boys’ in-and-out-of-school reading practices? Firstly, my discussion focused on the conscious effort that the librarian made to get both the readers and non-readers to take out books from the library. These included browsing and story-telling during formal lessons, competitions, book purchases of their choice, and the visual attraction of advertising on the boards in and around the media centre. I attempted to illustrate how the learners responded to her encouragement. I followed this up by demonstrating how an undisciplined approach to the “silent reading” period after school on a Monday appeared to foster a time-wasting attitude in the reluctant readers, while the readers keenly utilised the time for reading. It is important to realise that the negative attitude described in Extract 4
evolved through the casual handling of boys during this session. In this instance I argue that a wish to engage in reading emanates from a position in which the participants are guided and disciplined. The “casual handling” evident in this particular class seems to lack the underlying features that made home literacy and the library literacy practices pleasurable. The encouragement and sense of discipline that seem to be the basis of the literacy participation are absent during the reading periods, and this serves to legitimise the attitude taken up in the “silent reading” periods where no serious reading is taking place.

The attitude of the teacher seems to be relayed to the learner. This was made evident in the English periods, demonstrating that the constant encouragement from the English teachers to create meaningful poems, to go beyond literal meanings, to understand the syntax and structure of language, but most of all, to think about language, go a long way towards encouraging boys to read and talk about texts. My argument is therefore that reading is social, it is interactive, it happens through mediation by the teacher who, through this process, fosters a healthy attitude towards books (Gee, 2000). To follow on from this, I will develop an argument relating to literacy practices that influence the boys to read, and the following section focuses on the formal and informal literacy practices that influence those boys to take up a book.

7.5 The meaning of school literacy practices

7.5.1 The effect of literacy practices on learners

In Chapter 6 I demonstrated how the parents consciously guided their children into a particular literacy culture that they deemed important in the home. These constant routines and patterning of practices take place before the strictures of formal schooling start (Gee, 2000). Yet on school entry, the home literacy is drawn upon as the child reproduces the examples to which they are exposed at home (Teale & Sulzby, 1991; Comber, 2000). Since this section serves to examine the formal and informal school literacy practices, and the influence these have on the
learners, it is significant to remember that the informal and sometimes unconventional practices of literacy in the pre-school child, often determine their successful entry into formal learning (Heath & Thomas, 1984; Comber, 2000). This notion is the core of literacy processes depicted in New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984, 2001; Gee, 1996, 2000; Barton & Hamilton, 1998) that are embedded in the practices within the overlapping domains of home, school, sport, church, and clubs in which the child grows up. It is particularly these overlapping experiences that determine the literacy culture of each child, from emergent literacy to the more formal and regulatory school literacy (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). For this reason I firstly situated the eight boys in this case study in the home culture to analyse the essence of their home literacy. In this section the analysis shifts to the regulatory locale of the school.

Prinsloo and Stein (2004) contend that children enter school with an already pre-existing reading literacy in place, and are “in turn shaped by what they encounter in early school settings” (2004, n.p.). This is significant if one bears in mind that school achievement is often related to competence in reading (Tyre, 2008; Wilhelm, 2008). A key approach by the parents in this study was to make readers of their boys, and each of the eight homes harboured a distinct culture of reading. There was a tacit expectation that this culture would be perpetuated in the formal schooling.

With the aim of showing that reading literacy happens at The Hilltop School, I discussed the ways in which the librarian (in section 7.3.3) enticed the boys into listening to stories during the library period, into entering reading competitions, into browsing through the books in the library, and into reading articles from the newspapers, book extracts and commentary on sports writers. One could palpably feel the enthusiasm of the boys for these reading periods, but there could be little argument that reading literacy was not always pursued with a similar passion elsewhere in the school. While talking to the librarian, I noted disillusionment from her impression that she did not have the backing of all of the senior staff in her reading competitions. The senior staff does not endorse the librarian’s passion for getting all the boys to read. In the same way that the parents in the homes
provide encouragement and guidance, the teachers are constantly required to do the same, yet reading is not important for everyone - refer to the following comment by the librarian during our interview (May 2011):

**Extract 10:** “... there is no encouragement and unfortunately the boys perpetuate the same example.”

... even though boys rely on role models, I feel that the male staff couldn’t be relied upon as there is no encouragement and unfortunately the boys perpetuate the same example.

Even though this exercise pertains to reading only, and Rueda (2011: 84) makes a clear distinction between literacy and reading, defining the latter as the use of the “products and the principles of the writing system to get at the meaning of a written text”, I argue that this situation lamented by the librarian, symbolises more than just the act of reading. Becoming immersed in a book has a history. The reading process is a psychological process of learning and internalising powerful reading lessons in how literacy works (Meek, 1988; Fitzgerald, 1999). This process, however, is embedded in the support of a home, the school and the community, and for it to flourish within the Vygotskyan Zone of Proximal Development (Wertsch, 1985), it is reliant on the example set and the encouragement given in these areas.

The impression gained from the literacy teaching in the library, where reading is keenly pursued, is that it seems to function in isolation from the rest of the school. The intense co-operation that the librarian expects from the English teachers is limited, and her reference to “the male staff” refers to the Grade 6 and 7 English teachers who are all men. Of the six teachers in question, she mentioned only two who ask her for advice, or use the library as reference in project work or theme teaching. When asked if she experienced similar sentiments from the female staff in Grade 4, she indicated that they run the 50-Club competition most successfully in promoting much reading during that year. What is significant is that four of the eight boys in the case study lost interest in reading after the 50-Club initiative once they reached Grade 5. The librarian is thus pointing to the lack of co-construction in the reading habit that she perceives should be promoted and used collectively amongst the teaching staff (Jäger, 2001). She reads to the boys during their library
lessons, but finds that this reading does not happen in class or in the boarding school at night, except by the two teachers mentioned above. I am, nevertheless, of the opinion that Grade 6 and 7 boys are at an age where they would prefer not to listen to bedtime stories, but the smaller boys still enjoy story time, and this may justify the concern of the librarian.

Interestingly, however, the librarian seems to have more support from the parents than from some of the senior staff in terms of reading. The strong link between the encouragement from the librarian, and a similar attitude from parents to get the boys to read, was found in the following extract from my field notes (May 2011):

**Extract 11:** “… so parents just go out and buy them.”

| Affluence has a positive effect on the boys, since the library can’t stock more than six copies of a popular book, so parents just go out and buy them. There is more buying … |

She appreciates the support for literacy from the parents and recognises that this encouragement and guidance has had a profoundly constructive effect on the boys. There remains an acute awareness that not all parents go out and buy books, yet the parents at the school have the means to purchase them. Those parents who are concerned enough about their boys’ reading habits, do so, and these actions are inherent in the social practices of this group of parents, reflecting what they do with literacy in support of the library teaching. Even though Barton and Hamilton (2000: 7) contend that literacy practices “are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships”, it could be argued that these observable actions enhance literacy, and strengthen the “values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships” towards ingraining literacy culture. For the *action* to have taken place, there had to be discourse around it, shared values and cognition that trigger a positive attitude to the literacy process. This understanding reflects the further communication from the librarian in terms of “her” boys’ attitudes to reading. Examples that she mentions are: “John (these five names are fictitious) is sharing about his reading more and more. Oscar’s reading has had a good influence on his peers, and
examples are Desmond and Simon. They talk reading. Peter tells of his big brother at boarding school who was bored and started to read, and now doesn’t stop” (Field notes, May 2011). She is encouraged by these events, but expresses her unease over non-involvement in class situations, saying:

**Extract 12:** “... and the kids follow the example.”

| ... teachers should read aloud as reading is a social activity, and the kids follow the example. |
| (Field notes, May 2011) |

What the librarian is suggesting here is the cause and effect relationship that exists within literacy learning. Therefore, if guidance and encouragement from home and school are not consistent, this may have a vitiating effect, which could reflect in attitude to reading. This understanding is consistent with the view in New Literacy Studies that literacy is located in particular times and places, and that literacy is firmly embedded in social practices (Barton et al., 2000). From the perspective of the boy, then, as the receptor of literacy culture, the example set by teachers and parents needs to be unswerving in order for it to be sustained in the boy’s behaviour.

In this section (7.5) I look at the formal and informal school practices that influence the boys to read, yet the data above (please refer to Extracts 10, 11, 12) are aspects that discourage reading from effectively taking place, and I could not avoid commenting on them in an effort to understand what motivates boys to read. By taking up a position of contrast between reading and non-reading, I endeavoured to take a step closer to explaining the question – How do these practices influence them? To clarify this, the following extract demonstrates an inconsistency in generating a healthy attitude to reading during the Monday “silent reading” classes, reflected in yet another entry in my field notes (October 2011):

**Extract 13:** “There is a concern about the boys who come to these lessons without books ...”

| There is a concern about the boys who come to these lessons without books to read, especially since they know that it is a reading period. |

If the boys’ *don’t-care* attitude is tolerated, a pattern develops in relegating reading periods to *it-doesn’t-matter* periods, for this pattern, once again, repeats
itself in yet another time-tabled reading session of the boys’ academic week. There is a reading period on a Tuesday and a Thursday each week from 1:45 p.m. to 2:15 p.m. These sessions precede the preparation classes that run from 2:15 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. after which the boys go to sport lessons. The preparation classes, however, are structured differently to the “silent reading” classes on a Monday in that these are small classes containing no more than fifteen boys at a time. This means that each boy has a desk at which he can do his work, and there is no sharing of space.

Having desk space, nevertheless, does not automatically translate into sitting down and making use of the reading period. The same attitude towards reading that was observed during the Monday reading lessons is perpetuated during the preparation reading classes. The “readers” have books at hand and immediately proceed to bend their heads to focus on their reading. Others, who happen to be the majority of the class, fiddle in their bags for something to read, and when asked what they are reading, will shrug and ask to go to the library to find a book. This leaves very little time to do reading during an ostensibly compulsory reading period twice a week. Further disruptions during this time are the itinerant boys who attend extra-mural music lessons. They appear at the door to call the next learner, or they may summon the choir boys who have forgotten to go to choir practice (a regular occurrence). The school’s intention of having silent reading as part of the timetable is noble, yet the restlessness during this time demonstrates a lived example of an occasion when the majority of the class actively desists from practising what is set out for them. Power is implicit in the ruling that reading takes place during this time, yet due to disturbances and manipulative intentions by reticent readers, the structure dissolves into a different reality for which it was intended. Dixon (2011) suggests that schools are training grounds and that it is through pedagogy and teachers that a subject emerges. Engaging with literacy is a social act, and not engaging in literacy, and receiving the example that it does not matter in the Monday “silent reading” period, both support a watered down reading culture – in this case during preparation periods too. This attitude to literacy is confirmed in my field notes during preparation sessions:
Extract 14: “2 of 10 boys have nothing to read!”

two of ten boys have nothing to read! (during a compulsory reading slot) …

(March 2011)

and

the usual request for a book from the library by five of eleven boys in the class …

(June 2011)

and

Nothing has changed the entire year. There is still a scramble for a book at the start of prep by the non-readers, while the readers get a book from their bags and start reading immediately.

(September 2011)

The above evidence explains how literacy practices directly influence the boys who are reluctant readers, to get by without reading in the school day even in reading periods. They manipulate the situation, while the dedicated readers take the opportunity given to them. The readers have books at hand and are seen to focus on their reading as soon as the period begins - reflected in my observation of Leon, Brian, Mark, Sean, Barry and Kevin (Field notes, October 2011). This highlights the central question about formal circumstances that stimulate the boys to read. While my discussion in Extract 14 revolved around the abuse of the reading moments by the reluctant readers, at the same time it served to emphasise how the formal periods set down by the school for “silent reading” were aptly used by the eager readers. This observation emphasises the fact that the influence of home reading literacy habits is seen to be perpetuated in formal in-school events by the boys who wish to read. The reluctant boys forget to bring books, while the readers are always prepared, implicating a sense of rational thought and premeditated intentions in these boys. The readers seem to form an intangible bond with their books which they need at hand to fill a quiet moment. Their actions can also be seen as serving a structured lifestyle that may be interpreted as emanating from memories of structured bedtime reading.

Formal and regulated literacy times at school are the time-tabled lessons in the library, the reading periods after school and the daily language lessons. Observation showed that the boys responded single-mindedly to these literacy
times, but manipulated the less structured “silent reading” periods. I argue, therefore, that the context in which the literacy takes place provides the opportunity for all the learners to read, and I wish to suggest that the reasons for reluctant readers not to make use of such time can be ascribed to the personality of the leader/teacher in that context. In order to advance this idea, Extract 15 demonstrates the influence of a particular teacher who inspired the boys in the formal class time to read – this even applies to William who is a reluctant reader (Interview, September 2011):

Extract 15: “He just changed the whole perspective on reading, you know, the way he taught us to write, and view and to think about things.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>In class, do the teachers have any influence on your reading?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>To what extent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>Mr Jones (fictitious name), in Grade 6, he got us to read. Short stories were a big one; he made us think differently. He got us to do creative writing. He made us write on pictures. Mum, are there any of my picture stories around somewhere?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William’s mother:</td>
<td>Ja, ja.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>He made us write about pictures and think differently about the books we read, because when you learn to write better, you understand the book more. And also he knew the books well and he could give us books that would interest us. I asked him if he had a book that he thought I would like and he gave me Fly away Peter (by David Malouf), which was um, um, an Australian book on the First World War - a few Australian people who went to fight, um, in Europe. And it was very interesting. He just changed the whole perspective on reading, you know, the way he taught us to write, and view and to think about things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Do you think ... do you think he changed your attitude? For instance - before that, in Grade 5 - were you not reading?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>Um, in Grade 5 ... Mr Meyer (fictitious name) is a very good English teacher, but quite conventional in the way he teaches. So ... Lord of the flies is one of my favourite books and he told me that he thinks I should read it, but he didn’t change my perspective on reading, or didn’t change the way I thought about reading ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extract above portrays sentiments from a reluctant reader. William’s definitive view that “he got us to read” reflects a process in the class situation to which the
boys could relate. If William as a non-reader strove to read under Mr Jones’s tutelage, it begs the question of how, and why, this process influenced the boys to read beyond the classroom. It is noticeable that the teacher constructed his lessons around short stories, which allowed for more space and time for work in class than would a lengthy book. These stories formed the basis of their own story writing that he introduced in a scaffolding manner by making them “write on pictures”. The teacher guided the boys by first giving examples of short stories, and providing ideas that they were able to use. Their creative writing was further stimulated on a visual level when he used pictures as the source of their stories; once again supplying the boys with the inspiration for writing their own creations from a picture. Arguably the boys were empowered to believe that they were wholly capable of producing literacy that was appreciated. In William’s words: “He made us write about pictures and think differently about the books we read, because when you learn to write better, you understand the book more”, one recognises the extent to which the personality of the teacher mediates a learner’s belief in thinking he/she is able. For a reluctant reader to want to read: “I asked him if he had a book that he thought I would like…” is evidence of the metamorphosis in William’s attitude to reading literacy under this teacher. William verbalises the specific areas of influence as “the way he taught us to write, and view and to think about things”. There is clear evidence of enjoyment and the will to participate in this process as William affirmed: “He would give us books that would interest us”.

Learners astutely recognise strengths in teachers, yet may not always aim to please even teachers that they like. The way in which Mr Jones, however, relayed literacy to the boys made them want to respond to his persuasion. The learning took place in a milieu of discipline, yet his encouragement and guidance subtly persuaded the learners to co-operate and respond to these literacy events that made their English lessons a positive experience. William does, however, describe his English lessons of the previous year in a dismissive way even though the teacher “is a very good English teacher, but quite conventional in the way he teaches”. I therefore suggest that the person within a specific context holds the literacy culture in his/her hands, and the way in which this knowledge is disseminated, either influences the learner to take it
up or discourages him/her from doing so. To strengthen this point, I considered the following extract taken from my interview with William (September 2011):

Extract 16: “... we are doing short stories and reading a few he suggested. But we’ve got no readers this term.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>And in terms of using books in class; do you have a reader at the moment?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>We have finished it. It was, um, Goodnight, Mister Tom (by Michelle Magorian).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William’s mother:</td>
<td>Have you done it the whole year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>Yes, the first two terms with Mr Meyer, and the whole year group ... they have it most years I think ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>And nothing this term?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>No pleasure-reading in class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>No. There are no class books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Really?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>And Shakespeare? Did you do any?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>We did ... we did a little bit of Shakespeare. Then with our teacher we watched ... we watched The dead poets society ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>With Mr Gardiner (fictitious name)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>We watched quite a bit of it, and now at the moment we are doing short stories, and reading a few that he suggested. But we’ve got no readers this term.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As discussed in the previous extract, the learners were studying short stories. The contrast in sentiment was palpable between the two experiences of the same subject, both dealing with short stories. What is interesting is that the genre and the subject are the same, yet the enjoyment seems to be contingent upon the person teaching (Gee, 1996). The interaction between learner and teacher may be sound, for William mentioned in the previous extract that “he is a very good English teacher”; the boys nevertheless did not connect engagingly. Extract 16 reveals that much reading was taking place in literacy classes, but the year groups seemed to be distant from the
events, which for the unengaged readers did not translate into inspiring events. Crucial to these literacy events appear to be persuasive strategies that draw the boys into literacy, and they seem, at the same time, to react positively to interactive challenges:

**Extract 17: “He gave us all different strategies. There was one that we did very well …”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>And did he give you vocabulary, or ideas?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>He did it ... he did leave it up to us. He gave us all different strategies. There was one that we did very well called “ten-by-two”, and what you would have to do, is to look at the picture, write ten words about it, then stop for a minute, then look around, then look at the picture, then write another ten words about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Oh, hence the “ten-by-two”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William:</td>
<td>Yes, yes. Then we would have to do that and by just looking at the picture, we would get ideas about good adjectives to use in the story, and there were lots of different ones such as what was going to happen ... very short. They helped a lot but it was very easy. But otherwise, he left it mainly up to us. We weren't really pushed into a direction where we had to do this or that ... since some people like planning a lot and others don't. That was very cool.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Interview, September 2011)

Extract 17 (as in Extract 15) underlines the type of strategies that were employed to encourage the boys to write. Their interest in creating their own stories was stimulated through a “very easy” design by the teacher. He manoeuvred the participants into thinking about words that spoke to them from the picture in front of them, to taking a break, which apart from providing perspective on their thinking, also served as an enjoyable exercise in a classroom situation. The interactive session empowered the boys to believe that they were in charge of their own writing, and that “it was very easy ... [b]ut otherwise, he left it mainly up to us”. The lesson plan was carefully put into place to coax the boys into enjoying literacy, and since there were varying designs, the boys embraced these literacy moments. Two designs mentioned in Extract 17 were the “ten-by-two” planning from a picture, and the children’s story that had to be illustrated age-appropriately by each boy. The latter was bound and later read to the Grade 3 boys by their authors. These boys were therefore not only empowered in the classroom to write
their own stories, but were given the confidence to read their work to a judgmental audience - the Grade 3 boys enjoyed the story-telling sessions to such an extent that they were stimulated into reading their own efforts to a Grade 0 class at the school (my own experience).

The interaction between the teacher and learners in Extract 15 and 17 underscores the critical balance between content teaching and the methodology of transferring the content to learners. The pivotal point in the type of transmission rests on the personality of the adult mediating the process. The straightforward pedagogical process can ostensibly be regarded as painless, yet the effective teacher can surely be judged by what the learner takes away from the lesson. To inspire a class to engage meaningfully with literacy, and to be inspired enough to ask “him if he had a book that he thought I would like”, or having a pencil at hand to write down ideas for poetry in the middle of the night, means that true literacy engagement is taking place.

For a non-reader like William, literacy engagement relies on the tacit encouragement and guidance of the more knowledgeable teacher. William’s reading and pleasurable writing experiences dissipated in the subsequent year when the English teacher changed, even though “[he] is a very good English teacher”. His comment “I haven’t got a book at the moment that I am liking” (Field notes, September 2011) clearly reveals his non-engagement. The readers in my study, however, have not used “not liking” as an excuse to abstain. They seem actively to search for something to read, even if it means re-reading books: “but now I am re-reading the Artemis Fowl series” (Interview with Brian, February 2011), and Leon’s mother commenting: “It’s quite a difficult stage right now and it is difficult to buy books because he has read them all. He is re-reading books. He is re-reading Harry Potter” (Interview, November 2010). Similarly Sean’s mother comments on the fact that he is not too particular when there is nothing at hand: “... he borrowed books from a friend, and it was pretty much anything and everything he could lay his hands on” (Interview, January 2011). These comments serve to highlight the passion for books by readers, whilst non-readers seem to require the encouragement and inspiration of a teacher, as shown by William.
Since I am focusing particularly on practices that influence boys to read, I point to inspiration that is not only found in the formal classroom situation, but also in the informal events set up by teachers to unite the boys with their reading. In Extract 1 I demonstrated how the librarian got the boys to read in a competition. She maintains that “[c]ompetitions are powerful because the non-readers are encouraged”, and that was certainly true of Sean (Interview, January 2011):

**Extract 18:** “But he was going for the goal ...”

| Sean’s mother: | Sean was not a keen reader. But he was going for the goal ... he was not keen ... they were getting a chocolate from [the headmaster - during assembly in recognition of reaching the 50-Club goal]. That is where he started. |
| Researcher:    | And continued? |
| Sean’s mother: | Yes, and continued and then he would say, “We need this one ... and that one ...” um ... he would say, “No, Kevin’s (fictitious name) got that book and he’s going to read it first”, and then he will read it. |

The librarian’s belief that her competitions draw non-readers is reflected in “he was going for the goal”. Sean, who at that stage had an aversion to books, was inspired to enter the competition. Even if he could not win it, the chocolate from the headmaster was equally enticing, so was the confidence booster of being on the stage in front of the entire school to receive it. A second example with regard to the power of the library competitions is drawn from my observation in the Afrikaans class (Field notes, November 2011) during which the boys did a speech on their hobbies. In his speech Kevin described his metamorphosis in reading orientation, and mentioned that he even got a prize in the form of a book from the library for having achieved 10,000 words in a competition. Both Sean and Kevin responded to the challenge that the competition provided them, and having had a taste of what pleasure-reading provided them during the time that they competed, they were encouraged to continue. I argue here that the reading habit for these boys emanated from the way in which they perceived the challenge of the competition that was open to the whole school. They chose to take part, yet the impression that the reading process left on them, defines them in that their reading has shaped their day-to-day reality and functioning in society (Gee, 2000;
Jäger, 2001), but they are also able to determine their own reality by continuing to gain more knowledge.

As I have previously indicated, a further informal event that encouraged the boys to read in the school was the 50-Club competition that is run annually for the Grade 4 boys. Many of the boys continue onwards to reach their 100-Club, while some have reached 150-Club. The boys’ competitive nature urges even the most reluctant readers to try and achieve recognition during this time. The librarian’s belief that competitions are powerful “because the non-readers are encouraged”, rings true year by year in Grade 4. Yet, not only the non-readers, but also the readers respond to the competition as the following extract explains (Interview, November 2010):

Extract 19: “I think that is an incentive for them to read, that’s why a lot of them read at that age, and he had an incentive that year which has stopped.”

| Leon’s mother: | No, not at all. I think the reading club, the points system ... I do remember he got to hundred, and, do you remember, he stopped and went “Oooo” and [his teacher] said that it does happen, and he did not read for a week or so ... and then it carried on again. I think that is an incentive for them to read, that’s why a lot of them read at that age, and he had an incentive that year which has stopped. |
| Researcher: | But he hasn’t stopped, and it’s a habit now. |

This parent acknowledges the usefulness of the reading club and highlights the crucial point of the event – “I think that is an incentive for them to read”. Leon’s mother recognises that these events only become literacy practices with much encouragement and urgings from teacher and parent working together. Both have a vested interest in having readers at school, not only learning from print, but aware that word exposure leads to world exposure (Dyson, 1993).

7.5.2 Comment

In a study on early encounters with literacy, Prinsloo and Stein (2004: n.p.) suggest that the way that teachers engage with literacy teaching has important “consequences for the kinds of readers and writers these children will become”. I
concur with this by demonstrating that the type of contact that the librarian seeks with her learners, shows a gaping contrast to that of the teachers supervising the “silent reading” periods. Ostensibly the two spaces promote the same activity – that of reading. The library space comprises interactive literacy moments of discussing books, reading stories, promoting competitions, whilst the “silent reading” space is filled with noise from non-readers scrambling and searching for books. The latter remains a space that does not engender a milieu for healthy reading literacy to take place. I have argued that the way in which a class is planned, conducted and communicated determines the response from the recipients - in this case the boys in the class.

I have also similarly shown that the class ethos is regulated by the practices that evolve under a teacher with goal-directed strategies and a passionate involvement in literacy pedagogy. Arguably the process empowers the participants to believe that competence in writing is within their reach, and this alters their attitude to literacy involvement. I have demonstrated that the interest generated by informal literacy practices such as competitions and public goal-attainment recognition influences even reluctant readers to indulge, but conversely, reluctant readers who wish to manipulate an undisciplined class take the opportunity to defer their reading. Literacy intentions such as time-tabling reading periods, therefore, are wasted if there is not a culture of discipline and encouragement enforcing the structure. I argue, therefore, that for reading literacy to be productive, the process has to be structured, challenging, stimulating and empowering. In order to understand this notion, the following section investigates the research question:

Why do some boys lose interest in reading as they reach the upper primary school stage?
7.6 Losing interest in reading

7.6.1 Class teaching takes the blame

Because of the concern regarding gender differences in reading, Logan and Medford (2011) conducted a study amongst 492 children in four schools in England to explain the consequences of low motivation for children’s engagement in reading and learning. Since there was a particular focus on gender, the aim of the study was to examine how closely children’s reading skill “correlates with their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and competency beliefs” (2011: 85). One commonly associates boys with underachievement and girls with high achievement (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Wilson, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Maynard, 2002), yet what the study pointed out was that there were potentially different ways of increasing children’s motivation. These pertained specifically to motivating internal factors as well as external factors, demonstrating the complex nature of motivation. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, there are consistent gender differences in ability that favour girls (reflected in the PIRLS and PISA results) and a widening gender gap in reading and English in the level of skill, yet motivating factors go beyond ability and level of achievement, and gender preferences (Fletcher, Grimley, Greenwood & Parkhill, 2012). Having already examined the “intrinsic motivation” or guidance by parents in the home, and teachers at school in this study, the “extrinsic motivation”, on the other hand, involves constant encouragement towards retaining an interest in literacy engagement. This may be gained through interesting reading material, but more tangibly through reward and recognition.

In Extract 19 I demonstrated that boys react to the incentive that a competition or a challenge provides, yet this draws attention to two aspects of loss of interest in older boys. Leon’s mother refers to younger boys who, like the older ones, respond to attaining a competitive goal; yet from experience in my own class situation in Grade 3, the nine-year-olds are still discovering the joys of reading by themselves (Wang & Guthrie, 2004). The discovery process still fills them with excitement, and very few are reluctant to sit with a book in reading periods. (The
few who do not enjoy reading are normally the ones who experience reading difficulties or have reading disabilities.) The boys in this case study who lost their excitement for reading, seem to have done so after the incentive in Grade 4 stopped, and they were left to their own reading devices. “[H]e had an incentive that year which has stopped” demonstrates that the incentive influences the whole class. They respond to it knowing that there is a public reward that awaits them. In Grade 5 there is nothing that drives them to read other than the voluntary competitions that the librarian runs. The extract that follows, echoes this sentiment (Interview with William’s mother, September 2011):

Extract 20: “He hated reading; he hated writing.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>William’s mother:</th>
<th>In Grade 5 ... he hated it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Really?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William’s mother:</td>
<td>He hated reading; he hated writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William’s mother:</td>
<td>He hated everything. And then in Grade 6 it was like a light going on. That um ... that um ... that whole Harvard programme ... on art ... and using pictures ... William suddenly got all immersed in it, in writing and just loving it and he started reading every day.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The encouragement that the boys indirectly received through the reading competition in Grade 4 stimulated a subconscious need for the learners to read. Once the incentive did not form part of the Grade 5 milieu, some boys seemed to revert to an instinctual aversion to reading. Only four of the eight boys in this study pursued their reading habits. “He hated reading; he hated writing” reflects the strong feelings harboured by William. Kevin, on the other hand, is described by his mother in this way (Interview, October 2010):

Extract 21: “He was not a natural reader.”

| Kevin’s mother: | He was not a natural reader. I read to him long after I thought he should be capable of reading. For a long time he was not a reader. He loved stories; he loved to be read to ... it has taken a lot of me buying books, me reading and find something that he liked. |
Kevin did not hate reading. Reading, nonetheless, did not interest him at that time. His mother never wavered in her endeavour to entice him into reading literacy which was important in their home. She recognises that Kevin did not read since he was not a “natural reader”, yet he was unconcerned about it. Both he and Sean only became readers in their Grade 6 year. The argument that I want to put forward is that both boys achieved their targets in the Grade 4 challenge, but did not read beyond that until they found a genre of books that changed their habits. Whether the boys were not natural readers or were reluctant readers, they still responded to the challenge of the competition until the end of the year.

A further factor which I have already demonstrated in Extract 15, 16 and 17, is the manner in which boys were engaged by a teacher in the classroom that enticed them into literacy participation. The learners responded to being led into paths of self-expression and discovery in the English lessons, and from hating reading and writing, William conceded that his Grade 6 teacher made them “think differently about the books we read”. There is at present once again a slump in William’s engagement in reading. He maintains that even though his present teacher urged him to read Lord of the flies, and that it is one of his favourite books, “he told me that he thinks I should read it, but he didn’t change my perspective on reading or didn’t change the way I thought about reading”. The “extrinsic motivation” (Jones & Myhill, 2004) differs substantially enough from one teacher to the next to arouse the wish to read or not to read. During his interview he told me that “I haven’t read for a while this year”. William’s mother reflects her concern during our interview (June, 2011):

**Extract 22:** “Yes, and now he’s not reading once again. It depends on the teacher.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>William’s mother:</th>
<th>Then [teacher] gave him this list and gave him the books.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>And were they age-appropriate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William’s mother:</td>
<td>No, they were books that [teacher], having worked with William for a while, thought would be appropriate for his taste. Very dark, hey. Like Stephen King - that dark. His short stories - they are unbelievable, but very dark. So he put together a list for him, and if people put a list together for Graham, or for Andrew (fictitious names of two of William’s peers), they would be very different ... the mark of a great teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Researcher: And you reckon that set him on the way to sitting reading all day?
William’s mother: Yes, and now he’s not reading once again. It depends on the teacher.

Despite the culture of reading in the home, or the culture of reading in the school, William resists. He, like many learners, needs hands-on guidance. Thus I argue that the “intrinsic motivation” (Jones & Myhill, 2004) is present at home and in school, but William, like Barry in the following extract, requires very special coaxing guidance to empower them. William’s mother is of the view that the teacher is pivotal in swaying the non-reader into reading. Evidence of her conviction is found in a further comment later in our interview (June 2011): “But find the right book, and the teacher, and that teacher can suddenly ignite that whole area … I read all the time, and I buy books all the time, but I have far less influence than one teacher.” I have previously argued that William and Barry as the non-readers in my study seem to need more coaxing than the readers. Fox (1993), however, proposes that narrative initially reveals the reasoning behind problems in stories, thereby teaching readers the value of argument and discussion that require mental operations. In thinking about literature and narrative, Fox believes that the reader is introduced to new knowledge in stories in a personal and communicative way. She does suggest that the appeal can, nevertheless, dissipate, as one grows older. Other discourses take the place of narratives that most people find fascinating, while some children may lose interest when different powerful discourses are mastered. In line with this thinking, I suggest that the perceived influence of the teacher, or specially chosen books, may result in temporary changes, but it is not a pointer to a permanent habit that a child does not wish to embrace (Crago, 1985). William and Barry have embraced other powerful discourses that may be permanent within their own social world (Dyson, 1993), or may change over time as they enter into different social worlds.

William’s mother does, however, maintain that the situation is not irreversible since one teacher was able to reverse his non-reading habit for a year, she feels strongly that some of the onus falls on English teachers. She expresses her helplessness in terms of her inability to get her own son to read, yet, like Kevin’s
mother, she does not give up trying. I wish to underscore her sentiment that the teacher may have more persuasive means available, since the classroom is not a casual space, but one in which the learners respond to exhortations and discipline in a more structured way and do things that they would not choose to do in the informal home environment. Leon’s mother echoed this belief by saying that boys need incentives (Extract 19); a notion endorsed by Kevin’s mother (Interview, October 2010):

**Extract 23:** “they need a teacher that is slightly more eccentric so that a subject doesn’t stay one dimensional.”

These parents value a pedagogical space that provides their sons with the culture of literacy that will make a literate citizen of their boys – the type of literacy that will allow each one to meet the demands of the adult workplace with skills drawn from their school experience. It does not, however, mean that the home plays no role in this journey, or is absolved from guiding this discipline. I have argued in Chapter 6 that part of home literacy revolves around have-tos, demonstrating that bedtime stories are part of that discipline that, in later years, changes to reading in bed. Without the structure of non-negotiable bedtime routines, the home literacy practices cannot develop, and school literacy, in turn, is contingent upon disciplines enforced in home literacy.

### 7.6.2 The digital time-eater

I am not contending that it rests wholly upon the teacher to produce a literate adolescent boy. The many layers of literacy learning are far too complex to focus on one aspect only. What I attempt to demonstrate is the importance of the mediating teacher, and what is being taught, and how it is being taught in a class, is shown above as having a profound influence on the attitude to literacy. During my observation in their home (November 2011), I listened with interest to Barry
explaining to his mother that he is “doing quite well at English” despite not being a reader. He clarifies this by saying that his confidence was boosted by his Grade 6 teacher who got him “to think creatively and now he loves creative writing, rather than reading”. The teacher has left an impression on Barry’s literacy ways, even though he is now in with a crowd of boys that do not find reading literacy very attractive (Interview, March 2011):

Extract 24: “I just read a little bit. In Grade 6 I started socialising like ... I got into that group.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>So you still read a little bit in Grade 5?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry:</td>
<td>Ja.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Why, because you were still being encouraged by the teacher, or not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry:</td>
<td>Not really. I just read a little bit. In Grade 6 I started socialising like ... I got into that group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry’s mother:</td>
<td>But I also think there is something else there ... It is not only the socialising. It is also the techno-gadgets ... [Sister] likes techno, but has never engaged addictively with games. Yes, he’s had PC games and he’s played PlayStation games, he’s played X-box games. So you will find [sister] reading in her spare time, whereas Barry will be gaming in his spare time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry:</td>
<td>It’s not like that, Mum. It’s not ‘all’ my spare time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry’s mother:</td>
<td>No, no, no ... I’m just saying that you have an interest in it, where [sister] has zero interest in that game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interaction in this excerpt highlights a number of overlapping issues in terms of the home literacy. As described in Chapter 6, Barry’s home relies more strongly on verbal communication than focusing on book literacy, even though there is evidence of a reading culture from the beautifully arranged bookcases in every room. The members of this family express themselves openly without any fear of retribution. Barry is unconcerned about his admission that he achieved his reading certificates in Grade 4 for both the 50 and the 100-Club, which demonstrates that he can read avidly if he so wishes. Yet he has replaced that drive by preferring to be popular with his peer group: “In Grade 6 I started socialising like ... I got into that group”. Barry’s mother accepts this and chooses to elucidate even further: “It
is not only the socialising. It is also the techno-gadgets”. It seems as though he has no interest in engaging with a book whatsoever, and socialising and computer games take priority. By taking a gendered perspective of Barry and his sister, one realises that both are socialised in the same home, yet her reasoning is so different to his. She is found reading when he is “gaming”, and achieving at school is more important for her than being part of a “social butterfly” group. Barry attempts to justify his position: “Well actually, I want to read, but I run out of time and then it makes me bored”. Running out of time must mean that he has taken up his time with his computer games and has forgotten about reading which is a pastime that does not enter his milieu.

William too, mentioned that he plays a “little bit of TV games. There are a couple of people in my grade who are totally caught up. But if I haven’t got a book and I’ve got nothing else to do, I’ll play some. I’m not on the computer much” (Interview, September 2011). Leon is the exception who does not watch television or play computer games during the week. Each of the other boys in the study admitted to playing computer games most days, but Barry seems to be the only one who “is totally caught up”.

Since my main focus in this section is to understand what makes boys of this age lose interest in reading, I argue that mainly through the strict discipline on the one hand, and relaxed discipline (if there is such a thing) within the home, the boys construct their identities and cultures of literacy. By this I imply that without the time-eating impact of digital media, Leon is able to immerse himself in the print-centric environment that he so loves, while Brian, Mark, Sean, Simon and Kevin seem to regulate themselves and still leave time for reading literacy, once they have had their time on computers. For William and Barry it is different. Words have been replaced by images, and the visual literacy with its animation and interactive and instantaneous messages engages the participants on a different level. Greenfield (2008) suggests that a different identity develops where children expect instant answers as they do when pressing a button on the computer. Alvermann and McLean (2007) point out that pure reading is “quickly becoming just one among several other textual practices vying for young people’s attention”
Barry’s addiction to gaming can thus be seen as replacing the conventional printed text which one traditionally values more highly than playing games on computers. Whether he is engaging with a visual image and analysing experiences and gaining skills by means of these experiences, Barry remains so immersed that he loses interest in what is a necessary skill in terms of pedagogy, whilst he experiences new literacies that have opened up other possibilities for information and communication (Leu et al., 2007). Barry has entered the changing world of literacy learning and is taking advantage of the new literacy knowledge that incorporates a different way of reading and obtaining information.

7.6.3 Sporting recognition

Yet another time-consuming aspect of school life is participation in sport, and one may well ask why I link sport with school life. The point I wish to highlight here is that it is during the latter part of their primary school years in Grades 6 and 7 that boys evolve into important sportsmen. For some boys it becomes a burden in that their sporting prowess provides them with recognition and admiration that any human enjoys. They spend much time on perfecting their talent in order to achieve a higher team or provincial colours in their sport. Some of the boys take the recognition in their stride, whilst others develop an attitude of prominence against which even academic achievement pales into insignificance.

The boys in this case study who excel at sport are Simon, Kevin, Brian, Mark and William. In the same way that they were able to regulate their computer time, however, they seem to fit reading into their busy sport and academic days. Kevin and Brian have the added encumbrance of music that vies for their time. During our interviews, however, only William, who plays competitive golf extramurally, mentioned that sport often keeps him from reading (Interview, September 2011): “I struggle … quite often … to find time to read”. His mother both corroborates and counters that sentiment in the following comment (Interview, June 2011):
Extract 25: “I think it’s an excuse. It’s not the sport.”

William’s mother: But yes, he is extraordinarily busy with his golf, but I don’t think it would have been any different. He still finds time to read the right material, despite all of his, all of his busyness. So, give him Lord of the flies and within a week and a half it was ‘klapped’ (Afrikaans word for finishing quickly). In other words, given the right thing, and he will be riveted. So I think it is an excuse …

William, as an extremely active sportsman, quite probably spends more time practising the various types of sport in which he participates than any of the other seven boys in the study. There is no doubt that he returns home from these events quite late each afternoon, which justifies his mother saying: “yes, he is extraordinarily busy with his golf” and other school sporting events. Kevin, on the other hand, points out that although he is busy with sport at school, he slots in his reading (Interview, June 2011):

Extract 26: “I do do sport, but I read from about 8:00 or 8:30 onwards.”

Researcher: But then you are quite involved in sport. Does that impinge on your reading time or not?
Kevin: No, it doesn’t. I do do sport, but I read from about 8:00 or 8:30 onwards.

What is significant for both William’s mother and Kevin is the realisation that if one wishes to read, there will be time. Kevin fits his daily reading in once he gets to bed, whilst William only does so when he has a riveting book. Sean’s words: “I’ll still have time to read after doing homework, or when you’re just about to go to bed … ” reflect the way in which he determines his own realities and creates his own pleasures. As a reader he pursues his interest, being fully aware that he controls the construction of his own social reality (Wodak, 2001).

The latter two excerpts demonstrate that if there is a reluctance to read a book, there is always a reason for not doing so. “No, I think it’s an excuse. It’s not the sport” clearly justifies a mother’s opinion. Brian’s mother supported this sentiment in these words (Interview, September 2010):

Extract 27: “… it’s a choice to read a lot …”

Brian’s mother: Yeh, it’s not as if they don’t have a lot of other things. They are very busy with the cricket nets down at the bottom and they play
Her view is definitively succinct: “it’s a choice to read a lot” and that no preferable event such as a computer, television, sport or peers will interfere permanently in this process. It does seem, however, that once the significance of the home reading culture is imprinted on a child, reading, like a daily meal, is fitted in somewhere in a busy lifestyle. It is an attitude that develops.

7.6.4 Peer pressure

The essence of a person’s life is not found in what is observed only. Through the conversations with the boys during this study, their perceptions of their world opened up a new perspective into how they experience their lives. As I mentioned above, an attitude develops within the adolescent boys in many areas, and with this in mind, I focus primarily on literacy here, knowing that part of the attitude that feeds into the way in which they view literacy, is determined by how they see themselves and how they fit in with their peers. Since sport plays a defining role in how peers regard one another at school, it is enviably comfortable to be a good sportsman. If, on the other hand, one is a normal participant and does not excel, one has to work much harder to be accepted into the sporty groups. Sean is one of those boys who views sportsmen in the following way (Interview, February 2011):

**Extract 28: “So the sporty boys don’t read?”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>And are you one of many in your class that reads, or only a few?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sean:</td>
<td>Only a few like reading, because they are more sporty ... more balanced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>So the sporty boys don’t read?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean:</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is interesting that Sean regards the “sporty” boys as being “more balanced”. It seems to be a perception that the male primal strength takes precedence over other less obvious talents. Sean does not seem to define himself through his reading literacy indulgence, but rather uses his reading as a means of escaping this reality of his not fitting into the sporty crowd. He associates the in-crowd with non-reading behaviour. He admits, however, that Kevin is one of the exceptions to the rule. Kevin does not grapple with such feelings as he is both a reader and sporty. His ambivalence came across in the next excerpt (Interview, June 2011):

**Extract 29: “... nobody in your class minds that you’re a big reader now?”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>... nobody in your class minds that you’re a big reader now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>And do you go around with any other great readers, or are they mostly non-readers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Some of my friends read; some of them don't.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Mostly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Kind of like half half.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kevin accepts himself as a reader, and has no desire to impress anyone or to keep up with standards that do not suit him. From his sporty perspective, he does not lack the confidence to admit being a reader, while Sean speaks from a platform of no confidence as he regards a sportsman like Kevin as being “more balanced”. The key here is that Sean is entrenched enough in his reading literacy, and will not forfeit this pleasure to fit into any group. The same can be said of Leon, another non-sportsman, who constantly has a book at hand wherever one sees him at school. It is different for Barry and William, however, whose experiences are the opposite of that of Leon and Sean. It is important for Barry to be with “that group”
of “social butterflies” who do not read, and William’s mother describes that attitude as being relevant to her son too (Interview, June 2011):

Extract 30: “… it just becomes uncool to have your nose in a book at school.”

| William’s mother:       | Yes … You see, Jimmy [fictitious name] is going to be a very accomplished sportsman and the rest of his life just takes over … so for boys everything else just becomes more important. There is that element that it just becomes uncool to have your nose in a book at school. Not cool. It is just not cool to have your nose in the book. |

It is significant that this “cool versus uncool” perception of reading only emerged from among the non-readers. This situation begs the question of how this attitude develops, or more appropriately, why it is able to develop. Bourdieu (in Calhoun et al., 2007) provides a means of reflecting on this since his notion of position-taking in social life indicates that actors can make choices that signal their positions. These may include their way of dressing, their hobbies, and their tastes in art and literature. The fact of being in a certain position, however, does not cause a person to adopt the tastes or practices, despite the dictates of the group’s culture of doing things. In other words, there seems to be a perception that the new behaviour is condoned at home for it to become part of the *habitus*. In this study the participants have clearly indicated the position that each of them has adopted in terms of their reading literacy, and each stance has been made from a positon of choice. Leon, Mark and Sean do not mind being termed readers, and it can be said that they have allowed the perception to develop, since they are comfortable in their literacy. Brian, Kevin and Simon, while being readers, have the added comfort that they are exceptional sportsmen who can rely on admiration from their peers in this additional sphere. Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* is not “a set of strict rules about what to do or not to do, or what to like or not like. Instead, it works as a set of loose guidelines that orientate actors” (Calhoun et al., 2007: 261-262). Barry can be seen to have embraced the guidelines of the in-group, but he has done so from a position of choice and acceptance from those at home. I contend that parents have the means to counter the challenges their boys face in terms of undoing the values and culture that were established by them. Just as the mothers of Kevin and Sean never let up on guiding their boys to reading, and
Leon’s parents ban television during the week, and the parents of Mark, Brian and Simon indicate that they would step in if their boys were seen to abuse their television and computer time at the expense of their reading, the two non-readers seem to have the freedom to be “cool”.

7.6.5 **Comment**

Being mindful of the many ways of making literacy meaningful, I wish to suggest that attitude is a key element in wishing to read, and the process is inseparable from rules and discipline. People’s language, thoughts, tastes and dispositions are formed through socialisation into a particular community, in this case the home and the school community in which learners are trained daily to adhere to the rules and regulations set out by those persons who mediate the process (Vygotsky, 1978). In this section I have argued that the loss of interest in reading in some boys is linked to those non-regulatory cultures that are allowed to enter their daily activities. I am not suggesting that parents and teachers, who foist their antiquated notions of discipline onto their boys’ lives, must rigidly control adolescents. I claim that there must not be a total abdication of accountability by parents and teachers at the adolescent stage by allowing children the freedom of total self-expression (Stein & Slonimsky, 2001). Gee (2000) stresses the ways that social order is produced through moment-by-moment interaction, indicating that human thinking is not entirely private, but is mediated by the cultural tools such as the forms of language, technologies, symbols and artefacts that carry certain meanings. This may imply that the boys who perceive themselves as being with the non-reading in-crowd, are in fact in need of guidance by elders who are able to see a more holistic picture of the essential elements of reading. Gee (1991) describes the fact that the human mind is adept at finding patterns, but suggests strongly that a learner must be guided into selecting which patterns to focus on, since the ability to be discerning is still undeveloped. It is thus significant that the boys in the study spoke of losing interest in reading when not urged by teachers or parents (Prinsloo, 2006).
Adolescents seem to react to challenges, and incentives are a prerequisite for reluctant boys (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Sullivan, 2004). The challenges analysed in this study came from parents and teachers who endeavoured to be involved in the boys’ lives, who constantly encouraged certain literacy behaviours, and who engaged the boys in discovering literacy through self-expression in lessons (Snow & Beals, 2006). Involvement in sport, being part of the in-group, and spending much time on digital media and gaming are common factors cited as reasons for wayward behaviour by adolescents (Tierney et al., 2006; Rowsell & Burke, 2009). This may well be the case, yet the readers in the study, who are members of the same peer group, seem to use regulatory measures to organise their way of living (Li, 2011). Since literacy studies accept that literacy varies from situation to situation, and that it depends on the culture of the people who draw from it, it stands to reason that if a particular type of literacy is supported by a community such as the one in which the study was conducted, the community must strive to enable the process (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010). I argued that the parents of this community wish to have high achieving boys, and their home and school literacy practices are created out of a social history that promotes the values, attitudes and awareness which will achieve their goals (Barton, 1994, 2007). The following section will address how home and school congruent literacies are not only expected, but will also contribute to the school reading curricula, and must be promoted.

7.7 Understanding home and school reading curricula

7.7.1 The sameness of home and school culture

Teaching is a cultural and community practice, and schools need to be considered as being places that draw children from a particular community in which varying cultures exist. What children take from school culture depends largely on what they bring to the classroom. In my analysis of home literacy data in Chapter 6, I
have shown that the way in which a child experiences literacy with his/her family, is a strong determinant of the way in which he/she judges and utilises school pedagogy (Henderson & Berla, 1996; Mostert & Wikan, 2008). Skinner (2002) expresses concern over the low worth and value attached to parenting in the last two decades due to increased working hours, translating into less time spent with families, friends and the community. His unease in this respect relates to parents having to divide home time between relationships, children and sleep, which, in turn, influences the quality of spiritual investment into family discourse. This is certainly a reality for the boys in this case study, and yet the analysis showed that the parents made time to pass on to their children the culture and values of the home. It may not always have been both parents, but one of the two parents in each home spent time with the children. In four of the eight families both parents worked, yet there was a concerted input into creating literacy-rich boys, even though literacy practices were mostly created by the mothers. The parents’ actions reflect the expectation of their socio-economic status to prepare their sons for success, since underachievement in boys, relative to girls, has given rise to arguments regarding which boys are at risk, as the gender disparity tends to be greatest among those from less favourable socio-economic backgrounds (Martino et al., 2004).

In her study to determine what makes a difference in the children’s early experiences of school literacy lessons, Comber (2000: 39) suggested that the extent to which “children take up what teachers make available to them is inextricably connected with the repertoires of practices and knowledges that these children already possess”. Since the children in her study were at school entry level, their literacy experiences were predominantly from their homes. I therefore argue that home literacy and parent involvement shape a child into responding to successful pedagogic engagement. While home influence does not stop when the child enters school, an understanding of home literacy is nonetheless crucial to the success of the mutual relationship that should exist between school and home. Studies attest to the strong correlation between family literacy and success at school (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Pretorius, 1996; Weizman & Snow, 2001; Kajee,
2011), and I want to consider some of the literacy practices observed to which the boys were exposed at home that could contribute to academic learning.

As I mentioned above, teaching is a cultural practice and takes on the forms of traditional behaviours that are characteristic of the community from which it draws its learners (Li, 2011). In exploring the home, Bachelard (1994) suggests that our perceptions of home shape our thoughts, our memories and our dreams. The space and place can be assessed in terms of their potential to stimulate individuals (Gallagher, 1993). The boys in this study have been reared in places where books and reading are valued, and their spaces are not filled with anxieties of joblessness, dole and poverty, which may have all kinds of behavioural consequences (Bachelard, 1994). In selecting the participants for this case study, I actively excluded different language users (all eight have English as their home language), boys from different cultures and ethnic groups, and boys from socio-economically deprived homes. The eight boys are from one school, yet, despite the numerous non-variables, there is still an indication that the varying ways of doing at home have fed into cultural capital that caused a downturn in reading interest in two of the eight boys. This, in combination with some of the ways of doing at school, served to create an acceptance of the downturn. An investigation of these factors will serve to answer the research question:

How can an understanding of home literacies contribute to school reading curricula?

### 7.7.2 The meaning of literacy at home

The analysis of the home data in Chapter 6 revealed that daily literacy acts and events in the home shaped the expectations for particular literacy practices to become entrenched in the family ways. These included the bedtime stories: “but they can’t go to sleep without a story” and that “they demand it” (Leon’s mother, November 2010), which become routinely practised habits in that “you would read
them and re-read, and re-read them again and again” (Leon’s father, November 2010). The constant story-telling stimulated the boys’ imagination in which Leon thought he was *The sorcerer’s apprentice* and commanded the broom to stop moving, and his little brother pretended to be Asterix with his pants pulled high up over his tummy (Field notes, October 2011). It is not only the imagination that is stirred, but also the routine reading of the newspaper in this home that recalls Gee’s (1992) notion that the human mind seeks out patterning, of which repetition is a clear example. The children in this family associated strongly with the repetitive daily exposure to the type of literacy in their home:

Extract 31: “Now Leon starts telling us about things he read in the paper.”

| Leon’s mother: | Ja ... the other things are the magazines, do you remember that? We get the newspaper every night and they sit ... and myself ... and pore over the newspaper, and now there’s a fight when it comes to the comic section. |
| Leon’s father: | Yes, that’s when it started ... the best part of the newspaper was comics because it was funny. |
| Researcher: | ... to share as a family ... |
| Leon’s father: | Yes. We started to read comics ... then, um, and from that it has spread. “Are there any comics in the paper, Dad?” “Yes, *Hagar* on page 3”. |
| Leon’s mother: | Now Leon starts telling us about things he read in the paper. |

(Interview, November 2010).

The entire family has become involved in sharing the newspaper. This family practice has evolved into a routine habit around which there is family discourse (Gee, 2000). Gallagher (1993) suggests that in exploring the home, it becomes apparent that this space carries the basic components of the lived world in that it is the place where familiar occurrences are experienced. Gallagher (1993: 161) continues by stating that just as places can be “assessed in terms of their potential to stimulate, individuals can be described in terms of their capacity to be aroused”. There is, therefore, a relationship between the space where a child is reared and the behaviour that emanates from his/her experiences within this space. The experiences comprise repetitive actions, words, readings and communication. The words “[A]lways” and “every night” indicate the regularity of this patterning, and
the total involvement of the entire family: “they sit ... and myself ... and pore over the newspaper”. What started off as a pleasurable time to look at the comics, has become a symbol of family togetherness, but also alludes to the binary discourse that has developed through the bulletin board which is filled with articles from the newspaper, to which the grandparents have contributed, and serves as a source of interest and discourse around the dining table. These practices are framed by what Street (2003) refers to as the socially constructed values of "knowledge: the ways in which people address reading, and writing [that] are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being" (2003: 77-78). Through the constructed values and conscious involvement with their children, this family is providing a “‘toolkit’ of habits, skills and styles from which people construct ways to organize their behavior in concrete situations” (Li, 2011: 516). Further examples of interaction via books and newspapers are found in the homes of Mark, Kevin, Sean, Simon and Brian. These patterns of literacy discourse embody the significance of the reading and communication process that has developed as a given in these boys’ homes.

Literacy for these boys and their families mean becoming linguistically aware:

**Extract 32:** “I do like creative writing. It’s easier because when you read you have lots of ideas in your mind, and then it’s easier to put them down on paper.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sean:</th>
<th>I do like creative writing. It’s easier because when you read you have lots of ideas in your mind, and then it’s easier to put them down on paper.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Interesting. And ... and ... and you feel as though you are benefiting in terms of your world view, or...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean:</td>
<td>Ja ... general knowledge, world view, and vocabulary, maybe, because if you read big books, they obviously come with bigger words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(IInterview, February 2011)

Literacy for the boys means developing an understanding of metaphor and symbolism:
Extract 33: “I never really got that until recently.”

**Simon’s mother:** At about five he started picking up ... looking up ... I distinctly remember him looking at billboards and making sense of the words, and he was about five, so, in Simon’s case he almost learned to read by osmosis, but I do remember his absolute love for the Asterix books - I think that it was very much the need to understand what was being said - the visual pictures.

**Simon:** With Asterix ... I never really understood most of it until a couple of years ago, things like the village names were something something -ix , and they have these words that mean something like ...

**Simon’s mother:** Cacophonix.

**Simon:** Like Cacophonix for the bard or the fish guy - Unhygienix ... I never really got that until recently.

(Interview, August 2011)

Literacy for these boys means that it is important to have recognition for and discourse on their writing:

**Extract 34: “Good. You can read it if you want.”**

**Sean’s mother:** How is your story coming on?

**Sean:** Good. You can read it if you want. (She takes it from him to read it).

**Sean’s mother:** What is this?

**Sean:** Cherie. I just don’t know how to spell it. (She spells it for him).

**Sean’s mother:** Where’s the dictionary? It’s a nice story. You’ve got lovely adjectives and flowery bits. I am not good at stories.

**Sean:** We’ve got to type it out by tomorrow. I’m just thinking what to write.

**Sean’s mother:** Did you tell [researcher] that you got a Kindle? (Then talks about the books they bought in the bookshop in London where she got books of her choice, and the conversation around books with her husband).

**Sean:** I have finished my story. (He gives it to me to read. It is really good).

(Field notes, September 2011)

Literacy for them means constructing a world view:

**Extract 35: “... he’s got one sister who is quite an avid reader and a broad perception ... “**

**Brian’s mother:** Um, out of [father’s] family he’s got one sister who is quite an avid reader and a broad perception, and you can see it in her children - how
they’ve gone on and studied further – it seems to make a big difference.

(Interview, September 2011)

Literacy means being together over a book, and literacy learning taking place:

**Extract 36:** “He cuddles up to her. She is soft-spoken and very patient. He pages while she explains the vocabulary.”

I sit at the table in the kitchen area; they sit on a couch with an Afrikaans textbook (*Tande* by Jaco van Tonder). She suggests that they read the book. He is happy, saying the book is “so cool”.

She reads a page and explains sentence by sentence. He asks what it means and she explains. He cuddles up to her. She is soft-spoken and very patient. He pages while she explains the vocabulary. Then he reads the next page and explains each sentence to her, and waits for confirmation from her.

**Mark’s mother:** Do you understand that? **Mark:** Not really. **Mark’s mother:** Well, think about it. She refers to what happened before and coaxes an answer from him.

(Field notes, October 2011)

Literacy means pursuing the patterned literacy habits already established:

**Extract 37:** “… so I do some stories to my younger brothers now when my dad or mum is too busy.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>You had lots of bedtime stories when you were younger, but obviously not any more.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leon:</strong></td>
<td>No, there are too many people in our family now … so I do some stories to my younger brothers now when my dad or mum is too busy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Interview, November 2010)

and

**Leon’s father:** … I will lie on the couch and read, and um … and, to an extent, the boys … because reading is something that is happening, the boys read.

(Interview, November 2010)

Literacy for the family means understanding the power of language:
Extract 38: “... and I do think that the richness of your thoughts can come with greater scope in language ...”

Leon’s mother: I don’t know, maybe because of the reading, he is that much more capable ...

Leon’s father: There is an interesting debate about whether you can think without language and ... and there’s a theory that says that language is the product of thought rather than the other way round, and I do think that the richness of your thoughts can come with greater scope in language ... better vocabulary, better understanding, better experience and better empathy for the things you read and synthesise ... um ...

(Interview, November 2010)

There are powerful lessons to be gained from the way in which these families view their home literacies. The home literacy is regarded as a defining stepping stone in providing power for the members in their out-of-home positions. Leon’s father regards the power of language as a strong determinant of successful functioning in his social world, resulting in his endeavours to ingrain linguistic proficiency in his boys. The key to these vignettes that provide a window to their home literacy environment is that each literacy practice is goal-directed at empowering the boys’ skills, habits, attitudes and confidence (Moje, 2004). These practices provide a means of constructing the boys’ sociocultural worlds that stem from the wishes and beliefs of the community in which they grow up. Their ideology and discourses are embedded in the home culture since these are characteristic of the talking and writing and acting towards the people of their social group and family. Underlying the discourse of the families is a desire to achieve and sustain a knowledge base that the parents have attained, and endeavour to pass on to their children. The power of that knowledge is embedded in their talking and writing and reading. Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) believe that children acquire a world view as they learn a language, and language and literacy cannot be viewed in isolation. Children, therefore, learn the innate values attached to their home literacy practices to which they respond through parental encouragement and motivation (Teale & Sulzby, 1991). Since I have not drawn boys from varying cultures, I argue that the initial acculturation into their particular brand of home literacy does not differ greatly from the culture of The Hilltop School, which they learn to understand and accept as having similar practices to those that are available to them at home.
Having had mediation and involvement from parents who constantly encourage competence, the same is expected from teachers who take over the mediating role as co-constructors of the boys’ in-school literacy (McCarthy, Brennan, & Vecchiarello, 2011). The in-school knowledge learning takes place at different levels each year, to which the learners adapt as they mature, and the role of the school in achieving literacy is expected to be consistent with this attainment. In Extracts 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, I argued that the classroom experiences of learners being coaxed into self-discovery and expression elicited a positive response from them. The interactive communication and incentives fed into the way individuals associated with, and participated in, literacy. Even reluctant readers such as William responded to challenges, which, when the encouragement dissipated into conventional teaching, reverted to a lack of interest in reading literacy once again.

I therefore argue that literacy practices that are set up at home should be sustained by means of consistent motivation and involvement not only at home, but should be continued in the formal school milieu. Although having particular literacy events such as reading periods in the school that have been set up, is not sufficient to promote literacy participation. These practices can only demand active participation if they are enforced and the learners sense the urgency of having effective reading periods.

**Extract 39:** “There was still a scramble for a reader at the start of preparation ...”

| There was the usual request for a book from the library by five of the eleven boys in the class. This was ever so disturbing to those who started reading immediately. I say this as one boy banged against his friend’s desk just to be funny. Another one pretended to have a sore foot and hobbled out. This caused much mirth from his friends. They returned in dribbles and as the door opened, everyone automatically looked up to see who was entering. (Field notes, July 2011) |

| and |

| Nothing had changed the entire year. There was still a scramble for a reader at the start of preparation class by the non-readers, while the readers got a book from their bags and started reading immediately. (Field notes, September 2011) |

These comments from my field notes highlight the noticeable lack of urgency that prevails in terms of reading, which relegates the process to a pastime of less
importance. What is evident in this study of the reading periods is firstly, the indifference evident in many of the boys towards the reading process during these periods, and secondly that there is a distinct lack of discipline in urging the learners to be prepared and to participate in the reading classes. These issues are relevant to this study in that these experiences contribute to their practices and help to shape their attitude to reading (Bharuthram, 2006). I therefore argue that in the same way those bedtime stories within the home became non-negotiable practices in literacy adventures, so too the in-school experiences need to be infused with a sense of urgency. Children are most perceptive in sensing what is of value to the adults surrounding them, and are able to manipulate situations to suit them (McKool & Gespass, 2009). The reading period is a major literacy event in school which helps to set a pattern of behaviour that indeed ought to be adhered to, and ought to take on the earnest quality attributed to the core subject like Mathematics, English and Science.

7.7.3 Comment

This section investigated the research question that served to illuminate how an understanding of home literacies can contribute to school reading curricula. Home literacy is often discounted as irrelevant in formal pedagogy, yet studies have emphasised the importance of the type of literacy with which a child enters school (Heath, 1983; Comber, 2000; Mostert & Wikan, 2008). It is therefore not wise to ignore what ammunition home literacy provides for children, since the evidence from the data has demonstrated that strong literacy skills are built up and sustained by practices within family surroundings. I have argued that the key to literacy enrichment at home lies in the parents’ disciplined adherence to daily routine practices, in active involvement in time and space, showing interest in and discussing reading material, investment in communication and togetherness. Teachers who take the place of the parents cannot emulate these intimate moments at school, but I have demonstrated that those teaching strategies that engage learners and motivate them towards self-expression, promote in-school
literacy enjoyment and learning. I have also argued that, for effective pedagogy to take place in the classroom, a learner should perceive to be empowered and challenged to produce work that takes place through structured interactional dialogue with the teacher.

As a teacher in class, one soon recognises the power of the type of literacy that particular boys bring to school, or as Bourdieu (1991) puts it, their *habitus* with its sets of dispositions acquired in daily life that incline the boys to act in individual ways, together with their cultural, symbolic and linguistic capital. One is often aware of the parental involvement that has helped to create that powerful literacy awareness within the child. This ought to be harnessed, studied and emulated in a classroom if it is seen to have such influence on pedagogic performance (Weizman & Snow, 2001). In order to offer the same level of literacy to which they have been exposed, and to ensure congruence between home and school, the responsibility lies with the school to have closer contact with the homes in creating an understanding of their individual expectation, instead of teaching in isolation from the capital that the boys bring from their brand of home-literacy (Heath, 1983; Johnson, 2010; McCarthy et al., 2011). A mutual grasp of the knowledge base at home and school may even inform homes that lack the level of literacy valued at school (Prinsloo, 2006; Kajee, 2011). The questions that may be asked by parents and teachers could be the basis of their literate practices, and these refer to the practices that are used for pleasure, communicative purposes, social and cultural action, and knowledge, and particularly to what extent linguistic dispositions are strengthened.

7.8 Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter I explored the in-school reading practices of the boys at The Hilltop School. I have shown how the teacher’s personality and type of pedagogy can translate into a positive experience for the learners, whether the literacy activities took place in a structured classroom or in the less formal library environment. In these instances the boys responded gainfully to an interactive but
disciplined approach, as opposed to their time-squandering experiences in the less structured “silent reading” periods in afternoon classes. The encouragement and sense of regulation seemed to be the factors that raised the class and library literacy to times of enjoyment, and contributed to the literate culture of each boy (Brandt & Clinton, 2002), while each one took from these experiences in his own way (Gee, 2002). The stance and attitude of the mediating teacher (as in the parental influence discussed in Chapter 6) can therefore be said to foster a strong predisposition towards texts and reading.

In the second section of this chapter I examined the way in which the literacy practices in the formal environment of the school influence the boys’ reading. The data revealed that those teachers with goal-directed strategies and passionate involvement in the literacy process enticed the learners into active participation, while the unstructured classes with little teacher involvement resulted in time-wasting and manipulation by non-readers. The mutual interaction between teacher and boy seemed to have a scaffolding influence on the boys wanting to attain higher levels of performance in written work (Atkinson et al., 2008). In the same way the attitude to reading changed when there was deliberate encouragement from the teacher, thereby fostering a healthy predisposition towards books (Gee, 2000; Jones & Myhill, 2004).

The data in section three revealed how the lack of interaction, guidance and involvement from teachers and parents contributed to the boys losing interest in their books. Yet other learners reacted keenly to challenges and incentives, and constant support and guidance, turned two reluctant readers into voracious readers, revealing that the non-reading habit may not be a permanent one, but merely a phase (Crago, 1985). The contrasting loss of appeal for some adolescents was attributed to being part of the in-group or sporting group for whom reading became “uncool”. Further reasons for wayward behaviour were addictively spending time on gaming and on digital media, whilst their peers were regulated and given limited time on TV and computers. The positions that were taken up by each boy were through their own choice; a position that Bourdieu (1990a)
describes as individual choices that signal their positions reflecting their dress, their tastes and their ways that they have taken on as part of the *habitus*.

The final section of this chapter addressed the importance of understanding the type of literacy with which a child enters school, and the evidence from the data has shown that strong literacy skills are built up and sustained in family surroundings (Teale & Sulzby, 1991; Comber, 2000). I have argued that the way in which each member of this social group has been socialised, has contributed to his behavioural patterns, and the extent to which his motivation has been affected by his home, his family, his friendships, and the school which he attends.

The literacy practices that are prevalent in the social class found in the private school from which the case study emanates, provide avenues of power and thought that are promoted in the learners’ formal education. Reading and writing are cultural tools that evoke reflection, and are part of the way in which the boys from this class live (Bhabha, 1994). The discipline and encouragement that foster a similar culture of reading in the schools and home ought to be harnessed and emulated, since so much of literacy is embedded in the overlapping practices of home and school (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). The responsibility lies with the school to maintain closer contact with the homes, since an understanding of expectations may develop a co-operative approach between the parents and teachers. This could serve to inform homes of the level of literacy expected at school, and questions by parents may aid teachers in analysing their own pedagogic approach. I have concluded that reading literacy is social, interactive and dependent on the multilayered influence of the knowledgeable adult whose approach largely determines how reading literacy learning takes place in the child in both the home and school milieu (Vygotsky, 1978).

In the final chapter I will reflect on the findings of this research in terms of the way in which home, family and school literacies influence sustained reading in boys. The findings are contextualised within the key research questions framed in Chapter 1 which I set out to investigate. I will furthermore demonstrate how the study
contributes to knowledge, and I will point out the limitations and concerns that may affect further research.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

You may have tangible wealth untold;
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.
Richer than I you can never be –
I had a mother who read to me.

Strickland, Gillilan (1869 – 1954)

8.1 Introduction

The main focus of this chapter is to reflect on the findings of the study of home, family and school literacies, and their influence on sustained reading in boys. I will begin by reflecting on the research findings that arose from the research questions, while looking at the recommendations that the study makes to understand the culture of literacy learning for boys. Finally, the study will consider the limitations and implications for study that may inform further research.

8.2 Reflections on the findings

The concern at the outset of this study was to address the disquiet that is prevalent when boys’ literacy habits are considered in education. I argued that the attitude to a purely feminine or a masculine approach to literacy teaching in formal education has changed. From a concern over gender equity, initiatives in school, curriculum and reading materials were originally intended to resolve equity problems that appear to have been withheld from female students. Literacy assessments have, however, shown that females now outperform males in all areas of reading and writing (as demonstrated by the literature in Chapter 1), and that males are disadvantaged in literacy by the time they complete high school (Gambell & Hunter, 1999). As gender is a category that is strongly emphasised by research, and, furthermore, the different ways in which the genders connect with literacy (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Ballew & Gurian, 2003; Clark & Burke, 2012), the study, nevertheless, did not set out to make a gender comparison. The focus in this thesis was on a purposive sample of 8 boys from one school that draws students from upper-middle
class families. I questioned whether all 8 boys benefited equally from their literacy teaching within their homes and at school. Even though each set of parents recognised literacy as an essential cultural and community practice (Gee, 1996), the variables in enforcing a discipline of reading and communication in the home, delivered a different outlook to literacy engagement in each of the boys.

The non-variables pertained specifically to the understanding that each boy came from a home with a strong reading culture. To this end I examined the home reading practices that would shed light on the perceived resistance to reading literacy, which is the underlying assertion in my study. Drawing on the ideological model of literacy that starts from the premise that literacy is a social practice, I was interested in the way that each family constructed its own individual culture and ways of doing from which the boys were able to draw (Street, 2003). The findings of this study reveal the ways in which the family in each home directed their sons along a particular literacy path that impelled them to read, or otherwise, allowed their sons to be ambivalent to reading once bedtime stories gave way to individual reading.

In order to clarify and elucidate the process in the home, Chapter 5 of this thesis provided a vignette of each home as background to the home practices that serve to explain the subsidiary research questions:

- What literacy practices and events in the home influence the boys to read?
- How do these practices influence boys’ reading?

These vignettes were taken from field notes recorded during observation in each of the eight homes. The observation in the homes, and later in the classrooms at school, made me aware that a myriad fragments of literacy feed into their education, and without situating these boys in their individual homes, their literacy cannot make sense, since these are the spaces and people that mediate their literacy learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The differences in the ways that each family committed to critical literacy, or the social contextualisation of language practices, effectively determined the literacy outcome for their son. It was apparent that the parents were aware that critical literacy, which necessitates particular engagement with the politics of language practices, socio-economic status, gender and religion, was a strong
The socio-economic status of a group of boys from a private, suburban school was my positioning in this study in order to view the social and language practices that are entwined in the home and school. The family discourses around the house, and at the table reflected their type of communication, the importance of words, understanding turn-taking, interactions, topics that were discussed, how their thoughts were directed, and how their involvement with, and attitudes to, books developed and influenced their actions. The homes that reflected the most effective literacy influence were those in which the family was wholly focused on creating a strong literacy environment. Since language practices are not value-free, access to these powerful literacy practices provided the boys with motivation to pursue that particular home culture. These were also the homes in which the parents cognitively engaged in book sharing, book discussions, family discourse around the dining-room table, and had distinctive rules about reading, TV and computer times, having dictionaries available around the house for instant usage, and not only having newspapers, magazines and books around the house, but also showing an interest in the boys’ reading. These data gave overlapping views of family discourse that provided evidence that the intention behind practices in the home do not automatically become part of the children’s world, but that the content of the literacy enculturation and the means of implementation have a powerful influence. The analysis demonstrated that the reading literacy process was clearly a process in which parents and their children became wholly immersed, and ensured a continuation of the reading culture, whereas an approach of incidental literacy engagement had the opposite outcome.

8.2.1 The home

In Chapter 6 I placed emphasis on the practices in the homes that contribute to the accumulation of literacy experiences that foment ideas, thoughts and instinctive habits in the boys. My focus was on socialised individuals from a high-income group and the traditions that have been created in their lives. Since the 8 boys in the case study were exposed to Bernstein’s (1971) elaborated code of language usage and
strong literacy participation by parents, it was natural for each boy to associate with
the political and social aspects of identity that were embodied in their particular
home culture. I viewed the home as the primary space for literacy participation (Gee,
2000) that informed on the reading and writing behaviours that typify the families. In
(1996, 2000, 2010) and Prinsloo (2006), who view literacy as a social practice
embedded in the cultural context, the home was a significant factor in understanding
the literacy orientation of each individual child. In my analysis of the data in the
home, there were elements that emerged to a greater or lesser extent in each home,
and became the structure through which I viewed my enquiry. Each of the research
questions were therefore viewed with the following elements in mind:

- discipline;
- guidance;
- interaction;
- encouragement; and
- attitude.

The first research question in this chapter asked:

- What are boys’ out-of-school reading practices?

The practices in each of these eight print-rich homes initially started with a strict
bedtime reading routine that established a reading culture within each of these
spaces. The eight families were disciplined in enforcing this practice until the boys
became individual readers. These reading moments were the first steps towards
family bonding and using writing as a means of interacting. The moments also
provided the type of linguistic knowledge that the parents valued. This interactive
process clearly demonstrated the view held by these upper-middle class families on
reading (and texts in general) not being neutral, but by their efforts in teaching critical
reading, their offspring were provided with an understanding how texts allow critique,
debate and language development. The interviews showed the concern of two
parents who actively guided this process, by having dictionaries available in every
room of the house so that they were immediately accessible when needed, whilst
others were encouraged to talk around the dinner table and during family moments as
part of the importance placed on literacy development of each boy (Snow & Paez, 2004). This kitchen-table culture that readily generates linguistic interaction, is in line with the work of Vygotsky for whom the most important cultural instrument was speech (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991), and I therefore argued that the dinner table where interactive speech takes place, is a significant locale in which the groundwork is laid down for parents to mediate, and to instil their views on social processes and expectations (Wertsch, 1985). Valuable data was gathered during these times around the boys’ dinner tables. There was constant guidance and encouragement for children to be part of the family discourse, and opinions on books, events and news were valued. The parents were careful to ensure that books and magazines were made available for easy access so that opportunities for shared reading could be created. Each of these parents actively promoted reading literacy in their homes, which, the parents realised, represented their context for literacy learning. The way in which parents were involved was a clear reflection of their perception of how literacy should function in their own homes, and this seemed to influence the boys’ attitude to reading. As home is the location of culture in which political and social aspects are constantly expressed, the power of language and the importance it holds for the family, influence the thinking of each child - which was clear in the literacy engagement of the readers.

A further point of departure in Chapter 6 was to investigate:
- What literacy practices and events in the home influence the boys to read?
I argue consistently in this study that the parents are the pivotal determinant of the type of literacy that the boys carry with them. The practices that the parents have established in their own homes have been the practices that are a legacy from their parents. This chain-linking from grandparents to parents to sons can be perceived as an encouraging stimulus when considering that one of the Grade 7 boys in the study still persuades his grandmother to read to him, while another remembers the “tree fairy” stories that grandmother told about the big tree on the farm, or grandparents taking an interest in the family bulletin board by contributing articles for discussion. The importance of literacy learning was therefore gleaned from the elders in the family
and pursued by their children. I argued that the initial bedtime stories provided the routine patterning (Gee, 2010), while each home supplied many books either from the bookshop or the library, and two reluctant readers progressed into reading avidly through this process, while another was guided into re-reading *Harry Potter* to gain understanding of the dark side of the story in order to receive the following book in the series. By means of the parents’ actions and guidance, these boys take on the attitude of the parents and the way that they view literacy, and the boys succumb to the choice that has been made within the household to connect effectively to the culture of the upper middle-class community, and what the parents deem as good citizenship.

In seeking to understand the research question:

- How do these practices influence boys’ reading? I argued that the more the family is involved in the literacy process, the more the boy’s interest in the reading process is stimulated. An example can be found in the bulletin board in one home, which has become a key literacy attraction for the entire family (including grandparents). It originated from reading the newspapers during which time the boys started to take an interest in the cartoons, and later articles of interest. The family discourse around these articles is interesting and generates much enthusiasm. Of interest to me as the researcher was that this practice was not a phase that was to lapse – they continually take interest in the board that is situated on the wall next to the dinner table, and the family was disciplined enough to replace articles and to file the old ones since they come up in discussion at table. For this particular family, creating an interest in reading was clearly important, and they would go to the extent of creating an atmosphere in keeping with the story by reading by torchlight in the dark passage. Snow (2002) claims that research on comprehension suggests that visualisation is critical in helping children to enter books and to experience deep pleasure. She explains that the better readers are able to take in detail, be in the book, and grasp words. The involved parents make these moments possible for their children by enacting scenes and being in a position to supply books that will enable this process to continue on other occasions. The data thus reveal that these parents value
literacy and lead by example. The boys are guided from lower functions to the more intellectualised functioning that, without the interest of the parents, will not take place (Vygotsky, 1986). The skills that are gleaned by the boys from their literacy environment, give them the opportunities to use an elaborated language code that Bernstein (1971) describes as the decontextualised language of the upper middle-class language users. The boys draw on the politics that surround literacy acquisition and learn to value intelligences that provide them with abstract thinking. The space in which a rich literacy engagement takes place is, therefore, contingent upon the socio-economic status of a family, and the heritage of the habits that children internalise in their socialisation.

With reference to literacy studies, reading theory, and my data, it became profoundly clear that the way that families view their world cannot be divorced from reading and writing within the context of the home (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). It is evident that a strong correlation exists between the sets of practices, and the symbolisation and the value given to these practices in the home. The subtle differences in the way that each family applies reading literacy for specific purposes, feed into the kinds of attitude of each boy. It was thus found that the greatest variables appeared in guiding and disciplining literacy. I demonstrated that bedtime stories did not automatically translate into keen reading, but merely sowed the seed for reading literacy, but other aspects such as restricted television and technology time, seem to have had success in encouraging reading as a pastime. In the homes where there was free access to television and computers, and in those homes where the gadgets became time-eaters, there was clear evidence of loss of interest in reading. This view partly answered the research question:

- Why do some boys lose interest in reading as they reach the upper primary school stage?

Daily routine in the homes, especially the ones in which the routines were strictly monitored by the parents, was conducive to slotting in moments of reading, which did not take place in the more casual homes where the practices were not daily lived experiences. The literacy moments revolved around the family times at table where
the family experienced time of talking, discussing, creating space in which self-expression is valued – and these are the practices valued by the boys and emulated by them (Weizman & Snow, 2001) since it was evident that by taking up both a supportive and guiding position, parents were able to drive the literacy process.

8.2.2 The school

The first research question that was addressed in Chapter 7 was:

- What are boys’ in-and-out-of-school reading practices?

In changing focus from home to school, I argued in Chapter 7 that the teachers are the determinants of whether learners learn, since they are (like the parents in the home) the pivotal influences in literacy learning in the formal academic environment. I demonstrated that, even though home literacy is often discounted in formal pedagogy, studies have emphasised the importance of the type of literacy with which a child enters school (Heath, 1983; Comber, 2000; Mostert & Wikan, 2008), and home literacy learning lies at the core of knowledge teaching by the parents who prepare their children for later success. The discussion on home literacy in section 8.2.1 therefore demonstrated that the eight boys in the case study were well positioned for school success, bringing with them cultural values and family socio-economic backgrounds that were similar to that of the school. Data of the in-school literacy reading practices were analysed to determine the role of schooling in achieving literacy success.

The analysis of my data reveals that the same elements of literacy teaching that emanated for the homes, prevailed in the class situation. Discipline, guidance, interaction, encouragement and the development of a positive attitude in the learners, were the cornerstones of the library lessons. The librarian’s structured classes seemed to evoke a positive response from the boys, and her encouragement and constant guidance even engaged the reluctant readers. In contrast to this, a different attitude developed in the unstructured, casual “silent reading” periods after school. I argued that much of the wish to engage in literacy emanates from a
position in which the participants are guided, and casual handling lacks the underlying features that made home literacy and the library literacy practices pleasurable. I pointed out that encouragement and the sense of discipline that underpinned the literacy participation in the library was absent during the reading periods, which served to sanction the attitude taken during casual reading. My argument is therefore that reading is social, it is interactive, and it happens through mediation by a teacher who fosters a healthy disposition towards books.

A further question that was addressed in this section was:

- What formal and informal school literacy practices influence boys to read?
- How do these practices influence them?

The data on the formal and informal school literacy practices relate to the way in which teachers engage with literacy teaching, since their approach determines what learners take away from a lesson (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004). I have argued that goal-directed strategies and passionate involvement in literacy pedagogy empower the learners, in the same way as when that the parents in the home practised their version of literacy. Since reading is seen as interactive, it takes place through the strict mediation of a teacher who fosters a healthy disposition towards books. In my discussion on the data I pointed out that the teacher creates the type of space to which a class can relate, and I suggest that the teacher in that space holds literacy culture in his/her hands, since children gladly associate with encouraging ways of learning. The data collected in the Afrikaans class, and during the interactive English class, were examples of formal situations that enabled boys to respond and take part in enjoyable pedagogical discourse, and literacy practices in the library comprised healthy discourse on books, listening to stories, and being challenged to read in various informal ways. I argued that the involvement, guidance and discipline in these particular spaces acted as incentives for the boys to embrace the literacy practices, and to associate with reading.
The following research question was partly addressed in the data analysis of the home, but has relevance for school space as well:

- Why do some boys lose interest in reading as they reach the upper primary school stage?

In the same way that the boys took advantage of non-regulation at home to spend time on technology, so too I have argued that the loss of interest in reading in some boys is linked to non-regulatory cultures that are allowed to enter their daily activities. The data showed that the boys enjoyed being guided by teachers towards realising the Vygoskyan Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1986), since it was evident that incentives are prerequisites for reluctant readers (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Sullivan, 2004). If the reluctant reader is not steered towards an appropriate book, he does not seem to mind if he does not have a book, and lacks the motivation to find one. In contrast, a keen reader pre-empts situations since he organises a book with the view of having reading material when the occasion arises. I argued that, other than the lack of motivation, there are further situations that can be ascribed to reasons for loss of interest in reading: these comprise involvement in sport, and spending much time on digital media and gaming which are causes cited for wayward behaviour by adolescents (Rowsell & Burke, 2009), yet I have argued that the readers in the case study use regulatory measures to organise their way of living (Li, 2011). In my discussion I also pointed to peer pressure as a determinant of loss of interest in reading, since membership of a gang or an in-group is clearly anti-intellectual. As Barry demonstrated, his in-group has no interest in books, despite the understanding that books contain knowledge and form the essence of their home and school culture. I argue that the way in which Barry’s family transmitted their casual commitment to literacy, has influenced this boy not to internalise the importance of reading literacy in a durable way. I further argue that the reality of these home experiences contributed to Barry being more susceptible to the influence of his non-reading group of friends. Barry’s disengagement from reading can, therefore, not be ascribed to his gender, or his class, but to the way that he has internalised an external reality in his socialisation.
How can an understanding of home literacies contribute to school reading curricula?

The data indicated that whilst recognising the rich capital that these particular boys brought from their brand of home literacy, the teaching takes place in a classroom with many literacies contained in that space. I have demonstrated that the boys in this study are from well-resourced homes in which they have easy access to books and Kindles. The spaces of privilege that these boys occupy, can in no way be compared to the situation of the greater population. My research therefore focused on privileged boys who were able to continue the culture of the home within their school. The expectations of the books, Kindles and other technologies are fundamental to their milieu, and are the symbols of their aspirations. Any understanding of what literacy exposure the boys have in their homes, and of the culture of learning and reading that the parents expect within the school space to emulate their own, serves to inform school literacy aspirations.

My analysis shows that it is important to understand the type of literacy with which a child enters school, and the evidence from the data has shown that strong literacy skills are built up and sustained in family surroundings. I argued that the discipline and encouragement that will foster a similar culture of reading in the schools ought to be harnessed and emulated, and that the responsibility lies with the school to maintain closer contact with the homes, since an understanding of expectations may create a co-operative approach between the parents and teachers. To ensure congruence between school and home, the school should be proactive in ensuring closer contact with the homes towards creating an understanding of mutual expectations. The questions asked by parents and teachers may inform their literate practices for pleasure, communication, social and cultural interaction, knowledge, and particularly how linguistic dispositions may be strengthened. Promoting co-construction of literacy ideology between school and home may be seen as impractical, yet it can be driven by an enthusiastic “librarian” or “English teacher”, and can be regarded as support in this era of working parents and au pairs who help with homework. Reading literacy may provide that positive link that may educate the child, teach the teacher and guide the parent. As the research has shown, the spaces...
in which the boys are educated are intrinsically tied to reading and reading development, which has shown to have direct relevance to achievement.

8.3 Limitations of the study

This discussion begins by pointing to the limitations of the study with an acknowledgment that the case study was conducted in a socio-economic and gender context that does not allow the generalisation of findings to be applicable to all levels of the parallel cultures of education that exist in South African schools. I pointed out that the boys in the study have easy access to reading material, and by implication, this also means having easy access to the latest technology, which could translate into time away from books. It was interesting to observe the literacy development in these homes, and the data from the findings indicating the extent to which the parents of the readers cognitively generated discourse and reading moments. I had not expected the high-achieving parents within this socio-economic group consciously to spend so much time with their children, or to arrange so many literacy moments. This underscored the reality for many children in South Africa who do not have these experiences. Bloch suggests that home literacy is one of the key areas affecting education in underprivileged schools, and that problems in schools are caused by what is “brought from society into the classroom” (2009: 123). The boys in this case study are from the same school, and were essentially selected for their literacy exposure in their print-rich homes, and because they have parents that are professional, upper-middle class people. The power of the boys’ early literacy experiences underlies and shapes the preferences and patterns laid down at an early age, which are vastly different from those learners who grow up in poor, working-class families for whom the value of literacy is of secondary importance (Fleisch, 2008). This is reflected in findings by Bernstein (1971) who documented the different linguistic codes used by children from lower- and middle-class families in England. The lower-income children were described as using highly contextualised language, while children from middle-income families used an elaborated or decontextualised language. The differences translated into school achievement for the different classes of children. In similar findings by Heath (1983) and Comber (2000), Bernstein
found that the working-class environment of the low-income child created a verbal
deficiency responsible for subsequent low educational achievement. The purposive
sampling of 8 boys from high-income families may be taken as a limitation in this
study, yet the study serves to foreground the influence of literacy learning in a
particular culture where literacy is seen to embody intellectual power. By promoting
reading literacy in this milieu, there is the distinct knowledge that understanding
texts have effects in the world, of grasping different historical stages, modern
linguistic applications, technology and different discourses.

The research methods used in this ethnographic study served to explain the home
and school literacy to which eight boys from the same private suburban school are
exposed. The data that acted as the basis of my study included interviews with
parents, their sons, the librarian, and observation in English, Afrikaans classes, and
the library, and observation in the homes. The data provided me with insight into the
important consequences of literacy learning, yet I consider that a more dichotomous
choice of schools and learners might have provided deeper insight into literacy
learning. I initially identified four readers and four non-readers through library
records and interviews with the boys. Two non-readers, however, became readers.
Even though it was interesting to study the reasons for their metamorphosis, I
believe that more data on reticent readers would have provided me with a purer
understanding with regard to the loss of interest in their reading habits. In the same
way I consider a comparison between public and private schools boys might have
yielded a broader perspective on similar cultures, yet one where the boys do not
have easy access to books.

These two concerns expressed above highlight areas that place limitations on the
generalisation of findings from one school only. The investigation has, nevertheless,
revealed the intricate effect of the interrelationships of home literacy practices, the
members partaking, and their ways of engaging, while, at the same time, showing the
extraneous social, ideological and political forces that also link into these actions.
8.4 Contribution of the study

I have argued that research on home literacy findings has mainly drawn from low-income homes (Pretorius & Machet, 2004; Van den Berg, 2005; Stein & Mamabolo, 2005; Raikes et al., 2006; Walton, 2010), or were studies that focused on gender comparisons (Scieszka, 2003; Sullivan, 2004; Sax, 2005) and immigrant English learners (Li, 2004; Kajee, 2011), and that the literacy of privileged homes remains largely under-researched. This thesis therefore aims to provide a unique contribution to the knowledge of reading as a social practice within the South African home and school system. I argue that the research findings have made a valuable contribution to the following broad areas: firstly in providing insight for both parents and teachers into the literacy learning in the home and school environments, and secondly, by understanding how the kind of literacy occurs that inspires boys to engage positively, schools can assist learners to achieve the best possible educational outcomes. My thesis revealed that in the same way that literacy is perceived and supported in the home and experienced by the boys, the same boys respond spontaneously to similar in-school literacy activities. In relation to this, it is understandable that whatever wisdom and knowledge teachers bring to class without taking cognisance of what is appealing to learners in a particular lesson, has no effect when the learners are unmotivated to read (Applegate & Applegate, 2010).

For that reason, the strength of the analysis in this study is to contribute to the understanding of the environment in which teachers and parents conceptually scrutinise their respective inputs into boys, with the knowledge that the social relations in which boys move between home and school are jointly constructed. It is useful to consider the mealtime practice as a benchmark experience in the home. This is the time that interrelationships are built on many literacy levels in terms of knowledge and culture within a disciplined practice. The parents, through their interaction with the family at these times, are able to strengthen the family literacy culture, and translate these experiences to their children’s teachers, and develop a symbiotic relationship between parents and the school. This mutual interaction
serves the purpose of providing knowledge to the parents on literacy application in the homes that prepare boys for school, at the same time providing strategy for teacher development. This study has indicated that parental involvement is a predictor of a learner’s literacy achievement, and the knowledge will serve as a framework for school and home collaboration in literacy practices. Moreover, even though the ethnography pertains to the homes of boys from one school only, the findings are relevant to literacy for adolescent boys in this socio-economic community in which financial stability has proven to be relevant to the child’s optimal development.

Analysis of the in-and-out-of-school literacy practices and rituals of literacy engagement provided detail on the mores that aid sustained reading for the upper primary boy; yet there exists a belief that the adolescents’ literacy needs in current times are complex and demanding (Moje et al., 2000). The type of material that transformed some reluctant readers into readers did not always appeal to their peers. Some boys became absorbed in technology at the expense of books, or others blamed sport for their not reading. The complexity of the adolescents’ needs must be recognised by teachers and parents towards engaging with them in their world in new ways. The teacher and parent must recognise that there are complex ways in which language is communicated, and digital texts may offer many ways for readers to experience the reading process (Rowsell & Burke, 2009), yet it makes sense to communicate actively with learners about these literacies that have culturally engaged them and have become identity-making practices (Alvermann & McLean, 2007). Guidance, interaction and encouragement have been shown to contribute to perspectives in new literacies that place value on researchers’ thinking about how boys make sense of literacy. I have argued that the involved parents and teachers have achieved high levels of literacy success among their protégés in terms of creating a positive attitude to reading and literacy discourse, and those involved in educating the youth, whether as a parent or a teacher, must remember that regulation and discipline are the basis of even the most pleasurable literacy practices. Both the home and the school can be used as sites to promote the kitchen-table culture of discourse, by which I mean interactive talk and discussions, instead of the
top-down power structure of instructional discourse. Parenting and teaching should occur in a context in which the child, through strict guidance and encouragement, shares in the construction of his/her literacy education, and is made to feel literate (Prinsloo & Baynham, 2008). This is particularly relevant when engaging with new technologies and the concomitant social practices that demand collaboration with others. Literacy education can therefore be said to require a reorientation by adults to co-constructing literacy, with intense cognitive involvement, for the advancement of sustained interest in reading literacy.

8.5 Suggestions for further research

Because of the concern over the state of the education system in South Africa, and, more pertinent to this thesis, the poor grasp of literacy and dearth of books in the local schools, there are many possibilities for research. After reflecting on the findings of this study, I suggest that there is scope for further descriptive and analytic work still to be done with regard to the following in the literacy field.

i) In the *Education for All status report 2002: South Africa, incorporating country plans for 2002 to 2015*, the Department of Education in Pretoria, South Africa, expresses its goal of halving the illiteracy rate of people aged fifteen and over during the stated period (Aitchison & Harley, 2006). Aitchison and Harley (2006), however, are concerned that the government’s claims of successful intervention are unreliable, inflated and misleading. In order to understand the effect that the lack of literacy has on daily functioning of an adult, I suggest that this direction could be a line of further research. The World Bank defines adult literacy as the percentage of the population aged fifteen and above who can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life. There is no data on South Africa in the World Bank chart (1980 – 2012), and this may corroborate the comment made by Aitchison and Harley (2006) that the statistics on adult literacy are sometimes non-existent. Research on the functional literacy for adults is significant as the adults are pivotal to their children’s advancement and ultimate achievement.
ii) In this thesis it was pointed out that home literacy was a determinant of school success, and that the process was largely guided through literacy discourse by parents, and their interaction and the time spent with their children. I see a role for further research to determine what type of literacy that children from parents who are not literate, bring to school. To this end, strategies could be developed to assist the learners, teachers and parents through the medium of stories, reading and conversations in order to bridge the lack of those linguistic and comprehension skills which are required in formal school pedagogy.

iii) The power of literacy, in not only the pedagogical arena, but also beyond school, is well documented in international and local research, and partly in this study. Much of the research, however, suggests that literacy developmental concerns are centred around gender differences that are connected to a range of factors situated in the society in which the children live (Peterson & Parr, 2012) and these are: standards and assessment of reading literacy (Snow & Paez, 2004; Snow et al., 1998); teacher education (Mills, 2003); early intervention and literacy teaching (Bloome & Katz, 2003); second language and immigrant literacy practices and their congruence with formal schooling (Kajee, 2011); and the changing nature of literacy (Gee, 2010; Street, 2003; Tierney, 2007). The lack of development in literacy in low-income homes and schools in South Africa underscores the need to address the achievement gap in this area. For productive and deeper learning to take place, one can consider comparative classroom-based research which studies learners from low-income homes versus those from print-rich environments with the aim of providing practical recommendations for teachers and parents, and even establishing parent-workshops to foster co-operative learning/teaching.

iv) The findings of this study have pointed to parents as the core instigators of literacy development in children, and it was indicated that reading literacy learning mostly takes place in educated families. The absence of word exposure for a large part of South Africa’s illiterate, aliterate and semi-literate population is, therefore, of concern for learners from these homes. Parents who do not read, or wish to read,
may not see the value in teaching their children. There may, nevertheless, be parents who may respond to guidance in literacy teaching, but have no access to books or resources for acquiring them. Gaining entry into these particular homes may prove to be difficult, and I suggest a model to implement a literacy programme for interested parents. The programme would be run as a series of workshops with the aim of informing teachers and parents of the benefits of guided literacy teaching.

**Implementation of a literacy programme for teachers and parents in chosen school**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Identify an <strong>area</strong> in which there is a need for literacy teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Select <strong>one school</strong> within that <strong>area</strong>. (I suggest a primary school where literacy learning is still at its infant stage.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Meet with the headmaster to gain permission for access to teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Meet <strong>teachers</strong> since they have access to the parents of learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>A meeting with the <strong>headmaster and teachers</strong> is recommended as this serves the purpose of highlighting the robust influence of home literacy on formal pedagogy, and may incorporate the following:</td>
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- The workshop will focus predominantly on the “**elements of literacy learning**” for teachers. The basic elements of literacy learning to which I refer here encompass the activities in the home that are essentially instigated and controlled by parents, and the effect that these practices have on formal teaching. The purpose of this approach is to promote co-operation between home and school, thus underpinning the necessity of gaining access to parents through the school. To this end the long-term effect of literacy participation in cultural practices in the family are shown as the literacy skills and milestones of early childhood literacy learning, incorporating skills that children need for school and later literacy outcomes.

*Having gained access to parents through the school, a workshop can be conducted for teachers and parents (or just parents). Parents can be made aware of their role in school success, and that the stages of literacy learning may mean: that the three-year-old can hold a book the right way up and turn pages, listen to stories and understand pictures in books, may recognise some letters and scribble; that the four-year-old can recite the alphabet, produce rhymes and alliteration, and connect stories to real life; that the pre-schooler can associate with characters in books, and may track print when read familiar, simple books, and can name letters; that the first grader may read accurately when using letters previously*
learnt. If parents are aware that these skills enable learners to read increasingly accurate and complex texts in their first three years of schooling, and that the support of parents provides a firm foundation in which these skills can develop, they may seek to employ literacy participation in their home.

6. Establish a reading area if there is no library.

7. Conduct follow-up meetings to discuss books / story-telling / concerns as often as possible.

These sessions can focus on the political dimension of literacy by indicating that reading provides access to power and to knowledge. Parents who deem themselves powerless due to social factors such as poverty, being members of a minority or ethnic group, or factors such as inadequate housing, nutrition, and health care, may be made aware of the power they have in changing circumstances for their children. The basic skills to which parents strongly and positively contribute, are as follows:
- speak to children often;
- be interested in the games children play by listening to them, scribble with them;
- sound out rhymes and alliteration;
- tell stories;
- teach vocabulary that is important in the family culture and religion;
- relate stories to real life; and
- teach sounds to demonstrate that the graphic symbols represent speech.

With the above in mind, the workshops will provide detail in the following domains:

1. Kitchen-table culture of talking and listening, turn-taking
2. Ritualised patterns of meals, discourse, bedtime stories
3. Restrict TV times and mobile phone usage at mealtimes/night times
4. Story-telling
5. Technology
6. Books/library
7. Interaction and family time
Rather than accepting that illiterate families produce illiterate children, this model could provide small groups with the opportunity of empowering their children. Direct intervention in the deficit homes could generate reading and knowledge as a long-term literacy outcome for achieving academic and social success.

Children are socialised into very different kinds of cultural and speech communities in which the essence of home literacy is not instinctual knowledge for all, and I perceive workshopping as being a source of information exchange that may inform parents and teachers of co-construction that can take place in literacy education – a notion reflected in these words by Mitch Albom (Tuesdays with Morrie, 1997: 156):

“If we saw each other as more alike, we might be very eager to join in one big human family in the world, and to care about that family the way we care about our own.”
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# APPENDIX A

## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convention</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>A short pause in speech</td>
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<tr>
<td>Um</td>
<td>Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>//</td>
<td>Change topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>An aside - referring to wife, husband or child</td>
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<tr>
<td>(laugh)</td>
<td>Actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~</td>
<td>Repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Join phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“ “</td>
<td>Speech within dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[name]</td>
<td>Pseudonyms</td>
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</tbody>
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APPENDIX B

LIST OF FIGURES

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APPENDIX C

Informed Consent/Assent Form

Project Title:
Proposed Title: Home and school literacy practices: sustaining reading in the primary school boy.

Investigator:
Madeleine Ross

Date:
16 April 2015

I hereby:
☐ Agree to be involved in the above research project as a participant.
☐ Agree that my child, ____________________________ may participate in the above research project.
☐ Agree that my staff may be involved in the above research project as participants.

I have read the research information sheet pertaining to this research project and understand the nature of the research and my role in it. In addition, I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive the additional details I requested. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

☐ Please allow me to review the report prior to publication.

Name: ____________________________________________________________
Phone or Cell number: ________________________________________________
e-mail address: ______________________________________________________
Signature: ___________________________________________________________

If applicable:
☐ I consent/assent to audio recording of my/the participant’s contributions.
☐ I consent/assent to video recording of my/the participant’s contributions.

Signature: ___________________________________________________________