


**SUPPORT PROGRAMMES FOR MOTHERS AND  
CAREGIVERS: A FRAMEWORK FOR HOME-BASED  
PEDAGOGY IN INITIAL LITERACY AND NUMERACY**

*BY*

**HLUPEKILE LINDIWE MKABI**

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# **Dedication**

**This dissertation is dedicated to my children Khensani, Hlayisani and Khanyisa**



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## **Abstract**

This study presents a framework that identifies what a home and community can do to help school entry pupils in initial literacy and numeracy in the Thulamahashe area near Bushbuckridge in the Northern province of South Africa. The emphasis is on involvement for mothers and caregivers in helping school entry pupils to acquire basic skills in literacy and numeracy. The research covers a brief inquiry into the need for support programme for mothers and caregivers of school entry pupils as suggested by the research sample. Suggestions for the structure and content of a possible programme are forwarded. The study was conducted by means of observing schools and homes and interviewing mothers, caregivers and teachers about the need for and feasibility of a possible programme in home-based pedagogy in initial literacy and numeracy. The findings suggest that there is such a need in this community and that home – school collaboration is feasible.



# List of Contents

<b>1. ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY	1
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION	2
1.4 AIMS OF THE STUDY	2
1.5 THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY	3
1.6 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY	3
1.7 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY	4
1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	4
1.8.1 THE RESEARCH DESIGN	5
1.8.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS	5
1.9 THE PROCESS	6
1.10 THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE	7
1.11 SAMPLING SELECTION	7
1.12 DATA ANALYSIS	8
1.13 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS	9
1.13.1 DEFINING NUMERACY	9
1.13.2 DEFINING LITERACY	9
1.13.3 DEFINING PEDAGOGY	10
1.14 PROGRAMME OF THE STUDY	10
1.15 THE RESEARCHER'S PROFILE	11
1.16 CONCLUSION	12
<b>2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION	13
2.2 PRIMARY EDUCATION SITUATION	13
2.3 ENCULTURATION AS EDUCATION	13
2.4 MEDIATORS	14
2.5 ENVIRONMENT	15
2.6 INDIVIDUAL TEACHING, LEARNING AND EARLY INTERVENTION	16
2.7 PARENTS AS PARTNERS IN EDUCATION	17
2.8 COMMUNITY AND CHANGE	18
2.9 CORE-PLUS CURRICULUM (EDUCATION)	19
2.10 CONCLUSION	19

<b>3. THE DATA OF THE STUDY</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION	21
3.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS	21
3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS	21
3.3.1 OBSERVATION	21
3.3.2 INTERVIEW	24
3.4 THE PROCESS OF DATA ANALYSIS.	26
3.5 PROCESSING AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE DATA	28
3.5.1 THE PROCESSING OF DATA FROM THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW	28
3.5.2 CONSOLIDATION OF DATA FROM INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS	29
3.5.3 CONSOLIDATION OF DATA FROM THE TEACHER INTERVIEWED AND OBSERVED DATA FROM SCHOOL AND HOME	29
3.6 CONCLUSION	29
<b>4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS</b>	<b>30</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION	30
4.2 PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION OF FINDINGS.	30
4.2.1 FINDINGS RELATED TO MOTHERS' AND CAREGIVERS' INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY LEARNING	31
4.2.2 FINDINGS RELATED TO THE SUPPORT PROGRAMME	31
4.2.3 FINDINGS RELATED TO THE CONTENT OF THE PROGRAMME	31
4.2.4 FINDINGS RELATED TO THE TEACHER OF THE OVERCROWDED CLASSROOM	32
4.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS	32
4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS	33
4.5 CONCLUSION	33
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>35</b>

## **SECTION ONE**

# **1. ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this section, the context in which the study takes place will be described. The aim, the motivation, the research methodology and the programme of the study will be stated as well. The research question will be processed in this context.

### **1.2 CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY**

The focus of this study is the needs as expressed or identified by mothers of school entry pupils for support programme in home base pedagogy in initial literacy and numeracy skills. The area where the inquiry takes place is in Thulamahashe, near Bushbuckridge. The high rate of illiteracy in South Africa, especially amongst the blacks in rural areas, has brought about a debate on the issue of early learning support programmes for mothers and caregivers of school entry pupils. These programmes could aid them to assist the young in a way that illiterates could not.

Overcrowded classes in rural schools retard the child's progress to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills – especially if the teacher has little time and few skills to manage big classes. The child in this situation is not given sufficient, individual attention which is vital for initial literacy and numeracy. This sometimes causes a child to lose interest in schooling by dropping out earlier, without acquiring basic skills in numeracy and literacy. The first learning experiences are important for later learning (Pettipher, 1996).

The study will be conducted to investigate home and school activities and the use of educational artefacts and communication to find out what the nature of school pedagogy and home assistance is.

Many school entry (firstgraders) pupils repeat a grade before advancing to a next grade. This might have been caused by lack of individual teaching, overcrowding in the classroom, or no

effective teaching and learning due to disruptive factors in the community and at home. It may also have come about because of parents' and caregivers' limited knowledge.

Little individual attention is given to a child when teaching basic literacy and numeracy in the average school in Thulamahashe. There is also a tendency of concentration on advanced children who already have the advantage of home support. Slow learners are often ignored. The previous government was responsible for dictating school curriculum. The community was not involved at all. Hence many black parents were not interested in school matters. Some parents were not concerned because they were illiterate and feel strange at school, where writing and reading dominate.

My concern as a community educationist is for those school entry pupils who are at a disadvantage at home to receive assistance.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION**

The background to the study has already indicated the main premise on which this research is based, namely that mothers of school entry pupils may view themselves as willing and able to become involved in home pedagogy in order to complement the teaching done at school. I assume that the schools involved will reflect similar challenging conditions as the schools I observed in the pilot observational investigation. Against this background the research question reads:

What are the needs, as identified by mothers of school entry pupils, for support programmes in home-based pedagogy in initial literacy and numeracy?

### **1.4 AIMS OF THE STUDY**

- This study aims to identify the needs, as expressed by mothers of school entry pupils, for support programmes in home-based pedagogy in initial literacy and numeracy.



- It aims to document suggestions of mothers systematically.
- It also aims at forwarding suggestions for structure and content of programmes in the mentioned setting.
- The study will also frame the investigation in a relevant theoretical framework.

## **1.5 THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

I assume that my intervention in the lives of these mothers may result in some of the following outcomes, which are not stated as research aims, but included for purposes of possible long-term consequential validity of this investigation.

- Empowering of mothers in literacy and numeracy skills.
- Training mothers in how to read or listen to children read.
- Providing mothers with concrete methods and material to use at home with children.
- Teaching mothers to make and play games to reinforce skills in literacy and numeracy.
- Teaching mothers how to communicate with authorities (school).

## **1.6 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY**

Based on the assumption that young learners need support at home in learning to read, write and calculate, a research problem pertaining to mothers' need to be assisted in home-based pedagogy was identified. Presently mothers who are the main supervisors of homework, are not assisted in understanding the complexities involved in learning initial literacy and numeracy skills. In the Thulamahashe area most mothers and other caregivers refrain from assisting the young learners not only because they feel inadequate, but also because they have been socialised to view the school as removed from the community and family as distance extension. I assume that the selected mothers and caregivers will be able to identify needs involved in and supporting of school based learning.

## **1.7 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study is therefore believed to be important because of the following notions, stated as presuppositions of the investigation:

- If mothers play their role as primary teachers and really get engaged in helping the school entry pupil to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills, this may help minimise the high rate of illiteracy and early drop-out and better prepare school entry pupils for success in the school (Marrow 195:18).
- Mothers will strongly interact with the school in connection with the child's school matters. Again mothers can interact with the school in connection with the problems they might come across during the process of assisting to teach a child literacy and numeracy skills.
- It will promote parent child relationships and parent teacher relationships. Both the teachers and mothers can talk about the progress and the problems of the child. They can discuss how to help the child where he/she is experiencing a problem.
- It may also be a chance to practise new mothering techniques where a mother is expected to spend quality time assisting in the formal education of her child.
- Lastly I can say it may better the lives of the children of this area if they successfully acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills with which to progress to higher grades in the school system.

## **1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this section an overview of research design and methods will be explained.

## **1.8.1 THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design of this study consists of qualitative research methods. It is also a naturalistic inquiry because it takes place in a real-life environment. It is concerned with primary interactive research (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:371). The interactive field research is primarily concerned with the direct contact with the participants in their natural setting.

Marshall and Rossman (1989:97) maintain that the participants expressing their views and experiences in their own words and in their natural settings contribute to the contextual validity of an inquiry. According to Le Compte & Preissle (1993:31) qualitative research is concerned with meaning people make; thus such studies are “framed by descriptions of, explanations for or meaning given to the phenomena by both the research and the study participants rather than by the definitions and interpretations of the researcher alone.” Data will mostly be recorded in words (Miles & Huberman 1994).

## **1.8.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

### **1.8.2.1 OBSERVATION**

According to Marshall (1995:79) observation entails the “systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours and artefacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for a study.” Observation as research method also refers to a more specific method of collecting information, that is very different from interviews or questionnaires. The observational method relies on the researcher seeing and hearing things and recording these observations rather than relying on a subject’s self-reported responses.

Marshall (1995:79) also states that the researcher “makes no special effort to have a particular role, but is allowed as an unobtrusive observer.” This means that the researcher must not participate but simply record information without interpretation of the behaviour being seen and heard. Behaviour can thus be recorded as it occurs naturally.

In this study the researcher will be observing home and school activities and educational artefacts, how the teacher handles overcrowded classroom (activities) and the native conditions of learning. The duration for the observation will be one to two hours at school and thirty minutes to one hour at home.

### **1.8.2.2 INTERVIEWS**

Galfo in Mulaudzi (1994) says that interviewing is a process of obtaining information directly from the respondents. Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English (1991) defines 'interview' as an occasion when a person is asked a question by one person to find out about his or her opinions, beliefs or ideals.

Schumacher and McMillan (1993:426) distinguish three forms of interview, namely:

- Informal conversation (unstructured) interview: The questions emerge from the immediate context and are asked in the natural course of events. There is no predetermination of question, topic or phrasing.
- Interview guide approach (semi-structured interview): Topics are selected in advance but the researcher decides the sequence of wording of questions during the interview.
- Standardised open ended interview (highly structured interview): Participants are asked the same question in the same order, thus reducing interview effects and bias.

The selection of interview strategy depends on the context and purpose. In this study the informal conversation interview and the standardised open-ended interview will be used to obtain the general feeling about support programmes for mothers of early learners.

## **1.9 THE PROCESS**

Ten mothers selected representatively (Le Compte and Preissle, 1993) will be interviewed on two occasions. One interview will be conducted in the school setting and the other in the home. Home activities in the same sample will be observed, simultaneously documenting the existence

and use of educational artefacts. The mentioned interview will be conducted in a place (school or home) that is acceptable to the participants and the interviewer.

I will also make use of unstructured questions in order to allow me great latitude in asking broad questions in whatever order seems appropriate. Semi-structured questions will also be incorporated to allow an individual response where data are slow in forthcoming. I will wait for the participants to respond. The questions may be rephrased when the meanings of the questions seem unclear to the participants. I may comment in order to move the discussion to another level, or to check whether I have understood the meaning clearly.

After all questions have been addressed, the participants will be thanked for their time and comments or suggestions regarding the topic in question or the interview in general. The audio-recorded interviews will be transcribed.

### **1.10 THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE**

My role as researcher will be to gain permission from ten (n=10) mothers selected to be interviewed and observed in their homes. I will first tell them the aim of the study and they will be at liberty to ask any questions. I will also let the participants know how long it will take to be interviewed. They will be at liberty to withdraw. I will reassure them that the information collected will be confidential and only shared with my supervisor and me. No names will be identified. Their rights and feelings will be respected. I will conduct the interviews and the observation as an accepted outsider.

### **1.11 SAMPLING SELECTION**

According to Schumacher and McMillan (1993:374) qualitative research requires a plan for choosing a site and participants before beginning data collection. That is, the researcher must begin the research process by identifying a group and a place that suggests some personal, empirical or conceptual research problem. Nonyane (1996:5) states that sampling is more

specialised and restricted and involves selecting a small number, which represent the whole population in a significant way. The sample in this inquiry represents illiterate or semi-literate and innumerate or semi-numerate mothers of firstgraders.

According to Le Compte and Preissle (1993:65) selecting from a population involves “defining what kinds of people and how many of them can be studied as well as when, where and under which circumstances they will be studied.” It refers to a more general process of focusing and choosing what to study. Selection, for the purpose of this study, will thus be criterion-based and sampling will be purposeful rather than random.

## **1.12 DATA ANALYSIS**

According Schumacher and McMillan (1993:439) qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among categories. Inductive analysis means that categories and patterns emerge from the data rather than being imposed on data collection. Miles and Huberman (1994:10) define data analysis as consisting of the current flow of three activities: data reduction, data display and conclusion. “Qualitative data can be regarded as a systematic process of selecting, categorising, comparing, synthesising and interpreting to provide explanations of the single phenomenon or interests” (Miles & Huberman, 1994:10).

The data analysis in this study will involve thematic clustering of mostly verbal data. Some will be fieldnotes of observation and others will be transcripts of interviews.

Miles & Huberman (1994:50) recommend early analysis because it helps the researcher to “cycle back and forth between thinking about existing data and finding out new ways for collecting new, often better data.” They further state that early analysis “permits the production of the interim reports that are required in most evaluation and policy studies.”

## **1.13 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS**

In this section key concepts which are used will be clarified so that the reader may be familiar with their meanings as used in this study.

### **1.13.1 DEFINING NUMERACY**

Numeracy can be defined as the ability to perform the basic arithmetic functions of adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing and to compare and express different quantities. It refers to using numbers in computation.

### **1.13.2 DEFINING LITERACY**

In Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English (1991) literacy is defined as "the state or condition of being literate, that is being able to read and write." Nonyane (1996) quotes Fordman (1995:9) by saying that literacy means "the ability to communicate through reading and writing what can be communicated through speech. Graf (in Taylor, 1993) defined literacy as a technology of communication used for "decoding, and reproducing written and printed materials."

In this study literacy will be regarded as the ability to read and write simple statements used in daily life at an early stage. These skills are a major need in our daily activities. Reading and writing need to be developed at an early stage in order to:

- Address critical social problems in a child's life, for example reading forms, regulations, notices, and signs.
- Be a good consumer because he will know advertising and product information.
- Be a good citizen because the child will read sufficiently well to have taken and stored community and society values. These cultural activities (reading and writing) need to be passed to each generation in order to participate fully in the wonderful era of democracy.

### 1.13.3 DEFINING PEDAGOGY

Van Rensburg (1988:437) refers to pedagogy as “another term for education.” He further refers to it as scientific education, for example educating in the schools. This means that pedagogy is the science of teaching at school or in other formal educational institutions. For the purposes of this study pedagogy refers to school-related assistance.

In this study it will concern the science of teaching at home in a “formal” way. Teaching and learning will be planned activities with a goal in mind. In Freire’s social pedagogy, defined as education in any one place where the individual and society are learning, a social action can either empower or domesticate learners. This means that in the community of this investigation, we must reconstruct the teaching of school entry pupils by involving parents in the child’s work.

Parents as first teachers in the home have the following roles which need to be reconstructed if empowering pedagogy is to take place:

- As guide and supporter
- As active participant in the child’s learning.
- As evaluator
- As facilitator



### 1.14 PROGRAMME OF THE STUDY

This study consists of the following sections:

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Section 1 | The study is contextualised and the research question, aim, motivation and research methodology are discussed. |
| Section 2 | Literature sources are reviewed with the aim of exploring why early support in learning is needed.             |
| Section 3 | Research design and methods.   |



The research design and methods of research for the study are outlined in more detail.

Section 4      Display, analysis and discussion of research data. Interpretation of data will be included along with conclusions and verification as well as the implications of the study. Recommendations will be stated as well.

### **1.15 THE RESEARCHER'S PROFILE**

As the purpose of this study is to identify the needs, as expressed by mothers of school entry pupils, for support programmes in home-based pedagogy in initial literacy and numeracy skills, the role and person of the researcher needs to be clarified.

I started teaching at Amukelani Pre-school in 1986, teaching young children between 2 and 6 years of age. My experience of teaching pre-schoolers has made me acknowledge in great depth that a young age is the best for learning. The pre-schoolers used to go home very late, between 14:00 and 16:00 hours. During their stay at the school in the afternoon they were highly involved in educational activities guided by their teachers.

After graduating from pre-school they go to grade 1. Their classes are overcrowded because of a lack of teachers and enough classes. In each class there is between 40 and 70 pupils. In these classes there are not enough educational resources. The learning and teaching conditions are not nearly effective since there is little freedom of movement (due to lack of space) and there is little individual attention, assistance and pupil monitoring by the teacher.

Bodestein and Naude (1989) state that the guidance required for an early learner includes individual teaching, encouragement, respect, trust, love, care, patience, reinforcement of schoolwork and positive ways of correcting errors and reflection on pedagogy. If the teacher cannot move comfortably between the pupils it is very difficult to assist them. If, in addition, they have little support and monitoring at home, the chances for success diminish.

Early learners need an educational environment that is inviting, that is attractive and has a warm atmosphere to promote learning.

As we are in the process of building schools in communities (especially in the black communities) parents need to be engaged in school matters in order to help their children effectively. Parents should be empowered in literacy and numeracy in order to have more interest in helping their children.

### **1.16 CONCLUSION**

This section served as an introduction and it also oriented the reader, with regard to the context of the study, the aim, the motivation, the research question and the research methodology. The reason for undertaking this study in Thulamahashe was discussed as well.



## **SECTION TWO**

# **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous section the research was conceptualised. The focus of this section is on early learners' need of support from mothers and other caregivers in their learning to read, write and calculate. Because the researcher believes that the early learner needs immediate mediators, a rich challenging environment and a challenging education, the focus of this investigation is on a way to improve learning. For this they need the attention and involvement of mothers and caregivers as first teachers (mediators) working alongside the school. This section focuses on the theoretical framework in which the study is located.



### **2.2 PRIMARY EDUCATION SITUATION**

Van Rensburg and Landman (1986) defined the primary education situation as the education offered to a child spontaneously, partly experientially and intuitively. This is the first education of the child in his home environment. In this situation the child must be given time and allowed the freedom of making discoveries and sharing his “AHA” experiences with his peers and parents. When a child goes to school this phase does not end abruptly. The home remains a place of learning and can interact with the school.

### **2.3 ENCULTURATION AS EDUCATION**

In Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English (1991:25) culture is defined as customs, beliefs, art, music, and all other products of human thought made by a particular group of people at a particular time. Culture comprises the activities that are performed in a particular community

or group (Henning, 1991). The focus in this study is the culture of teaching of early literacy and numeracy. A child in his environment where he is born encounters a culture which he acquires through informal enculturation. Piaget states that children are not born with knowledge. According to Locke's "tabula rasa" theory, a child's mind is like a clean sheet of paper. This means that he is born a helpless and dependent being who neither understands nor knows anything but is capable of acting with the guidance of experienced mediators such as peers, teachers and parents, along with the use of tools (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990). The people who guide the young are the cultural mediators. These include caregivers and teachers.

## 2.4 MEDIATORS

A child acquires basic literacy and numeracy in his early learning in school. He cannot acquire these accomplishments without the assistance of fellow human beings, because there are times that the child needs mediation, otherwise he will not be able to participate and appropriate new cultural knowledge such as printed language and numbers (Rogoff, 1990).

The culture can be successfully acquired if the people around him are seriously engaged in helping him to (Vygotsky, 1978) access knowledge. The ability to reach beyond the present level of knowledge, assisted by an adult or more able peer, is described as being in a "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990).

Reading or writing and calculation are culturally mediated activities (Vygotsky 1978). During the acquisition of the skills of reading, writing and calculating there are times that a child fails to understand what to do properly. Mediators (mothers) can serve as a bridge to transfer the skills of doing these.

By socially interacting with immediate mediators, he comes to understand his environment better. Within the group there are many things that are communicated, for example facts (light, fire, stove etc.). The communicated skills, facts and meaning through the interaction with the mediator becomes his (intermental) understanding, that is his own thinking, and he can communicate (intra mental) back to his peers.

## 2.5 ENVIRONMENT

This task can be successfully carried out in the child's home environment. The home is the place where all learning begins and where the culture can be acquired. The home is the child's first "school" and the parents (especially the mother) and other caregivers are the child's first and most important teachers (Marrow, 1995). From the view of Vygotskian theory and especially contemporary social constructivist theory, early interpersonal communication lays the foundation for broader enculturation (Rogoff, 1996).

The child can do almost anything with ease in the home environment because of love, respect and care he is receiving from the mother and others. The love is unconditional, that is, without considering reasons or merit. Whether a clever child or not, at home he or she is shown love. This is why the child feels safe and secure in the first learning environment. With the mother the child learns with confidence because he feels more secure with her than with the teachers who are, in effect, strangers (Marrow, 1995). With the mother the child can express himself more freely and he won't be shy to show where he understands or not because of basic trust in the mother. In the case of traumatised homes, the above argument cannot be stated. Sometimes the school can be a refuge for unhappy children.

The home environment needs to be enriched with concrete objects suited to the culture. According to Piaget (1968) a child learns and understands better if cultural tools in his environment are used at an early stage. Vygotsky (1978) stated that human beings appropriate abstract concepts meaningfully if concrete objects are brought to the young learner to see, feel, hear and taste. This interaction between tangible home-based educational artefacts and the abstract concepts the young learner appropriates later on, is a vital foundation (Rogoff, 1990).

A mother at home is someone who, guided by her "teaching" aims, her culture, and involvement with the child, selects and organises the world of stimuli for the child. She selects appropriate or relevant stimuli and she "frames, filters and schedules the stimuli to help the child focus on the relevant stimuli while ignoring the irrelevant stimuli in the environment" (Rogoff, 1990). Not only does the mother act as immediate mediator who intentionally intervenes between the child and the stimulus, but she also explains, interprets and gives the meaning to the situation.

Beside the enriched environment, with concrete objects, home learning is characterised by a relaxed atmosphere which allows for mistakes and sees errors as part of the learning process and an opportunity for deeper understanding. If the three mentioned aspects prevail in the child's environment, early learning success can be experienced. The young learner moves from what Rogoff (1990) refers to as guided participation in an activity to appropriation of the activity. Washing dishes, baking, cooking, talking, playing with objects and even getting dressed are all activities learned in this spontaneous way.

## **2.6 INDIVIDUAL TEACHING, LEARNING AND EARLY INTERVENTION**

In the home the child can be treated as an individual member of a group. He is taught according to the abilities and potentialities that suit his development stage (Piaget, 1978). This happens spontaneously in a place like Thulamahashe. Children must be given enough time and opportunities to practise the skills until they automatise these skills. These can be achieved with ease in the company of the mother because she will mostly be interacting with one person at a time, even in big families (Pettipher, 1996).

The child as an individual in a family is an active participant that is actively involved. During teaching and learning the child in the end constructs his own knowledge gained from the examples around him. What a child learns is meaningful to him in order to make the knowledge that is meaningful in the context. In a home this is a cultural phenomenon that is not designed intentionally. That is why the home can be the bridge between school and community (Townsend, 1995). This is, in fact, where the core-plus curriculum starts. Communities consist of homes and families, and then schools.

Mothers in their home settings are happy when a child is able to demonstrate the learning outcome which he or she supposes to use all through life. When a mother has taught a child to sweep, she is happy when the child demonstrates understanding and performs competently.

This is what the South African educational authorities are intending to do by introducing Curriculum 2005, which is based on outcomes. Both curriculum 2005 and the mother's aims are

alike in the sense that it aims at equipping all learners with knowledge competencies and orientations needed for success after they leave school and home learning. Freire (1978) states that a child must be taught skills that assists him to be creative and independent in thinking during reading, writing and counting. If thinking skills are developed at an early stage there is a stronger possibility of success in learning at school. The home base need not be separated from the school.

Early intervention by a mother in the child's early years of learning can set the scene for learning which goes beyond sweeping and washing. According to Hurlock (1978:25) early development is more critical than late development. This means that it is best to develop a child's skill earlier than later. Early intervention may prevent a child from dropping out before having acquired basic literacy and numeracy skills. The example of a typical scene in a rural first-grade class illustrates the difference between home and school - if the mother is able to assist in literacy and numeracy. Here one finds that one particular child is not reading with the class where choral reading happens. At home reading is done by the child in the company of the mother. If the child fails to read some words, the equipped mother can intervene immediately. The child can be helped with the recognising and decoding of words. He can also be helped with the relationship between letters and sounds and recalling information (Pettipher, 1996; Goodyear 1997). If the problem is not attended to earlier, they became discouraged and develop reading problems, leading to behavioural problems such as anxiety and frustration, ending in leaving school. (Goodyear, 1997).

## **2.7 PARENTS AS PARTNERS IN EDUCATION**

Stone in Dekker & Lemmer (1993) state that true educative teaching necessitates a partnership between home and school in order to establish a firm foundation for education. That is, parents in the community should work hand in hand in order to assist with the child's social, emotional and cognitive development. Parental education and school education do not represent two opposing worlds. School education activities accord with and build upon the foundations of home. Therefore, the community and school must work jointly in order to improve our education in South Africa. The main tenets of community education presuppose family participation. Cohen's (1985) analysis of the concept "community" indicates that it is symbolic more than geographic,

and that it has definite borders. It is not possible to view a "community of learners" (Brown, 1994) without including the home of young learners especially.

## **2.8 COMMUNITY AND CHANGE**

A community can be defined as a group of people functioning together as one to accomplish a common aim/purpose. Cohen (1985) defines community as it is "symbolically constructed as a system of values, norms and moral codes which provides a sense of identity with a bounded whole to its members". This means that the community has to live according to these values, norms and moral codes. In this study the community has to value the teaching and learning of initial literacy and numeracy. Again the community will be seen as co-involved with school and consisting of mothers and caregivers as well as learners and teachers.

Illiteracy and innumeracy is a major problem in rural South Africa. Although education policy suggests ABET as a way to address the problem, and although foundation education will change its focus to outcomes-based learning in 1998, neither of these will be successful if grassroots community change does not take place. It may even happen that firstgraders still do not learn adequately, because the support they need from home is absent. That is why we must build community in schools. Instead of schools being distant institutions, schools should meet the immediate needs of a community (Sergiovanni, 1994). It should look at the needs of the community and address it. Real change can only come as a result of the commitments of the minds and hearts of the total community. Rural women can play an important role in this process. Reform should be based on careful identification of deeply and commonly held values. Home, school and community have a task to transfer held values of teaching and learning literacy and numeracy and the role of mothers, who are the primary caregivers, needs to be acknowledged. Change can only be achieved through people's acceptance of responsibility to further their goals of transmitting what is valued in the community through word and action (Sergiovanni, 1994). In the community people are organised as one based on purpose and commitments. If mothers unite in their support of young learners, the value of early education can become a community value.



A community of mothers and caregivers can be formed in order to support early learners in their learning. In this nonformal "organisation", mothers can help each other in teaching new skills in literacy and numeracy, organising resources, and teach one another how to handle support in schoolwork. New rural "societies", like funeral "societies" can be formed.

## **2.9 CORE-PLUS CURRICULUM (EDUCATION)**

In the booklet "Curriculum 2005", curriculum is defined as everything planned by an educator which will help develop the learner. This can be extra-mural sport activities, debates, and trips to a factory where paper is made or even a visit to a library. I can define curriculum as all the learning and teaching activities planned for a child by an educator in order to reach an educational aim that develops a child to the point where he can perform activities successfully. The aim can be realised through the learning content, but especially also the methodology created in learning.

When the curriculum is being planned the physical resources, work programmes, assessment criteria and extra mural programmes should all be taken into account. This can include the curriculum extending to learning opportunities outside school (Henning, 1997). The extended curriculum, or the "core-plus" may be what the community wants (Townsend, 1994:105). Mothers and caregivers can be roleplayers in the "plus" of the curriculum - that is if they are able and knowledgeable. The curricularists will need to realise that the culture and the curriculum of a school are tied to the culture of the community and of society.

## **2.10 CONCLUSION**

This section focused on early learners' need for support from home when learning to read, write and calculate. The primary education situation, the culture enculturation role of mediators and the stimuli to increase cognitive development were discussed briefly. A child as a person who needs individual assistance in learning and early intervention and mediation in learning was also discussed. Parents as partners in education, community and change and a need for core-plus

curriculum were discussed briefly, creating a conceptual framework for this investigation in which mothers as mediators in initial literacy and numeracy pedagogy are the focus.



## **SECTION THREE**

### **3. THE DATA OF THE STUDY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In section one the research design and data collection methods were discussed in detail. In this section the design and data collection methods of the inquiry will be referred to briefly, with the process of data collection, data analysis and data interpretation included with illustrations of data examples. A brief report on events of observation and interview will be presented. Lastly I will show how the data were clustered and "named" and then consolidated as themes or categories of the findings.

#### **3.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

The research design of this study is based on qualitative methodology. This design is concerned with interpreting and recounting accurately the meaning which the research participants give reality around them. The researcher is also co-maker of meaning, because she sees and interprets from her own baseline, joined by the conceptual framework.

#### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

##### **3.3.1 OBSERVATION**

The concept observation was clearly described in paragraph 1.7 in section one. The main focus is on observing behaviour in a natural setting and making fieldnotes.

In this section I will give a report on what I have observed in home and school settings in connection with the use of educational artefacts and how learning activities were conducted

The schools in Thulamahashe, all functioning under the Department of Education of the Northern Province were visited for observation. School A has seventy (70) grade one learners in one classroom, whereas school B has thirty-five (35).

In both the schools the situation is similar to a traditional schooling situation of teacher-centred class activity and repetition, drill and rote learning. The teacher stands in front of the children, doing all the talking. The chalkboard is used regularly for writing classwork, notes and tests. In both the schools the medium is English, albeit in limited code.

In school A learners sit in rows, facing the front, with the class-space half-filled, whereas in school B learners sit in rows, two tables facing each other. The space is fully occupied by tables, chairs and a cupboard.

In both the schools the following activities were observed:

- Reading: All learners read aloud in chorus format.
- Mathematics: Adding and subtracting were demonstrated and not monitored individually. They were instructed to write the examples:  $4-2 = \_$ ,  $6-4 = \_$ ,  $3+3 = \_$ .
- Dictation: The teacher dictates the words, then the children write.
- Transcribing of letters: In school A the children transcribed the letters U, Y, P and in school B the children transcribed B and D.
- Storytelling: In school A the teacher read a story while children were listening. In school B the teacher told a story using pictures. In both the schools the children responded by retelling the story and answering questions posed by the teacher.
- Music (rhymes and songs): The children were instructed to say a rhyme or sing a song. In school A the rhyme was "Hickory dickory dock" and in school B it was "Are you sleeping?"
- Games and commands: In both the schools the teachers gave the children a command and the children responded as a class, for example if the teacher said, "Stand up", the children stood.

The following educational artefacts were observed:

### **SCHOOL A**

- Reading books for each learner
- Charts on the wall
- Counters (cold drink tops)
- Writing strips with words
- Dominoes
- Shapes
- Pencils
- Memory games
- Weather chart with symbols of sun, rain, wind, and clouds
- Watch

### **SCHOOL B**

- Reading books (few)
- Counters (sticks and tins)
- Shapes
- Pencils



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I visited four homes and I observed mothers who do homework for their children. In another home the child did the homework alone and then said to the mother: "I don't know five multiple by one (multiple)". She asked the mother for help and the mother said, "I am coming".

I observed the following from two homes

- Books (reading, written)
- Toys (cars, aeroplane, puzzles)

From the other two homes only books for written work were observed. Mothers wanted to help their children. In five instances they could, but in four they could not.

### 3.3.2 INTERVIEW

The concept interview was clearly described in section 1.2.2. In this section examples of data will be given. Interview data were collected from ten mothers who were interviewed for 15-20 minutes each. During the interview the responses were recorded as field notes and audio recorded. The interviews were conducted in Xitsonga (language of the Shangaan people). The participants' responses will be provided in English. All transcripts of interviews were translated into English by a co-researcher.

#### Examples of questions and answers from the interview

##### Interview data from the mothers:

Here I will indicate the question asked and the responses of three mothers. The examples are representative of the larger body of data.

Q = Question

R = Response



Q<sub>1</sub> = Why should a mother be involved in a child's early learning?

R<sub>1</sub> = A mother should be involved by intervening in the child's early because a mother is the one who knows the child better. Another thing learning begins at home with the help of the mother.

R<sub>2</sub> = I feel that mothers must be involved since mothers spend a lot of time with young learners than with the teacher.

R<sub>3</sub> = I feel that mothers should be involved since early learners are faced with difficulty of constructing meaningful learning at this stage especially the slow learners. With the mother the child can ask for help where he experiences problems/difficulty.

Q<sub>2</sub> = What do you think can be done by mothers to help these children to acquire basic skills in literacy and numeracy?

R<sub>1</sub> = Children must be given work to do at home with the help of the mothers. Children need extra work to do at home. The school is too busy.

R<sub>2</sub> = Mothers should have extension programme that will help the child at home. The programme must designed to be followed by mothers and the child, it can be TV programme, video

programme that a child can easily follow. All the time the mother must be next to the child in order to help him to read, write and calculate properly. The mother understands.

R<sub>3</sub> = I think mothers should have after noon lesson to help where there are problems or needs. Parents must buy books, educational toys so that during the spare time a child can use the toys together with the parents.

Q<sub>3</sub> = What should be the content of these support programmes in connection with literacy and numeracy skills?

R<sub>1</sub> = The content of the programme should teach the child proper reading and writing skills. It should teach the child the meaning of numbers, that is addition (plus), subtraction (minus), multiplication (times) and division. The mothers must understand this work. Some mothers don't have the knowledge, but the parents must know too, otherwise they have problems.

R<sub>2</sub> = It should teach the child to read and write.

R<sub>3</sub> = The programme should teach the child to read with understanding. It should teach the child to have self-confidence when reading and writing. It should help the child to perceive and manipulate sounds and words. It should help with the relationship between letters and sound. Teach the meaning of the four operational of maths.

#### **Interview data from the teacher:**

Q = How do you handle overcrowded classes and how do you feel about this class?

R = Children are grouped into groups. It is difficult to work with overcrowded class because when you are busy with group it is difficult to see what is happening in the other groups. Overcrowded class kills children in the sense that it is not easy find the actual course of underachiever in this type of a class. There is no freedom of movement and the atmosphere is not conducive for teaching and learning.

Working with two groups is time consuming. I am bored about a teaching. I go home tired. I lose hope because there is no effective teaching.

Q = Do you give individual teaching?

R = Rarely because if I try to give an individual attention especially where there are problems it waste time. Those who are having a problem I just group them and help them as a group.

Q = What should be done to address the problems?

R = Parents should involved especially mothers because they spend a lot of time with the child and a child feel free working with the mother. Mothers always give courage and they have patience they have strong interest that a child should learn. I don't want mothers to stay away from school. I worry because some mothers don't know what to do. I wish I could teach them. Mothers don't come to PTSA meetings. I wish they could come. We can discuss.

### **3.4 THE PROCESS OF DATA ANALYSIS.**

Data analysis involves the process of analysis and clustering, the process of coding, consolidation and interpretation of data. According to (Miles and Huberman 1994:248) clustering is "a tactic that can be applied at any level and can be used to understand a phenomenon (occurrence) better by grouping things together that have similar patterns or characteristics". Other authors use the concept categorising for clustering. According to Nonyane (1996:102) categorising means looking for recurring regularities in the units of data, that is identifying units of data that are related to each other and then grouping them to form categories.

In this study the categories are formed according to interview data from each group of respondents. I use the example of the three responses of the interview conducted due to limited space. I will give examples of the three responses of the interview:



**UNITS**

**CATEGORIES/CLUSTERS**

**1.**

1. Mothers know their children better

Learning start at home with the help of a Mother

2. Mother spend a lot of time with their children than with the teachers.

3. Early learners are faced with difficulty of constructing meaningful learning especially the slow learner children can ask his mother where the experience a problem or difficulty.

Need the involvement Of the mother

**2.**

1. Children need extra work to do at home with the help of mothers.

2. Mothers should have an extension programme that will help the child at home.

3. Mother should have afternoon lesson to help where A child is experiencing problems or difficulty.

A need for programme

**3.**

1. The content of the programme should teach the child proper reading and writing skills. Teach meaning of number

2. It should teach the child to read and write properly.

3. Teach the child to read with understanding. Teach the child to read with self-confidence. It should help the child to manipulate and perceive sounds and words.

Teach proper reading  
Writing, meaning of  
Four operations in  
Maths

## **3.5 PROCESSING AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE DATA**

### **3.5.1 THE PROCESSING OF DATA FROM THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW**

The interview was conducted with 10 mothers and one teacher who teaches in an overcrowded classroom. The atmosphere in which the interviews were conducted was both peaceful and co-operative. Notes were taken during the interview and an audio recording was also made. A verbatim transcription of this recording was later made and this was subsequently analysed by means of dendogrammes, as described by Miles & Huberman (1994). Similar issues were noted and grouped together and the emerging patterns were identified.

Here is an example that will serve as an illustration of the analysis of raw data by means of dendogrammes:

#### **Individual interview data consolidation of unit one:**

- R1 The mother knows the child better -> involvement
- R2 The mother spend a lot of time -> involvement with the child
- R3 The mother can help where a child experiences difficulty in learning -> involvement

#### **Individual interview data consolidation of unit two:**

- R1 The children need extra work -> help at home
- R2 Mothers should have extension program -> help at home
- R3 Mothers should have after noon lesson -> afternoon help at home

#### **Individual interview data consolidation of unit three:**

- R1 The content of the programme -> read and write well
- R2 The content of the programme -> read and write properly
- R3 The content of the programme -> read and write with understanding

### **3.5.2 CONSOLIDATION OF DATA FROM INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

The first category, which emerged from the analysis process, is that these mothers regard involvement in a child's learning as a key issue in order to reach success at school. The second category indicates that mothers want a support programme to extend learning at home. The third category also shows that reading, writing and calculating must be meaningful to a child.

### **3.5.3 CONSOLIDATION OF DATA FROM THE TEACHER INTERVIEWED AND OBSERVED DATA FROM SCHOOL AND HOME**

The teacher indicated that in overcrowded classes there is no effective teaching and learning. I also observed, in both the situations indicated, that if the child is not helped there is no effective learning that is meaningful learning.

### **3.6 CONCLUSION**

In this section, an overview of the context of data collection the processing of data and consolidation of formal categories has been given. The empirical findings will be interpreted in the next section.



## **SECTION FOUR**

# **4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This section aims to present the findings of the investigation that was launched to address the research question. First the consolidated analysed data will be interpreted against the background of the conceptual and theoretical framework. Conclusion will be drawn from the findings. Thereafter implications of the findings will be discussed and lastly suggestions will be proposed.

### **4.2 PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION OF FINDINGS.**

Le Compte and Preissle (1993:150) regard the presentation, interpretation and application of findings as the conclusion of the research project. The researcher has to provide a framework for interpreting the meaning of what has been established from the data. This framework indicates how the results are built upon a foundation of categorised data elaborated by the relationships discovered among categories, and placed in the context by integration and application to the context.

In the light of the context of this study, the data collected through observation and interviews together with the theoretical or conceptual "data" constitute the findings.

#### **4.2.1 FINDINGS RELATED TO MOTHERS' AND CAREGIVERS' INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY LEARNING**

- Mothers expressed their need to be involved in their children's early learning because they say that they know their children better.
- They needed to be involved because they believe that all learning begins at home.
- They also expressed a need to be involved because many of their children struggled in the first grade.
- They expressed a need to be involved as they trusted themselves more than they did the teachers. They feel that their children may be scared of the teachers and are not willing to express themselves freely in school.
- Mothers doubt their own knowledge of literacy and numeracy and would like to assist their children more effectively.

#### **4.2.2 FINDINGS RELATED TO THE SUPPORT PROGRAMME**

The mothers and caregivers expressed a need for an afternoon lesson extension programme that can be used to employ mothers and caregivers to help the child with schoolwork at home. This means that mothers should have a support programme that will intentionally involve the mothers in helping early learners with schoolwork. They said that they would like to know the school, the teacher and the curriculum better.

#### **4.2.3 FINDINGS RELATED TO THE CONTENT OF THE PROGRAMME**

- The mothers and caregivers expressed that the content should assist them to teach the child proper reading and writing skills that are extensions of schoolwork.
- The programme should help the mothers to assist their children to understand the meaning of the four operations of Mathematics.

#### **4.2.4 FINDINGS RELATED TO THE TEACHER OF THE OVERCROWDED CLASSROOM**

- The teacher indicated that an overcrowded classroom retards the progress of the children since there is not enough time for individual mediation. There is also not enough space to move around and monitor children's classwork. It is not easy to see the activities of especially the underachievers in an overcrowded classroom and the atmosphere is also not conducive for teaching and learning, because an overfull classroom is not a pleasant place.

#### **4.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS**

From the findings of this research, the following implications are evident:

4.3.1 There is a need for mothers and caregivers to be involved in helping the early learner in literacy and numeracy skills. Mothers as primary teachers should intervene in the early learner's learning to make learning meaningful, to monitor progress and to support and encourage the child. Hence parents, especially mothers, must improve their own literacy and numeracy skills in order to have enough knowledge to effectively assist children.

4.3.2. It is also evident that the mothers need support programmes which will extend learning at home. This means that mothers should be empowered in literacy and numeracy and also in the outcomes-based mode of education. If parents encourage process instead of product, they can reinforce what the teacher is trying to do. It implies that during workshops they should be given the opportunity to see children "in action" during the teaching of literacy and numeracy. It also implies that they should be given guidelines and taught techniques for helping with homework without doing it for the children. Mothers must not do the homework for a child but do it with him. Therefore mothers should be trained how to read to children or listen to children reading. Knowledgeable people in the community, such as teachers, should assist parents to promote good reading and writing habits at home by continually communicating with mothers. This implies teaching parents to make and play games to reinforce skills in literacy and numeracy. Parents should also be taught to communicate with the school authorities in order to find out what new content and methods have been introduced.

4.3.3 Another issue that became evident is the content of the programme. They expressed the need for content that would make the child understand reading, writing and the four operations in Mathematics and not just to copy and rote-learn. This implies that mothers should be guided in using different methods of teaching and how to use educational artefacts effectively. The mothers should follow the programme step by step and they must lead the child. Mothers who are only semi-literate and hardly numerate need to be taught before they can teach.

#### **4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- All educators especially the teachers and the mothers must always accompany the early learner in learning. They must make sure that a child is able to make meaning of what he is learning.
- Both the teacher and the mother should know the child's ability and potential so that they may give suitable assistance.
- Teachers and mothers should endeavour to help each child to understand each small step or section of the work, and not to fall behind.
- Each pupil should be allowed to have pleasant experiences in class, such as experiencing success, solidarity and personal worth and to continue that in home-based pedagogy.
- Every learner should become actively involved in learning activities and not be allowed to become a passive observer.
- The environment should be conducive to both teaching and learning. It should be enriched with educational resources.

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

In this study an investigation of the need of a support programme for mothers of school entry pupils was conducted. The focus was on initial literacy and numeracy and how mothers viewed their role. The study included a brief theoretical overview which highlighted some contemporary knowledge on the role of home pedagogy and mothers as mediators in the use of cultural tools and knowledge. The field investigation covered views of mothers concerning their need of support programmes in home-based pedagogy in initial literacy and numeracy. The findings have

been encouraging as they tentatively indicate that mothers feel seriously about the need to be involved in helping their children in early learning. The main implication is that mothers need to be empowered in literacy and numeracy in order to have enough knowledge to help the child properly. This could promote progress in school and facilitate communication between home and school.





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