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Applying critical literacy theory to examine English Further Education and Training short story textbooks

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A research report submitted to the School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (with specialisation in Languages, Literacies and Literatures)

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Declaration

I, Adolph Sekgobela, declare that this research report, titled “Applying critical literacy theory to examine English Further Education and Training short story textbooks”, is my original work and has never been submitted before at any other university for any other qualification. Where reference is made to other people’s ideas, I acknowledged each instance by using references. This research was conducted following academic rules.

Signature:

Date: 20-08-2023

Dedication

This research is dedicated to my beautiful wife, Pertunia, and my lovely children, Mukutsuri and Warona.

Acknowledgements

Finishing a project like this one made me realize that *Motho ke motho ka batho!* A person is indeed a person because of others. It would have been an extra challenging project if it were not for the guidance and support of my supervisor, Dr Naomi Nkealah. It was an absolutely challenging piece of work, but my supervisor's support encouraged me to keep working. She challenged me to read more, to research more and it felt difficult in some instances, but it is exciting to realize that such challenges can also be interesting and enjoyable to do. I would like to thank the Wits Whitmore Bursary (2021, 2022 and 2023) and Post Graduate Bursary Support (2021) for their partial payments towards my coursework and research fees. I would like to thank my wife, Pertunia, for the support throughout. Lastly, I thank the loving awesome God for always giving me strength.

Abstract

Textbook authors have worked hard over the years to produce quality work. However, it has been a challenge in South African basic education to use these textbooks to train learners to be critical thinkers, which means that learners struggle to cope when they reach higher education. Basic education assesses basic knowledge, without learners themselves being challenged to engage creatively with content and interpret it through a critical lens. This study researched on three short story textbooks, namely *Fabulous*, *Short Story Anthology* and *Changes* using the qualitative method. These are short story textbooks used in public schools in South Africa, as part of English First Additional Language subject content. Purposive sampling was used to make selection of short stories. Within each book, the Department of Basic Education prescribed eight stories for learning. This study selected two of the eight prescribed stories from each book, making six short stories selected for the research. These stories were analysed with their activities against critical literacy theory. It was found that short story activities, especially those studied in Grade 11 and 12, do not assist learners to develop skills such as problem-solving, creative writing, and critical literacy, and that the Grade 10 stories do in some instances promote critical literacy skills development. On the whole, it was found that all short stories limit learners from being creative beings who are able to rewrite, rethink and reconstruct the world around them.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

South Africa is a country whereby, in the past, during apartheid, higher education institutions marginalised certain groups, mostly Blacks (Heleta, 2018). Institutions for Black students did not offer intellectual and critical literacy skills (Heleta, 2018). Black students were taught technical skills which prepared them for work (Heleta, 2018). Even primary and high schools did not offer Black learners' intellectual skills. There was an education system referred to as Bantu Education, which was aimed at creating inferior education for Black South African students, so that they could only work as unskilled labourers (Mhlauli & Mokotedi, 2015), while white students, in contrast, were offered intellectual education (Mhlauli & Mokotedi, 2015). The Bantu Education Act was in effect from 1954, until it was replaced with the Education and Training Act of 1979. Bantu Education had a negative impact on Black students in the past, and this impact is still evident today. Despite South Africa having moved from apartheid government to a democratic government for about 29 years, the country still feels the effects of some of the actions from the past, even educationally (Gallo, 2020). This has reduced Black South Africans' quality of education and job opportunities, especially in the intellectual fields (Gallo, 2020). While this research is not necessarily focusing on racial issues, it needs to situate its problem statement against this background.

Around 1996, the South African Schools Act (SASA) was introduced, which aimed at bringing equal access to education without discrimination. Around the same year, in 1996, Outcomes Based Education (OBE), also known as Curriculum 2005, was introduced as a curriculum aimed at addressing educational problems stemming from the reach and influence of apartheid (Williams, 2014). It was named Curriculum 2005 because it was anticipated to be completely implemented by 2005. This implies that SASA influenced implementation of OBE, which was the curriculum that was supported by the post-apartheid leadership (Williams, 2014). It was seen as a policy that would emphasise and bring about democracy in education, as teachers would decide what they want the outcomes to be in the curriculum. OBE was focused on the theory side of knowledge, education structure, and approaches to practice. It was interested in what learners can do at the end of their learning (Sun & Lee, 2020). An example would be, if a lesson is about defining concepts, the outcome or objective might be that learners should know how to define concepts at the end of the lesson. So, OBE is limited to and interested in what is referred to as competency and standards (Tungpalan & Antalan, 2021). The skills focused on in the Outcomes-Based Curriculum are Life skills, Basic skills, Vocational skills, Intellectual skills and Interpersonal skills (Tungpalan & Antalan, 2021). The goal of OBE was to impart knowledge of a past generation to the new generation of learners (Alonzo et al., 2023).

Part of the problems with OBE is that it did not pay attention to knowledge beyond the teacher in the classroom; furthermore, it was challenging to assess outcomes. For example, outcomes such as knowing that a learner respects themselves and others, and

that they take responsibility for their lives and actions, are things that are difficult to assess (Alonzo et al., 2023). Such outcomes are not observable and measurable. In the early 2000s, the development and progress that was expected from OBE curriculum was not seen. Around 2006, there were proposals to change the curriculum (Alonzo et al., 2023). Around 2012, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) was introduced as the new curriculum and some of its objectives were to modify OBE by making education accessible (Department of Basic Education, 2011). However, scholars such as Gallo (2020) argue that access to education is still as limited for Black learners today as it was during apartheid, because even though children have access to education in theory, the poverty they experience means that many of them are still significantly deprived of quality education. An example is Black learners who drown during the rains when they have to cross flooded rivers on their way to school—this number is still high (Gallo, 2020). Gallo (2020) argues that even after apartheid ended, the lack of educational services to Black societies still remained. By comparing the past and today, Gallo (2020) is justifying his suggestion that even today, with CAPS, policies need to be amended. In other words, CAPS does not seem to address all of the societal problems in relation to education. I concur with this view based on my context. There are few White learners at the school I teach in. Therefore, as a teacher, I am aware of racial inequalities that persist. This indicates that CAPS does not solve educational issues to any kind of ‘critical’ extent.

As the CAPS document indicates, English First Additional Language in Grade 10 to 12 is divided in three sections; paper 1, 2, and 3. Paper 1 covers language aspects such as parts of speech, and comprehension. Paper 2 is the literature section. In each grade, the

school or the teacher has a choice of choosing two types of literature texts out of four, which are the novel, short stories, drama and poetry (Department of Basic Education, 2011). For example, a teacher can choose to teach only poetry and the novel in Grade 10, as part of Paper 2. Paper 3 is about writing (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Learners are taught to write and are also expected to produce pieces of creative writing such as letters, diary entries and essays. Short stories, which this research focused on, are therefore part of Paper 2, which is the literature section. South African short stories evolved over the years; from the highly politicised stories in the 1970s and apartheid-based stories in the 1980s to more social-issue stories in the post-apartheid era, which address issues such as gender dynamics (Fasselt et al., 2020). Looking at most stories in the selected short story textbooks, most South African FET English stories were written and published in the the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, which means that learners barely read about current issues. Short story issues will be discussed in detail later, as literature findings and analysis unfold. Critical Theory is the theoretical framework of the study. Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy and their relationship to CAPS will be discussed in later chapters of this study, but for now it is important to state that this study is concerned with Critical Literacy which is a key pedagogical approach in Critical Pedagogy.

1.2 Research problem

There is disconnection between English education in basic education and higher education, and this is problematic because one would expect the two education systems to exist in a relationship of continuity rather than disconnection. The disconnection is

evident when public school English learners reach higher education institutions such as universities and find that they lack the basic skills needed for higher education English studies. These basic skills include critical literacy skills, which refer to one's ability to write and rewrite the world around them, in a way that they would be able to design and redesign concepts (Janks, 2013). Once these students reach university, they are shocked at the kind of education provided there as it is wholly unfamiliar to them (Shalem et al., 2013). This means that lecturers and tutors must start from scratch, as though the students are not continuing with education but somehow only starting it. In other words, public high schools do not prepare learners enough with knowledge and skills which would help them at higher institution levels.

Many first-year students, especially Black students, experience academic writing problems when they reach university, because, as stated earlier, there remain challenging inequalities in the educational system (Pineteh, 2013). Shalem et al. (2013) concur that first-year students at universities struggle with the basics of academic writing such as logical organisation of thought and referencing. As outlined in the background, there were inequalities in education in the past and there still are at present. Although student populations at higher education institutions are now diverse, with students coming from different racial, language and class backgrounds, epistemological access is still not evenly distributed as students from formerly marginalised populations come to university less prepared than those from formerly privileged populations (Meyer, 2012). This is because students from formerly marginalised groups attended largely public (government) schools where most of the teachers are a product of the same system that

trained Blacks to be labour workers (Mhlauli & Mokotedi, 2015). Thus, in South African basic education today, we still have learners who gain different kinds of knowledge and skills, as there are public (government) schools and private schools. Access to either type of school is determined by affordability which is in turn determined by class. There is a need therefore, to help those formerly marginalised learners from public schools so that they gain quality education which will help them tackle studies at higher education level. Meyer (2012) suggests that lecturers can close this gap. Already the likes of Fouche et al. (2021) have taken steps to design critical literacy assessments which allow students to also draw on their indigenous knowledge, hence being academically included.

While supporting disadvantaged students might function as a bridge to close the gap for existing university students, there is also a need to close this gap from high school or basic education level. Learners have to be trained at these levels for higher education. The CAPS document states that “the main reason” learners learn literature is to “develop” understanding of “special use of language” (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 16). For example, this would mean understanding that figurative language is language that has indirect meaning, and that literal language has direct meaning. According to the CAPS document, it is not easy to teach literature (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The document suggests that it needs “honest interpretations and comments from the learners themselves” (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 16). This suggests that high schools would not acquire literary interpretation skills if learning activities do not give them opportunities to comment on the texts from their particular perspectives.

The CAPS document advises teachers to do away with interpreting literature for learners but to instead allow them to participate and reason. The document states that interpretation is more about what is meaningful to the reader than the focus on what is right or wrong (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The CAPS document also encourages class discussions, especially ones that lead to written work. It is emphasised that literature is not about right answers: “A whole text means something, not just bits and pieces of it; a good reading of a text incorporates the whole text in interpretative, creative, personal, and exploratory practices” (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 17). But what stands out is that most learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds and schools, are not trained to be academic writers in high school (Pineteh, 2013). Even proper books in South African public schools are not used to empower learners to be critical members of society who are aware of social issues. For example, most schools in South Africa used to have *Animal Farm* as a prescribed novel. *Animal Farm* is a satirical novel that uses human beings to represent the capitalists – the owners of the means of production – and uses animals to represent the working class (Barkhordar, 2017). Despite being published in 1945, the novel addresses contemporary issues: it speaks about issues of class and power. What is sad is that in the learning activities on this text learners were supposed to mostly recall the story. I downloaded the English First Additional Language Paper 2 Grade 12 November 2011 and 2015 question papers from the Department of Basic Education website, as these were the ones available at the time. It was evident from these papers that most questions asked learners about the literal meaning of the novel; for example, the animals’ hard work, their characters, their roles,

and their attitudes. But what about the actual societal issues that the novel addresses metaphorically? The assessments on the novel do not help learners to get the figurative meaning of the text. This becomes a problem when learners reach higher education, since there is a huge gap between high school education and higher education (Pineteh, 2013). In higher education, students are expected to critically think, answer questions in relation to societal skills and apply theories in their critical interpretation of texts. High school literary studies therefore do not prepare learners adequately for university literary studies.

Academic writing is a skill applied in higher education, while in high school, learners still answer questions that test memory (Pineteh, 2013). Moreover, teachers are still applying traditional ways to teach prescribed literary texts. These ways include only teaching language basics, focusing on knowing characters and summarising the story (Seabi et al., 2020). However, the reality is that literature education takes quite a different direction at college and university level. There is a particular standard and curriculum that higher education applies (Meyer, 2012; Luckett, 2016) as lecturers teach students to question the realities around them. It is problematic how the higher education curriculum is so advanced, while high school FET education is very far from the advanced stage. Of course, education works in levels; this justifies why information offered in Grade 10 would not be the same as information offered in first-year university; but still, learners have to be trained for higher education literary studies. Learners at undergraduate level struggle to master academic writing, to conduct research and to develop proper academic arguments (Shalem et al., 2013). Freahat and Smadi (2014) found that several university

students battle with understanding texts at university, and this is caused by the gap between university and high school level of activities. The kind of activities learners do at schools do not prepare them to be literary students at university. They therefore struggle to answer questions that require analytical skills. This problem is caused by the prevalence of low order questions in high school textbooks. High school textbooks train learners to memorise rather than to apply critical literacy skills (Freahat & Smadi, 2014).

A study by Pineteh (2013) proposes improving academic literacies through using multimodality and lecturer and specialists' collaboration (Pineteh, 2013). Pineteh's study also recommends workshops which can help students with academic reading and writing (Pineteh 2013). Nel et al. (2016) mention that students from disadvantaged high schools have bad academic experiences at universities. However, Nel et al. (2016) draw a clear connection between disadvantaged high schools and disadvantaged universities, in a sense that most Black students attend disadvantaged high schools, and also have to attend disadvantaged universities. However, other studies make it clear that even advanced universities now face problems. For example, Fouche et al. (2021) complain about massification, even in institutions like Wits, whereby extra programmes have to be added to support students with academic writing. This makes it clear that there is a gap between high school and higher education. In other words, higher education offers the kind of education that students have not been trained for.

The problem therefore extends because in addressing issues such as the marginalisation of some groups, there comes the concept of decolonisation, which addresses issues such as the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge in subjugation of African education (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The subject of decolonisation is popular and also researched in higher education levels. The decolonisation movement became popular in higher education in recent years, with the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements. The #RhodesMustFall movement, which started around March 2015, was against the statue of Cecil Rhodes, in the University of Cape Town. The protest gained global attention. It led to a movement called #FeesMustFall which emerged from the University of the Witwatersrand, around October 2015. These can be argued to be good movements for raising of consciousness as staff from most higher education institutions adopted it in their studies. However, it is problematic how first-year students would be expected to enter spaces of decolonisation while they were not taught how to criticise in high school. The problem is that higher education institutions have advanced curricula that require one to be a critical thinker, who has academic writing skills (Shalem et al., 2013). Much of the teaching that happens in English classrooms in high school is not underpinned by literary theories as teachers simply follow the academic teaching plan to teach the prescribed texts. In a decolonial era, one would expect teachers to draw on critical literacy when designing literature lessons and to apply it to help their learners understand what is at stake. In summary, the problem here is the disconnection between literary education at basic education level, especially high school, and higher education.

1.3 Research aims

It is essential for English learners in public high school to be prepared for higher education studies in English. This can be done through introducing them to critical literacy, so that they can do basic constructions and reconstructions of knowledge to exercise their creativity and understanding of the world they live in (McKenzie & Jarvie, 2018). Hence critical literacy does not suggest changing the curriculum but enhancing it by allowing learners to have a voice, by including questions and activities that enhance participation as the CAPS document suggests. Critical literacy will be discussed in detail later. The aim of this research then is to see if prescribed short story textbooks and study editions at high school Further Education and Training (FET) level contain activities that promote critical literacy. This will be done by analysing both the story and its questions to see if this knowledge can help learners in preparation for them to tackle critical issues, like being analytical of politics in their country and having problem-solving skills in their communities. These critical literacy skills would also prepare those who wish to go to higher education institutions, so that they do not drop out due to academic challenges.

What learners do in high school influences their expectations in higher education institutions. Pather and Dorasamy (2018) state that students have expectations as soon as they enrol for their first year at university. These expectations are social engagement, academic engagement and academic support. What they would expect academically would be led and influenced by what they already know from high school (Pather & Dorasamy, 2018). Hence, if their prior knowledge and what they find at university do not

match, dropping out becomes a possibility (Pather & Dorasamy, 2018). Maddock and Maroun (2018) state that under CAPS, most learners are not prepared for higher education as it does not offer a strong foundation and preparation. For instance, in English classes, learners are used to being asked questions that test memory, but when they reach higher education, they find English courses in which assessments asks questions that need deep engagement with texts. This puts students on the threshold between staying in university and dropping out. The CAPS document states that the main reason learners are taught English literature is to create understanding of the special use of language in literary texts (Department of Basic Education, 2011). While, it is considerate of CAPS to want to equip students with knowledge of the special use of language, this often does not translate to learners acquiring critical literacy skills which they would need at university. This research focuses on short stories and their activities because assessment is essential in determining the extent to which content limits or advances learners' critical literacy. The research assesses short story textbooks in high school FET level and the focus is on short story textbooks in Grades 10, 11 and 12. The research focuses on short story textbooks which are prescribed in South African public schools.

1.4. Research questions

To achieve the aims outlined above, this research is guided by three research questions:

1. What kinds of activities are provided for learners in prescribed English FET short story textbooks?
2. To what extent do these activities promote critical literacy in learners?

3. To what extent do these activities prepare learners for higher education?

1.5 Rationale for the study

There is an educational deprivation in public schools. Learners are deprived of necessary information because teachers use traditional ways of teaching. These traditional ways include reproduction of information as it is, without critiquing it (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Traditional ways also include teaching basic knowledge like names of characters and the plot of stories instead of underlying critical meanings, which could be political, racial, or gender related (Ruuska, 2017). Teachers often find themselves reproducing what the curriculum says they must teach (Ruuska, 2017). It is important to investigate this problem to find out whether it is deliberate on the part of those who design the curriculum to deny learners critical literacy skills or not. This research focuses on English short story textbooks in public schools to see if the questions asked therein prepare learners for higher education in English education.

All public school learners do English at school in South Africa, whether as Home Language (HL) or First Additional Language (FAL). English itself is the medium of instruction in most public schools and universities and is used for most lessons and assessments in both basic and higher education. In both English HL and English FAL, learners are taught short stories at FET level. It therefore becomes important to find out if these short stories allow learners to apply critical literacy skills as they tackle different issues which sometimes touch on other disciplines. This research focuses on public schools. As a teacher of English, I am vested in this project because understanding

whether short story textbooks promote learners' critical literacy or not will enable me determine if I need to incorporate intervention strategies in my teaching or not, as well as decipher how best to do so if necessary.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

The study is limited to South African public schools, with a focus on English as first additional language, foreign language or second language. There are public schools, like former Model C schools, whereby learners do English as their home language, while their home languages are not English. This study will use FAL and second language to refer to such situations too. This study looks at the short story textbooks used to teach English in South African public schools and it is also limited to analysing short story textbooks used at the FET phase in these schools. The reason for this is to keep the data small and manageable and personally for me to focus on a phase that is relevant to my practice as a teacher.

1.7 Significance of the study

In this study, three English FET short story textbooks are examined in order to find out if they offer opportunities to train learners to have critical literacy skills, which would help them prepare for higher education. This study is significant since it interrogates the gap between high school and university knowledge in relation to English education. Pather and Dorasamy (2018) believe that this gap can be closed by higher education institutions'

willingness to understand students' expectations, so that they somehow can assess their prior or existing knowledge, in a way that would allow them to know where to start supporting them. This is critical since most groups that were marginalised in education before now have access to higher education (Meyer, 2012), but still experience challenges in academic literacy (Fouche et al., 2021). This study will remind curriculum designers and the Department of Basic Education to verify knowledge to ensure that it will train learners to develop deep-thinking, analytical minds which not only recall information but can also apply knowledge in different dimensions (Fouche et al., 2021). This will also remind authors and curriculum makers of the type of knowledge they can add to learners through assessment for learning. This study can also help the Department of Basic Education understand the significance of employing critical literacy theories in their curriculum. As a teacher of English, this study can help me realise the importance of allowing the classroom to be a literary space, whereby learners are not trained to be radical, but are trained to be objective about issues.

1.8 Organisation of the research report

This research report comprises seven chapters, the first being the introduction, which outlines the research background, research problem, research aims, research questions, rationale for study, and significance of the study. In general, it outlines what the whole study aims to focus on: the problems and aims around English literature and CAPS in South Africa. The second chapter is the literature review, which looks at other studies that tackled the same and/or similar problems, to be able to identify gaps. The third chapter is

the theoretical framework, which tackles the theory for this study and other sub-concepts that emerge from the theory such as power and inequalities. The fourth chapter is the research methodology, which presents the methods followed to produce the results of the study. Chapter five is the analysis of the selected short stories where each story is analysed along with its activities. Chapter six presents the discussion of findings in relation to the literature reviewed and theoretical framework. Chapter seven is the closing and concluding chapter; it summarises the study and offers recommendations for further study.

1.9 Chapter 1 summary

Chapter 1 looked at the research background, which outlines the curriculum that preceded CAPS and how CAPS came about. Secondly, the research problem, which is that of using literature to test mediocre skills that do not prepare learners for higher education literary education, was addressed. Thirdly, the research aims were explained, which are to find out if short story textbooks in Grade 10 to 12 public schools are used to teach critical literacy. Fourthly, the study outlined the research questions, drew borders for the study and justified the importance of the study. In general, this chapter aimed and managed to outline what the study is all about.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter outlined what this study is interested in, namely, the teaching of English literature in schools using prescribed textbooks. Literature is important to teach in high school as it plays a big role in shaping learners' minds and thinking. Through literature, learners can start to have a certain picture about the world. In this chapter, different scholars will be referred to, to explore issues around teaching of literature – short stories to be precise – since that is the kind of literature this study is specifically assessing. In this chapter, there will be a focus on several sub-topics. Firstly, the meaning of short stories will be explored. Secondly, this chapter will look at the importance of short story textbooks. Thirdly, the Department of Basic Education criteria for textbook selection will be discussed. Fourthly, the role of the short story genre in developing learners' critical literacy will be discussed. The fifth subsection will discuss Bloom's Taxonomy and types of questions in textbooks, from lower order to higher order questions. The sixth subsection will discuss problems with teacher training and pedagogies. The seventh subsection will discuss the contribution of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement to the teaching of literature in high school. The last subsection will discuss problems with high school literature textbooks.

2.2 What are short stories?

Dlamini (2016) defines a short story as a “brief tale” which mostly focuses on one or two themes. Short stories contain elements such as characters, plots, settings, and themes (Dlamini, 2016). Usually, a single aspect is explored. Short stories consist of a beginning, a middle which comprises the conflict or rising action, and the end which comprises the climax, falling action or resolution (Krone & Mattson, 2015). In short, short stories are brief pieces of fiction which explore “major conflict in a limited setting” (Krone & Mattson, 2015, p. 1). Short stories contain a few characters. Walter (2015) defines a short story as a brief piece of fiction in which, in the beginning, the character has a desire, and from the desire they encounter challenges; from the challenges they reach a turning point, and a resolution is made. A short story can also be defined as a piece of short literature, which can be written in different formats. Its usual features are a few characters, with a focus on a single incident (Walter, 2015). For Barkhuizen (2016), short stories are selections of data taken out from a bigger set of data such as written narratives and interviews and multimodal stories. They tell experiences of the past or imagined future following a single plot (Barkhuizen, 2016).

Fasselt et al. (2020) argue that South African short stories have had several shifts, from the highly politicised stories in the 1970s and apartheid-based stories in the 1980s to more social-issue stories in the post-apartheid era. They argue that continuous criticism on apartheid influenced this shift in short stories (Fasselt et al., 2020). Currently, the stories written are more modern, and they tackle subjects such as current socioeconomic

issues (Fasselt et al., 2020). Contemporary short stories also stretch to a number of subgenres like crime fiction, speculative fiction, erotic fiction, flash fiction, micro-fiction, and postcard fiction. These modern or current short stories also address issues such as sexuality and gender (Fasselt et al., 2020). Through short stories, students gradually learn how to think, and how to view the world and their place in it. It is then important to pick relevant short stories which relate to learners' realities, especially stories on adolescence and stories on students' history. Activities which learners do after reading short stories are important too because they emphasise what is important in the stories; the reason activities are important is that they enhance learning. They have an influence on learners' responses and imagination.

2.3. Importance of short story textbooks

This study is about short stories, but of course, it speaks about short stories found in textbooks, since the analysis that will be done is not only of the short stories but of the textbooks they are found in as well. Textbooks are advantageous as they are easily accessible, and in some instances, they are affordable and reusable without extra cost. So learners accessing their short stories in textbooks makes life easy for them. Textbooks are important resources in a classroom for curriculum delivery and curriculum sustainability (Okeeffe, 2013). The ideologies that compilers or authors of these textbooks promote are important aspects to look at. Textbooks in public schools complement annual teaching plans and lesson plans and function as curriculum pacers. When it comes to language teaching, they prove to be very significant (Weninger, 2018). One of the reasons

is that language has to do with texts and textbooks contain different types of text, from images to symbols and words (Weninger, 2018). Textbooks contain different aspects of focus, including culture, gender and others that keep learners engaged.

2.4 Department of Basic Education criteria for textbook selection

There is a general criteria that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) uses to select books for all subjects. According to Siebörger (2015), it has been quite a while since the DBE revised its criteria for selecting textbooks. The selection criteria used currently is interested in content, learning activities, design, and teacher guides. If the criteria were to be revisited, it would be advisable for the DBE to not limit prescriptions to written texts but to open room for other modes such as visual texts. This would help learners realize their multiple potentials and would also enhance creativity in the classroom. Firstly, under content, outcomes should be clear (Siebörger, 2015). This means that it should be stated what learners are expected to know at the end of lessons. Furthermore, content should be appropriately scaffolded, and it should be diverse in such a way that it shows different cultures, religions, genders and more. Textbooks should contain different meaningful activities for learners to work on individually and in groups (Siebörger, 2015). This would allow learners to have a skill to work individually and to work with others. Lastly, language and vocabulary should be appropriate for the grade; for example, key concepts should be clearly defined and simplified where necessary. The second criterion is learning activities. Firstly, it states that activities should be derived from learning outcomes. This means that activities should be part of learning, such that as learners do the activities they are also

fulfilling the outcomes. Secondly, they should be appropriate for the subject; for example, there should be scaffolding where necessary, so that learners build up their knowledge with necessary support. Also, if the subject is English, the activities should not deviate from outcomes and contents of the English subject.

The third criterion is layout, design, and overall quality. The text should be structured with the help of headings and subheadings, which would make it clear and easy to read. Where there are illustrations, they should be clear and relevant. The paper used should be of good quality and the textbook must be bound strongly. The textbook should also have a table of contents. This criterion applies to all textbooks selected by Department of Basic Education, not necessarily only English textbooks (Siebörger, 2015). The fourth requirement is the teacher guide. The guide should include clear guidance on how to use the textbook. It should contain examples of a work schedule; it ought to have an assessment plan and ideally should contain memorandum, checklist, rubric and other assessment tools that match the activity (Siebörger, 2015).

Looking at the textbooks selected for this research, they do contain several features from the criteria above. The short story textbooks meet the criteria under teacher guide, layout, and overall design. The content is also age appropriate. However, what is evident is that, of all the stories compiled, none of them is contemporary. It is the same content explained by Fasselt et al. (2020), which is either apartheid influenced, or set in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, meaning that the contemporary genres stipulated by Fasselt et al. (2020) are

not learnt in public schools. Under learning activities there is barely any group work, yet the criteria states that there should be group work. Moreover, activities are not variant to a satisfactory level: there are similar types of questions in all the stories. Other important aspects that are not mentioned in the criteria are visual aids or multimodality. The short story textbooks selected for this study have limited pictures. *Fabulous,* which is used in Grade 10, has no pictures at all. *Short Story Anthology*, used in Grade 11, has a drawing of a short story plot in the introduction. It also has pictures of authors for each story. *Changes*, used in Grade 12, has a picture of a short story plot. It also has a demonstration of a plot in the form of a cartoon in four frames, whereby the first frame is the beginning, the middle frames are the challenges, and the last frame is the resolution. The only image all of them have in common is the cover design, which is basic. There is nowhere in the textbooks where the textbook compilers refer learners to the internet or to another mode of learning. Siebörger (2015) states that if the criteria were to be reviewed, the Department of Basic Education should consider the inclusion of multimodality.

2.5. The role of the short story genre in developing learners' critical literacy

There are quite a number of benefits to be gained from reading short stories. According to Saka (2014), they can teach learners different literary features, for example, ambiguity, irony, exposition and others. Learners therefore become aware of language use. When ambiguity takes place in a newspaper, for example, or when learners see ambiguity on the television, they would be able to recognise it. Learners would also learn basic language skills, which would help them with everyday teaching and learning (Saka, 2014).

Short stories have evolved over the years. As it was stated, Fasselt et al. (2020) found that there are new genres; as such, short stories should raise consciousness of contemporary local and world issues, so that learners are not stuck in the past. This is not to say stories set in the past have nothing to offer, but it would be preferable if there could be a balance, not a situation where all stories, for instance are set in the 1980s. As stories teach language, which also evolves, it would be beneficial for learners to be part of the evolution by interacting with contemporary problems written about in contemporary language.

According to Saka (2014), short stories have to be chosen according to interests and needs of learners. The activities should be interesting and allow them to develop their critical reasoning. They should boost learners' ability to reason. Saka (2014) discovered that as much as literature is good for advancing learners' language, learners are resistant to it as they believe that it is difficult. Saka (2014) advises that it is possible to help learners enjoy literature, by choosing material that they relate to and which contains or prompts activities they enjoy. Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) state that short stories challenge and encourage learners to be creative in their process of learning language. Considering these factors, they suggest that, to make these stories interesting, learners should get to use their social resources to learn or tell a story. In this way, short story teaching and learning values diverse resources which learners bring to class. It also evokes learners' interests in learning short stories, as they know that after reading a short story, they may

be allowed to also write theirs, either as a reflection of the learnt story or a new project. It is also important to interpret stories in relation to sociocultural contexts, as this would allow learners to understand their own situatedness and will help lay the groundwork for them to start writing their own pieces (Essa & Mendelowitz, 2022). As learners interpret in relation to sociocultural contexts in class, they also get to know about different cultures.

Stories are written in different eras; many are set in the past. This teaches learners what happened in the past (Saka, 2014). They can learn cultures and traditions of the past (Saka, 2014). For example, the short stories they do in high school are written by different authors, from different places; in this study, there are writers from South Africa, Ghana and Botswana. Some are mixed-race, some are Black and some are White. Some are male, some are female. Some wrote while they were young, some wrote while they were old. This gives learners a chance to learn from diverse authors, which is a distinct advantages as compared to novels where often only one or two novels may be prescribed for a particular grade. When learners study short stories, they finish them quickly and in that way learn from many authors in a short space of time. As the CAPS document states, reading short stories is about the entire work, for learners to reflect on and interpret the whole work, rather than to focus only on parts of it (Department of Basic Education, 2011). They are therefore able to finish quickly and start discussing and interpreting, applying their minds and imaginations.

Literature influences learners' creativity as it stimulates their imagination. This advances their critical thinking abilities (Saka, 2014). Studying language through stories allows learners to be creative through relating issues of the past, present and future, and it enables them to rethink and to reimagine the future (Essa & Mendelowitz, 2022). Some learners may be encouraged to write their own pieces, as stories enrich their personal knowledge by teaching them from other people's fictional experiences (Saka, 2014). Learners are able to apply personal interpretations according to their personal views, experiences and feelings (Saka, 2014). Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) argue that learning language in the 21st century should be a creative process which employs different methods. To enhance this creativity, there should be a need to apply the imagination and interpretation to other modes. All of the textbooks that were analysed in this study barely have visual aids. They are text-based. Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) argue that language should apply multiple modes, so that learners are not limited to print-based material but are also exposed to performance-based story-reading and story-telling. Through performance-based storytelling, learners are able to decode the stories they are doing and translate them into enactments. Applying multiple modes in short story reading gives a voice to learners. They are able to use "facial expressions", "gestures", "eye contact" and "interaction" to connect the story with the rest of the class (Essa & Mendelowitz, 2022). In this way, learners are able to build and realise their identities in the process, so that they come away with a better understanding of their inner and outer selves (Essa & Mendelowitz, 2022).

2.6 Bloom's Taxonomy and types of questions in textbooks

Questions are one of the most effective methods used by teachers and textbooks to teach learners (Freahat & Smadi, 2014). So, questions are used to teach. Therefore, for proper understanding, good questions are advised as they help learners to arrange knowledge. The CAPS curriculum applies Bloom's Taxonomy, which categorises questions in different levels, starting from low order questions to high order questions. The taxonomy contains "Knowledge: Recalling specifications; Comprehension: Describing in one's words; Application: Applying information to produce results" (Freahat & Smadi, 2014, p. 1804). All the three terminologies, which are knowledge, comprehension and application, are low order questions. Higher order questions are Analysis, which refers to subdividing information to indicate how it was put up together; Synthesis, which refers to "creating a unique product"; and Evaluation, which refers to weighing a situation in order to come up with conclusions or decisions about it (Freahat & Smadi, 2014, p. 1804). Bloom's Taxonomy is the most used method in teaching and learning as it emphasises a variety of types of questions (Ulum, 2016).

Questions are not only used to evaluate learners academically. These questions can be used to help learners develop certain skills as a result of exploring and answering them (Freahat & Smadi, 2014). Different cognitive levels of questions should be applied as they influence interaction between learners and text (Freahat & Smadi, 2014). Questions which are well-designed lead to new perceptions, trigger discussions, and develop understanding of the subject matter (Tofade et al., 2013). Questions include various levels

of ability, so that learners can be able to interact (Freahat & Smadi, 2014). Freahat and Smadi (2014) argue that it is important to analyse the kind of questions in textbooks in order to realise the level to which they develop learners' thinking. Poor questions can hinder learning and limit learners' critical thinking (Tofade et al., 2013).

There are several scholars who have revised Bloom's Taxonomy. The primary authors to revise it are Anderson and Krathwohl (Wilson, 2016). The revised taxonomy terminologies are as follows:

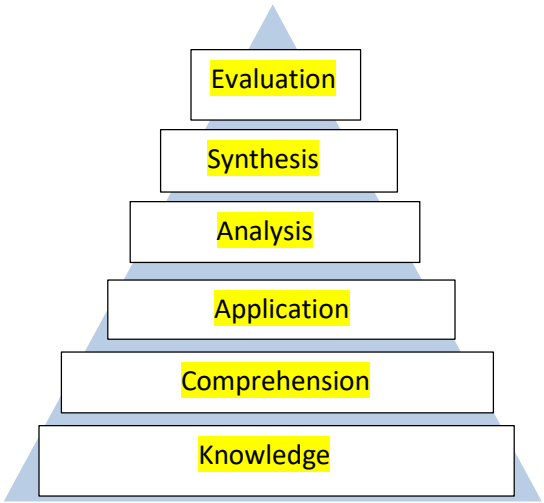
> Remembering: Retrieving, recognizing and recalling relevant knowledge from long-term memory; Understanding: Constructing meaning from oral, written, and graphic messages through interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarising, inferring, comparing and explaining; Applying: Carrying out or using a procedure through executing, or implementing. (Forehand, 2010, p. 3)

These substituted the first three terminologies from the previous Bloom's Taxonomy which used to be lower level questions. Looking at these new concepts, they position a learner in a way that the learner is the active individual who critically interacts with information. What is evident is that these terminologies were changed from nouns to verbs. For example, knowledge to remembering, comprehension to understanding, and application to applying. This could be to emphasize the active role that the learner plays when working with texts.

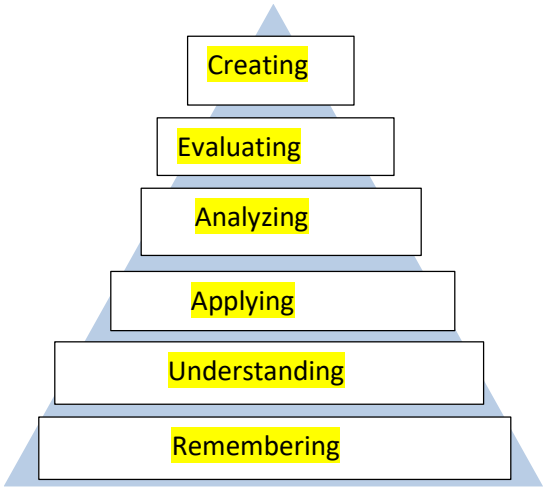
Terminologies which used to be higher order questions were substituted by the following:

> Analysing: Breaking material into constituent parts, determining how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose through differentiating, organising, and attributing; Evaluating: Making judgements based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing; Creating: Putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing. (Forehand, 2010, p. 3)

What is evident with the last three terminologies is that Analysis became Analysing, Synthesis was substituted entirely by Evaluating, while Evaluation was entirely substituted by Creating. In other words, one terminology in the taxonomy, which is Synthesis was entirely removed, while a new terminology being Creating was introduced. The order also changed, as evaluation which used to be the last, became the second last, substituting the removed Synthesis (Wilson, 2016). To make the explanation understandable, below is a model which clarifies and summarizes what was revised:



Old Bloom's Taxonomy model



New Bloom's Taxonomy model

Figure 1: Bloom's Taxonomy models

2.6.1 Lower-order questions vs higher-order questions

There are two levels of questions, which are high-level and low-level questions, also called lower-order and higher-order questions. The revised Bloom's Taxonomy does not use this category. This could be because it finds both categories significant as they serve different purposes (Freahat & Smadi, 2014). However, I will briefly discuss lower-order and higher-order questions, so that their functions and different purposes are made clear. Lower-order questions encourage learners to recall names, processes, settings, etc. Teachers generally tend to ask lower-order questions (Tofade et al., 2013). English textbooks also tend to promote lower-order questions which rely on learners' opinions or their recalling of the work they are studying, and prior knowledge. Higher-order questions are advanced. They need learners to have knowledge of the subject, so that they engage

in deeper thinking and interaction of the context they are busy with (Freahat & Smadi, 2014). Tofade et al. (2013) argue for higher-order questions which would promote deep thinking, allowing learners to analyse and evaluate concepts.

Some research has shown contradicting facts about using different questioning levels, to the point that the authors suggested the use of both lower- and higher-level questions (Freahat & Smadi, 2014). This is because both types serve different purposes: lower-order questions are used to assess basic skills, while higher-order questions develop critical thinking skills (Freahat & Smadi, 2014). Research has found out that authors use a lot of lower-order questions and this hampers learners' ability to develop critical thinking skills; learners are trained to memorise, but not to be critical thinkers (Freahat & Smadi, 2014). Freire (1972) sees education as an action to bring freedom, not to memorise.

2.6.2 Divergent vs convergent questions

Divergent questions have many options to respond from; they allow for diverse responses. They also encourage dialogue (Tofade et al., 2013). Agustianingsih and Mahmudi (2019) argue that it is only open-ended questions which can inspire learners to develop higher-order thinking skills. Faroh et al. (2022) argue that questions which are open-ended increase high-level thinking abilities. Open-ended questions help learners to decode and interpret problems and evaluate information in order to come to proper decisions. These kinds of questions help learners be able to create statements or arguments, and this helps them to be creative (Wulandari & Ekawati, 2022). Textbooks

normally have closed-ended questions, and that makes it difficult to develop higher-order questions (Agustianingsih & Mahmudi, 2019). Closed-ended questions, also referred to as convergent questions, are kinds of question that do not offer a lot of choices (Tofade et al., 2013). This means they are questions whose answer is there in the textbook and is somehow fixed.

2.6.3 Brainstorm questions

These kinds of questions are used to allow learners to come up with a list of ideas. Through brainstorming ideas, learners would be encouraged to be creative (Berger, 2016). However, if learners are also given a chance to brainstorm questions, instead of only answers, Berger (2016) argues that they would be smarter, as they will dig deep into a problem, and also aim to solve it. In other words, in order to spark creativity, a teacher may allow learners to brainstorm both ideas or questions, either at different times or simultaneously. Brainstorm questioning helps learners to be creative and innovative. Brainstorming is an organised technique, which is an example of the divergent question, and it sparks creativity (Kalargiros & Manning, 2015). In other words, brainstorming is an example of an open-ended question itself, as Kalargiros and Manning (2015) associate it with divergent questioning and thinking.

2.6.4 Personalised questions

Personalised questions and activities have to align to each learner's needs and what they prefer. There has to be a model used, in order to identify each student's needs. In personalised activities, learners are allowed to finish in their own time, as they do different activities or activities modified differently. Such personalisations might range from making content for the specific age of learners, e.g. customising for age-appropriate content (Kucirkova et al., 2021). FitzGerald et al. (2018) state that personalisation of content or activities is seen as positive but it is not clear how the system would be implemented effectively in educational technology, although personalised education is often associated with technology (FitzGerald et al., 2018). They propose creation of personalised technology-enhanced learning (FitzGerald et al., 2018).

2.6.5 Comparison questions

These questions can be both lower-order questions and higher-order questions (Tofade et al., 2013). They can require the learner to evaluate and analyse issues around text and can also ask for lower-order comparison like tabulating differences and similarities of characters or text (Tofade et al., 2013). Learners normally compare and contrast concepts or ideas within a text. They also examine and differentiate (Tofade et al., 2013). When answering a comparison question as a higher-order question, learners focus on subdividing content to show how it is put up together. In so doing, they are interacting with text and are opening up possibilities to gain more knowledge through comparing the context given and also using their prior knowledge to make judgements. Learners get to

organise information using the data they analysed and therefore make inferences about the information. This allows them to choose what they think is most appropriate in a given context (Tofade et al., 2013). Compare and contrast questions allow learners to have autonomy over their response or discussion and give them a choice to take a side if they prefer.

2.6.6 Funnel questions

These are multiple questions which start as broad and become more narrowed (Tofade et al., 2013). These kinds of questions move from general information to specific information (Troyer, 2022). As a teacher of English, I use this method during class discussions and debates, to focus the conversation on narrower aspects. These are called funnel questions because they are like a real funnel, which holds a lot of liquid on top, but the liquid narrows as it goes down. These questions can even be asked as interview or interrogative questions. For example, after a learner gives their understanding of a story, the teacher may funnel down the ideas to get a deeper understanding of the concept. Troyer (2022) argues that the teacher may use the funnel method in a way that directs the learner to the teacher's understanding of ideas. The idea is to have a detailed and clearer response. This type of question sounds like a higher-order type of question as it challenges learners to dissect the concept into finer critical aspects.

2.6.7 Memory and recall questions

Memory and recall questions are types of questions which need learners to only recall incidents that they might have memorised during learning or studying (Persky & Fuller 2021). Through memorisation, learners decode information and then encode it in the storage area of the brain from where they later retrieve it (Vander Beken et al., 2018). It is seen as a good sign to be able to memorise, as memory is an important tool in a human's mind and intelligence (Vander Beken et al., 2018). In terms of short stories, memory questions would help learners remember characters, plot and incidents that took place. These are lower-order kinds of questions. They become memory and recall when the actual extract with answers is absent. Learners usually recall these details during an exam.

2.6.8 Focal questions

These are questions where learners have to choose an option or justify it (Tofade et al., 2013). These are normally questions which require a 'yes' or 'no' response, then in some instances, learners give reasons for their answers. This type of question is typically used in textbooks (Tofade et al., 2013). This is a lower-order type of question as the learner is usually given direction by the question (contained in the question itself) and all they have to do is agree or disagree.

2.7. Problems with teacher training and pedagogies

Most teachers just reproduce the textbook and follow the annual teaching plan, and in so doing they limit learners' critical literacy skills, and they also reproduce a circle of passiveness, in a way that learners are trained to agree to what is given (Comber, 2015). What children learn in class depends on the teacher who offers them the subject (Taylor, 2008). Taylor (2008) argues that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds suffer the most because when they leave school, they have fewer resources at their homes to enhance and advance their knowledge. It is therefore important that teachers be trained to teach and offer fair education that gives learners platforms to exercise their own agency, which is the capacity and freedom to act (Ahearn, 2010). Learners have to be able to use their own voices (Ahearn, 2010). Thus, education should contain thinking skills, to avoid producing passive learners.

In a certain SACMEQ (Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality) programme, teacher knowledge was tested (Taylor, 2008) in which there were 14 unnamed African countries participating. Taylor (2008) makes it clear that, in this programme, South African teachers refused to participate. It would have been good, however, if the participating countries were mentioned by name rather than only stating the one that did not participate. Of the countries involved, 46 teachers participated, and these were Grades 1-3 teachers. The lowest mark of their assessment was 58%, while the highest mark was 94%; the average result was 75%. According to Taylor (2008), this suggests that the teachers study less or do not study from the textbooks they use.

Taylor (2008) therefore concludes that teachers are exhibiting a passive culture (Taylor 2008). The reason teachers seem passive in this instance is that the curriculum and annual teaching plan are specific with what teachers ought to teach, hence it might be difficult to teach the way they would want to (Maddock & Maroun, 2018). They just teach for the sake of fulfilling the annual teaching plan. Taylor (2008) notes that these same characteristics are also seen in high school teachers. Taylor (2008) argues that it is especially South African learners who receive education of poor quality compared to other neighbouring countries. He suggests that improving what teachers do in classrooms is significant to better learning. This implies that the other counties that participated are our neighbouring countries. This is because, in his conclusion, Taylor (2008) mentions that "South African children receive schooling of a significantly poorer quality than pupils in many of our much poorer neighbouring countries" (Taylor, 2008, p. 21).

This study investigates the gap between high school English and university English studies through analysing English short stories to determine if high school prepares learners fairly or not for higher education. The problem with critical literacy is that there is less information and guidance on how it can be applied to schools (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). This means there are less trainings and intentions for basic education to turn learners into active beings who exercise their voices. Borsheim-Black et al. (2014) advise teachers to use the critical literacy approach in their teaching, but it still needs teachers to be trained in it.

There is no single strategy to bring change in high school education but if theory is explored together with practice, there can be change (Maddock & Maroun, 2018). There are challenges in South African education and these challenges include poor performance, and undertrained teachers (Singh, 2015). This leads to learners not coping with university, and dropping out as a result (Maddock & Maroun, 2018). The study by Maddock and Maroun (2018) established that CAPS has not managed to address OBE problems. Maddock and Maroun (2018) state that teachers receive training from less knowledgeable trainers, which is sometimes inadequate and does not offer enough practical knowledge; the same applies with teaching workshops. These are usually run by trainers who do not even know answers to certain questions themselves. Maddock and Maroun (2018) found that most teachers show love and commitment to their work and they believe that if the Department of Basic Education can improve its systems and methods, the problems that exist with literacy can be solved.

Maddock and Maroun (2018) found that one of the teachers in their study was worried about the state of learners who lack respect and also display an attitude of disinterest in education. One of the teachers mentioned the department making teachers do unnecessary things like paperwork which takes time, thus compromising teaching and learning as teachers run around to get their paperwork done (Maddock & Maroun, 2018). Another thing that is problematic is the fact that the Department of Basic Education creates workshops aimed at improving teachers' skills, while the trainers themselves are not necessarily subject experts, but just subject teachers. This was made evident by teachers' perceptions when it comes to training, through the feedbacks they give

(Bantwini, 2012). It would benefit education and the curriculum if the Department of Basic Education hired trainers and subject advisors who are experts in their relevant fields. When officials like curriculum advisors visit schools, they ignore actual teaching and learning problems and how to address them, and seem preoccupied instead with the state of teachers' files. According to Mayda (2015), it is crucial that learners are provided with adequate resources so that they can better interact with language. This supports the idea of multimodality: with different resources, learners would interact better with language. One of the problems which is evident when looking at the CAPS document and textbooks is that there are no adequate modes used and prescribed beyond text.

Sowell (2017) states that being able to offer good instruction to learners is an essential skill needed from teachers and is often overlooked in educators' training programmes. Sowell (2017) argues that significant topics are sometimes compromised and fail to deliver adequate results in the classroom because of poor instruction. As mentioned earlier, powerful literary pieces are prescribed for schools but mostly not used to touch on critical issues affecting contemporary South Africa. For example, the novel *Animal Farm* was used for learners to memorise incidents, instead of using it in the classroom as a means of tackling actual societal issues such as oppression, exploitation and tyranny. This is a skill that can be learnt, so teachers who lead workshops and training sessions should emphasise this skill and learn to impart it properly. Beyond this, most problems arise from the curriculum itself, the CAPS curriculum.

2.8 Contribution of Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement in high school

The CAPS document outlines several aims of the curriculum:

> The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 gives expression to the knowledge, skills and values worth learning in South African schools. This curriculum aims to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. In this regard, the curriculum promotes knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive to global imperatives. (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 4).

CAPS aims, as stated in the CAPS document, indicate that it is a curriculum with several advantages. Despite Gallo (2020) still emphasising that the impact of apartheid is still visible, which is true, nowadays CAPS helps most Black learners to access university. The document states:

> The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 serves the purposes of: equipping learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country; • providing access to higher education; facilitating the transition of learners from education institutions to the workplace; and providing employers with a sufficient profile of a learner's competences. (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 4)

As mentioned in Chapter 1, CAPS came to replace OBE (Wilmot & Merino, 2015). This new curriculum was intended to help learners access higher education institutions so that they would be equipped with skills for the workplace (Maddock & Maroun, 2018). CAPS aims to help learners have a profile of competencies so that they can confidently present them to employers (Maddock & Maroun, 2018). Maddock and Maroun (2018), in their study, interviewed teachers about CAPS. Notably, one teacher stated that CAPS was introduced too quickly and its content is too sophisticated for South Africa (Maddock & Maroun, 2018). In addition,

> all respondents repeated the gravity of the shortage of excellent educators; the escalating number of experienced, expert educators leaving the profession; an unwieldy and rigid CAPS system introduced without adequate research and testing, and low standards which do not reach the 50 per cent pass rate in English and Maths prescribed. (Maddock & Maroun, 2018, p. 207)

Based on this quotation, the CAPS curriculum has been found to be problematic. The first problem with CAPS is that it claims to bring creativity and critical literacy in the classroom but that is not evident in CAPS prescribed books and exam papers (Hove & Maruma, 2014). Hove and Maruma (2014) argue that the CAPS curriculum opposes its stated mission by not practically promoting critical literacy skills, and problem-solving skills in schools. Hove and Maruma (2014) further note that the aim of teaching learners is to open their minds and enable them to be aware of misconceptions, and to enhance their ability to reason and question. Unfortunately, that is not seen in schools. Instead, learners read to memorise. Freire (1972) argues that education should be a tool to allow learners to critique issues associated with what they are learning, and not to memorise. Hove and

Maruma (2014) make reference to Freirean theory, which is actually a critical literacy theory, and they state that according to this theory, learners should have a voice. CAPS instead treat learners as passive human beings with nothing to say. The only thing learners would be doing throughout the year would be to reproduce what authors said, and that does not necessarily come with understanding, as it is memorised. Hove and Maruma (2014) claim that CAPS is similar to Curriculum 2005 because it is a curriculum that lacks creative pedagogies to education, and in particular language education.

2.9. Problems with high school literature textbooks

It is necessary to realise that schools do study literature, which helps learners learn from characters' experiences, which may help them with their social lives. It also helps them with language skills and more. Seabi et al. (2020) did a study in which they were exploring "innovative methods of teaching English Literature in South African Secondary Schools" (Seabi et al., 2020, p. 120). They focused on Limpopo schools, based in Mankweng Circuit. What they found was that the lessons aimed at conveying and assessing language skills. Seabi et al. (2020) highlight that CAPS in literature is aimed at conveying "cultural knowledge and advanced English language skills to the learners" (Seabi et al., 2020: 120). What is problematic here is that schools use literature to assess learners' reading and writing skills but not to enhance critical literacy skills and that also denies learners' skills that would enable them to be independent thinkers with a voice. In that way, learners' ability to solve problems, including contemporary issues, would be limited.

Blöch (2016), in her thesis, analysed “three selected contemporary South African short stories from the Apartheid era, each written by a different author, and each located in a different social and regional background” (Blöch, 2016, p. 117). She did so by examining a lesson plan for each short story. The first lesson plan was on *Six Feet of the Country* by Nadine Gordimer: The first aim of the story according to the lesson plan was that learners “familiarise themselves with the storyline” (Blöch, 2016, p. 96) so that they could summarise the plot. Secondly, learners had to study the characters in detail so that they could “improve their speaking and presentation skills” (Blöch, 2016, p. 96). Lastly, they had to understand more about setting: the story didn’t “necessarily have to be set in South Africa” (Blöch, 2016, p. 96). The skills assessed in this lesson plan are writing, speaking and presenting. None of the skills are part of the skills questioned in this study which include critical literacy skills. Short stories have to be selected according to interests and needs of learners. The activities should be interesting and allow learners to develop their critical reasoning (Saka, 2014). According to the lesson plan for *Six Feet of the Country*, learners are limited only to language skills, which confirms what Seabi et al. (2020) found, that literature is used to assess language only.

The second lesson plan was on “The Park” by James Matthews. The first objective of the story according to the lesson plan was “to improve [learners’] writing skills, moreover, [to] proofread their classmates’ texts which is a great way to improve their own writing skills” (Blöch, 2016, p. 102). Secondly, learners were supposed to have a discussion which would help them work on “their speaking skills” (Bloch, 2016, p. 102). This story also assesses writing and speaking skills. It is problematic how the same skills were assessed.

Teachers should be allowed to assess multiple skills, not only language skills (Seabi et al., 2020). “The Park” was also selected in this study for analysis. It will be discussed with its activity later in the findings.

The third lesson plan was on “Mrs Plum” by Es’kia Mphahlele. The first focus of the story according to the lesson plan was “on the students’ speaking skills” (Blöch, 2016, p. 107). Secondly, the lesson was used “as revision of the text and to ensure that every student has understood the text” (Blöch, 2016, p. 107). Thirdly, on the second part of the lesson plan, “students are asked to create posters for the characters. This task evokes their creativity, but it simultaneously emphasises the main characters of the short story” (Blöch, 2016, p. 107). The third story too focuses on speaking skills. However, at least another element was added here, in that learners were also allowed to be creative, by creating posters.

Looking at all the lesson plans, it is clear that in the school, or rather the classes, which Blöch (2016) did research on, there was barely critical reasoning and application. The focus was only on learners being able to read, comprehend and write. According to the Department of Basic Education textbook selection criteria, there should be a variety of activities in textbooks (Siebörger, 2015). If the lesson plans researched by Blöch (2016) all focus on language, it implies that the curriculum encourages those kinds of activities, as lesson plans are derived from the annual teaching plan. It also implies that the textbooks contain only activities interested in assessing language.

2.10 Summary of the literature reviewed

This chapter managed to expose a number of important issues. This subsection will give a brief summary of the information that stood out. Firstly, short stories were explained: they are pieces of literary work with a short storyline and plot, featuring a few characters. Secondly, it was discovered that textbooks are important for curriculum pacing. They are also affordable and easy to access. Thirdly, the Department of Basic Education uses a set of criteria to select textbooks. What is problematic is that textbooks that are evaluated in this study only have certain features outlined in the selection criteria. This suggests that the Department has a challenge following its own selection criteria. Fourthly, the role of the short story genre in developing learners' critical literacy was discussed; what stood out is that multimodality should be utilised when teaching and learning short stories, to enhance creativity. Under the fifth subsection, Bloom's Taxonomy and types of questions in textbooks were discussed; it stood out that higher-order questions influence critical literacy, while lower-order questions do not, but in the end both types of questions are important. Under the sixth subsection what stood out is that there are problems with teacher training and pedagogies; there are teachers who are not well equipped when it comes to critical literacy. Under the seventh subsection, it was discovered that CAPS aims to produce learners who have the power to interpret text, yet the questions found in CAPS textbooks are mediocre and they assess lower-order thinking (Hove & Maruma, 2014). The last subsection discussed problems with high school literature textbooks. It was discovered that these textbooks test lower-order knowledge, which is assessed as language skills and comprehension. Looking at this summary, it appears that there are

problems that emerge. These will be discussed later in the analysis and discussion sections.

Chapter 3: Theoretical and conceptual framework

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the literature on literacies and curriculum innovation. It looked at works of different scholars and managed to sieve out what can be referred to as gaps. These are issues that were found to be either problematic or that need continuous attention. One issue that was found problematic and requiring further attention is the contradiction between what CAPS outlines as useful learning activities in textbooks and what textbooks actually contain as learning activities for short stories. By analysing prescribed short story textbooks and their activities, this study will contribute in shedding light on that contradiction. The analysis employs critical literacy theory. This chapter thus explains the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study. It will focus on critical literacy and concepts around critical literacy. It will also look at criticisms of critical literacy theory and key concepts which arise out of it.

3.2 Critical literacy theory

As mentioned in Chapter 1, critical literacy is a product of critical theory, which is an approach originally rooted in sociology, founded by the Frankfurt School of Thought. This is a social theory with interests in society and culture (How, 2003). It is aimed at creating awareness of power structures and developing means to critique and challenge them. This theory argues that social problems in society arise from social structures, and not

necessarily from individuals. Ideology is the main problem that hinders freedom (How, 2003). According to McLaren (1989), ideology is related to hegemony, as he states that hegemony is permitted by ideology (McLaren 1989). Hegemony is dominant knowledge which is passed through different structures like the school, church and family (McLaren, 1989). From critical theory came critical pedagogy, which is a theory of social change. Critical pedagogy is interested in giving freedom from oppression by applying critical consciousness, which motivates individuals to strive for change in the world by challenging dominant ideologies (Giroux, 1989). Critical pedagogy was founded by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher (Giroux, 1989). Supporters of the theory found a way to use critical pedagogy to address issues such as racism and class oppression (Giroux, 1989).

The theoretical framework for this study is critical literacy. According to Janks (2013), critical literacy is aimed at giving people the ability to understand the world. It also enables them to understand power relations, their identities and access to knowledge (Janks, 2013). Critical literacy gives students the ability to write and rewrite the world around them; in this way, they would be able to design and redesign concepts (Janks, 2013). Since this study aims at determining whether short stories and their assessments allow learners to be critical thinkers who are prepared for higher education and who understand issues around them, this is the most appropriate theory. Social critical theorists developed the concept of critical literacy (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). Their concern was power structures, social injustice and inequalities (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). They were also

interested in the role education plays in inequalities: in how it either reduces or reproduces inequalities (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016).

Critical literacy is rooted in critical social theory which is a wide neo-Marxist approach that is interested in social change. This is an interdisciplinary approach that emerged from the Frankfurt School. Critical social theory argues for knowledge to be constructed. As critical literacy is a product of the social theory, it aims at promoting engagement with text, which encourages reading and producing text with understanding, and a voice (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). Freire used and supported critical pedagogy theory and is often regarded as the founder of critical literacy (Comber, 2015). For Freire (1972), critical literacy was a tool to assist employees to question issues around their workplaces. Freire views language and culture as tools that carry multiple values, voices, and realities (McLaren, 1989). His interests are the society and the multiple realities that exist in society, which include inequalities such as systematic silencing of the oppressed (Freire 1972). To address the inequalities, he introduced concepts such as consciousness, which would enable people to become aware of societal struggles (McLaren, 1989). For Freire, education should be an action to bring freedom, a way for people to know, not to memorise (Freire, 1972). Inequalities in society create a tradition of silence which aims to see the oppressed being passive and suppressed (Freire, 1972). Education should then allow learners to have critical consciousness so that they criticise what needs to be criticised and applaud what needs to be applauded, as a culture of silence is meant to oppress (Freire, 1973). Having a culture of silence results in oppressed learners not

having the means to critically respond to unfairness, hence acting passively (Freire, 1973).

Bobkina and Stefanova (2016) make it evident that the application of critical literacy allows for critical thinking skills. They mention that the integration of literature in English classrooms is meant for critical awareness. Literature was meant for learning basic language skills, grammar and comprehension. Bobkina and Stefanova (2016) make it clear that in recent years, different scholars mention the possibility of literature being used as a tool to allow learners to have skills to interact across different disciplines. In this way, learners would communicate their interpretations of literary works. In so doing, learners develop critical literacy skills; hence their critical reasoning is stimulated (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). There should be a relationship between language and social change. For Freire (1972), incorporating critical literacy skills in literature would mean bringing social justice. As the theory is developed by critical social theorists, it advocates for learners to read texts in a way that they interpret and reflect, in order to understand issues of power, justice and inequalities among them (Comber, 2015). Critical literacy skills allow learners to interpret various texts applying a critical lens to do so (Giroux, 1989). To incorporate critical literacy, teachers should play a formative and creative role. Teachers would have to outline and provide proper conditions in order to allow learners to be active agents of their own transformation (Giroux, 1989). Teachers should also help learners to communicate effectively, especially during discussions, and to be able to learn from one another (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016).

For critical literacy method, teachers are responsible for making learning in the class meaningful through appropriate lesson design. They plan the lesson and also bring it to practice (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). Critical literacy approach in English language is directed at adding critical quality to existing work. In other words, critical literacy is not meant to make learners rebel against existing education, but to have the ability to interpret any work in front of them through applying critical literacy (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). Critical literacy helps learners interpret texts in a way to challenge certain beliefs and social structures of power (Freire, 1973); this approach allows learners to develop a critical awareness of how language is used in social settings. Critical literacy enables learners to interpret and analyse work instead of reading to memorise. As learners interpret texts, they are able to compare it to their realities. As they reflect on their experiences, they are able to question social injustices. At the end of the day, they develop problem-solving skills and reasoning skills (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). Through critical literacy, learners develop critical reading skills, which are skills encouraged by CAPS. As they read, they interact with the text, they interpret and they reflect; they become aware of other cultures and they are encouraged to respect them; they become able to form arguments (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). Therefore, critical literacy and critical reading teach learners critical thinking skills.

Borsheim-Black et al. (2014) argue that critical literacy is a method to question power. There are texts that perpetuate dominant ideologies, which include “Whiteness,

masculinity, heterosexuality, Christianity, and physical and mental ability" (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014, p. 124). Approaches normally used for literature do not challenge these issues, hence they continue marginalising certain groups in favour of others. Borsheim-Black et al. (2014) advocate for critical literacy, as it intends to examine and question issues of power, inequality and what is viewed as normal. Critical literacy pedagogy equips learners with skills which allow them to read against texts, understanding that language is not neutral. Borsheim-Black et al. (2014) argue that critical literacy does not only contain academic literacies but enhances learners to have a critical mind even after school, when watching content in the media, for example. Critical literacy is interested in teaching how a text is weaved, so that learners understand what that text aims to do in the world, hence challenging learners into a position of agency, while also equipping them with skills to reconstruct text to fit into their own realities (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). Critical literacy aims at allowing learners to decode ideologies in the text in order to critique them. In so doing, critical literacy adds more quality to the work than simply to criticise it (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). Critical literacy is a product of critical social theory. Therefore, Comber (2015) argues that critical literacy promotes social justice by allowing students to be researchers of language, by respecting their resistance, exploring diverse cultures, and critiquing classroom and public text.

Comber (2015) believes that we must question issues of poverty and inequality even in education, by applying critical literacy. Janks (2012) argues that critical literacy is a skill needed across all schools. This is mainly because we live in a world where information has become multiple as we have internet, social media platforms, etc., which produce

knowledge, and when some of the knowledge or information opposes another, critical literacy is needed. Janks (2012) argues that critical literacy would be needed in any place, whether in a privileged rich society or a poor society, because there would always be binaries everywhere; for example, of what is good and bad, what is evil and holy. Janks et al. (2014) discuss critical literacy as a living practice in the classrooms. They do so by providing examples of activities and focusing on whose interests, values, benefits are being served by these. They also look into inclusion and exclusion: whom and what a text includes and excludes. When text is written, there is choice in it, whether to write it in the present or in the past, or to include more describing words or doing words; this implies that texts can be deconstructed (Janks et al., 2014). According to Vasquez (2019), there has to be new ways to teach critical literacy which would accommodate new multimodalities. These modes might include the internet and social media. McKenzie and Jarvie (2018) refer to critical literacy as the ability for learners to apply resistant reading, which is reading against the text to realise to what extent texts contain ideologies of power and inequalities.

This study focuses on short stories and their activities, to see if these activities give learners the agency to be critical thinkers who are prepared for higher literary education and to critique different societal issues. Critical literacy theory helps in answering the research questions for this study which are:

1. What kinds of activities are provided for learners in prescribed English FET short story textbooks?

2. To what extent do these activities promote critical literacy in learners?
3. To what extent do these activities prepare learners for higher education?

Critical literacy theory also helps in providing a framework for evaluating different levels of questioning – lower-order, middle-order and high-order questioning – to see if these activities can prepare learners to be critical reasoners and interpreters. Critical literacy is considered a useful tool for English First Additional Language learners or English Second Language learners as it gives them the opportunity to develop critical awareness of the use and role of language, making them aware of the culture that might be rooted in the English stories, the power structures, gender, identity and class (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). Critical literacy theory is important because, as people, we are not free. We live in "asymmetries of power and privilege" (McLaren, 1989). Theories, according to McLaren, help people realise societal problems as not individual problems but societal problems (McLaren, 1989).

Education should address inequalities (Giroux, 1989). Therefore, curriculum advisors must examine the conditions of school knowledge in terms of how it is produced and what particular interests it might serve (Giroux, 1989). This implies that education is capable of producing certain forms of life. Critical literacy encourages learners to critique "dominant forms of knowledge", thus giving learners a voice and identity as they evaluate their own experiences in the process (Giroux, 1989). In an attempt to highlight the critical literacy of teachers of English, Justice and Tenore (2018) include in their book several voices of critical teachers who tell their stories. In chapter 15 of the book, Pabon (2018) tells her

story. Her critical literacy is closely linked to identity, and when she assesses unfairness, she looks more on the systemic inequality side (Pabon, 2018). She clarifies that there are existing systems in society which are unfair, for example, Black boys in US schools always being suspended and punished as they were associated with ones who despise education. To break this narrative, Pabon (2018) created after-school classes for learners who were suspended, and the way the suspended boys remained after school broke the narrative that Black boys do not like school. In other words, unfairness does not only exist in books but in the real world too. This was a way Pabon advocated for the learners. She also realised that the way Black girls were always guarded in her school, which was White-dominated, meant that Black bodies needed surveillance (Pabon, 2018). She makes us aware that before unfairness can exist in books, it also exists in everyday life, and that we must have a way of addressing it.

3.3 Critique of critical literacy theory

While critical literacy has been shown to be valuable in education, it is also important to acknowledge some criticism of the theory. Luke and Gore (1992) refer to the concept of agent of empowerment – the teacher, who is perceived as the one who carries extra-ordinary abilities. The problem Luke and Gore (1992) find is that since teachers are seen as agents of empowerment, their work contexts are ignored. For example, a teacher might be rooted in a patriarchal institution and culture, therefore their kind of empowerment is likely to carry an influence towards patriarchy. This study is aware of that and will not be referring to teachers as agents of objective empowerment. Another problem Luke and

Gore (1992) mention is that power is portrayed as “property”, something that can be ‘given’ to the learners by the teacher. They also mention the problem that once a person feels empowered, they might develop an attitude of not wanting to learn further. If not applied correctly, critical literacy may reproduce problematic ideologies. As teachers, we need to understand that our agency has limits, that we are not always correct in what we think (Luke & Gore, 1992).

The issue of critical literacy is also challenged by the Global Educational Forum, which views educators as persons who portray themselves as advocates (Berliner, 2013). The Global Education Forum wants education to be in its basic level (Berliner, 2013), thereby promoting teaching that is quite similar to the textbook approach emphasised by the annual teaching plan in South Africa. In other words, the Forum promotes the idea of the teacher just teaching content as it is, without encouraging learners to apply their critical minds to question issues. Leaders are also challenged to make critical decisions for their regions in terms of proper and fair decision-making, and enough resources (Berliner, 2013). Application of critical literacy tends to be criticised for leading and influencing learners towards certain critical analysis of injustice and oppression (Berliner, 2013). It is also criticised for problematising everything, by allowing for multiple perspectives. There is a general claim by critical literacy critics that critical literacy limits knowledge acquired by learners and influences them to be interested in issues of justice (or injustice) (Berliner, 2013). Andreotti (2014), to address this criticism, comes with a solution to teach for action. For example, when teaching learners about certain poor schools or environments without educational resources, learners have to understand that they have to engage in charitable

acts, or form charities, to help the disadvantaged learners. Secondly, learners have to be taught that they should be critical thinkers, so that they verify information instead of creating arguments from knowledge they did not verify and think critically about (Andreotti, 2014). In that way, critical literacy is used to help others and break the cycle of unfairness and inequalities.

3.4 Key concepts in critical literacy

This part of the chapter discusses key concepts of critical literacy according to the literature explored. It does not imply that these are the only concepts within critical literacy but these are the concepts found in most scholars' work and they will be the ones explored for that reason. These are power, inequalities, social justice, interpretation, critical language awareness, neutrality, and agency. The concept of power that founders of critical theory were interested in was that of questioning power relations in society. These power relations perpetuate dominant ideologies around class, race and gender. Critical literacy aims to problematise such ideologies in texts (Janks, 2012; Janks, 2013; Borsheim-Black et al., 2014; Janks et al., 2014; Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Luke, 2018; McKenzie & Jarvie, 2018; Vasquez, 2019). An example would be a text that portrays a certain race as being better than another or a certain gender as being better than another. The concept of inequality is also of interest to critical theorists as they question inequalities within races, gender groups, classes (Janks, 2012; Janks, 2013; Janks et al., 2014; Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Luke, 2018; Vasquez, 2019).

All these concepts are somehow related, as powerful groups perpetuate dominant ideologies which reflect as power, and these cause inequalities, which leads to the need for social justice. From the above discussed concepts, which are power and inequalities, there are concepts that arose as solutions to them. Firstly, social justice. Critical theorists were interested in social justice and fairness in society because of inequalities that were prevalent in society (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). Secondly, interpretation, which is more of a critical literacy concept. Critical literacy is an approach that teaches and allows the learner to interpret text, so that they can challenge and problematise it (McKenzie & Jarvie, 2018). This leads to the concept of critical language awareness, which emphasises how one should be aware of language use when they decode text (Vasquez, 2019). From critical language awareness, there is neutrality of text, which is a concept that emphasises that text can never be neutral (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). Each text contains and promotes certain norms or ideologies. If one were to read a novel or a short story, one cannot say the idea in the text is neutral, as truth is not neutral. The last concept is agency, which is all about taking an active role and exercising a voice, instead of taking any text as it is, without questioning it (Janks, 2012). There is also the concept of subjectivity, which refers to knowledge created from individuals (Luke & Gore, 1992), as well as hegemony, which refers to dominant knowledge and ideologies being perpetuated through social institutions like the school, church and family (McLaren, 1989). These concepts collectively function to bring about justice in society, so that even the oppressed develop a voice to challenge powerful ideologies.

3.5 Conceptual framework

This study utilises chosen concepts from critical literacy, which form part of a conceptual framework. However, as shown in the previous section, critical literacy concepts are closely related. In that case, I have chosen the ones that directly help me to answer my research questions. In doing that, I answer the questions also using the literature reviewed, where necessary. Thus, to address the questions, concepts from both the literature review and theoretical framework are used. The first question is: what kinds of activities are provided for learners in prescribed English FET short story textbooks? This is addressed by 'types of questions' found in textbooks that are found in the literature review, which includes concepts such as convergent questions, divergent questions and memory questions. Therefore, under theoretical framework, critical language awareness becomes an important terminology. I pose questions like: does the question give learners room to critically answer, or does the question propel the learner to answer in a certain way which does not challenge their critical abilities? Concepts such as agency and voice are applicable here as the study wants to understand if questions give learners a voice. The second research question is: to what extent do these activities promote critical literacy in learners? To answer this, I draw on concepts such as critical language awareness, interpretation, and agency. The third research question is: to what extent do these activities prepare learners for higher education English studies? This will be answered by concepts such as social justice and issues around power and class to see if CAPS textbooks are effective when it comes to equipping learners for higher education.

3.6 Chapter 3 summary

This chapter has explained what critical literacy is, its influence and origins. It has been found to be a theory which was meant to challenge societal inequalities. It is a theory that believes that education should be used to critique and challenge dominant ideologies rather than to treat learners as passive memorisers of knowledge. This theory already challenges a number of issues which were discovered in the literature review, which include the fact that textbooks are used to test mediocre skills. Critical literacy is still a theory I find necessary for learners, as they need to be critical analysers of text, and not just passive beings who would not be able to see what is problematic about texts. This chapter aimed to outline more of what critical literacy is, and its origins. In so doing, most concepts that relate to the study were ‘discovered’. They include critical language awareness, ideologies, and agency.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the theoretical framework of this study which is critical literacy. Critical literacy is a product of critical pedagogy, which is also a product of critical theory. Concepts and sub-concepts that form critical literacy, such as power, ideology, and critical language awareness were discussed. In this chapter, the research methodology of the study is presented. The chapter firstly looks at the study's research method. Secondly, it looks at the research design. Thirdly, it outlines the research paradigm. Fourthly, it indicates how data was collected. It then describes the data analysis process. Lastly, it looks at ethical considerations.

4.2 Research method

The research used a qualitative research approach, which according to Flick (2018) is interpretive methods used to decode and develop meaning. Flick (2018) gives several general examples of the qualitative approach, which include walking into a university for the first time and starting to observe things, ask questions and listen to responses. That is qualitative research in simple terms, using information to create answers and meaning. Qualitative research is a research method that transcends different theories, such as interpretivism and constructivism (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative researchers are people aiming at implementing an interpretive approach in order to make sense and get answers

to certain problems (Hammersley, 2012). Theories applied in this kind of research include constructivist theory and critical theory (Hammersley, 2012). Qualitative research method involves “meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things” (Lune & Berg, 2012, p. 12). “In contrast, quantitative research refers to counts and measures of things, the extents and distributions of our subject matter; how large a thing is” (Lune & Berg, 2012, p. 12). Lune and Berg (2012) state that we need qualitative research in order to understand our lives and the issues that surround and impact us. Hence this study wanted to understand whether short story textbooks allow learners to have agency or not. By applying qualitative research, it seeks to understand issues in short stories. This was done through text interpretation, and not quantity measurement. Qualitative research has several designs that can be followed, depending on the nature of the study, and these designs include phenomenology, case study design, narrative research, textbook research and grounded theory design (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). This study follows textbook research.

4.3 Research design

This study followed the textbook research design. In this study, short stories were analysed using critical literacy as a framework. These short story textbooks were evaluated in relation to the activities designed for learners, using critical literacy as a theoretical lens. As it was said in the literature review that textbooks are important resources in a classroom for curriculum delivery and sustainability, this makes it significant to research them—this makes this study textbook research. Textbook research

is a way in which different ideologies embedded in a textbook are analysed in order to see whether they make the textbook a valuable tool or not (Okeeffe, 2013). Textbook research is significant since it helps in rethinking education, so that education can be reformed if there is a need (Okeeffe, 2013). In this study, two short stories were selected from each textbook: two from the Grade 10 short story textbook, two from the Grade 11 short story textbook, and two from the Grade 12 short story textbook. The selected short stories were then analysed in relation to their activities, using critical literacy theory as a lens, to see if they train learners to be critical thinkers and prepare them for university.

4.4 Research paradigm

This study is located within the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm came about as a critique to the positivist paradigm (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The interpretivist paradigm, applied together with qualitative approaches, has the potential to make it possible for the researcher to gain a deep understanding of certain social contexts (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The positivist paradigm, allows the researcher to “have more statistical reliance and generalisation leading to development of universal laws and findings”. Under the positivist paradigm, truth can be measured, and it stays the same (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020, p. 43). Interpretivism is a paradigm with a subjective perspective. It is more interested in multiplicity of knowledge. Interpretivism values diversity, be it cultural, phenomenal, or social (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

Examples of interpretivism are firstly Hermeneutics which refer to the interpretation philosophy, mostly interested in “biblical sources and wisdom literature” (Alharahsheh & Pius 2020, p. 42). The second one is Phenomenology which aims to perceive the world “through direct phenomena” or experience (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020, p. 42). The third one is Symbolic interactionism which conceives symbols as “social objects” that have potential to create “shared meaning” and plays a role in the creation of reality (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020, p. 42). Therefore, the interpretivist approach is seen as a Relativist Concept. The truth, according to interpretivism, is subjective and is constructed by a number of meanings. It is viewed as a subjective epistemology; thus, it believes that humans, as individuals, have the ability to create knowledge (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

Interpretivism, however, is criticised for rejecting knowledge developed as a universal law (Pham, 2018). This paradigm believes that reality can differ from one individual to the other (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Interpretivism paradigm allows for in-depth comprehension of particular contexts (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020) through interpretation of qualitative information. Through the interpretive paradigm, researchers would be able to realise various factors, for example, the behavioural aspect of individuals, and this would add more to reality (Pham, 2018). Again, this paradigm allows researchers to deal with a certain concept as unique and supports a study to be more focused on a certain topic than try to be holistic (Pham, 2018).

In the interpretivist paradigm, a single situation may be interpreted in multiple ways rather than being treated as reality which can be measured. This allows for understanding of the thing researched in its unique context rather than treating it in a generalising manner (Pham, 2018). There is a strong relationship between interpretivist and qualitative approach. Researchers using them are more interested in results to certain problems which have to do with experiences and understanding, rather than statistics or numbers (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Interpretive paradigm permits researchers to understand the world by observing participants' experiences to find answers; the researcher then gathers an understanding using the experiences and then interprets the information (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

Thanh and Thanh (2015) state that qualitative method normally yields rich results, which are useful for interpretivists to fully analyse contexts; that is the reason interpretivists prefer qualitative approaches. Positivist paradigm, on the other hand, supports quantitative approaches. The interpretive paradigm views reality as socially constructed, and evolving in the world, and thus it gives interpretivists an opportunity to keep on finding out different knowledge and possibilities (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Interpretivists seek to obtain an in-depth understanding of individuals around their surroundings and how individuals contribute to creating the reality they are living in; this is the reason they use methods that give subjective results rather than objective information (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Hence, qualitative research is a way to explore meaning which individuals impose to a "social or human problem" (Thanh & Thanh, 2015, p. 26). Qualitative and interpretive

approaches used together in this study seek to explore meaning around short stories and their activities, and the potential they have in shaping learners.

4.5. Data sampling

The sampling method for this study was purposive sampling. This is a non-random method of choosing data, directed at concentrating on content with certain features which help yield relevant results (Etikan et al., 2016). For this study, three English short story textbooks, one from Grades 10, 11 and 12, respectively, were sampled for a critical content analysis, with the aim of determining if the stories prepare learners for critical language awareness, by using critical literacy concept. Critical language awareness can be helpful for learners as they prepare for higher education literary studies.

The chosen short story textbooks are prescribed in public schools in South Africa. The study selected only textbooks used in public schools where learners learn English as a First Additional Language or what may be referred to as English as Second Language. All the chosen short story textbooks contain an average of 20 short stories. As this is a big number, only two short stories were purposively sampled from each short story textbook for this study; the two stories selected per book were preferably the ones which are not too long, so that there could be enough time to read them. So, the stories were selected in terms of length. Also, a smaller number of short stories allowed for an in-depth analysis of the short stories and their activities. This means that six short stories were sampled and subjected to a close content analysis. Below is a list of prescribed short

story textbooks, as outlined by the Department of Basic Education on their website under Grades 10-12 FET Literature Catalogue:

English First Additional Language Grade 10

Dlamini, L. Z. (2016). *Fabulous: An Anthology of Short Stories*. Wynberg: Ilima Publishers.

English First Additional Language Grade 11

Krone, B., Mattson, E. (2015). *Short Story Anthology*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter Publishers.

English First Additional Language Grade 12

Walter, B. (2015). *Changes: An Anthology of Short Stories*. Midrand: Marang Publishers.

The above are South African prescribed short story textbooks for English FAL Grade 10 to 12. The research focused on these short story textbooks since most public schools offer English as a first additional language. Below are what the textbooks look like:

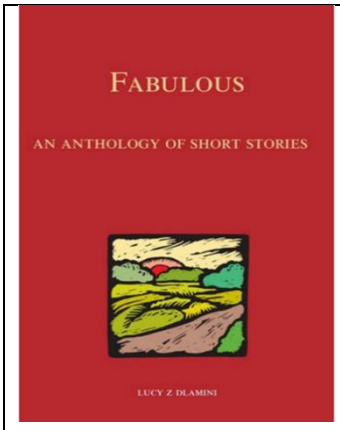
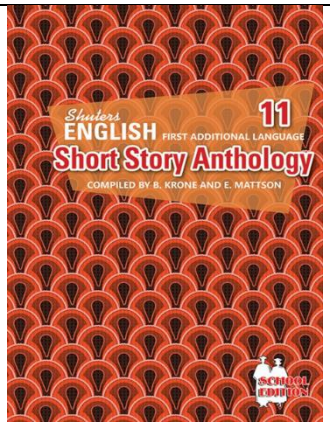
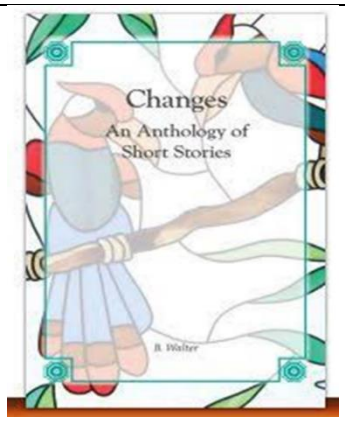
		
Cover 1: Grade 10 English short story book	Cover 2: Grade 11 English short story book	Cover 3: Grade 12 English short story book

Figure 2: Selected short story textbooks

Within these prescribed short story textbooks are specific short stories prescribed by the Department of Basic Education. *Fabulous* has about 20 short stories; *Short Story Anthology* also has about 20 short stories. *Changes* has about 23 short stories. Below is a list of prescribed Grade 10 stories from *Fabulous*:

Stories prescribed	**Author**	**Grade**	**Page**
"The Park"	James Mathews	Grade 10	28
"I Am Not Talking About That Now"	Sindiwe Magona	Grade 10	39
"Her Three Days"	Sembene Ousmane	Grade 10	63
"The Darling"	Anton Checkov	Grade 10	86
"The Late Bud"	Ama Ata Aidoo	Grade 10	129
"The Boy Who Painted Christ Black"	John Henrik Clarke	Grade 10	145
"Prayer from the Living"	Ben Okri	Grade 10	182
"Nostalgia"	C.A. Davids	Grade 10	197

Table 1: Grade 10 prescribed short stories.

Below is a list of prescribed Grade 11 stories from *Short Story Anthology*:

Stories prescribed	**Author**	**Grade**	**Page**
“The Love Portion”	Charles Bosman	Grade 11	4
“Swimming Partners”	Timwa Lipenga	Grade 11	36
“Gemini”	Ahmed Essop	Grade 11	75
“Pink Bow Tie”	Paul Jennings	Grade 11	82
“The Gift of the Magi”	O. Henry	Grade 11	104
“The Journey”	Barry Hough	Grade 11	127
“Raymond’s Run”	Toni Cade Bambara	Grade 11	141
“Scared”	Anthony Horowitz	Grade 11	154

Table 2: Grade 11 prescribed short stories.

Below is a list of prescribed Grade 12 stories from *Changes:*

Stories prescribed	**Author**	**Grade**	**Page**
“A Chip of Glass Ruby”	Nadine Gordimer	Grade 12	19
“Village People”	Bessie Head	Grade 12	38
“The Fur Coat”	Sean O’Faolain	Grade 12	73
“The Doll’s House”	Katherine Mansfield	Grade 12	87
“Transforming Moments”	Gcina Mhlophe	Grade 12	96
“The Last Breath”	Sam Kahiga	Grade 12	116
“Next Door”	Kurt Vonnegut	Grade 12	122
“The New Tribe”	Buchi Emecheta	Grade 12	165

Table 3: Grade 12 prescribed short stories.

Since there are 8 prescribed stories in each of the three short story textbooks, two stories from each book were purposively selected for analysis. Below are the selected stories which were analysed:

Sort stories selected	Author	Grade	Source
“The Park”	James Matthews	Grade 10	Dlamini, 2016, p. 28
“The Late Bud”	Ama Ata Aidoo	Grade 10	Dlamini, 2016, p. 129
“Swimming Partners”	Timwa Lipenga	Grade 11	Krone & Mattson, 2015, p. 36
“Pink Bow Tie”	Paul Jennings	Grade 11	Krone & Mattson, 2015, p. 82
“Village People”	Bessie Head	Grade 12	Walter, 2015, p. 38
“Transforming Moments”	Gcina Mhlophe	Grade 12	Walter, 2015, p. 96

Table 4: Selected short stories for analysis.

4.6 Data collection

Since this study was designed as textbook research, the sampled textbooks were purchased from the nearest bookstore. The textbooks were verified by obtaining full description, including their ISBN numbers, from the Department of Basic Education website before being purchased.

4.7 Data analysis

The short stories that were analysed in this study are in textbooks, and textbook analysis can follow different methods. The data analysis method chosen is content analysis, whereby the collected data was analysed against the critical literacy theory. Within this theory are terminologies such as social justice, power, inequalities, interpretation agency, and critical language awareness, which made it possible to apply interpretation, so that at the end, it is clear whether short stories and their activities give learners the necessary voice and agency to be equipped as literary learners. Conceptual framework helped to evaluate if short stories raise learners' critical consciousness of power relations, gender bias, social injustice and racial differentiation. Content analysis refers to interpretation of data with thorough discussion on material analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2012). It has to do with arranging data and presenting it in the order of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In this study, the selected short stories were analysed in conjunction with their activities to determine if they raise students' critical awareness. Critical literacy theory was applied to analyse the selected texts.

4.8 Ethical considerations

This research applies critical literacy theory in examining selected high school English short stories to check if the activities include training learners to be critical thinkers and also preparing them for literary studies in higher education. An ethics waiver certificate was obtained from the Wits School of Education Ethics Committee. The protocol number is 2022ECE015M. The research did not involve human participants.

4.9 Trustworthiness, Reliability and Objectivity

It is possible at some point that as a researcher, one becomes biased or uses methods which are not reliable for different reasons. There has to be confirmation to the reader that the work presented followed research rules and protocols. This subsection aims to clarify the trustworthiness, reliability and objectivity of the study.

4.9.1 Trustworthiness

This study is credible as there was thorough engagement with selected short stories and their activities. There was also prolonged research on critical literacy. Textbooks researched on were verified and accessed in the bookstore. Findings for this study can be applied in other contexts and disciplines. Critical literacy can be applied in other fields to open new knowledge and possibilities. The results for this study can easily be transferred to people, so that they apply them in their own contexts. The study was not influenced by any biases. The research is not objective but subjective, and opens room for new possibilities. Findings in this study portray focus on the area which is researched on, and not beliefs or biases of the researcher. The reader will be in a position to confirm the correctness of the findings.

4.9.2 Reliability

There is consistency in the results obtained. Any kind of bias was not entertained, allowing the study to be in a form where there is transparency. The research followed a proper research format that does not promote bias and stereotypes. Reliability of results is ensured through the provision of textual evidence for all claims made.

4.9.3 Objectivity

The study is subjective in nature rather than objective as it is a qualitative study. It does not apply measurable variables but allows for multifaceted truths. Short stories and their activities in this instance undergo analysis and interpretation against critical literacy theory. The study, in its subjective nature, aims to understand the truth around short stories and their activities in Grade 10 to 12 English short story textbooks, in order to see if they allow learners to develop consciousness and a voice to be critical thinkers.

4.10 Chapter 4 summary

This chapter outlined the way in which the research was conducted. The research applied a qualitative approach. This study is located within the interpretivist paradigm; therefore, interpretation is made from a subjective perspective. Interpretation is done through content analysis. Lastly, the chapter discussed three ethical considerations: trustworthiness, reliability, and objectivity.

Chapter 5: Data presentation and analysis

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the methods deployed in conducting this study. In this chapter, the selected short stories and their activities are presented and analysed. The short stories, as already stated in Chapter 4, are prescribed for English Grade 10, 11 and 12 in South African public schools. Under analysis of each story, there is a picture of the author and the book they were featured in. Note that the pictures are not of the authors of the textbooks but of the stories featured in the textbooks. The authors of the textbooks will be referred to as compilers, as they created their short story books by compiling them.

5.2. Short stories from *Fabulous* (Grade 10)

Fabulous is a short story textbook used for the English subject in South African public schools and it was compiled by Dlamini (2016). It is currently prescribed by the Department of Basic Education as a Grade 10 short story textbook. They prescribed eight stories from the book. Only two, namely, “The Park” and “The Late Bud”, were analysed with their questions.

5.2.1 **"The Park" by *James Matthews***

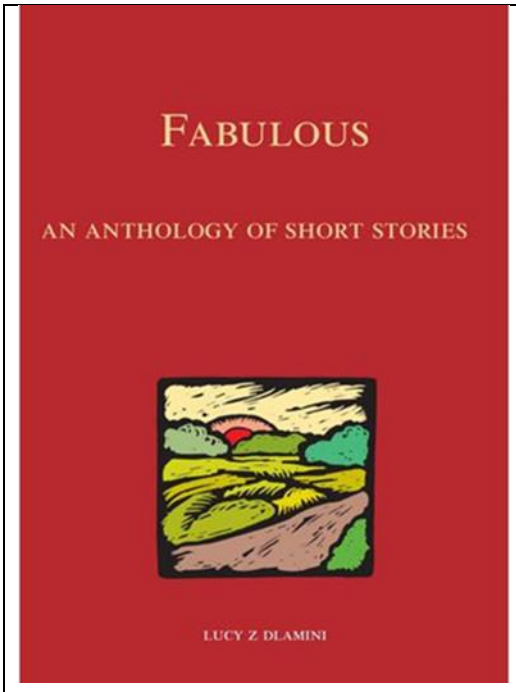


Figure 3: "The Park" book and featured author.

Summary of the story

"The Park" takes place in South Africa, during the apartheid era; there is evident social separation between Whites and Blacks. A young boy, the main character, really longs to play in the park. He always sits outside the park, as he watches other children who are White play. Unfortunately, he cannot play, as there is a big board which states that only Whites are allowed to play there. He had played there before but got removed by the security guard. Towards the end of the story, he sneaks into the park at night and plays while fearing he would get caught.

Compiler's activities

Pre-reading Activities

Discuss some of your happy earlier childhood moments, especially the games you used to play or the type of amusement that brought you much pleasure.

Are there some family chores which you performed during your younger years, but which you would rather forget? If possible, share these experiences with your classmates or study group.

Prejudice can take many forms – class, ethnic, gender, religious, racial, national, generational, etc.: discuss these and share some upbuilding experiences of triumph.

Activities/questions on the story

- In terms of point of view or position of narrator of the events of a story, can you observe a similarity between "A Gathering of Bald Men" and "The Park"?
- What is the central conflict advanced by the story? How does the unnamed protagonist resolve it?
- What inner conflict is experienced by the park attendant? Does he resolve it? If so, how?
- Naming of characters is apparently not the author's main focus: what thematic intention does this serve?
- "*The Park*" may be said to be a tale of two cities: how does Matthews advance this view?

Extract 1: Compiler's Activities for "The Park"

Looking at the pre-reading activities, they contain diversifying possibilities, as learners are allowed to draw from their different experiences. Which means, if they are of different cultures, the responses would be diverse. This is similar knowledge to what Fouche et al. (2021) uses in their group portfolio assessment activities; it allows for a decolonised space, thus assisting learners to be critical thinkers. So, looking at this pre-reading activity, there is a direction as to how learners must work, but there are no boundaries or limitations when it comes to responses. This gives learners room to have confidence as they are allowed to voice out something which only they have power and knowledge in. In other words, they are given what Ahearn (2010) refers to as agency, which is the freedom to have a voice. This type of question happens to be a divergent question, where learners have unique options to respond from. Diverse questions allow for diverse responses (Tofade et al., 2013). These are types of questions Agustianingsih and Mahmudi (2019) believe inspire learners to have higher-order thinking skills. Faroh et al. (2022) argue that questions which are open-ended increase high-level thinking abilities. As discussed in the literature review, open-ended questions help learners to be able to create statements or arguments, and that helps them to be creative and confident (Wulandari & Ekawati, 2022).

Looking at the questions after the story, the first question asks learners to compare this story with another one which is "*Gathering of Bald Men*". This story was not part of the sample. However, I went to read it and realised that the compiler expected learners to understand that both stories use a third-person narrator who is omniscient, and whose views are evident. This is not the kind of comparison which make learners see a gap or

some underlying issues. This is a lower-order kind of comparison, as it only tests literature techniques. This type of question is called ‘comparison question’. In Bloom’s Taxonomy, comparison questions can serve as either lower-order or higher-order questions. In this case it functioned as a lower-order type of question (Tofade et al., 2013).

The second question asks the learner what the central conflict of the story is, and how the main character resolves it. This question is a convergent question, as it allows for a specific response which is in the story. This is a comprehension question, according to Bloom’s Taxonomy, and it means it is a lower-order question. Learners would be able to see in the story that the central conflict is an inner conflict, where the boy wishes to play in the park but cannot because he is not White. The question needs a learner to identify and explain the conflict and explain how it is resolved. Despite the question falling under lower- order questions, it is a controversial question as it challenges learners to look at the central conflict, which has to do with racism. The boy’s problem is the fact that he cannot play in the park, as only White kids are permitted to play there. The boy resolves the problem by going to the park in the evening and that is defiance. What does one do in a situation, where to resolve a problem, they have to be defiant? The question encourages learners to challenge unfair systems. This might trigger in learners critical thoughts about issues of exclusion and might challenge them to have further interests in resolving societal issues such as racism. Critical literacy is a theory that allows for education to challenge societal issues. Thus, this question points to critical literacy.

The third question allows learners to explain how the events in the story portray the Old South Africa. This makes the question an evaluation type of question, which under Bloom's Taxonomy is a higher-order question. Learners have to evaluate the old South Africa and make conclusions about it, using the story as a reference. This might give them a chance to explore similarities and differences between democracy and apartheid. For example, looking at the high levels of corruption rate today, most people tend to say it is better to go back to apartheid because the economy was good then. This is a general idea I have seen a lot of young people use on social media; I have also heard my learners say it. So, this question would allow learners to make further comparisons, so that they see both the good and bad of each system and then are able to draw a conclusion. That, too, is allowing them to be critical thinkers.

The fourth question asks learners what the inner conflict of the park attendant is, and how he resolves it. The conflict might be that he is a non-White as well and he realises the unfairness that races considered inferior to the White race have to go through, but he cannot do anything because he wants to maintain his job. This is also a lower-order question, as learners can easily identify in the story that the attendant is bothered by what is happening. If this question was to be answered in the exam room, it would be a memory and recall question.

The fifth question asks learners what the thematic intention of the author is by not naming the boy. This could be because the author does not want to limit the oppressed to a certain

race. In other words, the boy in the park could be Black, Indian, Chinese or another race, besides the White race. Learners might also answer that the author does not want to cause tension or further tension between the White race and the race he could have mentioned. This question is also a higher-order question, as it needs learners to analyse and evaluate characterisation of the author, in order to understand why the author does not name characters. Open-ended questions happen to be higher-order questions. Faroh et al. (2022) argue that questions which are open-ended increase high-level thinking abilities.

The last question asks learners how the story is a tale of two cities. The question gives learners options in answering. Firstly, the literal meaning of the question refers to the fact that the story gives a picture of the suburbs where the boy's mother works, where it is considered a 'whites only' environment and also gives a picture of the township where the boy stays. This would also challenge learners to think about issues of class; for example, in the townships, there are no parks but in the suburbs there are. The second meaning could be an allusion to the story, *A Tale of Two Cities*, which is a historical novel by Charles Dickens, published in 1859 before the French Revolution. This question is a comparison question, which is a higher-order question. This question needs learners to apply analytical skills in order to understand how James Mathews, the author of the story, is advancing his story as a tale of two cities.

5.2.2 **"The Late Bud"** ***by Ama Ata Aidoo***

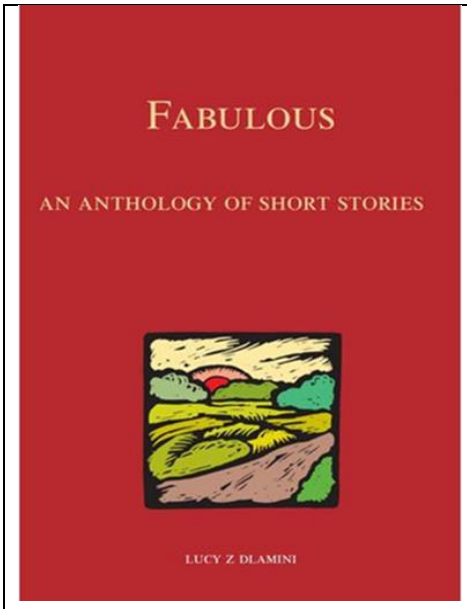


Figure 4: "The Late Bud" book and featured author

Summary of the story

"The Late Bud" takes place in Ghana. The story uses a third-person narrator to tell the story. In the story, the main character, Yaaba, is not like other children. She loves to play to an extent that when others do their duties, she would not do hers. Her mother develops a habit of calling her other children, 'my child', but Yaaba is called by her name, due to her non-compliance. One day, Yaaba wanted to be a good child and impress her mother by going to fetch red earth for Christmas day, which is polish they use for the floor. However, she falls and faints. Her mother, Maami, becomes very sad and emotional. She helps Yaaba to bed. In the morning, Maami goes to check on her child, Yaaba. She sits next to her and calls her 'my child' for the first time. The child is shocked to 'learn' that

she is also ‘my child’ – Maami’s child. Maami learns that Yaaba fell on her way to get her red earth, to show obedience to her.

Compiler’s activities

Pre-reading Activity Discuss the question: During your era, what constitutes a “problem child”?
Activities/questions on the story • Discuss the theme of girlhood in a traditional African context.

Extract 2: Compiler’s questions for “The Late Bud”

The first activity, which is a pre-reading activity, asks learners “what constitutes a problem child” in the learners’ era. This activity allows learners to tap into contemporary realities of what a problem child is and discuss them, and in that way, they would get to learn from each other’s understandings of what constitutes a problem child, and that might help them to understand more about how to behave as a child. The question also pushes them to draw on their cultural understanding of the notion of a problem child. This is a divergent question, an open-ended question with a lot of possible answers. It challenges learners to look at their environments and evaluate what a problem child is. The question allows learners to be critical thinkers. One might say this is a funnel question, as the instruction says ‘discuss’. So, if the teacher decides to allow a discussion, the question qualifies as a funnel question. Funnel questions start from broad responses which are narrowed down

to finer details. If the teacher chooses to have an actual verbal discussion, this may function as a verbal type of question. However, it is also a divergent type of question. What remains is that this question allows learners to give their understanding of the concept of a problem child.

The main question asks learners to discuss the theme of girlhood in an African context. As a class is a combination of boys and girls, especially in public schools, this question might trigger some feminist debates, and allow boys to realise the extent to which society is fair or unfair to the girl child. In some context, the word feminist is perceived with a negative attitude as it is perceived as disrespect. However, in this context, it is used as African feminism, where there is respect for all genders, but what is seen as unfair is challenged. In Africa, we have histories of girls not going to school because they must get married. Some of them later become married in polygamous relationships. This question is a strong one to trigger those feminist discussions; it gives learners a voice – it gives learners agency (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). The questions for this story allow for critical perspectives from learners to allow them to understand gender roles in the past and gender roles today; and to challenge some of those that they find unfair.

Despite opening room for learners to share their diverse knowledge, the word ‘discuss’ in both questions is quite vague and does not necessarily allow for critical literacy. Learners might still discuss in an ignorant passive way, which reproduces societal unfairness. For example, when discussing the theme of girlhood, one might discuss it from a patriarchal

point of view or in a religious view. Thus, learners are to be aware of different possibilities, so that they do not reproduce hegemonic beliefs.

5.3 Short stories from *Short Story Anthology* (Grade 11)

Short Story Anthology is a short story textbook used for the English subject in South African public schools and was compiled by Krone and Mattson (2015). It is currently prescribed by the Department of Basic Education as a Grade 11 textbook; they prescribed eight stories from the book. Only two, namely, “Swimming Partners” and “Pink Bow Tie” were analysed with their questions.

5.3.1 “Swimming Partners” by Timwa Lipenga

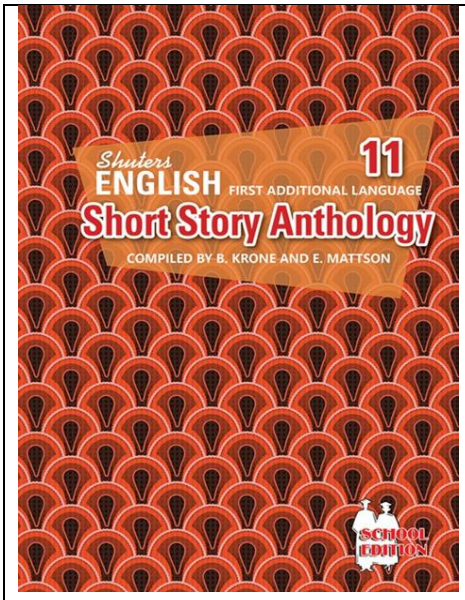


Figure 5: “Swimming Partners” book and featured author

Summary of the story

The story takes place in a rural area in Malawi. The story uses a first-person narrator, Linda. Aisha is an older sister to Linda, who is two years younger than her. This is their life story. What the two girls share the most is their friendship and sisterhood; they were swimming partners as children, as they used to sneak out together and go to the stream without their mother's knowledge. Even after their mother found out about their antics, they made a plan to still go to the stream and act like they were fetching firewood. The two girls were from a poor background; they lived in a village. The father and mother worked hard for them to go to school. In the story, an unfortunate event occurs when the father falls from the roof and dies. The mother struggles to take care of Linda and Aisha and they are forced to leave school. The girls get married to two men who are young farmers. They begin to think this would rescue them from poverty. The story tells us that the younger sister has two daughters who remind her of her and her sister. We are not told of the older sister's children. What is clear about the older sister is the fact that she comes back from the city looking 'pale' and thin, suffering from AIDS. Towards the end of the story, her husband passes away. Linda is then able to take care of her sister.

Compiler's activities

1. Use the table to compare the characters of Linda and Aisha. Put the descriptions below under the right headings.

Linda	Aisha

Cautious, obedient, a leader, a follower, confident, trusting, dedicated, takes risks, decisive, independent, respects authority, wants more from life, indecisive, loves freedom.

2. Reread the paragraph where Linda's mother says she is like the khope bird. Is there truth in this comparison? Give reasons. (2)
3. Why did the girls love swimming? Quote a sentence from the story that explains why the stream was so precious to them. (1)
4. Why do the girls have to leave school and work in the maize fields? (2)
5. When Aisha asks Linda to join her and go to the city, Linda is afraid of taking the plunge and going to the city. Explain the significance of the idiom 'taking the plunge' in the context of the story. (1)
6. Do you think Linda's life as a married woman in the village is happy? Give reasons. (2)
7. a) For how long does Aisha stay away from the village before returning? (1)

   b) Why does she return? (1)

8. When she takes Aisha into her house at the end of the story, Linda says, ‘It was a decision I had no difficulty in making.’ Why do you think the author uses these particular words? (1)
9. In the last paragraph of the story, Linda and Aisha exchange roles: Linda takes on the role of the stronger sister. But is she really stronger now than Aisha? Explain your answer. (2)

Extract 3: Compiler’s questions for “Swimming Partners”.

The first question expects learners to place the given words under one of the two main characters, Linda and Aisha. Learners can easily find answers in the story. For example, the fact that Linda is obedient, dedicated, trusting, etc., and that Aisha is a leader who is confident, independent, loves freedom, etc. In that way, learners would be able to fill in the table. This makes the task one that promotes lower-order thinking. The second question expects a learner to answer, ‘yes’ or ‘no’, and give a reason. Learners are supposed to say if it is true that Linda is like a khope bird and give a reason for their answer. This is a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ kind of question. The mother is comparing her child to a bird but not that the question requires the learner to compare, which makes it a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ lower-order question. These are referred to as focal questions as learners are supposed to choose or justify a side (Tofade et al., 2013). The likes of question one and two are not questions that promote critical literacy. In the first question, the learner just has to confirm what they read with the given answers which they have to place under the correct heading. The second question just needs an opinion.

In the third question, learners are expected to quote a sentence which explains why the stream was precious. The answer is there in the story. They just need to quote from it. For example, they can easily cite the quotation that says, “There was a certain freedom about being in the water that was more precious than any of the games we played at school” (Krone & Mattson, 2015,40). As they have to justify their answer through a quotation, it makes this question a focal question. This is a lower-order question, as learners are expected to copy the answer from the story. The fourth question asks learners why ‘the girls have to leave school and work in the maize fields’. The answer is also in the story. Since learners have to justify, it is a focal question. It is clear from the story that their father, who used to take care of them, passed on, and therefore they had to go and work in the maize fields to support themselves. This makes it a lower-order question, as learners can easily identify the answer in the story.

In the fifth question, learners have to ‘explain the significance of the idiom *taking the plunge* in the context of the story’. Learners just have to understand the meaning of the idiom and explain their understanding of the idiom in the story. Taking the plunge means to do an action that makes one nervous. The story has been about nervousness or risks, from when the girls risked going to the stream, to make an uncomfortable decision by going to work, and now the fear that comes with going to the city. So, the significance of the idiom taking the plunge could be that the girls have to do a number of things which make them nervous. This can be seen as a higher-order question, as learners are

supposed to explain by evaluating the situations that make the girls uncomfortable and grouping them together. The sixth question asks learners if they think Linda's life as a married woman is a happy one. The learner is expected to give a reason. It is another question that expects a 'yes' or 'no' response, then gives opinions as reasons, which makes it a focal question. It needs an opinion; however, the opinion is influenced by the story. So, learners can see in the story that while married, Linda missed her sister, and she did not trust her husband. That makes it easy for learners to find the answer. This is a lower-order question.

Question 7(a) asks how long Aisha spent away from the village. Learners have to get the time duration in the story. It is clear in the story that she was away from the village for five years. Question 7(b) asks why she decides to return home. The answer too can be found in the story. It is clear in the story that she returns home because she is ill with AIDS. These questions would be memory questions if this was an exam or test, but as the activities are in the book, they just require the learner to find a response for a question; it makes them low-level questions. In question 8, learners are asked why the author used the words 'It was a decision I had no difficulty in making'. Learners have to look for the answer in the story. This could be because Linda has always been longing to stay with her sister, so comparing this decision with the decisions such as working on the farms, it is a simple decision. This question is a lower-order question.

In question 9, learners are asked if Linda is now stronger, as she switches roles with her sister, taking on the role of the stronger sister. Learners have to give a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer according to what they find in the story. This makes it a focal question. Learners can explain strength according to physique, because both the girls have AIDS, however, Linda’s is still in the initial stage. Learners can also explain strength in terms of personality. This question is interesting; however, it does not challenge learners to be critical thinkers.

The story could teach learners information around navigating the world, that besides having fun with friends and siblings in life, one must be in a situation to make proper informed decisions, to be also aware of different possibilities when getting into relationships or marriage or life in general. Critical literacy is a concept that teaches learners about the world around them, and it allows learners to interpret and create meaning in relation to what they know, but questions for this story did not empower the learners to reach that level of textual interpretation.

5.3.2 *"*Pink Bow Tie" by Paul Jennings

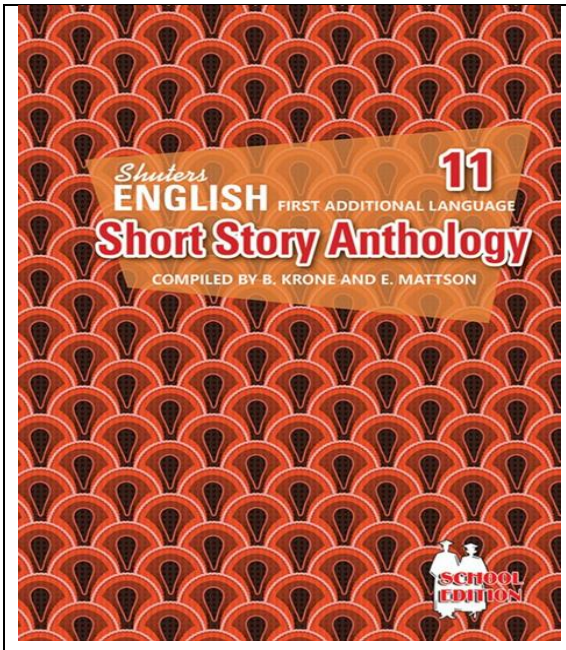


Figure 6: "Pink Bow Tie" book and featured author

Summary of the story

The story takes place in Australia. The story is narrated in the first person and it is divided into three parts. The narrator, who is a learner, is called into the office of the principal for wrongdoing: making fun of the principal wearing a pink bow tie. The learner does not know that the man wearing the pink bow tie is the principal. Secondly, the learner gets in trouble for dyeing his hair blond. When explaining to the principal why his hair is blond, he explains strange and unrealistic situations. He lies, saying that there was a machine that could change someone's age. The principal does not believe his story. He tells him to leave and that he would send a suspension letter. The third part of the story is when the narrator never receives the letter. The narrator feels as though he is off the hook, but

later realises that the principal is nowhere to be found, and the girl he had a crush on at school had then gotten a boyfriend. That is the end of the story, which of course the reader would never expect. The story is a combination of science fiction and comedy (Krone & Mattson, 2015).

Compiler's activities

1. Who is the 'bloke' in "Pink Bow Tie", and what is his nickname? (2)
2. How long has the narrator been a pupil at his school? (1)
3. Find the sentence in Part 1, Paragraph 4: 'He doesn't see the joke and he gives me the strap'. The words 'he doesn't see the joke' are an example of which rhetorical device? Choose from the following options:
   a) metaphor
   b) hyperbole
   c) understatement (1)
4. Find slang words in Part 1 of the story for:
   a) a man
   b) a very attractive woman
   c) a surfer (3)
5. In the inner story (Part 2), why does the ticket collector on the train run away screaming? (1)
6. According to the narrator, how and why did his hair turn blond? (2)

7. The narrator describes himself as nervous, sensitive and easily scared. Do you agree with this description? Give reasons. (2)
8. Dramatic irony is when the reader knows or understands something that the narrator or the other characters in the story do not know or understand. At the end of “Pink Bow Tie”, the reader knows something that the narrator seems not to have worked out. What is it? (2)
9. Would you recommend this story to a friend? Write either:

- one sentence telling a friend why he/she should read the story,

  OR

- one sentence telling a friend why he/she should not bother to read it. (1)

Extract 4: Compiler’s questions for “Pink Bow Tie”.

The first question asks learners who the “bloke” is in the story, and what his nickname is. This is a question that expects learners to just name a character. It is mentioned in the story that the principal’s nickname is Old Splodge, so learners can easily spot the name in the story. This is a lower-order question. The second question asks learners to tell how long the learner has been at the school. Learners can easily tell from the story that the learner has been at school for two days, as it is mentioned in line two that the narrator has been in school only for two days. This is a lower-order question.

In the third question, learners must choose an answer from a) metaphor, b) hyperbole and c) understatement. This is a language-based question. They are expected to choose the correct figure of speech used. This is a lower-order question, which happens to be a multiple-choice question. They are also memory questions as learners have to remember what those figures of speech are. In the fourth question, they are supposed to find slang words for a) a man, b) a very attractive woman, and c) a surfer. A man is described in the story as a bloke, while an attractive woman is described as a knockout, and a surfer is a surfie. Learners can easily identify and write down these words. This is a lower-order question.

In the fifth question, learners are asked why the ticket collector runs away. Learners are supposed to find the answer in the story. It is explained in the story that he runs away because a boy has suddenly turned into a man of about 25 years of age (owing to the boy dyeing his hair, something the ticket collector is not familiar with). This is a lower-order question. In the sixth question, learners are asked why and how the narrator's hair turned blond. The answer is also in the story. The narrator claims that his hair turned blond because he sat with a skeleton in the train for fifteen minutes. The story is interesting and funny to read. However, so far, it is one of the stories difficult to discuss, as its incidents are unusual and sometimes confusing to understand in a realistic manner. However, this is a lower-order question, which can also be a memory and recall question.

The seventh question asks learners whether they agree or not to the fact that the narrator is sensitive and scared. They should then give reasons. This is a focal question, as learners can choose to say he is sensitive or not sensitive. However, looking at the incidents that occur, the fact that he could face the principal and lie, and the other funny stories that he tells, one might say he was not nervous and sensitive. In question eight, learners are made aware that there is a dramatic irony, where they know something the narrator does not know. They are asked to mention it. What the reader knows is the fact that the principal used an Age Rager to make himself younger, and so Miss Newham's boyfriend is the principal. This is a lower-order question as learners can find that answer in the story. In the last question, learners are asked if they would refer a friend to read this story or not. If they say yes, they should quote a line that would convince them to read the tale, and if they say no, they should also quote a line that would convince their friends not to read the story. This is a focal question, which is an example of lower-order questions.

On the whole, the questions asked from this story do not help learners have a critical thinking mind. Questions asked are lower-order questions. What is more problematic is the fact that these are questions asked in high school, in Grade 11. Rahman and Manaf (2017) found out that critical literacy is important for students' learning. They state that literature is essential in developing creative and critical thinking skills. They then argue that Bloom's Taxonomy should be used in literature to boost rational thinking, purposeful thinking, and relation to contexts. Bloom's Taxonomy is not evident, as we see only lower-

order questions being asked. There is no single higher-order question. This is problematic.

5.4. Short stories from *Changes* (Grade 12)

Changes is a short story textbook used for the English subject in South African public schools, and it was compiled by Walter (2015). It is currently prescribed by the Department of Basic Education as a Grade 12 short story textbook; they prescribed eight stories from the book. Only two, namely, "Village People" and "Transforming Moments" were analysed with their questions.

5.4.1 "Village people" by Bessie Head

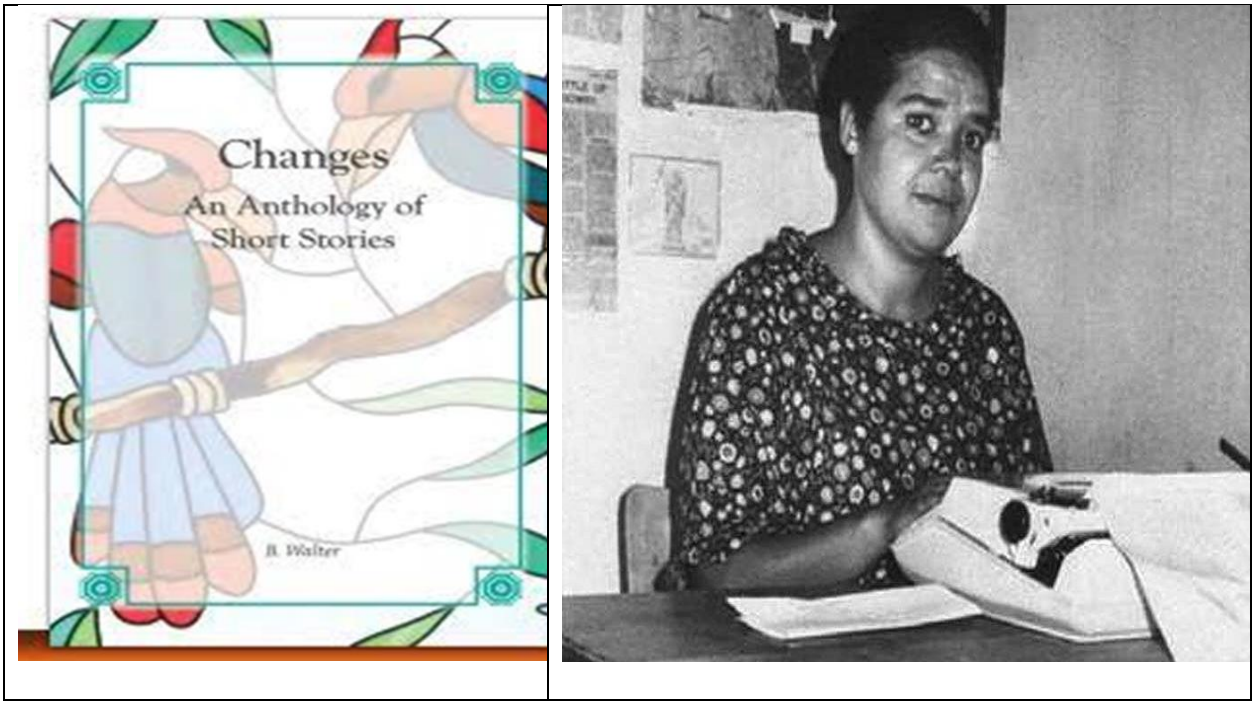


Figure 7: "Village People" book and featured author

Summary of the story

The setting of this story is rural Botswana. In this short story, the speaker praises Africa. Head's story, in some lines, sounds like a poem. This story has two parts or stories in it. In the story, the speaker praises the beautiful nature of Africa; she praises both its physical and social nature. She tells a story of an old woman whom she once assisted. The family of the old woman showed appreciation by giving her water. This shows the humanity that Africans have despite any lack they may be experiencing themselves. She also thinks their lack is the one that challenged Africans to be good people. The speaker shows concern about African poverty; she says it's as though poverty will never leave Africa. What stands out in the story is that the speaker refers to Africa as her country and not her continent.

Compiler's activities

1. In the opening essay, Head describes some of the problems faced by the people who live in the rural "desert and semi-desert places" of Botswana. List at least three of the problems she mentions. (4)
2. What does she say that these people have, on the more positive side? (3)
3. In the first story, what simile is used in the first line to describe the old woman? (2)
4. How did the speaker assist the old woman? (3)

5. How did the woman's family thank her? (1)
6. Explain the major problem in the second story, 'Summer sun'. (1)
7. "The last paragraph of this story gives some idea of how people cope with the sun": explain this statement. (2)
8. Which of these two stories do you prefer? Explain why. (4)

Extract 5: Compiler's questions for "Village People"

In the first question, learners are asked to list three problems that Head mentions that the people of the rural Botswana face. They can easily identify this from the story. For example, Head states that there is poverty, starvation and death of babies. This is a lower-order question as learners can easily identify the answers and write them down. In terms of an exam, these would be memory and recall questions. The second question asks what the story say these people have, positive things. Learners can also easily find this answer in the story. Head mentions positive things such as humanity, love and warmth. This is a lower-order question, which would be a memory and recall question in an exam.

The third question asks learners to identify the simile used in the first line that is used to describe the old woman. This question tests language. It is a lower-order question. In the fourth question, learners are asked how the speaker assisted the old woman; learners can find the answer in the story with no difficulty. One of the things the speaker helped the old woman with was sending her to her home. This is a low order question which is a memory and recall question for exam purposes.

The fifth question asks how the woman's family thanked her. Learners can easily find this answer in the story. It is evident in the story that her family thanked her by giving her water. This is a lower-order question, in a form of memory and recall in an exam. The sixth question asks learners to mention the main problem in the second story, '*Summer Sun*'. They can find the answer in the story. The speaker states that there is a lot of heat yet no rain, and for that reason, farming becomes impossible. This is a lower-order question and a memory and recall question in exams.

In the seventh question, learners are expected to explain the last paragraph, where there is a statement that speaks about how people cope with the sun. This is more like their understanding of the sentence. This is a lower-order question which focuses on comprehension. The last question asks learners which of the two narratives in Bessie Head's story they like. Learners have to choose the story they like and give their own reasons.

For all these questions, if they were to be asked in an exam, we would say they are testing language as well as memory and recall, as learners would not have the whole story in the exam room but still be expected to remember incidents in the story. There are no critical thinking skills being tested here. There is also no Bloom's Taxonomy applied, yet this activity is for Grade 12 learners. Ulum (2016) examined the level to which Bloom's Taxonomy is applied in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) comprehension activities.

The focus of the study was on checking the extent to which lower-order questions and higher-order questions were asked. The findings were that the analysed English book lacked higher-order questions; thus, it did not assess higher-order skills (Ulum, 2016). The findings here are very similar.

5.4.2 "Transforming Moments" by Gcina Mhlophe

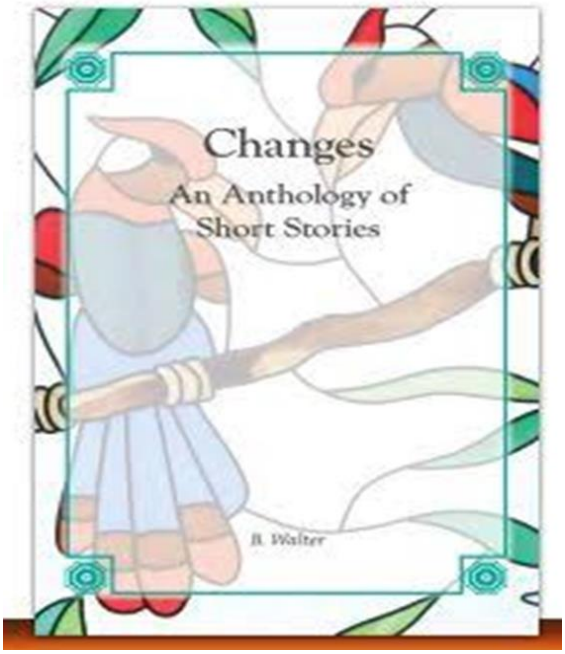


Figure 8: "Transforming Moments" book and featured author

Summary of the story

The setting of this story is in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The story revolves around an unnamed narrator, a young Xhosa girl who is in secondary school. She is academically clever. However, she gets teased and is often called an ugly person with a terrible voice.

She is shocked to see a handsome boy befriend her. The minister then tells her that she has a resonant voice. She starts to gain a bit of confidence. She is inspired by seeing an *Imbongi* (a poet) performing. She then develops self-confidence. This is a story that addresses issues of bullying and isolation as the protagonist encounters social and verbal bullying.

Compiler's questions

1. In the opening paragraph the narrator describes her hair as "dry grass in winter". Explain this comparison, and say what it tells us about her self-image. (3)
2. What did the narrator do instead of going to the sports field? (1)
3. Do you think this activity contributed to her growth? (2)
4. Did the narrator have people she trusted who supported her? Explain your answer. (3)
5. What is the turning point in the narrator's life? (3)
6. The narrator compares the feeling of writing her first poem to the feeling of giving birth. Is this an effective comparison? Discuss. (3)
7. Compare the opening paragraph with the last two paragraphs in order to show how much the narrator has changed. (6)
8. What does the cock at the end of the story symbolise? (1)

Extract 6: Compiler's questions for "Transforming Moments"

The first question asks learners what they think about the narrator's self-image, after she says that her hair was as "dry grass in winter". Learners have to state what they think about her self-image, though the answer is given in the story. Issues about her self-image are stated in the story, that she was teased and called ugly. Because of this, she might have lost interest of taking care of her hair. This is a lower-order question, which would be a memory and recall question in an exam. The second question asks what the narrator did instead of going to the sports field. They can easily find this answer in the story. The narrator states that she would read books. This is a lower-order question. The third question asks if what she chose to do contributed to her growth. They are also expected to think, though an answer is given. It is stated in the story that she achieved growth by becoming a writer. This is a lower-order question.

The fourth question asks if the narrator has people she trusted who supported her. Learners are expected to explain their answers. Learners can easily identify in the story whether the narrator had people who supported her. It is stated in the story that the minister helped her, and the boy did not undermine her. This is a lower-order question. The fifth question asks what is the turning point in the narrator's life. The answer to this question can be found in the story. It is stated that when she listened to the poet, her life changed and she started writing. This is a lower-order question. The sixth question is based on the sentence, "the narrator compares the feeling of writing her first poem to the feeling of giving birth". The learners are asked if this comparison is effective. They are not told what it is effective in relation to, which means learners would have to form their own

opinions. “Giving birth” might be like the start of a new life to the narrator. They are then asked to explain.

Question 7 asks learners to compare the opening paragraph with the last two paragraphs to show to what extent the narrator has changed. For this question, they can easily find the answer by referring to the opening paragraph and the last two paragraphs. The protagonist does not have confidence in the beginning but at the end she is a writer and is confident about herself. The last question asks what the cock at the end of the story symbolises. Learners can answer according to what they think it symbolises. It can be either that it is the beginning of a new day or chapter. Others might say it could symbolise the celebration of her success. The questions asked are lower-order questions which do not bring empowerment or critical awareness to learners.

5.5 Chapter 5 summary

Short stories and their activities were analysed in this chapter. Most activities, especially in the Grade 11 and 12 textbooks, were found to not test critical literacy. Grade 10 activities do have potential to assess critical literacy. However, there is still room for growth; for example, the questions do not challenge learners to use multimodality and create their own pieces of work. There is a lot to discuss in relation to the literature review and theoretical framework. The next chapter will discuss these findings.

Chapter 6: Discussion of findings

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter analysed the selected short story textbooks. This chapter will discuss the findings in relation to critical literacy theory and terminologies in the literature review. Selected short stories were analysed together with their activities to determine if they challenge learners to be critical thinkers. This was done by applying critical literacy theory and using the literature review to analyse the selected texts.

6.2. Discussion of findings in relation to literature reviewed

The literature reviewed touched on different issues, from teacher trainings, CAPS, types of questions, etc. All those will collectively be used in this subsection to discuss what was found.

6.2.1 Order of questioning in FET short stories

In *Fabulous* textbook, two stories were sampled from the book, namely, “The Park” and “The Late Bud”. These stories were analysed with their activities. In *“*The Park*”,* there are four higher-order questions, which happen to be divergent questions, one of which is the pre-reading activity. All the divergent questions allow for critical literacy skills. Faroh et al. (2022) confirm that higher-order questions enhance critical literacy. There are three

lower-order questions, one of which allows for critical literacy as it triggers issues around apartheid and democracy. “The Park” therefore has four higher-order questions and three lower-order questions. **“**The Late Bud” has two questions only: a pre-reading activity and a post-reading activity. The first question is a divergent type of question; it also allows learners to be critical thinkers as it allows learners to discuss what a contemporary problem child is. If this question was going to be treated as a verbal activity, this would be a funnel question. The second question is also a divergent question, which can be converted into a funnel question if answered verbally. It allows learners to be critical thinkers as it challenges them to critique what girlhood means in an African context. Critical literacy was meant to critique (Freire, 1972), so both these questions allow learners to criticise society in terms of what it is to be a problem child and to be an African girl child. This makes it nine questions analysed from the textbook *Fabulous.* Out of the nine questions, six questions are higher-order questions and open up for critical literacy practices, while three questions are lower-order questions.

In *Short Story Anthology,* two stories from this story were also analysed with their activities: “Swimming Partners” and “Pink Bow Tie*”*. In “Swimming Partners”*,* there are nine questions. Eight questions are lower-order questions, and one question is a higher-order question which requires learners to explain the idiom ‘taking the plunge’ in relation to the story. The imbalance between lower-order and higher-order questions here is problematic; this is a Grade 11 short story book, yet the questions do not prepare learners for higher education literary education by fostering higher-order thinking. All nine questions in “Pink Bow Tie” are lower order questions. It is problematic how critical literacy

is not assessed; lower-order questions do not assess critical literacy (Faroh et al., 2022). What is more concerning is the fact that these are questions asked in high school, in Grade 11. Rahman and Manaf (2017), in their study, found out that literature as a subject "is important for students' learning". They state that literature is essential in developing creative and critical thinking skills. They then argue that Bloom's Taxonomy should be used in literature to boost rational thinking, purposeful thinking, and relation to contexts. Yet Bloom's Taxonomy is not evident in these questions, as we see mostly lower-order questions, and only one higher-order question in both stories. Therefore, in the textbook *Short Story Anthology*, seventeen questions were analysed; sixteen questions are lower-order, while one question is a higher-order question.

In *Changes* also, two stories were analysed with their activities. Firstly, in "Village People", all the eight questions were found to be lower-order questions. In "Transforming Moments", all eight questions are lower-order questions. This is problematic, since it does not necessarily portray what CAPS says it intends to do. CAPS claims to be a curriculum that allows learners to be interpreters of text, but this is not evident in the textbooks it prescribes (Hove & Maruma, 2014). This is a Grade 12 textbook and one wonders how it is prepares learners for higher education literary studies as Grade 12 is just one step away from higher education. Hove and Maruma (2014) argue that the classroom should be a space where texts are used to discuss surrounding issues, and not to memorise. What the activities in the two analysed stories do is test memory and not the ability for learners to have or develop skills such as problem-solving skills.

6.2.2 FET short story questions hinder learners' creativity

Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) argue that a short story in this era should be read and learnt in interesting ways; these ways are multimodal ways. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of effective multimodality, even in the short story textbooks themselves. The questions asked do not require learners to develop skills. For example, almost all questions in the Grade 11 and 12 textbooks are lower-order questions. That is extremely problematic. How do learners gain knowledge from flat questions or questions that test the same level of knowledge, which in this case would be memory and recall? In all the stories, from Grade 10 to 12, there are no brainstorm questions and personalised questions. It is understandable that personalised questions can be time-consuming, especially under CAPS curriculum, hence learners can do them in their spare time. However, brainstorm questions are not time-consuming, and they allow learners to be creative (Berger, 2016).

Learners, when studying short stories, should at least be at a place where they are expected to brainstorm a story themselves. Berger (2016) argues that they would be smarter, as they would dig deeper into a problem, and also aim to solve it. In other words, in order to spark creativity, a teacher may allow learners to brainstorm ideas or questions, either at different times or simultaneously. Divergent questioning helps learners to be creative and innovative. Brainstorming is an organised technique; it is an example of a divergent question, which sparks creativity (Kalargiros & Manning, 2015). The lack of

creativity in CAPS' questions confirms what Seabi et al. (2020) stated, which is that CAPS books in general use lower-order questions to assess lower-order knowledge. Such lower-order knowledge may also be referred to as mediocre knowledge (Hove & Maruma, 2014). It is opposed to knowledge that allows learners to be innovative and to be aware of what is problematic in texts.

6.2.3 CAPS contradiction

CAPS is contradicting itself and is not producing what it claims to be its aims. The two analysed stories from the Grade 11 textbook, *Short Story Anthology*, have lower-order questions, except for one question. The two analysed stories from the Grade 12 textbook, *Changes*, entirely have lower-order questions. The two analysed stories from the Grade 10 textbook, *Fabulous*, have more higher-order questions than lower-order questions. It is quite a good thing as higher-order questions are said to enhance critical literacy (Faroh et al., 2022). However, there is always room for growth. For example, in "The Late Bud" by Ama Ata Aidoo, both the questions start with 'discuss'. Learners should be exposed to different ways and modes of testing knowledge. At some point they may as well enact the story (Essa & Mendelowitz, 2022).

Learners may also get creative and brainstorm ideas (Berger, 2016) and write short stories themselves. The CAPS document states that teaching literature needs "honest interpretations and comments from the learners themselves" (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 16). CAPS, as stated earlier, wants learners to be critical of

knowledge and be able to interpret information according to their standpoints. Unfortunately, that is not evident in most of the analysed stories and their activities. This confirms what Hove and Maruma (2014) found, that CAPS does not promote creativity in schools. The question is: what are the gaps that exist between CAPS designers and school textbook creators? Is there no effective communication between curriculum makers and textbook creators? How can CAPS aim to produce critically literate learners, yet accept material which is not of its standard? If CAPS is meant to equip learners with skills that would allow them to be critical thinkers, then there should be a place where they also jot their ideas in terms of what they interpreted, as CAPS' aim is to allow learners to interpret.

6.3 Discussion of findings in relation to critical literacy theory

In the theoretical framework, there are a lot of terminologies that came up, which are sub-concepts of critical literacy. What is interesting, is that all of them aim to advocate for one thing, which is challenging of powerful ideologies in society and the ability to question inequalities. Critical literacy theory was designed to challenge societal inequalities and to use text and education to allow for critical language awareness. This subsection will discuss the findings in relation to critical literacy.

6.3.1 Learners are not given a voice

Most questions in the Grade 11 and 12 textbooks asked learners low order questions; in other words, Bloom's Taxonomy is not applied. As much as critical literacy is not necessarily allowed by Bloom's Taxonomy, there is still no effort to diversify questions. The questions assess memory and recall, and not other skills. There is also no provision of exercise of agency in these books. However, in the Grade 10 textbook, it has been found that the way the compiler asks questions, learners are given a chance to apply critical thinking and to exercise agency. While the Grade 10 textbook asked higher-order questions, it still has room for growth. An example that was given earlier was that in "The Late Bud", both the questions start with 'discuss'. Learners may easily discuss without applying or developing critical literacy. This point is not made to contradict the fact that these questions allow for critical literacy to be developed, but just to emphasise that there can be other forms of questions which can enhance critical literacy, like asking learners to be creative by enacting or encoding the story as a drawing, or any other creative mode (Essa & Mendelowitz, 2022).

Learners may also be asked to brainstorm ideas or even to create their own stories as Janks (2013) states that critical literacy has to do with learners writing and rewriting the world around them. In the activities analysed, however, there is no creativity – learners are not rethinking the world around them; they do not reconstruct texts as Janks suggest. None of the questions from Grade 10 to 12 challenge learners to rethink realities. The questions do not challenge learners to have the voice to tell their own stories. Instead,

the questions silence learners and deviate them to mediocrity (Hove & Maruma, 2014). Is this the problem of CAPS or textbook compilers? The study suggests that it is both. CAPS prescribes a curriculum and textbook compilers follow it without much critical reflection on its practicalities.

6.3.2 Absence of critical literacy skills in CAPS

From the data analysed, there is no evidence of critical literacy in CAPS classrooms. When learners are given a space to be critical thinkers, it is through vague verbs like ‘discuss’. Learners are not really challenged to be critical thinkers, creators, solvers who make use of multimodality to interpret and analyse text. Instead, learners are made to recall answers from the stories. It looks as though there is continuation of the tradition of making public school learners labour workers, as they are not equipped to be planners, solvers, implementers, and creators (Gallo, 2020). Most learners who are a product of CAPS do reach higher education, but the problems mentioned earlier arise, where lecturers must start supporting them from basics, and extra programmes have to be created by the university to bridge the learners into a state where they can be proper academic writers and critical thinkers (Shalem et al., 2013).

For example, in “Swimming Partners”, the story could teach learners information around navigating the world, that besides having fun with friends and siblings in life, one must be in a situation to make proper informed decisions, to be also aware of different possibilities when getting into relationships or marriage or life in general. Critical literacy is a concept

that teaches learners about the world around them (Janks, 2013), and it allows learners to interpret and create meaning in relation to what they know, but questions for the story did not empower learners to that level. The questions only required the learner to copy answers in the story and to remember incidents.

6.3.3 Learners not empowered to question embedded ideologies

Learners are not taught critical language awareness. They are not made aware of embedded ideologies in texts. Even where these ideologies are in clear sight, learners are trained to be passive and not to critique them. Critical language awareness is a great tool to allow learners to be aware of what surrounds text (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). As stated earlier, ideologies are permitted by hegemony, which is the powerful norms and beliefs learnt in institutions such as the school, church and the family (McLaren, 1989). From the stories analysed, it is evident that short story textbooks are not used to allow learners to be critical interpreters. It means learners absorb hegemonic conceptions, as activities given do not challenge them to question ideologies. If these learners do not qualify to enter higher education, where other students are helped to close the gaps from high school, what will happen to develop their reasoning skills as their textbooks would not have exposed them to reasoning skills? This is problematic. Better reasoners make better communities.

6.4 Chapter 6 summary

It is only the activities of the Grade 10 short stories that open room for learners to engage and to be critical thinkers; however, there is still room for improvement. The author may introduce activities that allow learners to be creative. Activities of Grade 11 and 12 short stories mostly ask lower-order questions. In the Grade 11 and 12 short story textbooks, compilers assess memory and recall skills. In other words, learners must remember or refer to stories before answering questions. This means critical literacy is not assessed. There is also no provision of exercise of agency.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the findings of the study against critical literacy theory presented in Chapter 3 and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. There are a number of issues that stood out in this discussion. A key issue is that CAPS is not producing critical thinkers through short stories, although its stated aim is to do so. Learners are not made critical thinkers; they are limited by lower-order questions. Where there are critical questions, they tend to be vague in a way that if the teacher is not equipped with critical literacy skills, they and the learners may be passive about the ideologies embedded in that story.

This chapter is the conclusion and recommendations of the study. It will start by summarising the findings. Secondly, this chapter will outline the contribution of this study to knowledge. Thirdly, limitations or challenges faced during the study will be discussed. Lastly, recommendations will be made.

7.2 Summary of findings

The study answered research questions which were asked in Chapter 1. The first question was: what kinds of activities are provided for learners in prescribed English FET

short story textbooks? The study found that the activities of the Grade 10 stories allow learners to express themselves freely. The textbook also allows learners to apply critical thinking to some degree. However, its questions are sometimes vague, as they might be answered passively by learners who are not taught by a teacher who is equipped with critical literacy. For example, when they are asked to 'discuss' the theme of girlhood, they might discuss the theme of girlhood in general, or in normalised and patriarchal terms. It would be better if questions clearly challenge the class to be creative, in other words, force them to be critical thinkers. It was also found that the Grade 11 and 12 short story textbooks do not allow learners to exercise critical thinking at all. Most of the questions are lower-order questions. The question now is: how come Grade 10 questions allow learners to have a voice, but as the books move to Grade 11 and 12, there is no longer critical thinking encouraged? Grade 11 and 12 should be the beginning of the process for learners to prepare for higher education, but how do they prepare for higher education through lower-order questions? This is an important question to consider.

The second research question for this study was: to what extent do these activities promote critical literacy in learners? It is only the Grade 10 activities that allow learners to apply critical thinking, despite these questions or prompts being sometimes vague and not fully giving learners room to be creative thinkers. The Grade 11 and 12 activities do not allow learners to be critical thinkers at all; most questions found in them are lower-order questions. This is problematic, since these stories are studied in the CAPS curriculum, yet CAPS claims to be equipping learners with interpreting skills which would allow them to reason and analyse stories in relation to their standpoints. Is there

consistency in textbook selection? Was the Grade 10 textbook selected using the same criteria as Grade 11 and 12 textbooks? If so, was it the curriculum designer's decision to have the Grade 10 textbook contain higher-order questions and not do the same for the Grade 11 and 12 textbooks? These questions are my attempt to grapple with the ambiguity embedded in the findings of this study.

The third research question was: can these activities be said to prepare learners for higher education English studies? As stated in the paragraph above, the answer still is that the Grade 10 activities seem to prepare learners for higher education in some way but not fully. The Grade 11 and 12 activities ask lower-order questions. They can be said to be not preparing learners for higher education at all. So, when CAPS claims that it produces a lot of learners who reach higher education, which is true, does it refer to learners who will be boosted by higher education institutions themselves to adapt to critical thinking and academic writing? So, *Fabulous* activities analysed are the ones that have divergent questions that allow for critical literacy, while stories analysed from *Short Story Anthology* have lower-order questions with one higher-order question, and stories in *Changes* only have lower-order questions. This is a challenge that needs to be resolved.

7.3 Contribution of the study to knowledge

This study managed to make it evident that activities in short story textbooks are very important when it comes to enhancing teaching and learning in the classroom. The contribution of this study to knowledge is that it highlights the contradictions in CAPS

when it outcomes to outcomes of learning. The questions that arose in the discussion sections in Chapter 6 point to the problems with CAPS as a curriculum. For example, how come CAPS claims to aim to produce critically literate learners while it accepts material which is against that mission? These are the questions the study managed to pose in its discussion. By analysing the kinds of questions used in the short story textbooks, the study managed to highlight questions that influence critical literacy in learners. This can help teachers in general understand assessment in short stories, and how essential it is to teach in a creative way that allows critical thinking, so that they do not limit learners' potential by reducing them to lower-order questions. However, it is difficult for teachers to temper these questions, while textbooks themselves do not ask critical questions. This means this study is important to show the Department of Basic Education how teachers are also limited in becoming critical teachers. The study has shown the importance of textbooks including questions that promote critical literacy for high school learners as that would prepare them for university.

7.4 Limitations of the study

The study was limited to English textbooks which are used in Grade 10 to 12 in public schools in South Africa. The challenge was that the textbooks have many stories each, with eight stories prescribed by the Department of Basic Education. I would have loved to analyse all these stories but it would have been too time-consuming for the purposes of this study. As much as the findings I have on the six stories say a lot about the textbooks, I do not have the power to conclude what the contents of each whole textbook

might divulge. I remember discussing with my supervisor that it would be ideal if I could go to schools and observe actual lessons, to see if teachers somehow help learners be critical in responding to issues of social inequality, but still, it was well into the study when we thought about this idea. Thus, the study is limited in its restriction to a textbook research, with no classroom-based research side to it.

7.5 Recommendations

Having uncovered the problems and challenges, there are suggestions that can be made to different stakeholders. This subsection aims at giving recommendations for policy, practice and further research.

7.5.1 Recommendations for policy

What is evident is that short story textbooks which are prescribed by CAPS do not fully function the way CAPS stipulates in their documents. Firstly, I would recommend that curriculum designers have communication and training with textbook creators so that there is no contradiction in curriculum. In this study, it was discovered that the short story activities in two of the books analysed use mostly lower-order questions, which are equivalent to memory and recall questions, yet the CAPS document states that in literature classrooms, learners should interpret text and indicate their understanding of it in relation to their own backgrounds. Secondly, curriculum designers should not only be excited that they produce learners who meet higher education's minimum requirements

but should also be impressed with knowledge that the curriculum managed to impart in learners, not mere memorisation. There is a high rate of dropout in higher education due to epistemological shock, and this partly results from the discrepancy between high school literature education and university literature education. Thirdly, I would recommend curriculum makers to be vigilant of the kinds of activities that they give learners. In other words, critical literacy should be incorporated in CAPS material. The questions asked should trigger learners to critique, to rethink, to recreate and to have power over texts. Fourthly, I would recommend that curriculum makers stretch to different modes. Through their activities, they should allow learners to enact stories, transform them to other modes like art, music and other creative channels. Lastly, the Department of Basic Education should introduce contemporary short stories which address contemporary problems. When the stories I analysed were written, there were few to none of the issues that we face today, such as sexual labelling, cyber harassment and escalating levels of gender violence. This does not make the stories superfluous in any way, but it would be fair for learners to read about what they relate to, and issues that speak to their interests.

7.5.2 Recommendations for practice

Firstly, teachers should be critically literate themselves, so I would recommend that the Department of Basic Education offers them proper training. By proper training, I mean training that is offered by experts in the field of teacher training. I am a full-time English Home Language teacher myself and I worked as an English First Additional Language

teacher before. It is startling to see how the Department of Basic Education would send someone to come and lead training, and when we ask them questions, they say they do not know the answers. Therefore, subject specialists should be critically equipped. Secondly, I would recommend that the Department of Basic Education give educated specialists a chance to improve and align their curriculum. This is because, in their job advertisements for specialists, they are interested in experience, but not in the fact that the candidate is epistemologically equipped to go and train many teachers. Thirdly, after teachers are trained to be critical trainers, I would recommend that they instil critical reasoning skills in learners and not limit them to being passive beings. Lastly, I would recommend that the Department of Basic Education reduce the paperwork. I would not suggest that they use paperless systems as that would cost a lot of money for a developing country like South Africa, but at least they should reduce paperwork and emphasise equipping learners with critical thinking skills instead of focusing on paperwork. In that way, the Department of Basic Education should develop ways to monitor teachers' work without burdening them with mountains of paperwork which hinders them from teaching as it consumes too much time and takes focus away from the learners and their needs for critical literacy.

7.5.3 Recommendations for further research

For further research, I would firstly recommend an empirical study that looks at actual teaching practices at different public schools to ascertain if and how teachers were circumventing the challenges of the short story textbooks to help FET learners think in

critical ways. This observation will help in realising the level in which CAPS material boosts teaching and learning to be a creative space in a critically engaging manner. Secondly, I would recommend a study on the communication between curriculum makers and textbook creators. This would expose the gap that exists between the two and might point out the problem that causes contradiction in curriculum. Thirdly, I would recommend a study on how CAPS aims to produce critically literate learners yet accepts material which does not promote critical thinking. This would help expose the contradiction as well. Where does it go wrong? Who perpetuates mediocrity in basic education – between curriculum makers and material creators?

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Appendix 1: Ethics Waiver Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG | WSoE Wits School of Education

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NONMEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2022ECE015M

PROJECT TITLE	*Applying critical literacy theory to examine English Further Education and Training literature textbooks.*
INVESTIGATOR	Adolph Sekgobela
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	Wits School of Education
DATE CONSIDERED	22 April 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	No
EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the Research Report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE CHAIRPERSON

Dr. Batseba Mofolo-Mbokane

cc: Dr. Naomi Nkealah

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

_____ ____**07**__/___**05**____/_**2022**___

Signature **Date**