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A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF LITERACY AND ITS ENACTMENT IN TWO GRADE R CLASSROOMS

by

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree Master of Education

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Abstract

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a time of 'critical opportunity' (DOE, 2001) when learning is paramount and when the foundation for lifelong learning and successful living is laid. In South Africa the educational sector in ECD has a history of being marginalized and fragmented and deprived of infrastructure, sufficient educational resources and properly trained educators (Willenberg, 2003). The notable shift to increase access and promote equity for all children has been the foregrounding of the Grade R year in the Foundation Phase of schooling (DOE, 2001). However, the lack of effective management and curriculum and pedagogical changes brought about by this massive restructuring places Grade R in a tenuous position (Phatudi, 2007); greatly affects the quality of education offered. It is in this context that this research explored what two Grade R teachers understand literacy to be and how it is enacted in their classrooms. The sites included a preschool and primary school to compare pedagogical approaches. Using a qualitative framework a case study design was used. Semi-structured interviews were supplemented with video-taped classroom observations and documentation. The findings show that teachers understand literacy in a sophisticated way: literacy is about meaning making and communication. The observations reveal this understanding is enacted in practice. Children have access to multimodal and semiotic resources and learn that literacy has a range of social uses and purposes. The major differences are in approach: the preschool teacher views literacy as an act of creative expression and her pedagogy is more implicit. The teacher in the primary school provides more explicit instruction focusing on how texts and language work. However, all the children gain a knowledge of print, the visual and a range of genres. High-functioning classrooms with qualified teachers prepare children to grow up being literate. Neither approach is totally play-based or 'a mini-Grade 1'; and while the concern of the formalization of Grade R is valid, neither approach is one-dimensional.

Declaration

I, Kerri-Lee Schneider (student number 0309992D) declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Name of Candidate: Kerri-Lee Schneider

Date: 15th day of February 2013

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Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

The earliest years of life are the most important. What happens – or doesn't happen – after conception and from birth onwards – is of critical importance and underpins and informs children's immediate well-being and lasting future (UNICEF, 2006). The period of early childhood development (ECD) is defined by the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), the World Summit for Children (1990), as well as South African policy frameworks (DOE, 1996) as "strategies that meet the basic needs of young children from birth to nine years" (Porteus, 2004). The fundamental needs of optimal health and quality care and protection are thought to determine the growth and development of the young child (Gordon & Browne, 2008). ECD is a formative period of life when children begin to master more complex levels of moving, thinking and feeling and develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally and morally (DOE, 2001). Early childhood is a time of 'critical opportunity' (DOE, 2001) when learning is paramount and when children are schooled in the knowledge and dispositions that lay the foundation for lifelong learning and successful living.

These definitions emphasize the integrated care and education needed for children between the state and civil society (families, communities, NGO'S and the private sector) (Porteus, 2004). However, a lack of consensus of the kinds of provision to be offered creates difficulties in and around ECD when it is viewed through the lens of educational policy (Porteus, 2004). Although there is agreement that young children need security, positive regard and quality stimulation (Excell & Lingington, 2011; Spodek & Saracho, 2005); there is little consent about the type of programmes to be offered and the best social setting for children to receive these educational opportunities.

With reference to South Africa, a dichotomy exists between the family and community on the one hand and institutionalized care (preschools, ECD centres) on the other. This complexity reflects two conceptual shifts in thinking in ECD in the early 1990's. First, the universal endorsement of the United Nations (UN) on the Rights of the Child (1989) (and reflected across the human rights movement in South Africa) that replaced the more-dependency based approach to child development; and second, increased cognisance of the cultural variations in

notions of an ideal childhood (Porteus, 2004). It is through the lens of addressing the best form and function of early educational provision, that I use ECD in relation to schooling in the context of this study.

1.2 Patterns of ECD provisioning: A historical process

In South Africa the educational sector in ECD has a history of being marginalized and fragmented where the needs of its most vulnerable population, children, have not been adequately met (September, 2009). The current patterns of formal ECD centre provisioning date as far back as the 1930's, and reflects segregationist and Apartheid ideologies (Porteus, 2004). By 1940 the Union Department of Welfare provided per capita subsidies to day-care centres and the provisional education departments subsidized nursery schools. With this, the divide between "welfare for custodial care" and "education for school programmes" was intensified (Willenberg, 2003). While welfare subsidies were provided across racial lines, subsidies from education were reserved for white children only. In other words, the state provided some black children with custodial care but not with any educational provision. As state subsidies were not increased over time, the user fees of white parents particularly from privileged backgrounds were heavily relied upon (September, 2009). Due to the increased use of private services, the quality of care became increasingly differentiated along racial lines.

Simultaneously, pre-primary education became the responsibility of provisional education departments. This is evident in the National Education Policy Act of 1967 that established the provision of school services to white children (Porteus, 2004). As this trend continued during the 70's and 80's, the Department of Education and Training (DET) stopped subsidizing care centres for black, coloured and Asian children. The responsibility of the provision of care services was placed onto families, communities, NGO's and the private sector. Although the NGO sector developed facilities, they remained limited in scope (September, 2009). Historical inequalities were entrenched even further by the race-based discrepancies in practitioner training. Black ECD practitioners were largely prevented from receiving training. As provincial training was phased out after early 1990, non-governmental organizations continued to service black practitioners while white practitioners obtained credentials from formal state programmes (Porteus, 2004).

The consequences of Apartheid have seen ECD deprived of infrastructure, sufficient educational resources and properly trained educators (Willenberg, 2003). The treatment of children under this regime served to tighten the state's ideologies of power and control. These injustices affected the extent to which all children were able to gain access to sound education that lies in contrast to ECD as a foundation for lifelong learning. It is in this context that the creation of explicit educational services became essential (Porteus, 2004). The National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI) established prior to 1994 was one of the most influential processes for the articulation of new educational policy. NEPI informed the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC), conducted between 1990 and 1992, that investigated educational policy options within the broad values of a democratic movement (Porteus, 2004).

These policies, notably driven by a human rights discourse, mirrored a change world-wide that ECD should merit higher priority attention (Prinsloo & Bloch, 1999). This is evident in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations (UN), 1990) that supports children's holistic potential and acknowledges their right to education met in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance and freedom (UNICEF, 1996). The Education for All (EFA) initiative identified its first goal as "expanding and improving early childhood care and education" (UNESCO, 1990 cited in Marfo; Bierkester; Sagnia, & Kabiru, 2008). These international trends were to some extent reflected in African nations. In South Africa, the most essential policy initiative was the constitution itself where a range of human and specifically child rights are articulated and guaranteed (Prinsloo & Bloch, 1999). In response to this the Government recognized ECD as a key asset to human development. A number of policy documents attest to this shift: White Paper 5 on ECD (WP5, 2001) and the National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS, 2009).

These policies set a precedence to the well-being of children in South Africa. The state aimed to re-centre primary school education as a means to increase access and promote equity for all children (Marfo et al, 2008) especially for those previously disadvantaged. In South Africa the most notable shift has been the foregrounding of the Grade R year and the provision of primary education for all children (DOE, 2001). The Interim policy on ECD in 1996 that informed WP5 (2001) saw government centralising Grade R in the education sector. Grade R has become part of the 10 years of free schooling and "provisioning in ECD for children over 5 that begins in

Reception year (Grade R) of an integrated four-year Foundation Phase Programme (Grade R-3)" (DOE, 2001: 8). This move has prompted government to improve the quality in the Foundation Phase of primary schooling and affirms its responsibility to curriculum frameworks. It is envisaged that this schooling year be universal and that by 2019 every child is expected to have attended an accredited Reception programme before entering Grade 1 in the year they turn seven (DBE, 2011). Reports show that enrolment in these programmes has increased from 15% in 1999 to 52% in 2011 where more than 500 000 attended Grade R facilities (DBE, 2011).

The DOE (2001) does not envisage Grade R as an institutionalised year of instruction. Rather, it is to serve as a bridge between informal education (home and community care centres and preschools) and a formal education system. The Grade R year should essentially promote continuity in children's experiences and knowledge as they transition from one system into the other (DBE, 2011). Ideally, this schooling year should provide children with opportunities to discover how their world works; experiences to problem solve and make decisions; chances to work with literacy artefacts and materials and to play; to help them develop coping skills and become ready for formal learning.

However, the implementation of Grade R is not without its challenges. This is most notably reflected by the lack of fit between the needs of young children and the operations of state bureaucracy (September, 2009). Grade R is now provided for by many different types of programmes that include community centres, private preschools and the public primary school sector. Although the education department has jurisdiction over this year, the lack of infrastructure in some sites, varying pedagogical approaches, poor training of staff and lack of effective regulation over all settings, places Grade R in a difficult and tenuous position (Phatudi, 2007). At a certain point, not only does this prevent educational quality from being assured but provision may become counterproductive in offering children a foundation for lifelong learning.

This problem is most clearly reflected in the different philosophies that underpin teaching and learning across the different educational sites. Traditionally provision in ECD for children of five years has been dominated by community based centres (Closquin-Johnson, 2011). These "local" sites emphasize the synergy between children's care and education and promote a more informal approach to teaching and learning (Closquin-Johnson, 2011). An informal approach

promotes an emergent curriculum and involves discovery-based activities, teacher-guided instruction and semi-structured routine. This approach aligns itself with developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) where "play is used and sustained through reciprocal and responsive relationships and situated in activities that are socially constructed and mediated" (Excell & Linington, 2011: 14). In contrast, provision in ECD for children aged six to nine has been facilitated by the primary school and formal learning programmes. A formal approach to teaching and learning emphasizes children's academic development and includes structured curricula, teacher-directed instruction, paper-and-pencil activities and evidence based assessment (Closquin-Johnson, 2011). Practices that are not in line with DAP may present challenges to children's holistic well-being for successful lifelong learning.

The curriculum, pedagogical and structural changes brought about by the massive restructuring of ECD over the past two decades has created a tension within the Grade R year. Insufficient regulation and poor management of this schooling year greatly affects the quality of education offered. It is in this context that I want to understand how practice, with specific regard to literacy, is enacted in the Grade R classroom in a preschool and a primary school.

1.3 A literacy focus

Literacy is a key concept that I draw on in this research. This is because literacy is thought to be the primary avenue through which children learn to communicate and gain access to knowledge (Allington & Pearson, 2011). Literacy is a constant activity of the classroom and is a necessary requirement for the other subjects children learn. Street (2005) asserts that children acquire literacy as they begin to consciously recognise the purposes and actions involved in the social acts of reading and writing. It is therefore important to understand how children's literacy experiences in different settings is enacted to build knowledge of the different kinds of literacy practices required in different cultural contexts (Street, 2005).

In the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2012), literacy falls under the subject of home language. It is also visibly integrated into the mathematics and life skills subjects as language is the primary means through which children learn, make meaning, read and write (Allington & Pearson, 2011). According to CAPS out of the 23 hours of instruction per week in the Grade R classroom 10 hours should be allocated to the home language subject (DBE, 2012). Teaching

and learning in this subject area aims to promote the skills of listening and speaking; reading and phonics; and writing and handwriting; while the meta-cognitive abilities of thinking, reasoning and language structure and use are integrated throughout (DBE, 2012).

Research shows that even though children live in a print immersed world they are rarely recognized as entering school with any literacy knowledge or experience (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). It is only with the onset of formal instruction that children are thought to take on the role of readers and writers. Studies (Allington & Pearson, 2011; Baatjes, 2003) show children's diverse socio-cultural backgrounds continue to result in wide differences in their exposure to literacy in school. In working with a socio-cultural lens this research takes these points into account. Research into children's literacy development and the factors that support its emergence is warranted (Cunningham, 2009). I aim to use the Grade R classroom to gain insight into the socio-cultural domain of literacy. Knowledge of this kind is needed to help promote quality early education with culturally responsive teachers in a diverse South Africa (Street, 2005).

1.4 Aims and Research Question

The current status of Grade R warrants research. Examining teaching and learning of literacy will provide insight into the practices enacted in early education.

Research Question:

What do Grade R teachers understand by the term literacy and how is it enacted in classroom practice?

Research Aims:

- To determine Grade R teachers' literacy knowledge and practice.
- To identify the tensions that may exist between teachers' literacy knowledge and enacted literacy practice.
- To compare the approaches of literacy teaching and learning in preschool and primary school sites.

1.5 Rationale

There are several reasons for conducting this research. My honours research provided a useful basis to conduct further research in the domain of early literacy. My research found that unqualified teachers find it difficult to explain the nature of literacy and to articulate their pedagogical practices. Since teachers are accountable for developing children's literacy, I wanted my Masters research to explore how qualified teachers understand literacy and help determine the theoretical frameworks that underpins their literacy instruction. According to Shulman (1987: 1) exploring the knowledge base of teaching is to "manage ideas within classroom discourse". My study focused on the teachers' content knowledge and instructional strategies and how these inform their pedagogical representations and actions during classroom practice (Shulman, 1987). Conducting semi-structured interviews was a useful tool to gain insight into what children need to learn to become literate and how literacy is taught. This was a necessary aim to help extend the body of disciplinary knowledge in the language and literacy domains. Eliciting teachers' understanding was valuable in helping me work towards establishing theorized practice that is currently lacking in ECD as a field.

Examining teachers' understanding and enactment of literacy was useful to help me determine whether a disjuncture exists between teacher's knowledge and practices regarding the purposes of literacy. Classroom observations, field notes, video-recordings and photographs were purposeful instruments to capture the nuances of teachers' practice. This is specifically relevant to the Grade R context where early learning occurs mainly through interaction, demonstrating and enacting (Flewit, 2005) by the teacher. The instruments focused on teacher's general pedagogical knowledge and the kinds of strategies and activities that inform teachers' approaches to literacy. This reflects that claim of Shulman (1987: 12) where observations of classroom practice help to "collect, collate and interpret data that showcases the pragmatic knowledge of teachers to establish case literature".

This knowledge is important to determine to help strengthen early literacy instruction (Armbuster, Lehr & Osborne, 2002). This is in recognition of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) study where South Africa came last out of 40 countries with less than half of the country's learners reaching the lowest benchmark level of 50% (DBE, 2006). Knowing how teachers' understand and practice literacy would offer insight into early education

and work towards improving the literacy competencies of our children. Good literacy instruction does not take place only in the final year of the Foundation phase but strong understandings of what it means to work with emergent literacy in order to produce highly literate children is key.

Second, my personal motivation for undertaking this study relates to my working experience. In mentoring my ECD students on their teaching experience, I found there was a growing emphasis on the use of worksheets to teach children how to read and write at the expense of play. In selecting to work in both a preschool and primary school, the research makes a comparison between an informal and formal approach to teaching and learning (explained in section 3.3). Discovering the affordances and limits of each of these approaches would help me identify what constitutes high quality pedagogy. This purpose is in line with research that argues for a need to promote the articulation of thoughtful early childhood practices (Souto-Manning & Vasquez, 2011).

Further, as a lecturer in ECD at the University of the Witwatersrand, I find that gaps exist between students' pedagogical content knowledge and their implementation of literacy activities in the classroom. To explore how effective Grade R teachers teach literacy would begin to close the gaps present in the pedagogical instruction in my teacher training programme. This objective is in line with the Norms and Standards for Educators where teacher qualifications are to reflect an integrated competence between theories and practice (DOE, 2000).

1.6 Outline of chapters

Below is an outline of the chapters that follow:

Chapter two presents my survey of the literature that includes, the field of ECD; Grade R and the South African schooling system; a socio-cultural approach to literacy; emergent literacy, and teachers' understanding of literacy and enactment of their literacy practices.

Chapter three describes qualitative research and a case study design; outlines the research site and research participants; and explains the research instruments, data collection methods and the analysis of data; the research process and ethical considerations and research difficulties encountered.

Chapter four presents the findings of the study. It explains my findings about the tensions between teacher's literacy knowledge and enacted practice and the comparisons in literacy approach in preschool and primary school sites.

Chapter five presents a synthesis of my research study. It includes the concluded findings, recommendations for further research and the limitations encountered during the research process.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This survey of the literature draws on work done in the field of Early Childhood Development, the Grade R year and the South African schooling system. It also includes research on a socio-cultural approach to literacy, children as emergent literates and teachers' knowledge of literacy and the enactment of their literacy practices.

2.2 Early Childhood Development (ECD)

This section explores the field of ECD as the broader context in which this study is conducted. ECD is a time when children continue to grow and develop (Gordon & Browne, 2008). Gordon & Browne (2008) comment that early childhood can be considered the formative years of life when children begin to master more complex ways of moving, thinking, interacting and being. The ECD Audit (2001) characterizes the early years as "a period of life from birth to nine when children thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially" (DOE, 2001: 7) and develop holistically. The well-being of children appears to rest on the kinds of knowledge, skills and dispositions that are acquired early in life. This is because it is a period of time that is a 'critical window of opportunity' when a foundation for lifelong learning is laid (Evans, Myers & Ilfield, 2000). The phase of early childhood includes the integrated policies and programmes that cater for the care and education of young children that includes the participation of their parents and/or caregivers (DOE, 2001). These policies aim to enhance children's potential and mobilize safe, suitable and healthy environments for optimal learning and development.

However, the literature shows that ECD is not only foregrounded developmentally. Phatudi's (2007: 34) notion of ECD being a "social and cultural construction" must also be noted as this points to the role of context. Socio-cultural foundations are laid during early childhood. ECD cannot be separated from the external variables of race, class, gender or time. Early childhood is rooted in the home and branches into other macro-systems that include the school and wider community (Closquin-Johnson, 2011). The varied communities in South Africa establish cross-cultural differences in the norms, values, and knowledge systems that shape children's development in the broader socialization process (Marfo et al, 2008).

In this way, children acquire certain behavioural competencies that are internalized in accordance with the core values in their culture. Among others, these core values determine concepts of morality, authority, spirituality and respect. With reference to Africa, these values also help shape the relative balance between valuing a communal and community legacy and promoting personal autonomy (Marfo et al, 2008). With regards to educational provision, indigenous traditions can provide rich tools and strategies as in symbolic and literary artefacts; that can be integrated into contemporary practices that support the well-being of children (Porteus, 2004). However, cultural practices are fluid and constantly evolve. This shifts the expectations within the variety of developmental contexts in which children grow and "preclude the tenability of there being a single conception of child and of childhood" (Marfo et al, 2008).

In order to help children thrive as the ECD Audit (2001) asserts, childhood pedagogy should be sound and of quality. Excell and Linington (2011) argue that creating interactive and playful learning environments that offers stimulating experiences is most conducive to how young children best learn. A sound and developmentally appropriate curriculum should use a pedagogy of play to promote early learning (Excell & Linington, 2011). Wood (2009: 27) defines a pedagogy of play as "the ways in which early childhood professionals make provision for play and how the designed play environments and all the pedagogical strategies used enhance learning and teaching through play". A play-based approach to teaching and learning is underpinned by sensory-motor integration and takes cognisance of the fact that most children are sensory, active and kinaesthetic learners (Excell & Linington, 2011).

Movement has a direct relation in the promotion of emergent literacy (Gallahue, 1996). Movement (action based activity) is the dominant force that activates sensorimotor integration and perceptual behaviours that underpin the knowledge, behaviours, skills and processes needed for formal literacy instruction; through which all other learning is integrated (Saracho & Spodek, 2005). Perception is the process through which the young child gathers stimuli (information) through the five sensory modalities that elicit a nervous response in the body. The neural plasticity of the child's brain activates responses that enhance the interconnectivity of neurons (different nerves) that establish different neural pathways (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003). These "implicit" pathways create sensations that are interpreted by the brain to provide an appropriate motor response (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003) that the child utilizes to make meaning

of the world. These adaptations become the building blocks to literacy and include sensory stimulus (visual recognition of word patterns and knowledge of phonemes); spatial orientation (laterality, directionality and balance to overcome gravity in order to sit and work cross a page) and temporal awareness (rhythm in the pronunciation of words) (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003). These behaviours lead to the development of gross and fine motor skills that enable the child to handle literacy materials and tools and engage in pre-reading and pre-writing activities in becoming successfully literate (Saracho & Spodek, 2005).

2.2.1 ECD Internationally

The centrality of childhood has attracted the attention of many groups in wider society. Media for, about and with young children has taken on an expanded role worldwide (Phatudi, 2007). The development of early education is recognized as an investment into human development, social growth and economic expansion (UNICEF, 2006). In countries like England and Germany as well as South Africa, ECD has become a central focus in the introduction of curriculum at all levels: policy, programme development, and practice (Marfo et al, 2008). A number of South African policy documents attest to this: The ECD Interim Policy (1996); WP5 on ECD (2001); and NELDS (2009). As noted previously, the international and national movement of ECD from the sidelines to the mainstream of society is foregrounded in the human rights discourse. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2006) sanctions the right of all children to a sense of safety and care and provision to basic and quality education (section 29(a)).

While the South African constitution provides a rights-based legislative framework upon which to base the mandate for equitable and quality ECD services, these provisions, per se, are not articulated as a specific right (Marfo et al, 2008). Nevertheless, it is proposed that harnessing children's holistic potential serves to adequately prepare them for successful living and lifelong learning (Gordon & Browne, 2008), and promotes human. However, the debate around prioritizing ECD based on the need to develop human capital raises fundamental objections. Kagan (2008 cited in Closquin-Johnson, 2011: 1) argues that, "ECD is currently regarded as a magical panacea that prepares young children for school and life and equalizes opportunity; preventing welfare dependence and school dropout". I agree with this argument. Although it is important to consider who the child might become in the future, it is equally, if not more important, to consider the being and belonging child (Excell & Linington, 2011). By solely

focusing on the becoming child educational provision may force children to learn at higher academic levels at an earlier age than they are psychologically and physiologically ready for (Gordon & Browne, 2008). Also, children might be encouraged to learn through more formal instruction at the expense of play. These results may be detrimental to children's well-being (House, 2011) and it is important to recognize ECD in its own right as a formative time and critical phase of a child's life.

2.2.2 ECD in SA

The implementation of ECD services in South Africa is concerning. The legacy of Apartheid and the racial injustices and inequalities created continues to leave many populations without access to quality provision (September, 2009). In an Audit of ECD centres in the Western Cape in 2007, September (2009) found that one in three white children gain access to services compared with one in eight Indian children and one in sixteen African children. The lack of provision of facilities is due to poor levels of infrastructure, a limited supply of educational resources and unqualified care workers and sufficient teacher training (Willenberg, 2003). Yet despite this, increased political pressure for reparation sees ECD as the vehicle through which human development is being addressed.

Prior to 1994, children from birth to five years were traditionally placed into informal edu-care programmes under the Health Department and Social Services sector (Willenberg, 2003). Programmes of this kind tend to focus on the synergy between children's care and education and pedagogy is underpinned by an informal play-based approach to teaching and learning (Excell & Linington, 2011). An approach of this kind recognizes that children develop holistically and encourage children to play, explore and discover their world and work actively with materials in constructing knowledge. Gordon and Browne (2008) assert that children's participation in active, open-ended and movement experiences is most likely to engender an enthusiasm for lifelong learning (Gordon & Browne, 2008). However, the shift of ECD to the centre of educational provision has seen changing and current policies reflect universal access to a pre-primary year as part of the primary school. The aim to "ready children for learning earlier" (Seger, 1996) has witnessed this pre-primary year being moved from its traditional place in informal schooling into the formal education system.

2.3. The Grade R Year

In South Africa Grade R is the one year of public and educational provisioning in ECD. The DOE (2001) recognizes "provisioning for children over 5 that begins in Reception year (Grade R) of an integrated four-year Foundation Phase (Grade R-3) Programme" (DOE, 2001:16). Grade R was introduced in early 2001. It is proposed that the Reception year be universal and not compulsory. The state envisions that by 2019 every child of five years will attend an accredited Grade R programme before commencing Grade 1 in the year they turn seven (DOE, 2001).

The Grade R year was established with a view to "facilitate the transition to formal schooling" (DBE, 2011) and into the Foundation Phase (Grades 1 – 3). It is a schooling year that is meant to provide a permanence of care and complementary practices by bridging the curriculum differences between informal learning and a formal education system (Phatudi, 2007). Hence there is a need for formal structures and programmes to supplement family efforts and ECD community centres and services. Grade R aims to promote continuity in the experiences and knowledge of children where the range of skills, abilities and understanding they bring into the school year can serve as a foundation for learning (Phatudi, 2007). In this regard, Grade R is thought to provide a seamless continuum of development from pre-reception through to reception and beyond (DOE, 2001). However, in reality this view is contentious.

The implementation of Grade R in South Africa corresponds with the international trend of the Kindergarten. The kindergarten is one type of programme that caters for the care and education of children and supports the transition from a home environment to a school setting (Marfo et al, 2008). Kindergarten school programmes are now found throughout much of the Minority World and most parts of the Majority World (House, 2011). As its name "children's garden" suggests the kindergarten philosophy is one more of nurturing the "budding" (Marfo et al, 2008) child than of providing didactic teaching or direct instruction. The "ripening" of children best occurs through supporting their growth and them reaching many sequential and holistic developmental milestones. A developmentally appropriate teaching and learning approach is one guided by children's developing milestones (Gordon & Browne, 2008). With this in mind, Woodhead (2005: 12) argues that young children should in fact "know no other endeavour but to be at every stage of development wholly what this age calls for". Grade R children are thought to be physical and active beings that best learn through play (Wood, 2009). The

kindergarten programme has found its way into the early childhood literature leading to a child-centred and interactive play-based approach. This informal teaching and learning approach encourages children to move, interact with others and manipulate concrete rich materials and is thought to be most appropriate for pre-primary learning and development (Porteus, 2004).

Willenberg's (2003) study of ECD provision shows that in South Africa Grade R extends a wide range of sites including programmes in public primary schools (17%); independent settings (34%) community based centres (49%). Although these Reception Year programmes vary in location they must all be registered with the respective provisional department of education (DOE, 2011). Due to the wider terrain of provision, Grade R is now situated in both pre-primary and primary school sites allowing children over five years to gain access to formal schooling provided by the Education Department (DOE, 2001). Lowering the age (from seven to five years) to include a pre-primary year as part of universal education is useful to create access for potentially large numbers of children in contexts where the majority of young children have not gained admission to ECD programmes (Marfo et al, 2008).

However, post 1994; the implementation of Grade R has seen a steady and progressive move away from the informal sector in favour of school-based development. This is evident in WP5 (2001) whereby it states that 85% of the provision of Reception Year services is offered through public primary schools. School provision is being promoted at the expense of community-based centres and ultimately "shifts ECD services that reflect a diversity of typologies to school-based classes" (Marfo et al, 2008). This raises concerns when children of poorer communities are placed into under-resourced, poorly structured and less stimulating classrooms in public school settings. This is even more so when the purpose of Grade R in increasing school success is to promote easier transition and create a readiness for learning immediately prior to children's entry into primary school (Phatudi, 2007).

Also, an unresolved tension remains between two models of ECD provision: a community-based multi-age-group model of integrated provision on the one hand (with an emphasis on creating safety nets for children and families) and a school-based model emphasizing the sole provision of the Reception Year on the other (Marfo et al, 2008). While in reality there is a continuum of programmes between these poles, the two models represent profoundly different ways of

conceiving ECD services (House, 2011; September 2009; Marfo et al, 2008). This raises the question of what kind of content and approaches of developmental stimulation typified by ECD programmes in formal and informal settings, best support children's optimal learning and development? (Marfo et al, 2008). Yet there seems to be a striking tension in the kinds of education offered in informal settings and formal education programmes. In South Africa the National Curriculum reflects these opposing pedagogical positions. Curriculum for Grade R is part of CAPS (2012) and forms part of the Foundation Phase of schooling which includes Grades 1-3 (approximate ages 6-9 years) (DBE, 2012). The focus is on the subject areas that involve literacy, numeracy and life skills. The principles that inform practice include the holistic development of the child, contextually relevant and developmentally appropriate activities, a focus on human rights and democratic values in the curriculum and opportunities to play and learn informally through experience in a supportive environment (Marfo et al, 2008).

In practice however, the location of the Grade R year in public primary schools has resulted in pressure for a more formal curriculum. In Africa, pre-primary programmes have been modelled on a primary instructional approach which many parents see as the most appropriate approach to prepare children for later schooling (Phatudi, 2007). Research has shown that this formal approach to teaching and learning is one of the many challenges facing Africa in the implementation of the Grade R year and is largely the result of the limited availability of qualified early childhood educators (Closquin-Johnson, 2011; Wood, 2009; Phatudi, 2007). The pedagogical approach in the primary school is more structured. Classroom practice is instruction orientated and teacher directed and is framed by prescriptive curricula and curriculum controlled outcomes (House, 2011). In this context teaching and learning occur through paper-and-pencil tasks, desk-based activities, whole class instruction and formal assessments (Woodhead, 2005). In this way, Grade R continues to adopt a push down curriculum (Power, 2002) and instead of optimizing children's development and learning and preparing children for formal schooling; many Grade R approaches are thought to offer children watered down Grade 1 programmes that affect their well-being and prevent ECD from becoming a foundation for lifelong learning (Gordon & Browne, 2008).

The differences between a formal and informal approach can be noted in literacy as one of the subject areas of the Foundation phase (DBE, 2012). Children are being provided with fewer

opportunities for learning through movement activities, explorative and discovery experiences and have less interaction with concrete activities (House, 2011). Instead of Grade R children forming letters through their bodies, outlining the forms of letters in sensory trays and engaging in oral dialogue; children are sometimes completing pages in workbooks, completing writing patterns and reading words (Allington & Pearson, 2011). In this regard and in agreement with Woodhead (2005:34) "achieving good quality play in practice remains a considerable challenge particularly where teachers face competing notions of what constitutes effective teaching and learning". Tasks of a more formal kind may be less natural and enjoyable for some children and may prevent them from acquiring the dispositions needed for lifelong learning.

The implementation of Grade R was indeed necessary to help shift ECD from the outskirts to the mainstream agenda of society (UNICEF, 2006). The introduction of a pre-primary year as part of the schooling system is an exciting and significant commitment toward the development of ECD services (Marfo et al, 2008). However, the lack of development of systems to adequately monitor the impact of the Reception programme on the transition to formal schooling is lacking. In South Africa Grade R is a schooling year that has been implemented without sufficient teacher training and resource development (September, 2009). Teacher training for the primary schooling requires a four-year degree as a minimum (level six). However, the minimum to teach Grade R is a level four and equivalent to a further education and training certificate after completing high school (Marfo et al, 2008). Many concerns remain about the quality and educational value of the Grade R year (House, 2011). The kinds of content and pedagogical approaches best suited to support children's development and learning of literacy are not well documented (Phatudi, 2007). It is with this point in mind that this research was conducted.

2.4 A Socio-cultural approach to Literacy

Literacy is a complex construct. The ways in which people address literacy and reading and writing are rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being (Street, 2005). It is also always embedded in social practices and the affects of learning that particular literacy will be dependent on those particular contexts in which it is enacted (Street, 2005). The interpersonal interactions in the classroom setting is already a social practice that effects the kinds of literacy being learned and the ideas participants have of literacy (Rowe, 2010). I have chosen to position my work using a socio-cultural theoretical approach to literacy.

Within this approach is the term “New Literacy Studies” (NLS) which considers the nature of literacy, focusing not on the acquisition of skills as in most dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice (Street, 2005). This view recognizes the fact that people participate in many literacy activities as part of their everyday social and cultural lives. Understanding different literacy experiences in different settings builds knowledge of the different kinds of literacy practices required in different cultural contexts (Street, 2005). NLS argues that multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, are thus also contested in relations of power (Street, 2005). It takes nothing for granted when it comes to literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated. Literacy is always positioned in a particular world-view with the desire to dominate a particular view of literacy and marginalize others (Street, 2005).

NLS opposes a view of literacy as an ingrained cognitive process like in a system of sounds to be learned. Street (2003) argues that this conception, reflected in dominant literacy programmes, represents an autonomous model of literacy. This model works from the assumption that literacy in itself will autonomously have effects on other social and cognitive processes (Street, 2003). According to Street (2003) this view disguises the cultural knowledge s that underpin it so that it can be presented as being a universal and neutral idea for the whole of mankind. Rather, NLS conceptualizes literacy as a powerful construct that can shape knowledge, knowledge and action. Literacy in this way works interdependently with individual consciousness making some dispositions for daily functions more important than others (Rowe, 2010). Here, literacy as a social act allows individuals and groups to use literacy and multimodal forms of communication to impact the social practices of their communities (Street, 2003). From this approach, literacy is a powerful construct that shapes our identities, feelings and way of life (Gee, 1996).

In practice, literacy is thought to vary from one culture to another affecting the different literacies taken up in different situations (Street, 2003). In contrast to the autonomous model of literacy that imposes Westernized views onto other cultures; the alternative ideological model (Street, 2003) offers a more culturally sensitive view of how literacy practices vary from one context to another. In this model literacy is always thought of as a social practice, not simply a neutral skill; that is always embedded in socially constructed conceptions of knowledge (Street, 2003). In context, literacy is fostered through the interactions we have with others. Freire (1970

cited in Cushman, Kintgen, Kroll & Rose, 2001) suggests that dialogue is a powerful tool as the reciprocal exchange of ideas can often elicit new ways of thinking about things in the world.

The socio-cultural conception of literacy places individuals into the role of a knowing subject, moving individuals away from being the object of the process of reading and writing to its subject (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000). In this regard, Street (2003) develops a distinction between literacy events and literacy practices. A literacy event is "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretative processes" (Heath, 1982). For example, when children write a report on their news for the classroom newspaper they participate in a school literacy event based on a real-life literacy experience. A literacy practice on the other hand, focuses upon "the social conceptions of reading and writing and the social models of literacy that participants bring to bear upon them that give meaning to them" (Street, 2003). Here, a shared family experience of creating a list for grocery shopping forms the basis of out-of-school literacy practices as the family members recognize that compiling a list is an important tool to record and recall ideas. In this way, individuals make meaning of what one reads and transfers understanding into what ones writes and communicating with others includes a range of multimodal modes (Barton et al, 2000).

The Grade R classroom as a site of early learning is already a social context through the kinds of interactions encouraged among the teacher and children. In this context, knowledge of the literacy practices would offer insight into the nature of literacy being learned and the ideas the participants' have of literacy (Street, 2003). Bloch (2002) comments that literacy experiences are often represented through language. Although literacy and language are separate entities they work in conjunction with one another where language is often used to describe literacy practices. In a multilingual society like South Africa a plurality of texts can be created through the multimodal communicative tools individuals and communities use (Bloch, 2002). In line with a socio-cultural approach to literacy the processes of reading and writing take literacy beyond communication to an act of consuming and producing meaning (Barton et al, 2000). In this way, literacy becomes a creative endeavour where people create and recreate texts that reflect their ideas, experiences and knowledge s of the world.

Each cultural context constructs different knowledge principles that underpin literacy practices specific to their unique social setting. Examining literacy practices in the preschool and primary school classroom can help extend knowledge of the ways in which Grade R teachers understand and enact literacy. This research explores the kinds of spaces, activities and resources that give rise to literacy and how the social forces at play help shape participants literary selves (Dixon, 2011).

2.5 Emergent Literacy

Although an examination of the socio-cultural approach to literacy is important to consider for the broader context of this study; Street's (2005) conception of literacy fails to recognize children's emerging literacy practices. For this research this must be taken into consideration since early education is expected to promote learning that is developmentally appropriate (Gordon & Browne, 2008). Although the conception of emergent literacy does acknowledge the cognitive competencies in learning to read and write, and it may also be in tension with literacy as social practice; it is still important to consider to help children thrive and "get ready for learning" (Allington, & Pearson, 2011).

The development of literacy begins in early infancy along a continuum of growth (Gordon & Browne, 2008). Children do not reach a specified point in time when they suddenly take on reading and writing. Rather, children slowly and gradually add onto what they already know through their continual exposure to oral and written language and books and stories in their everyday social and cultural lives (Laman, Miller, & Lopez-Robinson, 2012). Strickland and Morrow (1989: 3) agree and argue that "emergent literacy keeps on emerging". Growing up in a literate society enables children to have early contact with environmental print and semiotic signs. Laman et al (2012) suggests that learning about reading and writing occurs when children see how they are used in the real-life settings of the social practices of which they are part. For example, observing adults follow an instruction manual on how to assemble a table allows children to identify the functional uses of literacy.

Prinsloo and Stein (2004) argue that emergent literacy occurs as children acquire knowledge around what literacy is and how it is used. It is through using an array of modalities that children begin to recognise that texts carry meaning. This conception corresponds with Street's (2005)

premise that children learn how literacy works as they begin to consciously recognise the purposes involved in reading and writing in their communities. As community and connectedness are considered to be the hallmarks of learning (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001), it appears that teachers' cannot afford to assume that children walk into school with no knowledge of literacy.

The above discussion describes the kinds of knowledge and values children acquire as they develop literacy. Seger (1996) argues that as children learn literacy they also develop a set of skills that allows them to work with literacy texts and literacy tools. With this conception in mind Seger refers to emergent literacy as the "behaviours that children exhibit before they learn to read and write conventionally" (1996: 7). Research (Roskos & Neuman, 1993) shows that as readers' children learn to display competencies that include holding a book correctly, turning pages, 'reading' pictures and knowing words carry meaning. As writers children learn to draw to communicate their ideas and imitate adult like behaviour such as compiling lists. Children learn literacy as they begin to recognize what they want to represent to others and select the modes and materials to do so (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004).

It is suggested that in order to facilitate children's development of literacy there are key components that should inform early literacy programmes. Research (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001) shows that oral language is crucial for the emergence of literacy. Adults use language extensively to interact with children and to inculcate them into the social and cultural values of their communities (Street, 2003). In this way children play with and explore words and develop their receptive and expressive language as their knowledge of literacy grows (Woodhead, 2008). Varied opportunities to hear and talk and use language are necessary to build children's oral language for the purpose of communication. As a setting that should promote creative expression, ECD classrooms can make use of dramatic play, movement and music activities and literature experiences to promote oral language. Saracho and Spodek (2005) comment that children's social play is useful in helping children understand tempo that accompanies body movement in beginning to feel language.

Perception is another key component integral to the development of literacy (Excell & Linington, 2011). Excell and Linington argue that perceptual behaviours and sensorimotor integration are

the “invisible pathways to literacy” that provides the foundations for formal literacy instruction (2011: 12). Perception is the process wherein children receive stimuli from the environment via their senses. This information is sent from the nerve neutrons to the brain allowing the body to react through movement (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003). The proprioceptors provide input about body concept and the body’s position in relation to space that includes laterality and directionality behaviours. The vestibular receptors process input about gravity and balance (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003). The development of these processes is thought to have a direct relation to learning literacy. Children must overcome gravity in order to sit at a desk and develop motor control to handle objects to which she/he relates. Through gross motor movement children develop fine motor skills as in hand dominance, eye-hand coordination and thumb to forefinger opposition; that are essential for success in the school years including literacy behaviours (Excell & Linington, 2011). As young children become literate there are other signposts included. There are letters, words and pictures that children use as a symbolic means to make meaning; while working with illustrations demands the use of children’s visual sensory-modalities (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003).

These early literacy components are essential to help children develop reading and writing. The National Reading Panel (NRP) issued a report in 2000 identifying five key pillars central to reading instruction (Armbuster et al, 2002). First, phonemic awareness includes the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. The promotion of oral language develops children’s phonological sensitivity as they learn to hear the smallest sounds in speech (Armbuster et al, 2002). Second is phonics and knowledge of the relationship between the graphemes of written language and the phonemes of spoken language (Armbuster et al, 2002). Phonics helps children learn to spell and recognize sight words for easier reading. The third pillar fluency is “the ability to instantly recognize words that allows a text to be read quickly and accurately” (Armbuster et al, 2002: 17). Fluency helps shift a readers’ attention to making meaning by bridging ideas in the text together with their knowledge.

The fourth pillar is vocabulary. Vocabulary which comprises an oral and reading vocabulary refers to a set of words that must be used and understood to communicate effectively with others (Armbuster et al, 2002). Armbuster et al (2002) argue that vocabulary is not just about learning words by rote. Rather, it is about fostering word consciousness where children become

interested in words and their meanings and how words work. The development of a rich and extensive vocabulary is also necessary to allow children to acquire concepts that extend their access to knowledge. This argument aligns with Freire's (1979 cited in Cushman et al, 2001) argument that a generative collection of words brings with it a range of diverse meanings in different social settings. In this way, children use language to invent new ways of using familiar words in order to participate in the social and cultural activities of their world. The fifth pillar of reading instruction is comprehension which is thought to be the ultimate reason for reading (Armbuster et al, 2002). Texts demand that readers engage as active participants. In this regard, children need to use their semantic and syntactic knowledge to make sense of text. Making connections between a text and ones' own experiences is indicative of a knowledgeable reader, as users and analysts of text (Freebody, 1992).

Research shows that children learn about reading and writing in social activities in which written texts play a central part. Dickinson and McCabe (2001) argue that reading and writing develop concurrently and interrelatedly in children. Reading and writing are considered to be multimodal events that provide children with multiple entry points for creating messages, understanding texts and learning about literacy.

Reading in Grade R

This section below describes how children in Grade R learn about the uses and purposes of literacy as they use reading and writing in authentic everyday activities. Reading is not so much about taking meaning from a text but about describing meaning about texts with others. Stories and pictures are valuable resources for the early literacy classroom. Street (2003) comments that books help create awareness that literacy experiences can be shared. Reading a story to children with expression and action promotes literacy into a social and enjoyable activity in a community of readers. Young children learn much about how the world works from expository books, and as research has shown, semantic knowledge is crucial in learning to read (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). Engaging with books and multimodal texts allows children to acquire knowledge about print in recognizing how words are represented and how images present meaning of the written word. Through explicit demonstration children can also develop many essential skills that underpin literate behaviours. For children learning through English, they

become aware of how English works and how print is organized from left to right and top to bottom (Excell & Linington, 2011).

Writing in Grade R

The early representation of children's writing is characteristic of the writing systems of their culture (Strickland & Marrow, 1989). Children use a wide range of writing forms such as scribbling, drawing and inventive spelling to construct and reconstruct texts before writing in a conventional way (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). In line with Street's (2003) premise, children learn to write by writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences. For example, children can design a pictorial invitation for fantasy group-play or draw symbolic circles to represent rain. An extensive range of writing materials that may include crayons, koki's, pastels, paint, paper and glue can be provided for children to use to convey their messages in multimodal ways. By observing how a child draws it is possible to understand the meanings and cadences of written language they hold. Thus early writing is not only about recording ideas down on paper but is a vehicle for organizing and expressing thought (Street, 2003). Making literacy materials and tools accessible in the classroom makes writing a visible part of the curriculum (Strickland & Marrow, 1989). Through manipulating tools children develop perceptual behaviours that include dexterity and letter recognition.

2.6. CAPS

It is important to consider how emergent literacy is foregrounded in National Curriculum as it often informs the 'theories' teachers have of literacy and their approach to literacy. This is essential as it shapes what children learn with regards to literacy, reading and writing. This is even more important considering that CAPS (DBE, 2012) is now part of the ECD phase as it includes Grades R – 3. Prinsloo and Bloch (1999) argue that curriculum often present formal ideas of teaching and learning as in the pacing of pedagogical activities (DBE, 2012). This is concerning since children young children are thought to learn in their own time in an informal way (Wood, 2009). An examination of literacy in CAPS is important to recognise the kinds of spaces created or not created for early learning.

CAPS defines emergent literacy as:

> a child's growing knowledge of the printed word. Children see print and begin to understand its purpose. They learn about books by being read to. They may begin to try and write their names using invented spelling and they may begin to pretend to read books. These behaviours all point to their growing literacy knowledge (DBE, 2012: 20).

CAPS proposes a balanced approach to literacy where:

> incidental learning opportunities arise spontaneously throughout the day through child-initiated activities that promotes speaking, listening and enlarged vocabulary; and spatial behaviours; and through teacher-directed activities such as story-rings. Issues relating to language as well as social, fine and gross motor, present themselves naturally in routines (DBE, 2012: 21).

The descriptions above recognize children's mastery of perceptual-motor behaviours in learning literacy. Perception helps build pre-requisite behaviours such as laterality and spatial awareness that children need in order to manipulate a page. CAPS also recognizes that children develop literacy as they realize how texts work through the shared social practices they have with others, for example being read to (Street, 2005). The literacy approach also includes the tenets of phonics, vocabulary and print knowledge for early reading (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001).

However, the descriptions above do raise some questions. There is a lack of recognition of the ways in which children use symbolic and semiotic resources to communicate with others. In this way, teachers may not use the full range of print resources available to them to help children make meaning where children are limited in the ways they get to work with texts (Street, 2003). This is concerning since children are thought to use literacy to participate in the wider social and cultural settings of their lives (Street, 2003).

In CAPS the emphasis on getting children to learn to listen, speak and spell may promote the teaching of literacy as a formal set of skills. The lack of clarity provided as to the kinds of explicit instruction needed to develop children's literacy may prevent them from internalizing the

behaviours around reading and writing (Dixon, 2011). There is also little recognition in the promotion of children's drawing abilities as pre-writing activities that might hamper their early manipulation and handling of literacy tools. As a result, children may not be fully engaged in authentic literacy practices that prevent them from emerging as active users of literacy. Although the learning of skills like phonics is necessary to learn to read; the lack of emphasis on promoting an enjoyment of literature which research shows is key for children developing a love for learning and literacy (Armbuster et al, 2002), may in a literal reading, affect the way in which teachers practice literacy with Grade R children.

2.7 The Classroom Environment

In light of the discussion above it appears that early years' teachers need to build a community of literacy users in their classrooms. Strickland and Morrow (1989) argue that literacy should become an integral part of the school curriculum centred on children using language. Promoting a language rich environment is important to build children's vocabulary and knowledge. By interacting with children, modelling reading as a pleasurable activity, talking about children's artwork with them and participating in song and dance; literacy becomes an artistic expression (Saracho & Spodek, 2005). These joint activities help externalize the processes of reading and writing for children in helping them develop independent habits around literacy (Street, 2003).

Children need to have their experiences with literacy valued in order to develop ownership of the process of learning to read and write. Trawick-Smith (2010) comments that teachers should offer children varied and developmentally appropriate opportunities to use text in multimodal ways. Literacy practices should be linked to children's active use of language and may include, listening to stories; sharing and talking about books; illustrating stories; narrating tales; enacting stories; and exploring bulletin boards that cover current events in the world (Trawick-Smith, 2010). Play areas that include the library and socio-dramatic corners should be well equipped with a range of open-ended materials that include magazines, message pads and a range of writing tools. Saracho and Spodek (2005) argue that these authentic experiences help cultivate literacy into a positive activity that engenders a lifelong desire to learn literacy.

The practices described above lie in contrast to formal instruction and rigid academic reading programmes (Bloch, 2002) that fail to capitalize on how reading and writing are used and how

young children learn. There seems to be too little attention on reading for pleasure and using reading and writing as tools for learning (Strickland & Morrow, 1989). This may prevent children from developing into creative users of literacy. In contrast, a socio-cultural approach to literacy can allow early education to partner with parents in helping to build literary communities (Street, 2005). Programmes that focus on the nature of literacy and how it is learned can support children's development of literacy across different contexts for optimal success in ECD and for life itself (Gordon & Browne, 2008).

2.8 Teachers' understanding and practice of literacy

This research is based on the assumption that there is an integral link between teacher knowledge and classroom practice (Gains, 2010; Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich & Stanovich, 2004). The Norms and Standards for Educators (NSE) (DBE, 2000) supports this conception as it promotes an integrated teacher qualification. In the name of quality education, teachers are expected to reflect a foundational competence (knowledge that underpins action) and an applied competence (considering a range of possible actions). With these competencies it is thought that teachers can adopt the role of a discipline specialist in knowing the principles and methods relevant to this discipline, in this case literacy (DBE, 2012). In this way teachers can articulate and justify their practices that directly inform teaching and learning (Gains, 2010).

Teachers' understanding of literacy is often informed by their own school experiences, their knowledge s and curriculum policy (Gains, 2010). Cunningham et al (2004) examined teachers' (Grade R – 3) conceptualizations of childhood literature, phonological awareness and phonics; the components considered to be critical to beginning reading. The findings showed that teacher's had limited knowledge of children's book titles and were unable to identify the correct number of phonemes in a word and recognize that what is an irregular word (Cunningham et al, 2004). Bloch (2002) comments that inadequate teacher training in the past has left teachers' without knowledge of the theoretical orientations that underpin their practice.

Similarly, work on early literacy pedagogy in SA (Gains, 2010; Prinsloo & Stein, 2004; Willenberg, 2003; Bloch, 2002) shows that teachers' understandings of literacy often fits into two distinct paradigms. One the one hand teachers view literacy as learning a set of phonic skills (Prinsloo & Bloch, 1999). This conception of literacy leads teachers to promote a bottom-up approach to

literacy that emphasizes the mastery of decoding, knowledge of phoneme-grapheme relations and word recognition (Prinsloo & Bloch, 1999). On the other hand, teachers view literacy as a meaning making process. This view informs a whole language approach where teachers use the context of reading and writing practices to implicitly teach the technical aspects of language (Prinsloo & Bloch, 1999). In theses classrooms children engage in shared-reading activities, an authors' writing chair and oral discussions. However, Street (2003) argues that both of these approaches reflect dominant literacy approaches.

Prinsloo and Stein (2004) carried out a study examining children's encounters with literacy in four Western Cape schools. These accounts show how literacy practices can determine if "children's multimodal strategies of meaning making are acknowledged and extended or erased and subjugated" (Power, 2002: 607). In the first preschool the teacher sang IsiXhosa songs with the children through oral chorus and recitation. IsiXhosa seemed to be a purposeful choice as it represented the indigenous language of the children. However, the emphasis on rote learning promoted literacy as an academic activity centred on the sound-symbol relationship (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004). In the second school the teacher taught children rhymes. The content focused on how to obey instructions at school. It was found that the children in this classroom experienced little pleasure around literacy as it was related to their bodies being disciplined (Dixon, 2011).

In the third school the teacher's literacy approach was embedded in mainstream academic literacy. The teacher read fables to the children that were irrelevant to them. The teacher assessed the children's ability to comprehend by getting them to answer questions on the story. This approach avoided the children's critical inquiry limiting literacy to a closed language system (Power, 2002). In the final school the teacher immersed the contexts of the home and school together. Here, literacy went beyond a disparate set of skills into an opportunity of social action as the teacher used literacy to create awareness around HIV/AIDS (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004).

In all of these examples of classroom practice, except for the last one, the social aspect of literacy is shunted and is in contrast to the principles of literacy teaching and learning as outlined in CAPS (DBE, 2012) and Streets (2003) ideological approach to literacy. In contrast, the socio-cultural view of literacy recognizes that multiple modes, including language, writing, images, gesture and movement; can be used to develop literacy into a meaning making activity

for the purpose of communication (DBE, 2012). In classrooms that reconceptualise school literacy in relation to the everyday literacy and language practices of children; more discursive traditions are constructed (Stein, 2007). In these classrooms teachers may explain the purposes of literacy tasks and consider the contexts of learning. Prinsloo and Bloch argue (2002: 24) that "dialogical processes with written language" are promoted when interactive approaches to learning are used. In this way teachers can use a play-based approach to teaching literacy (Power, 2002). Children can act out meanings of their world through developmentally appropriate symbolic play while teachers translate and explain these demonstrations in helping them link the familiar discourses of the home with those unfamiliar in school (Stein, 2007).

From the discussion above it seems as though there are discontinuities between curriculum and teachers disciplinary knowledge in South Africa. It is this disjuncture that can lead to children's failure in school as reflected by the poor results of the PIRLS where South Africa came last out of 40 countries in benchmark reading assessment (DBE, 2011). Interviewing teachers about their understanding of literacy is necessary to extend knowledge in the discourses of language and literacy. Observing teachers' classroom practice can reveal the kinds of literacy practiced in diverse social settings. These processes would provide insight into teachers' actions that can inform curricula and pedagogy currently lacking in Grade R.

Chapter Three - Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research design and the research sites and participants. It explains the method of data analysis and outlines the ethical considerations of the research and the difficulties encountered. But most of all, it describes the processes undertaken in completing this research.

3.2 Research Design

A qualitative design studies phenomena in the real life settings in which they occur. McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 320) define qualitative research as "inquiring into the meaning individuals ascribe to a social dilemma through an emerging approach to inquiry in a natural setting sensitive to the people and place under study". The natural setting of the Grade R classroom was a useful site in which to discover the kinds of practices that inform teachers' approaches to literacy. Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 32) comment that qualitative research focuses on "the quality and process of data collection rather than on the quantities gathered". With this in mind, a qualitative approach was useful to help me identify participants' understandings and enactments of literacy.

In keeping with the tenets of qualitative research it was important to collect rich data in order to provide a full description of the aims that guided the study. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to share and describe the meanings and 'theories' they have of literacy. Discovering teachers' understanding of literacy was useful to extend the body of disciplinary knowledge of literacy and language in early childhood. Observing teacher's everyday practice offered further insight into the socio-cultural uses and purposes of literacy in the early years' classroom. Examining teachers' practice provides ways of thinking about what constitutes good practice in South Africa where we have little documented evidence. Charmaz (2004) supports this premise and asserts that qualitative research is valuable to help place theory into context in studies of classroom practice.

However, since qualitative research is more dynamic and less rigid than quantitative studies, bias and the subjectivity of the researcher may enter the research (McMillan & Schumacher,

2010). This may lead to the findings gathered being less accurate and less generalized. To help counteract this, I used a method of triangulation to help increase the credibility of the findings. McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 25) define triangulation as a "qualitative cross-validation among multiple data sources, data collection strategies, time periods and theoretical schemes". Against this definition, triangulation is a purposeful strategy to counteract the weakness of individual data sets (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Cross-reference between the interviews, observations and supporting documentation (art exemplars, photographs etc) was purposeful to allow for alignment between the researcher and participants' interpretations and descriptions of literacy practices in the Grade R classroom. In this way, the validity of the findings was strengthened (Thorne, 2000) in allowing a certain kind of pedagogical literacy approach in the early years to emerge.

Under a qualitative framework a case study design was used for this research. A case study suited this research for many reasons. Based on the ideas of Merriam (1998) and Yin (2009) a case study allows for a deeper analysis of specific and complex contemporary concerns. As literacy is a complex construct it demands an in depth exploration. This is even more necessary when early literacy teaching and learning is under-researched in the ECD field. In line with Merriam (1998) and Yin (2009) this research warranted a more rigorous investigation. Yin (2009) argues that case study research is a useful strategy when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not always clear. In this study the Grade R classroom is the primary site through which literacy is enacted. Literacy is thought to be constructed through the actions and behaviours participants' attribute to the acts of reading and writing (Street, 2005). This research examined literacy through a socio-cultural lens where literacy as social practice is embedded in the norms and practices of the setting in which it occurs. Thus the presence of artefacts reveals how teacher's understand and represent literacy in the different contexts in which they are used (Street, 2005). A case study fits an exploration of literacy in the classroom context as a setting in which social interactions and knowledge emerge.

A case study design was also useful to help capture teachers' nuanced understandings of literacy as they emerged out of everyday classroom practice. This is line with Merriam's view of qualitative case study research as "an intensive, holistic description through an analysis of a single phenomenon or social unit" (1998: 27). A case study is characterised as being heuristic. It

can offer vivid and concrete accounts of literacy practice as it resonates with participants' experiences. This would increase the richness of the findings (presented as thick narrative descriptions) (Ponterotto, 2006) that reflect the understandings teachers' have of literacy. Haas-Dyson (2004) supports this claim as she asserts that knowledge in educational practice is built case-by-case. This is especially true in a world like ours where knowledge is dynamic and ever changing. The two school sites of the preschool and primary school provided a deeper understanding into the literacy practices in early years' classrooms.

3.3 Research site

This research aimed to compare literacy teaching in two Grade R classrooms in a preschool and primary school site respectively. Two schools that share a similar demographic were selected so findings could focus on teachers' knowledge and pedagogy. The schools both function efficiently. The preschool and primary school in this study were purposefully selected as they are thought to be functional sites of teaching and learning (Meehan & Cowley, 2003; Jensen, 1994). Characteristics of effective schools can be applied to these two sites.

Jensen (1994) argues that effective schools include both organizational and non-structural aspects. The structural aspects can be identified by the level of productivity in the school and the extent to which it is able to adapt and be flexible. In both of the schools there is an increased output where all of the children progress into Grade 1 in public primary schools. Further, I noticed that in both schools teachers were able to alter the length of rings and reshuffle the order of the daily programme to meet and respond to the children's needs.

The non-structural aspects include the shared values, norms and knowledge of its staff that are thought to be necessary in promoting a learning culture (Meehan & Cowley, 2003). In their interviews both principals recognized that managerial efficiency, as in the supervision of the daily routines for all staff, is essential to the successful running of a school. Penelope stated, "I mostly manage the people of the entire school. You know this um would include the parents, teachers and children and mostly any related matters with regards to them". She further highlights the importance of the calibre of teachers in promoting a schools effectiveness noting that, "it's just so important that my teachers know how these children learn and also develop so that they can impart this knowledge more readily." The evidence from these extracts show that

the aspects of leadership, teacher support and shared goals for teaching and learning are instrumental in promoting school success (Meehan & Cowley, 2003; Taylor, Muller & Vinjevold, 2003).

Jensen (1994) adds to the discussion of functional schools in his paper entitled: *Beyond Effective Schools* where he (1994) discusses the notion of quality education. Here, he argues that the kinds of connections a school builds with the family and community often reflects its cultural ethos. In the early childhood setting this is often recognized by the high levels of parental contact and regular involvement in school activities. Joan highlights the importance of a worthy home-school partnership in contributing towards the quality of children's early education. "I try to interface with the parents on a daily basis as preschool is a place where the parents and teacher work together for the child. We say at our school we need you to be hands on. We try share solid ideas with them like what kinds of books are appropriate to read to their children". This recognition highlights other principles of quality education as recognized by Taylor et al (2003) and Jensen (1994) that includes resource input (chapter four indicates these schools are well resourced); sufficient teacher: child (1:20) and quality content and curriculum coverage where reading and writing were the literacy practices respectively observed in both schools.

Taylor et al (2003) argues that quality education and effective schooling rests upon adequate teacher qualifications. Joan supports this view, "I think the minimum of a B.ED Primary degree specializing in early learning is an absolute minimum". Penelope similarly adds "staff that know young children. A pre-primary qualification to know about development, and the children's different needs and abilities to plan for teaching and learning that is positive". The teachers in this study are considered to be well qualified. Penelope and Theresa each hold a Higher Diploma in Primary Education, while Joan and the Grade R teachers each respectively have an additional Diploma in ECD. Consequently these schools were purposefully selected to determine the kinds of practices that inform high quality literacy instruction.

In addition, the inclusion of the preschool and primary school creates juxtaposition between an informal and formal approach to teaching and learning in early education. Joan explained the approach of teaching and learning in the preschool as, "that incidental learning where we use a hands on method and it is play based. There is a combination of teacher guided whole group

and small group activities and self chosen activities. Our Grade R is structured but not formal as children are not yet ready to sit behind a desk." In contrast, Penelope describes Grade R "as the first year of a more formal learning environment where there is more emphasis on longer paper tasks and more classroom time and activities as well". Knowing the affordances and limits of each of these approaches would be useful to promote quality programmes in ECD.

Both schools are situated in Park Hill in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg. Sunway Preschool serves a middle class multicultural community. It is privately owned, free standing and has been established for 52 years. The majority of children come from English speaking homes. 106 children between 1 and 6 years attend the preschool which has five classrooms with one Grade R group that feeds at least four local primary schools in the surrounding area. The preschool was identified for its informal approach to teaching and learning and implementation of a traditional play-based approach that aims to "give children a solid foundation on which to grow" (school website - please note the reference cannot be stated for issues of confidentiality). This objective is in line with ECD as a time when children thrive and develop holistically and when a foundation to lifelong learning is laid.

Oaks Primary School is a co-educational and multi-cultural government school. The school has been established for over 50 years and schools 700 children. The Grade R unit has run for over 10 years, consists of two classrooms and registers children between five and six years. The teachers are all qualified and teach through the medium of English, while Afrikaans and isiZulu share equal status as second languages. The language profile of the children differs to that of Sunway preschool in that the majority of children come from Afrikaans and isiZulu speaking homes. The school implements a more formal approach to teaching and learning that aims to "lay the foundation for young children to succeed in a changing world" (school website - please note the actual reference cannot be stated for issues of confidentiality). Although this approach is in contrast to early childhood pedagogy (House, 2011), the objective parallels the purpose of Grade R to help prepare children for the demands of formal schooling and to cope with the challenges of life for successful living.

3.4 Research Participants

There were three groups of participants for this research: principals, teachers and children. They are described in detail below. The tables presented here offer the reader a synopsis of the participants and their biographical details.

Table 3.1 Participants at Sunway Preschool

Name	Position	Yrs Experience	Qualification	Age	Gender
Julie	Principal	18	H. Dip in Primary Education & ECD	53	Female
Lyn	Grade R teacher	24 (in Grade R)	H. Dip in Primary Education & ECD	60	Female

Table 3.2 Participants at Oaks Primary School

Name	Position	Yrs Experience	Qualification	Age	Gender
Penelope	Principal	15	H. Dip in Primary Education	58	Female
Patricia	Grade R teacher	22 (in Grade R)	H. Dip in Primary Education & ECD	50	Female
Theresa	Grade 1 teacher	15 (in Grade 1)	H. Dip in Primary Education	38	Female

Julie and Penelope were important participants in this research. The principals being in the schools for many years witnessed the implementation of the Grade R year. They offered insight into the conceptualizations of this schooling year.

The two Grade R teachers are white female English speakers and are between 50 and 60 years. The teachers have over 40 years teaching experience between them. The Grade 1 teacher is a white female, 38 years of age and has taught for 15 years.

The Grade R children were not major participants in this research. As I observed the teacher's classroom practice I entered into the children's learning space. Even though the children were indirectly observed it is important to acknowledge them as research participants.

3.5 Research Instruments and Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and artefacts comprise the data sets and are described below. The table below presents the data collection instruments and duration of collection.

Table 3.3 An outline of participants' involvement in the research

Participant/s	Activity	Time	Duration
Principals (x2)	Interview	45 minutes	Sunway Preschool – 06/08/2012 between 10:00 and 10:45 Oaks Primary School – 13/08/2012 between 09:00 and 09:45
Grade 1 teacher (x1)	Interview	45 minutes	Oaks Primary School – 13/08/2012 between 10:15 and 11:00
Grade R teachers (x2)	Interview	45 minutes	Sunway Preschool – 06/08/2012 between 10:45 and 11:30 Oaks Primary School - 13/08/2012 between 12:00 and 12:45
Grade R teachers	Classroom observation	(8 lessons of 30 minutes each with two examples of literacy practice video-taped)	Sunway Preschool – 20/08/2012 – 27/08/2012 (between 8 and 12 almost every day) Oaks Primary School – 02/09/2012 – 10/09/2012 (between 8 and 12 almost every day)
Children	Artefacts – artwork and activities	Throughout duration	Sunway Preschool – 20/08/2012 – 27/08/2012 Oaks Primary School – 02/09/2012 – 10/09/2012)

3.5.1 Data Set One - Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary source of data for this research was the semi-structured interview (see appendices A – C). A semi-structured interview begins with a general set of questions followed by more targeted ones (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The targeted questions in this study aimed to ascertain a comprehensive conceptualization of the Grade R year and to probe into the understandings the participants have of literacy.

I began the research process at Sunway Preschool on the 6th of August 2012. The principal and Grade R teacher were interviewed consecutively from 10:00 to 11:30. The interviews were conducted in the office during children's outdoor free-play. During the interview I wrote shorthand notes of the key words and phrases of the participants as well as audio-recorded the interviews. I transcribed the interviews soon after they were recorded. I entered Oaks Primary school on the 13th of August 2013 where a similar process was followed. The principal was interviewed first, followed by the Grade 1 and Grade R teacher. The times from 09:00 to 12:45 coincided with the times children had curricula activities outside of the classroom.

The principals provided useful insight into the conceptualization of Grade R and the underlying purposes and aims of this year. Theresa's participation was necessary to know about the kinds of literacy competencies children from the preschool and primary school bring into Grade 1. This understanding was useful to compare literacy practices in preschool and primary school sites. Theresa also helped to reveal the kinds of literacy capabilities children need to be able to read and write in Grade 1. This allowed me to identify the kinds of transition in literacy knowledge children are expected to make in formal schooling. The Grade R teachers were interviewed about their understanding of literacy and their classroom instruction. To elicit this kind of knowledge the teachers were asked to explain what literacy means to them, to describe children's literacy development and discuss how they enact literacy learning in their classrooms.

The Grade R teacher's interview was used to determine whether there was congruence between their understanding and enactment of literacy. This aim aligns with Goffman's (1989 cited in Charmaz, 2004) view of educational practice where the things people say often differs from what they do. Observing teachers' classroom practice makes use of specific actions that often assume taken-for-granted meanings. This leads me into the second set of data namely classroom observations.

3.5.2 Data Set Two - Classroom Observations (field notes and video-recordings)

Qualitative researchers can try to learn about educational practice from outside the classroom. However, to truly understand the nuances of practice insight into the setting through which it occurs is needed. Charmaz (2004) argues that systematic knowledge of how practice works allows a richer qualitative analysis to develop. The statements, actions and expressions that are

captured provide insight into the socio-cultural context through which literacy is constructed. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) recognize that understanding is made up of different forms of knowledge that include: verbal, nonverbal and tacit. This is true for the Grade R context where teachers often use active demonstration and body movement to accompany their oral instruction. To build an explicit understanding of teachers' literacy practice in-depth classroom observations were conducted (see appendix D). The observations focused on what the teachers did and said as they practiced literacy. Observation is a useful data collection instrument as it is uncontrolled in the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This is congruent with the features of qualitative research that focus on the natural settings in which the phenomenon under study occurs. Entering the Grade R classroom allowed me to discover what is significant from the actions of the teachers' and where teacher's enactment of literacy is the occasion that tells its own story (Stake, 1995).

I re-entered Sunway Preschool on the 20th of August 2012 to get acquainted with the school settings, the teachers and the children. I entered the classroom on the 21st of August where I had informal conversations with the teacher and played games with the children. This was necessary to build rapport with the participants. It was during this time that I took photographs of the outdoor and indoor play areas, activity centres, book corner and walls of the classroom. Photographs were a useful data collection instrument to capture still images of things in their natural setting (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Photographs were used to capture the artefacts and print environments Lyn used to support her practice of literacy. The photographs were also used to help me present and narrate stories of the children's emerging reading and writing practices. The photographs were useful to showcase the evolving behaviours of the children as they occurred within moments of time. I began observing the teacher's practice from the 22nd to the 23rdof August. I observed six lessons of 30 minutes each and used field notes to record the behaviours, actions, dialogue and instructions of the teacher and the children. The page of field notes was divided into classroom observations and reflections. The first part recorded exactly what was seen and heard while the latter part recorded my insights into the practice. Field notes were a less obtrusive instrument and provided a broader picture of literacy instruction.

I returned to Sunway Preschool on the 27th of August 2012. With the children being less aware of my presence and being more comfortable with me I entered with a video-recorder. I held it in

my hands so that I was able to sit and walk around and follow the movements of the children and teacher if needed. I observed two lessons of 30 minutes each. These lessons were reading and writing activities which occurred at the beginning and end of the school day. The video-recordings were immediately downloaded onto my computer. I transcribed the excerpts of each lesson into a log sheet that included the headings: video-code (time frame), name of participants, participants' language and participants' actions. The demonstrations supplemented the participants' interactions and were thickly described. This process was re-enacted in Oaks Primary school on the 2nd, 3rd to 5th and 10th of September.

The use of video-recording as a data collection instrument is supported by the argument of Flewit (2005). She asserts that visual data is a most valuable tool to unveil how early year's teachers' use the full range of material and bodily resources to construct, negotiate and express meaning in the teaching of literacy. Visual data that includes eye-contact, body language, facial expressions and the manipulation of objects; influences how teacher's and children practice literacy in the symbolic world of the classroom (Flewit, 2005). Also, since teacher and child talk is a permanent and natural feature of the Grade R classroom, a multimodal instrument like video-recording is useful to fully capture the exchange of signs and behaviours that best characterize early learning. Flewit argues "images and physical activity can be viewed as socially organized, sign-making activities and as key components in the construction of meaning" (2005: 27). With this in mind, video-recording was a useful strategy to highlight the unique and situated features of the classroom and to shed light on the broader literacy practices. The varied written, audio and visual modes provided a multilevel analysis that added richness and complexity to this literacy study.

3.5.3 Data Set Three - Documentation

A collection of artefacts from the teachers and children were gathered. These artefacts included children's artwork and 'reading' and 'writing' texts; and teachers' support materials that included charts, print materials, storybooks and texts. My interest was in identifying the social processes these artefacts showed and the understandings of literacy they revealed. The artefacts supplemented the data and increased the credibility of the findings.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis was divided into two parts to illustrate the dual foci of the overarching research question; "What do Grade R teachers understand by the term literacy and how is it enacted in classroom practice?" The first part of the analysis focused on what teachers' understand about literacy. The semi-structured interviews and artefacts were used to present the meanings and 'theories' teachers' have of literacy. The primary data source for these findings was the interview transcripts. The transcripts were coded using a constant comparative method wherein overarching and repeated themes were identified (DeBruin-Parecki & Henning 2002). The comparative method uses one piece of data and compares it with others that may be similar or different (Thorne, 2000). This strategy is useful to develop conceptualizations about the kinds of relations that exist between various pieces of data. The overarching themes that emerged included:

- Definitions of literacy;
- Types of literacy;
- Characteristics of literacy;
- Programme; and
- Resources

The transcripts from the interviews with the Grade R teachers were cross referenced against the transcripts of the principals and Grade 1 teacher interviews.

The second part of the analysis examined the ways in which teachers' enact literacy in the classroom. Classroom observations were used to identify the kind of methods and modalities teachers' use during literacy instruction.

Thick narrative descriptions were used to document and reflect on things seen and heard. Thick descriptions were particularly valuable to this research. Geertz (1973 cited in Ponterotto, 2006) comments that thick description does more than just record mere facts or the actions of an individual or setting. Like in Ponterotto's (2006: 5) view, thick description searches for meaning where it "presents detail, context and webs of social relationships that join persons to one another as the voices, feelings and actions of interacting individuals are heard". This method was useful for the classroom context where interactions between teachers and children are

often based upon verbal and non-verbal communication. It was also useful to illuminate the diverse ways in which teachers and children make meaning in multimodal ways. Thick description was useful to capture the holistic experiences of the Grade R classroom.

A triangulation method with the interviews and artefacts supplemented the observations. From this multimodal analysis an inductive process was used to organize the data into categories to allow themes to emerge (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The themes included:

- Teacher knowledge; and
- Literacy approach

This analysis helped me find patterns of data by finding supportive and contrary evidence for each category of themes.

3.7 Research Process and Ethical Considerations

I contacted the principal of each school and e-mailed them a synopsis of the research. With their acceptance I met each principal and provided them with a participant information letter (see appendices E and F) that outlined the research, its key objectives and the kinds of participation requested.

I then contacted the teachers and gave them a participant information sheet and set of consent forms (see appendices G - J). The teachers' were asked to consent to being interviewed and to have their interview audio-recorded. The teachers' were also asked to consent to have their classroom practice observed and video-taped. I met with each group of children under the guidance of their teacher and read the information letter to them. Each child was provided with a child and parent/guardian consent form (see appendices K - N). All consent forms needed to be completed for participation to commence.

The participants were ensured that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw their consent at any time during the study without any disadvantage being held against them. They were also told that the names of the school and their identities would remain confidential throughout the study and writing up of the report through the use of

pseudonyms. Before commencing the research, ethical clearance from the GDE and the ethics committee at the University was obtained.

3.8 Difficulties encountered during the research process

During the research process I encountered a few difficulties. The most difficult constraint was time. Since the initial primary school I contacted declined to participate, the time lapse to find an alternative and consenting school was extended. As I was unsuccessful in trying to merge the two different school calendars together, I was unable to make alternate visits between them. This reduced my time spent in the schools and hurried the collection of data. Although the participants received letters of consent three weeks prior to the study (July 2012), the forms were slowly returned and even then not all were received. Thus, some of the children could not be present during the classroom observations. Support staff had to be arranged to monitor these children adding some organizational difficulties. Also, although the video camera was useful to capture the data as it naturally unfolded, it was a difficult tool to manoeuvre around the classroom (tables, chairs, carpet area etc), making the video-recordings less fluid. As a result, the precise language and facial expressions of the teacher and children were difficult to transcribe as they were sometimes obscured.

Chapter Four – Findings, Presentation and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This research was motivated by the relationship between knowledge and practice and the spaces created for different pedagogical approaches (Dixon, 2011). This chapter is presented in two sections that illustrate the dual foci of the research question; "What do Grade R teachers understand by the term literacy and how is it enacted in classroom practice?" The first section presents teachers' understanding of literacy while the second section examines teachers' enactment of literacy. I aimed to discover if tensions exist between teachers' literacy knowledge and practice of literacy.

4.2 Teachers' understanding of literacy

The interviews were the data collection instrument used to gain insight into "what teachers understand literacy to be, what they use it for and what the value of being literate is in our communities and the world" (Dixon, 2011: 166). This knowledge allows teachers to explain the principles and processes that underpin their literacy practice. The teachers in this study have a sophisticated understanding of literacy that goes beyond mastery of skills. They view literacy as a communicative tool and meaning making activity.

Lyn, the Grade R preschool teacher, presents an all-encompassing view of literacy:

> In real life at school that's still what you have to do, you still have to learn to read and write and learn. To understand the black lines on a printed page are meaning something and to communicate ideas. I think also to interpret symbols and signs and to put them into something concrete and sensible. It should be taught throughout the day. It is to learn with concrete first, everything with movement. But there's not necessarily the feeling of the page anymore, that's the other thing.
>
> (Interview 06 August 2012)

Patricia, the Grade R primary school teacher, comprehensively characterizes literacy as:

> The way we communicate with one another whether oral or written. It always carries meaning. Literacy is about the use of language and gives rise to all other learning areas and cannot be taught in isolation. Language is in maths and even on the playground. It's all language and learning which is pervasive throughout the day.
>
> (Interview 13 August 2012)

The interviews reveal striking similarities and some differences in the teachers' understanding of literacy. Lyn and Patricia both recognize that literacy is a social act. Patricia highlights this when she asserts that children use literacy to ask to "join a game or take turns with a toy". Here, literacy orientates children to the social norms of the cultural contexts in which they are a part (Street, 2005). Literacy is set up as a life skill that is used for social action in different contexts for different purposes (Street, 2005). Using reading, writing and oral language in a "sensible" way allows children to gain access to knowledge. These tenets also highlight two of the essential building blocks necessary to promote early reading namely knowledge the grapho-phonic relationships and an extensive vocabulary (Armsbuster et al, 2002). This is inferred by the teachers approach to teaching literacy through orality, language learning and the written word. The classroom observations reveal that the Grade R teachers' promote a balanced approach to literacy (DBE, 2012) that includes phonics, developed through song and ryhme; vocabulary encouraged through word learning and discussion; and book and print knowledge supported through shared-reading and working with print materials (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001).

However Lyn foregrounds her interpretation of literacy into a set of perceptual-motor skills. Recognizing the marks and "black lines on a page" develops children's visual acuity, laterality, and directionality; and tactile awareness as they interact with the textual features of print (Excell & Linington, 2011; Freebody, 1992). Lyn's reference to signs and symbols extends literacy into a multimodal and symbolic activity. For example, Lyn recognizes that children begin to identify logos like Coka Cola and 'stop' signs in the print immersed world in which they live. The array of communicative modalities children come into contact with allow them to recognize that texts carry meaning (Street, 2003). In these classrooms it seems as though literacy teaching is aimed at getting children to acquire knowledge and skills around what literacy is and how it is used. In alignment with Gees (1996) work literacy in these classrooms is not only about the

purpose of communication but about producing meaning through ways of knowing, acting and talking.

Principal Julie of the preschool extends this view further:

> Literacy is more than reading. It is understanding language has nuances. Like knowing the author and illustrator that's what we learn about books at school. That's life skills hey and learning more than you need to know. It is looking at something and knowing what it is and what it's for and what you can do with it and seeing signs and reading them and knowing them.
>
> (Interview 06 August 2012)

Julie also constructs literacy as a social practice (Street, 2005). Social interaction is emphasized in the Grade R classroom as the teacher and children engage in dialogue, theme discussions and shared-reading experiences. These literacy practices can elicit new ways of thinking about things for all members of the classroom community (Gee, 1996). Lyn states, "everything in your day should promote literacy" while Patricia says, "I promote vocabulary all the time such as equal for numeracy during baking and everyone has a turn during games for life skills". In this way literacy gives rise to and is integrated into other areas of learning. Based on this understanding it can be assumed that the teachers' practice of literacy is contextual where children explore language and texts through interactive and purposeful activities (DBE, 2012). The teachers' recognize that literacy in the early years should be taught and learnt through movement and concrete activities. This reflects the argument of House (2011) that early learning pedagogy should be child centred where children are presented with pleasant discoveries and rich materials for active learning.

Photographs were used to capture the literacy artefacts in each classroom. These artefacts were analyzed for the kinds of social processes and understandings of literacy they reveal. In Lyn's classroom children were immersed in pictures, signs, labels and story books that represented knowledge about the theme the Summer Olympic Games and thus an important world event (figures 4.1 – 4.4). Patricia's implementation of a wide reading approach was clearly evident as

children have wide access to varied reading material that include story books, charts and illustrations. In this setting children are able to view the daily weather that often resonates with their daily functions and activities (figures 4.5 – 4.8). In these classrooms teachers' understandings of literacy makes a notable shift from a narrow view to one more holistic.

<u>Figures</u> 4.1 – 4.4 Sunway Preschool – Examples of classroom literacy artefacts



Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2



Figure 4.3



Figure 4.4

Figures 4.5 – 4.8 Oaks Primary School - Examples of classroom literacy artefacts



Figure 4.5

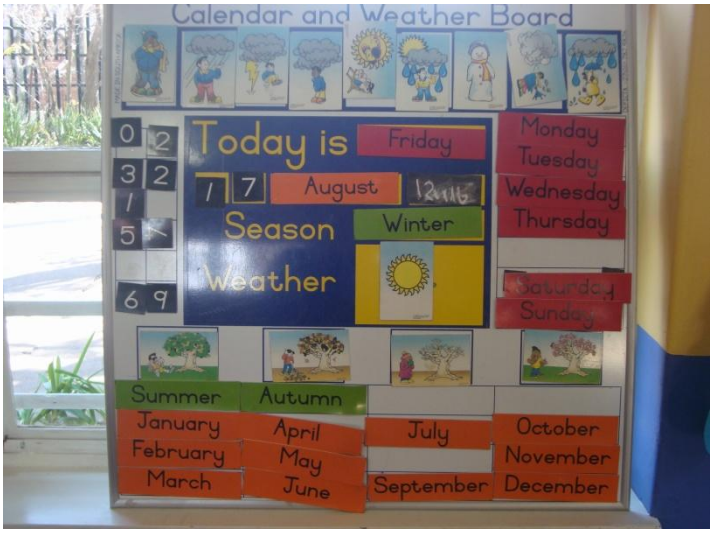

Figure 4.6



Figure 4.7



Figure 4.8

Theresa's explanation differs in some ways from the Grade R teachers:

> Literacy means being literate in a language. Being able to speak, write, read and understand this language and to use it in a proficient way. To reach a level of competent understanding for all learners in my class that involves coping in language work.
>
> (Interview 13 August 2012)

Theresa presents a standard view of literacy. Her emphasis on language, speaking, reading and writing sets literacy up as a set of skills to be learned. Her lessons reflect mainstream academic literacy wherein children fill in missing spelling sounds, write out words and complete sentences. The content, unlike the Grade R classrooms, was less relevant to the children's immediate life-worlds. Lessons of this kind are less encouraging for children's critical thinking and focus on getting them to learn the skills of decoding, spelling and handwriting. In line with Power's (2002) perception this construction limits literacy to a closed language system. The emphasis on "proficiency" reflects the curriculum controlled outcomes and the correctness of learning (Dixon, 2011) and draws a contrast to the pedagogical approaches in ECD. Formal learning emphasizes children's cognitive competence while an informal approach tends to promote children's holistic abilities to learn. This raises questions about the nature of children's transition into a formal education system.

As in Dixon's (2011) study on children's literate bodies, a common thread that runs through the participants understanding of literacy is the integral link with language. Theresa's emphasis on language work may influence the way Patricia teaches literacy. The children in Patricia's classroom use the mediums of English, Afrikaans or IsiZulu to communicate with others outside of school. Some of the children are introduced to English as the language of teaching and learning (LoTL) at school. Since many of these children will transition into the Grade 1 classroom, Patricia might need to 'school' children in language work in a more explicit way to help prepare them to become "skilled in speaking, reading and writing".

In summation, both Grade R teachers have a broad understanding of literacy. For them literacy is a social act through which meaning and knowledge are constructed. In these classrooms children use reading and writing to learn about how literacy and language work (Street, 2005). Here, the teachers' literacy approaches focus on multimodal communication for a wide range of purposes. In contrast the view of literacy of the Grade 1 teacher is more narrow and formal. In this classroom children learn to read and write for the purpose of learning to read and write.

4.3 The Classroom Environment

This section examines teachers' enactment of literacy. Research shows that there is a close relationship between teachers practice and the materials used for teaching and learning. Ormerod and Ivanic (2000) argue that the texts present in a setting can often shed light on the literacy and social practices embedded within it. A brief analysis of the artefacts present in each classroom is useful to provide insight into the complex meanings and actions teachers use in representing literacy knowledge.

4.3.1. Sunway Pre-school

Outside the Grade R classroom there is a large patio. To the far left of the patio there is a large sandpit and a smaller sand tray. Inside the sand tray there are small plastic containers, spoons and buckets in varied colours and sizes (figure 4.9). Children use these materials to build towers and bridges. The children pull the spoons across the sand creating different shaped lines and patterns. Yoghurt containers have pictures of fruit, numbers and symbols printed on them that children can incidentally view and use as a prop during their socio-dramatic play (figure 4.10).

Next to the sand area is the creative art area. A large shelf extends from the classroom window and is filled with aprons, newspapers and A3 pieces of paper. This shelf stands next to an easel that the children use for their painting and drawing activities (figure 4.11). Children take a piece of paper off the shelf, flip the top ledge of the easel open and place their paper inside and down onto the plastic board. On the bottom edge of the easel there are containers filled with different coloured paint. Each container has a thick paintbrush placed inside it. The children are allowed to use these materials to create unique pictures and designs (figures 4.12 – 4.14). On the outside wall of the classroom hangs a large communication folder. On it is each child's name printed with a small pocket underneath it where newsletters are placed inside for the children's parents/caregivers (figures 4.15 – 4.16).

In this setting, children come into contact with an array of materials. The containers in the sand tray are used by children engaging in fantasy group-play. The children can pretend to buy products and 'read' the names of pictures and logos. This reflects Lyn's view of literacy as "interpreting symbols and understanding they give you some sort of a message". The art section allows children to design images. Children select the materials for the purpose of displaying

their creativity and thoughts (Gee, 1996). In this setting literacy is part of children's life world as they use many modes to communicate their meanings to others.

<u>Figures</u> 4.9 – 4.16 Sunway Preschool – Examples of outdoor environment literacy artefacts



Figure 4.9



Figure 4.10



Figure 4.11



Figure 4.12



Figure 4.13



Figure 4.14



Figure 4.15

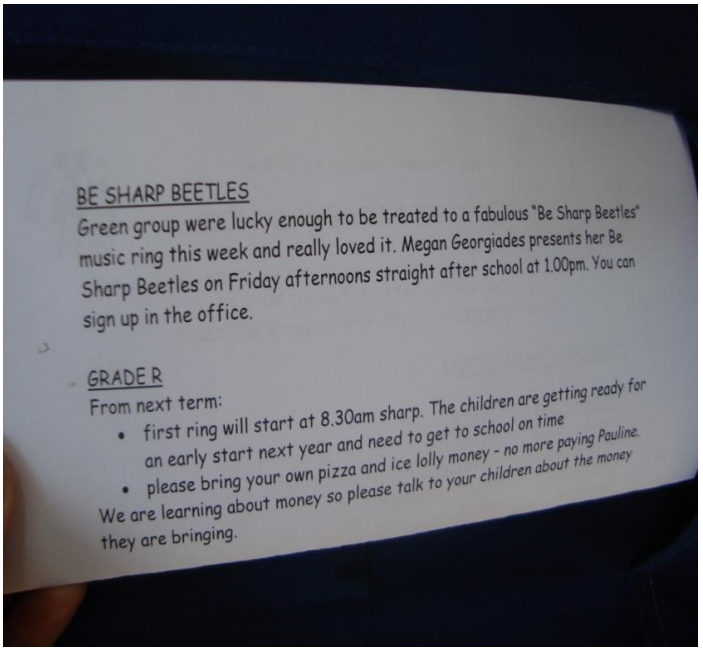

Figure 4.16

On the classroom door there is a whiteboard and marker that serves as a communication tool between Lyn and the parents/guardians. The parents/guardians write messages about the children's achievements that Lyn shares with the class during news time. Lyn also uses the board to record the children's daily activities. At home time the parents/guardians often discuss these activities with their children (figure 4. 17). Inside the classroom there is a brown carpet on which four plastic tables and twenty five chairs are placed. On the far left hand side of the classroom there is a shelf filled with paper, scissors, glue, crayons and koki's that children can access during free-play (figures 4.18 – 4.19). Children use this assortment of materials to create

3D models and representational characters (figure 4.20). Along one side of the classroom there is a large banner of flags (figure 4.21).

On the opposite side of the room is a theme table. At the time of observation (20 - 27 August 2013) the theme was the Summer Olympic Games. Here, children are encouraged to independently handle the medals, sport gear, books and posters to explore the theme (figure 4.22). On a shelf next to the theme table is an array of games and perceptual activities (figure 4.23). On the other side of the classroom there is a book corner. Big pillows and cushions lie loosely on the carpet. A shelf holds a variety of picture and story-books that children can independently page through and narrate their own tales (figure 4.24). Finally, the classroom is stocked with reading materials children often see in contexts beyond the classroom. On my days of observation children were provided with newspapers. The children flipped through the pages and pointed to images they found relevant and thought provoking. In relation to the theme one child found a photograph of a ceremony and commented, “Cool... a medal” (figures 4.25 – 4.26).

<u>Figures</u> 4.17 – 4.26 Sunway Preschool – Examples of indoor environment literacy artefacts



Figure 4.17



Figure 4.18



Figure 4.19



Figure 4.20



Figure 4.21



Figure 4.22



Figure 4.23



Figure 4.24



Figure 4.25



Figure 4.26

In this classroom children are surrounded by print rich artefacts. As they interact with them they learn how texts work and how to make meaning (Street, 2005). Children often work at the art table where they learn how to handle materials with care. Children work in a symbolic way as they experiment with glue and scissors to create three dimensional objects. In this classroom children can take on alternative identities as readers and writers. Children have opportunities to be independent, for example they can choose and read the available picture books. This is different to story time which is a mainly adult-guided and shared experience. Children also get to handle newspapers which are often considered an adult reading material. The emerging identities of children in this literacy rich context are dynamic and ever changing (Gee, 1996).

4.3.2 Oaks Primary School

At the back of the Grade R classroom there is a small patio with two tables and five chairs around each table. Next to the tables there is a rack of aprons the children use during their art activities. At the front of the patio there is a large cupboard filled with newspaper, magazines and paper. The teachers use the table top to prepare materials for the children's activities. The shelf is filled with craypaz, crayons, paint containers and a range of paintbrushes of different widths and lengths. The paintbrushes are differentiated according to the purpose of the activity and development of children's fine motor abilities (figures 4.27 - 4.28). At the back of the patio there are two chalkboards. Children take a piece of paper, press open the top lid and push their piece of paper inside and down flat onto the board (figure 4. 29). The children use the chalkboard during free-play to draw and design illustrations (figure 4.30). During my observation

children were given whiteboards and koki's as an alternative drawing material (figures 4.31 - 4.32).

<u>Figures</u> 4.27 – 4.32 Oaks Primary School – Examples of outdoor environment literacy artefacts



Figure 4.27



Figure 4.28



Figure 4.29

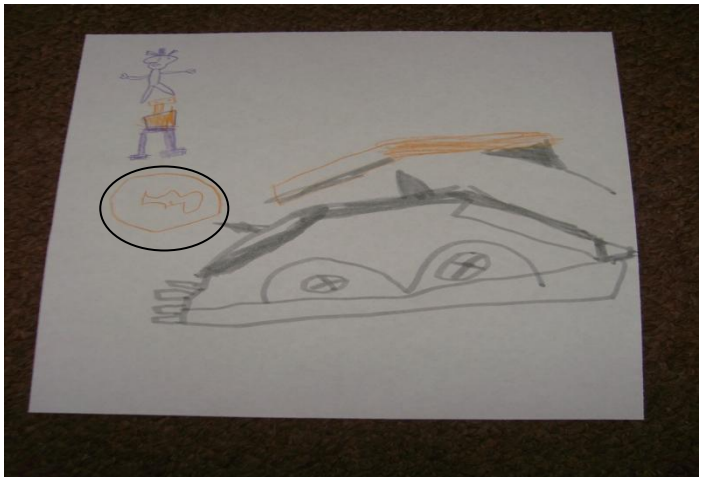

Figure 4.30



Figure 4.31



Figure 4.32

In this outdoor area of the Grade R classroom, children take part in literacy events that are shaped by the socio-cultural traditions of the school (Street, 2005). In this setting drawing is an accepted and dominant way through which children make meaning symbolically and graphically. Drawing a heart might express Kyle's happiness while Luca's drawn weapon (circled) may convey his interest in super-heroes (figures 4.33 – 4.34). Children use literacy materials to communicate their ideas to others (Street, 2005). This instance is particularly interesting as the children deliberately select the "specific materials and methods they consider appropriate for their purpose" (Ormerod & Ivanic, 2000: 98). Additionally, Lyman et al (2012) comments that literacy materials hold different functions depending on how they are used. For example, if children choose chalk and paper their drawings become a permanent record. However, if the white board and koki is selected their miscues can be erased and their message re-conveyed making the artefact a more flexible resource. In this classroom children handle a wide range of tools. This highlights the perceptual development of literacy where children develop hand dexterity and motor control for the purpose of inscription (Ormerod & Ivanic, 2000); an important part of the development of an emerging literate.

Next to the classroom door there is a message board. The board is used to convey information to parents/guardians about school events (figure 4.35). In contrast to the preschool, parents do not use it as a communicative tool with Patricia. However here, as opposed to the preschool, additional languages is a highly regarded resource. Patricia has the word teacher printed in English, Afrikaans and IsiZulu followed by her surname (figure 4.36). This artefact matches Patricia's view of literacy being about the "use of language" and reveals that in this school literacy happens in a range of languages (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004).

Inside the classroom there is a long shelf of lockers. The lockers are marked with cards that display each child's name and symbol. Inside each locker there is a box of stationary where children can access an array of semiotic materials that include koki's, crayons, craypaz and prestik (figure4.37). These writing tools are used during teacher-directed activities. Children have access to one set of communal koki's during free-play. One of the writing instruments provided in this art area is a letter stencil with the capital letters of the alphabet and numbers from 0 to 9 (figure 4.38). This instrument is used to support children's emerging ability to form letters and extend their grapho-phonic knowledge (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). In this

classroom as opposed to the preschool there is a computer (figure 4.39) This builds children's understanding of technology and digital literacy (Cunningham, 2009) as they explore how the keyboard works developing knowledge of the alphabetic principle.

This classroom also features a wide book collection. There are two distinct sets of reading texts available. The book corner is filled with picture and story books the children can visit independently (figure 4.40). The wire shelf implies that books are a protected resource that should be treated with care. However, in contrast to the preschool there are no cushions in this area. This may make the corner less inviting for children. During my visits no child chose to visit the corner. The second set of books available is the classroom reader (figure 4.41). Patricia uses the big books for shared-reading and children take home the small readers for rereading. In contrast to the preschool there is also a blackboard that Patricia uses to do literacy activities like letter formation with the children (figures 4.42 – 4.43). The classroom is print rich and filled with a myriad of pictures and labels (figures 4.44 – 4.46). These texts show that they have different functions; they can entertain, inform and command.

<u>Figures</u> 4.33 – 4.44 Oaks Primary School – Examples of indoor environment literacy artefacts

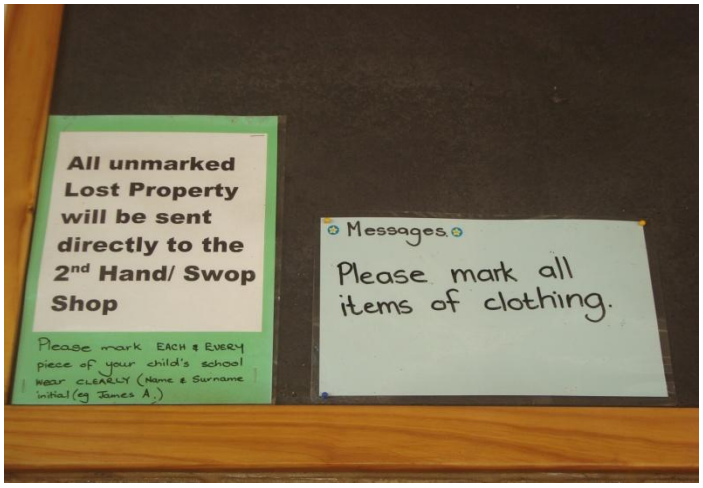

Figure 4.33



Figure 4.34



Figure 4.35



Figure 4.36



Figure 4.37



Figure 4.38



Figure 4.39

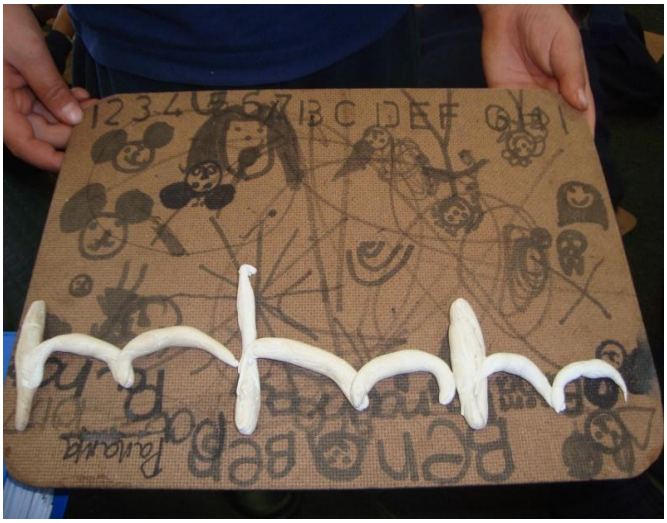

Figure 4.40

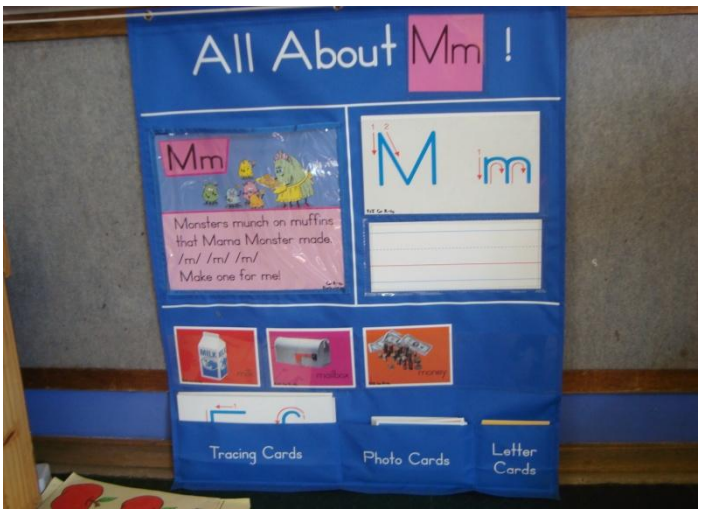

Figure 4.41



Figure 4.42

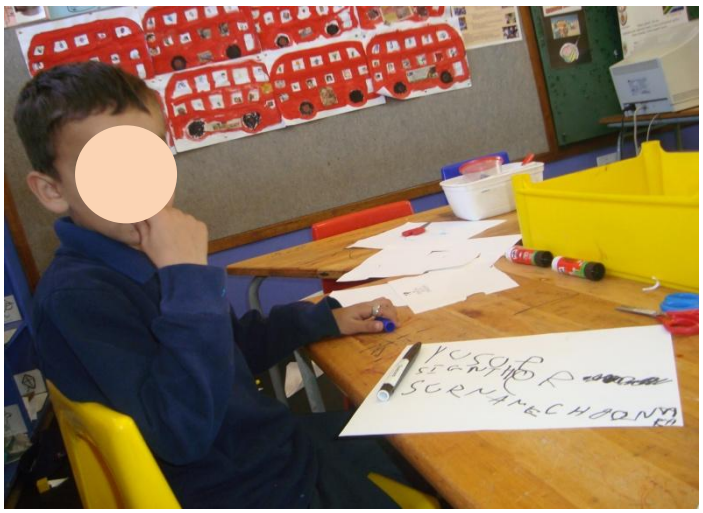

Figure 4.43



Figure 4.44

In this environment children are able to convey meaning in multimodal ways. They can use the computer to explore graphic design, use the paper and writing tools to represent their ideas and use the prestik to physically mould letters. Interestingly, Patricia does not explicitly view literacy as a multi-sensory practice. Although she recognizes that children use oral language and illustrations to learn about the written word, she does not include the tactile modality in her understanding of literacy. However, the classroom observations show that the children do in fact learn about literacy in a tactile way (using prestik to shape letters and manipulating paper to create designs). It is interesting that this is not something that was foregrounded in Patricia's interview. Children in this classroom as in the preschool find opportunities to work both individually and collaboratively in socially meaningful ways. Children are involved in practices through which they emerge as readers and writers as they use literacy and take actions to communicate with others (Street, 2003).

Photographs were a valuable data collection instrument to capture the natural and social environments through which teachers' enact literacy. Both classrooms have an abundance of materials and are conducive for children learning about the purposes of literacy, reading and writing. Children use these materials to design texts that represent their knowledge, feelings and actions (Gee, 1996). Children begin to allocate specific purposes to these different materials as they learn how to best present their meanings to others (Ormerod & Ivanic, 2000). Here, children get to experience how texts work and expand their understanding of the written word. This aligns with the teachers' understanding of literacy as a social and meaning making practice.

The observations of the classroom environments revealed some differences in the ways teachers' promote literacy. Lyn offers children informal experiences in working with print. The classroom is filled with picture story-books the children appear to enjoy paging through and exploring. In this way reading is pleasurable and experienced as a leisure activity. In comparison, the book corner in the primary school holds less child appeal. Also, the collection of big books and classroom readers signifies the importance of literacy instruction which was noted by the lesson observed on punctuation (05 September 2013). It is only in the preschool setting that children interact with texts as in newspapers that are seen beyond the school context. The preschool setting is more reflective of children's real life worlds.

In the preschool classroom children are able to access print materials and tools with more freedom. During free-play children use the drawing table to create original designs. Free play provides the child with open-ended and process driven opportunities (Saracho & Spodek, 2005). Free play is completely child initiated in that the child decisively chooses where to play, what to play, and what to play with and who to play with (Gordon & Browne, 2008). In this regard, play becomes purposeful in helping to engender children's sense of ownership for their own learning and develops the lifelong dispositions of independence and responsibility. In contrast children in the primary school classroom have access to one set of kokis where they mostly produce representational texts like drawings. However even with this contrast both of these literacy events are important. In the preschool classroom children learn to use literacy in an expressive and creative way. On the other hand, children in the primary school learn to use tools for a more structured purpose and in this way learn about their physical and textual features (Ormerod & Ivanic, 2000).

The observations and artefacts show that both teachers promote social practices that orientate children around the uses and purposes of literacy. In these contexts children learn about literacy as they engage in authentic reading and writing activities (Street, 2003). The texts children use allow them to create meaning and produce knowledge. Children explore literacy in multiple ways that allow them to emerge as active and thoughtful literacy users. Children learn about phoneme-grapheme relations and develop motor control as they manipulate writing tools. These contextualized literacy experiences help to prepare children for formal schooling. The reading and writing events depicted here shows that the teachers understand literacy as social practice and they create a rich literary environment where children use literacy to learn.

In the section below I present teachers' enactment of literacy in the classroom. Observations, video-recordings and photographs were used to collect data and capture teacher's literacy practices. Research shows that children learn about literacy when they use reading and writing for real purposes (Allington & Pearson, 2011). For this reason, I examined the teachers' creative art and shared-reading lessons and examine how they relate to pre-writing and pre-reading activities. As these activities took place in both classrooms I was able to compare literacy approaches in a preschool and primary school site.

4.4 CAPTURED through video - A 'WRITING' EVENT at Sunway Preschool

This section examines one teacher-guided creative art activity. Art is a useful starting point to examine how teachers facilitate children's use of texts and literacy materials. As children paint they learn how to manipulate a paintbrush and use a range of strokes to make marks on a page. Art is a means through which children can become writers (Saracho & Spodek, 2005).

This interaction involved teacher Lyn and five children: Wesley, Carter, Salman, Caleb and Rachel. The children are seated around the table outside. In the middle of the table there are plastic containers filled with different coloured paint with a thick paintbrush placed inside each container (figure 4.45). Lyn places an A3 piece of paper down horizontally in front of each child. She uses a black pen and writes down Wesley's name for him on the top left hand corner of his paper. She repeats this for all of the children. Caleb points to his name and exclaims, "That say Caleb.... that's me!" (figure 4.46). The printed names indicate the children's seating position and

their piece of artwork. Children learn that artefacts and the symbols used in their construction carry meaning (Roskos & Neuman, 1993), in this case the letters that identify their names.

Lyn tells the children to roll up their sleeves. Lyn pretends to push up her own sleeves to help children follow the oral instruction. Lyn shows the children her right palm and says, “You see our four fingers. Then we have a thumb. I don’t want you to paint your thumb, that’s going to be our flower. You going to choose a colour but remember to wipe your brush. Paint your whole hand and then print it on the paper”. In this introduction children role up their sleeves and learn to wipe excess paint off their paintbrushes. This exercise prevents the children from getting messy and essentially teaches them organization skills that help them better manage themselves. Children learn how to self-regulate and as they internalize these behaviours they develop habits around the practices of reading and writing (Power, 2002).

Figures 4.45 – 4.51 A ‘WRITING’ EVENT at Sunway Preschool



Figure 4.45



Figure 4.46

The interaction continues and Lyn says, “we have to paint green stems so we want some tall and some short flowers”. Lyn uses the creation of flowers as an opportunity to integrate other areas of learning into the children’s activity. The inclusion of vocabulary like small and tall relates to the concept of measurement in numeracy. Children interpret symbols around them that lead to the expansion of knowledge (Roskos & Neuman, 1993). Lyn then pretends to paint her right hand with a paintbrush. She holds the edge of Wesley’s paper and presses her right hand onto the middle of the page. Wesley looks down at his palm and says, “Our hands cool”, while Caleb shouts, “Ooooh, ... this paint is cold”, as he touches the paint container.

Salman holds his paintbrush at the bottom edge of the handle. He paints his left palm red. He makes brief strokes up and down continuously. He turns his palm to face him and then presses it down firmly onto the bottom of his page. He holds down his page with his right hand and pulls off his left palm. An imprint of his hand is left (figure 4.47). Salman looks back at his painted palm, smiles broadly and hurries off to rinse his hand in the nearby basin. Caleb stands up and leans over to the tub of paint. He paints in broader strokes from left to right and holds the brush in a thumb to forefinger grasp. He presses his hand firmly onto the bottom of his page (figure 4.48). The children repeat this process as they create an array of Spring flowers.



Figure 4.47



Figure 4.48

The above incident is interesting for many reasons. Children use their bodies (hands and fingers) to print flowers onto their paper. This activity is supported by Lyn's understanding of literacy that "symbols must be put into something concrete" for it to make meaning. The comments made by the children show their developing knowledge of body awareness. When Caleb stretches over the table he shows his ability to cross his midline. When Salman and Caleb manipulate the paintbrush they use fine motor skills, eye-hand coordination and directionality. In one of the classrooms analyzed by Prinsloo and Stein (2004) literacy was underpinned as a set of perceptual skills. Here, this too is an aspect of literacy that is heavily encouraged, but as the rest of the data shows literacy is not limited to this. These skills are crucial so that children develop the correct pincer-grip and postural control needed for formal writing. The video-recordings show that this learning is incidental and embedded in children's actions. In contrast, in the primary school Patricia explicitly promotes the children's perceptual knowledge as she

labels their left and right sides for them. This may be useful to extend children's vocabularies which they may apply to different contexts (Street, 2003).

In the final interaction Lyn suggests, "Children try and make little tulips". Rachel paints her hand red and excitedly exclaims, "Mines gonna be red". Salman suddenly flexes out his right hand and sways it about. He opens his eyes wide and shouts, "That's like blood!" Cater follows Salman and shakes his hand around pretending to touch the other children. Rachel squirms and responds, "That's disgusting...hey Carter your page is going over mine!" In this instance the children take literacy beyond the boundaries of the activity. Children rely on their semantic knowledge to make meaning (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). To complete the activity children need to know about the characteristics of flowers such as the shape of petals and buds. Here children explore literacy in a symbolic and graphical way. This aligns with Lyn's view of literacy as a system of "social cues used to make meaning". Rachel's ability to label her sheet of paper a page shows her awareness of the features of text and knowledge of print (figures 4.49 – 4.51).



Figure 4.49



Figure 4.50



Figure 4.51

The above incident reveals Lyn's balanced approach to literacy. The children work with loose pages to create their flower gardens. In this way children familiarise themselves with the concepts of a page, space, texture and design. Lyn also makes it a point to include less known words like tulips and stems in the context of the art activity to discuss children's designs with them. The intention to promote vocabulary is clear (Armbuster et al, 2002). Children hear words and recognize how they are used in different ways in different contexts. In this way oral language helps children become accustomed with their social settings (Allington & Pearson, 2011). Lyn promotes vocabulary implicitly where the children become acquainted with words and their meanings. However, this is not always the case. When the children sing songs they repeat the words. This explicit instruction helps to develop children's speech, articulation and communication. As oral language users children use words in order to participate in their world.

In this activity the children created flowers using their fingers as printing tools to make marks on their page. Children interpret these marks as a "semiotic system of communication" through which they make meaning. But children also recognize symbolic representations, in this case the colour red, has more than one meaning attached to it. Children designed a flower garden that can be viewed and read by others. Through the social practices of this classroom children become authors of their own texts (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001) preparing them to develop both the physical skills necessary for handwriting and the creative skills to write. In line with an informal approach to learning Lyn sets up creative art as a social activity for the children. This relates back to her understanding gained through the interview where children use literacy to communicate with others in multimodal and expressive ways.

4.5 CAPTURED through video - A 'WRITING' EVENT at Oaks Primary School

The content of this writing event is similar to the one described above. The children use paper and the paintbrush as their writing tools. However, there is a contrast in the use and purpose of literacy in this classroom. Patricia directs the behaviours and actions of the children. There is explicit emphasis to teach children about the features of text and to develop children's syntactic knowledge for early reading. Knowing how texts work places children into the role of a text-participant (Freebody, 1992). This incident reveals some implications when comparing informal and formal approaches to literacy.

The children are seated in rows on the carpet with Patricia on a small chair in front of them. Patricia tells the children, “Today we are going to start our next piece of artwork”. In this classroom children participate in daily art activities. The permanent display of children’s artwork is testament to this. This recurring literacy event helps regulate children’s writing behaviours. The “literacy norms” (Dixon, 2011: 68) of this classroom are to reinforce children’s hand dominance, dexterity and pincer-grip. This is promoted as children learn how to handle and physically master literacy materials. This muscular development allows children to manipulate writing tools more easily that eventually leads to fluency and legible print (Armbruster et al., 2002). Patricia uses art as a context in which to help children work functionally with literacy tools as she explicitly said so.

Patricia continues, “Today we are going to start with our background” She asks the class, “What does a background mean?” Rebecca responds, “it means behind the people” while Ammerah adds, “You could have trees”. Patricia tells the children that they are talking about a landscape that can have trees, hills and flowers. Patricia lifts both arms above her head and sways them from side to side as if imitating the flowing movement of leaves. She shows the children prior examples of their artwork (figures 4.52 – 4.53) and asks them to name what they see. The children’s answers include sky, birds and a bus.

<u>Figures</u> 4.52 – 4.62 - A ‘WRITING’ EVENT at Oaks Primary School



Figure 4.52



Figure 4.53

Patricia uses the introduction of this activity to discuss features of text with the children namely images and elements of design (Reed, 2006). The children learn how to use symbolic and contextual cues to make meaning of text. This enactment is in line with her understanding of literacy as a "communicative tool". Patricia directly uses children's visual acuity as they differentiate between the foreground and background of a text. These perceptual skills are essential to help children eventually identify the form and shapes of letters (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). In this lesson Patricia also explicitly extends the children's vocabulary. She gives children the correct terminology for the things they name and describe. This builds children's receptive language, vocabulary and extends their semantic knowledge (Armbuster et al, 2002). These building blocks are essential to Patricia's approach to literacy.

Patricia tells the children to go to the table outside. She places an A3 piece of paper horizontally down onto the table (figure 4.54). She then places two bowls of yellow paint with two brushes inside each container on the table (figure 4.55). Patricia asks the children, "What can you tell me about this piece of paper?" Jean answers, "It has two long sides on the bottom and top", while Jody jumps up and adds, "you can draw in its middle". Patricia follows up, "Yes there are four sides altogether. The paper has a top, middle and end". Patricia holds the bottom left hand corner and pulls the paper towards the edge of the table. She takes a paintbrush in her right hand and places it on the top left hand corner of her paper. In this incident children gain knowledge about the shape and form of a page. The discussion about the length and space of a page integrates numerical knowledge into the activity and promotes children's perceptual-motor behaviours that include spatial awareness. Here, children develop text handling skills as in manipulating a page and turning it around (figures 4.56 – 4.57). The acquisition of these literacy behaviours provides children with multiple entry points for using literacy.



Figure 4.54

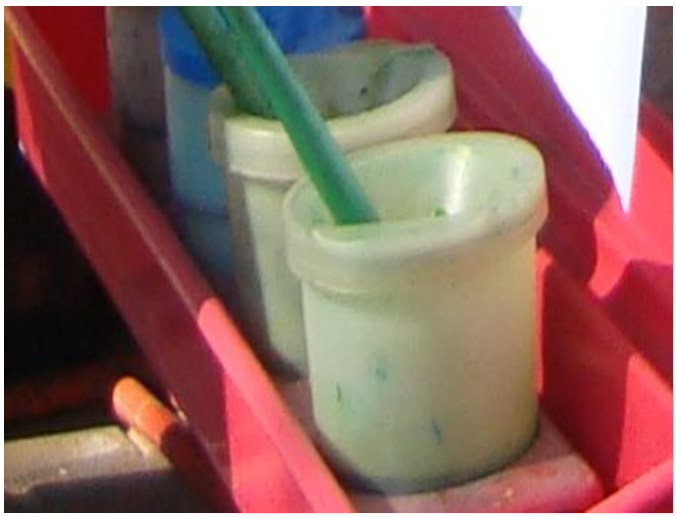

Figure 4.55



Figure 4.56



Figure 4.57

Patricia intentionally turns the children's attention to the paintbrushes. Patricia asks, "can you tell me how are we meant to hold our brushes?" Ammerah flicks her right hand into the air and shouts "we hold it at the end of the holder silver thing" while Lindalani adds, "um we hold it at the bottom of the long stick" (figures 4.58 – 4.61). In line with early literacy research (Phatudi, 2007) this incident shows children's developing meta-language awareness through the socio-cultural practices they encounter. In this classroom children have acquired an expressive vocabulary which they use to interact with the literacy artefacts around them. Here, children are able to name and describe the colours and positions of the paintbrushes. This matches Patricia's view of literacy being about "the use of language for learning". As previously stated some children in this classroom do not have English as their mother tongue. Many parents have schooled their children through the medium of English for the higher social status it holds (De Klerk, 2002). Although the children do not always use the correct terminology they use words that allow them to optimally function in the classroom and beyond.



Figure 4.58



Figure 4.59



Figure 4.60



Figure 4.61

Patricia takes a paintbrush out of the container and lowers her right hand to the bottom edge of the handle. Holding the brush in a thumb to forefinger opposition she looks at the children and says “you put your hand near the metal, between your fingers then you have the right way to hold your paintbrush”. She continues, “I want you to paint from the left just like when you read a book. I want you to go all the way”. Patricia dips the brush into the paint and presses the bristles against the container. She then places the brush on the top left hand corner of the paper and makes broad sweeping strokes across the page from left to right and up and down. This activity explicitly models for children perceptual-motor behaviours that include directionality and laterality. To promote these spatial behaviours further Patricia asks “Where are we going to go when I get there (pointing to the end of the line)?” to which Sam responds, “You going down and then do another stripe”. Patricia then asks, “And when we write our name where do we always write it?” to which Mbali replies, “the left” while waving her left hand.

The above activity is directed and scaffolded by Patricia. In this lesson Patricia aims to develop children’s handwriting skills and their knowledge of how texts work. Moving the brush across the page gets children used to the idea of tracking for easier reading (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003). Children learn how to properly manipulate the paintbrush to make more fluid strokes across their page. Here pre-writing is set up as a set of perceptual skills to be mastered. This relates to Theresa’s view of literacy in which proficiency and competency in writing is expected. Although a more formal event, these skills are valuable to help children make the shift from drawing to formal handwriting (Closquin-Johnson, 2011). Children also gain knowledge about the uses of literacy that effect the ways in which they create texts for different purposes.

Patricia tells Jody, Rebecca, Lindalani and Joshua to sit at the table. Patricia writes the name of each child on the top left hand corner of their paper. Patricia tells the children to paint yellow lines from the left of their page all the way to the right and from the top to the bottom (figure 4.62). The children continue to paint yellow lines across their pages. Lindalani then says, “when I was little my mom teached me and Belle how to paint.” This miscue reflects the natural development of children’s acquisition of language. Patricia corrects him and says, “she taught you how to paint”. Patricia models the correct form of the word for Lindalani; a second language speaker. Krashen (2002) explains that language acquisition is a complex process. As children hear and receive words repeatedly they become more likely to produce them. In this primary school classroom teaching vocabulary is an essential building block for early reading. In this way children’s semantic knowledge expands. Patricia says, “In order to understand information for many contexts children must have a wide vocabulary both spoken and understood”.

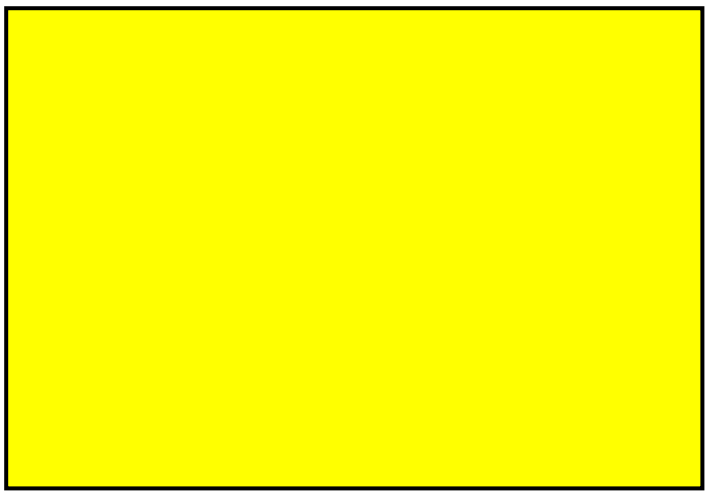

Figure 4.62

This art activity is presented more formally than in Lyn’s classroom. The activity requires children to make continual strokes across the width and length of the page. Here, children are not encouraged to create their own designs and use literacy as a self-expressive tool. Rather, the activity focuses on children mastering the skills that underpin writing (Phatudi, 2007). Although this approach does not enforce play-based learning, the children do practice skills that are a pre-requisite to writing. The ability to handle and manipulate writing tools and exercise motor control is necessary to learn to write with ease and fluency (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). When these skills are well developed and become habitual, writing as a meaning making activity can be strengthened.

4.6 A comparison of 'WRITING' EVENTS at Sunway Preschool and Oaks Primary School

Prinsloo and Bloch (1999) recognize that early literacy teachers need to consider the roles children take up as readers and writers. The above examples present similarities and differences in how teachers' understand and enact literacy. I found two interesting comparisons. In both classrooms children are encouraged to share writing tools. The paint containers and brushes are placed in the middle of the table for all of the children to access. Children take turns as they share the materials with their peers; learning how to manage both themselves and their resources. Dixon (2011) argues that aspects of cooperation and organization inform 'collective' learning reflecting a social and communal stance towards literacy.

Wenger (1998: 1) characterizes a community of practice as "people learning together within a social system". In the context of the Grade R classroom, the children and teachers engage in the processes of creating, using and communicating knowledge that construct literacy practices (Wenger, 1998). Here, a community of practice was promoted through the joint enterprise of its participants. These shared practices exist over a particular time and within particular boundaries and in this study literacy pedagogy is a collective process of knowing and learning. Additionally, in each classroom children also acquire self-regulatory behaviours like wiping excess paint off their brushes. In this way, self-management is important for internalizing the habits of a reader and writer (Dixon, 2011). This is emphasized further in the primary classroom where children master a metalanguage around writing; developing into social and sophisticated literacy users.

The content of the teachers' literacy lessons is also similar. Both teachers view literacy as incorporating the acts of reading and writing. Patricia states "Literacy is the way we communicate whether oral or written", while Lyn says, "In real life at school that's what you have to do you have to learn to read and write and learn." However, in both classrooms the teachers prevent children from writing their own names. In Grade R children are developmentally able to recognise, read and write their own names which in turn enhance their grapho-phonic knowledge (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). Perhaps it is to save time or to attend to the focused 'aims' of the activity. In any case, it remains a lost opportunity for children to see themselves as authentic authors of text. Interpreting and 'reading' visual signs carries more emphasis than early writing in both school sites (Levin, de Vries, Aram and Bus, 2005).

One of the main differences between the teachers' enactment of literacy is their practice of writing. Barton (1994 cited in Dixon, 2011) talks about a writer having a role as both a scribe and an author. A scribe masters the technical skills of writing as in developing motor control over writing tools. In the primary school classroom the handling of paintbrushes, working across a page and within a space reflects children's ability to scribe (Dixon, 2011). This enactment fits Theresa's view of literacy as ''a readiness approach for learning". This further reflects the ideas of Street (2005) of an autonomous model of literacy where children develop technical skills that affect their social and cognitive processes. An author, on the other hand, uses writing as a tool to convey meaning. In the preschool classroom children used their body as a creative printing instrument. The children selected their own colours of paint and either extended or retracted their fingers to design their flowers. In this activity children are prepared as authors of text while simultaneously practicing perceptual skills. In the preschool classroom children can be seen as emerging identities both as a scribe and as an author. In the preschool classroom an ideological model (Street, 2003) underpins Lyn's enactment of literacy where children are members of a socio-cultural community of writers.

Another contrast found is the approach to learning in each school site. In the primary school learning in Grade R is more formal. Patricia's lesson is teacher-directed and instruction bound. Children listen to explanations on how to handle a paintbrush correctly and then demonstrate this competence throughout the activity. The activity is content-orientated and knowledge is taught explicitly. Lyn's practice, whilst she does give careful instructions, promotes learning as a time of creative expression, exploration and discovery. Children participate in sensory activities where they explore the texture of paint. However, the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes promoted around literacy in each classroom is equally valuable as each site allows children to successfully learn and emerge as literate beings.

4.7 CAPTURED through video - A 'READING' EVENT at Sunway Preschool

This section examines one teacher-guided shared-reading activity. Reading is a useful starting point to examine how teachers facilitate children's learning of the written word in English. As children 'read' they learn about the features of text and how to make meaning. Shared-reading is a means through which children can become readers.

Story-reading is a daily practice of the preschool classroom. The interaction begins as Lyn tells the boys to sit on small chairs on the carpet while the girls sit in front in rows. The book Lyn has chosen to read integrates the theme the Summer Olympic Games (figure 4.63 – 4.66). Lyn holds the A5 sized story-book in the palm of her hand. She says, "I read you a book yesterday about Paddington. He went to visit a very famous place. Can you remember where it was?" Adam lifts himself off his chair and shouts, "London!" Lyn repeats and extends this key vocabulary for the children. "Yes, the tower of London where Paddington took the ravens away from the tower". Lyn simultaneously flicks her right index and middle finger forward to imitate a running action. Tao asks, "What are ravens?" to which Lyn replies, "Ravens are big black birds".

<u>Figures</u> 4.63 – 4.70 A 'READING' EVENT at Sunway Preschool



Figure 4.63

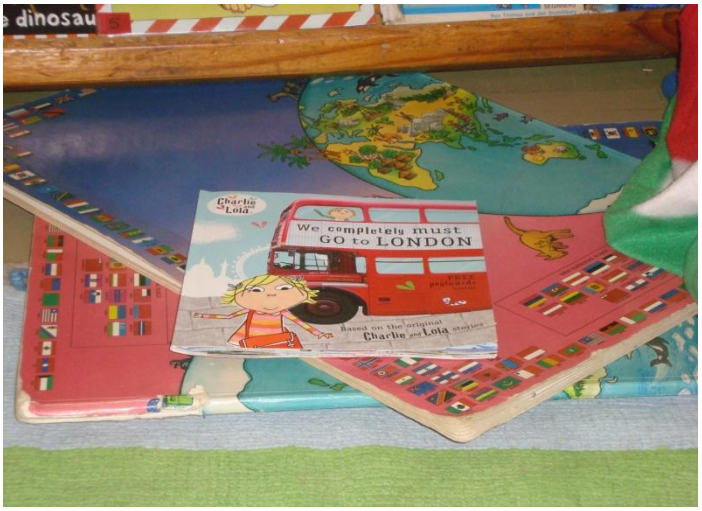

Figure 4.64



Figure 4.65



Figure 4.66

Lyn uses the introduction of this shared-reading practice to promote children's meta-cognitive strategies. She requires children to recall their prior knowledge in answering her questions. Lyn makes demands on children's cognitive ability as they actively engage with the text (Roskos & Neuman, 1993). In this classroom children's semantic knowledge expands as they continue to discover new vocabulary and learn new concepts (e.g. ravens). Also, in this context children are accustomed to singing songs that allow them to play with language. Vocabulary building is an essential aspect of Lyn's literacy practice and informs her understanding as stated in her interview, "Vocabulary and more vocabulary in everything we do. Explaining new words and using new words is geared towards learning". Research shows that children need to bring a wide knowledge to the reading of a text in order to comprehend it (Armbuster et al, 2002). Books are a powerful resource to extend children's experiences and access to knowledge. This matches Lyn's view of the use of stories "to open huge worlds for children". Tao understands that one way to improve his comprehension is to ask the meaning of words he does not know. This incident shows children's growing reading habitus to use books to enquire about and understand their worlds (Dixon, 2011).

Lyn continues, "I have another story about Paddington with lots of adventure. Guess what this one's about?" Lyn turns the book around and shows the children the front cover. Joshua looks at the illustration of plants and exclaims, "Gardening!" (figure 4.67). In this exchange Lyn encourages the children to predict. Lyn follows on from Joshua's response and then reads, "It says Paddington's garden and it is written by Michael Bond". Lyn simultaneously runs her finger under each word as she reads them. Lyn incidentally models directionality for the children and as she tracks words from left to right she helps the children more easily follow the text. Tracking is a habit children develop to read words across a page. This activity develops children's auditory (hearing words) and visual (observing illustrations) behaviours for reading (Gallahue, 1996).

Lyn opens the story-book onto the first double page (figure 4.68). She reads, "There's Paddington writing his list. Paddington thought he should go shopping. He had some savings left over so he went to the gardening shop and bought a wheelbarrow, a trowel which is a small spade and a large packet of assorted which means different seeds. Suddenly there was a whooshing noise". Lyn again reinforces the meaning of new vocabulary to promote children's comprehension of the story. She does this by simplifying the words for the children and giving

them acronyms that are familiar to meet their level of understanding. She turns the book around and shows the children an illustration of Paddington. She then says, “Let’s turn the page”. Afterwards, she points to the left hand page and says, “Look at this picture. It is a bottle of marmalade in case he’s hungry”. Salman says, “It is like the jam at school..... cool!” to which Lyn responds, “yes it is. Perhaps we can try marmalade sometime”.

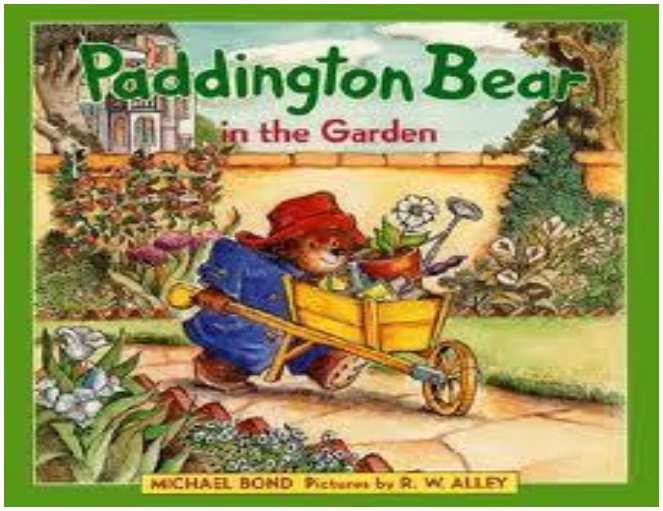



Figure 4.67 **Figure 4.68**

This lesson is interesting for many reasons. Lyn relies on a lot of bodily movements to convey the meaning of words and phrases to the children. In turn, the children have to read both verbal and non-verbal cues to understand the content and sequence of the story (Flewit, 2005). Lyn directs the children to name interpret and “read” the images of printed text. In this classroom children read without formally reading words. Here literacy is practiced as a semiotic activity where children discuss the images to make meaning (Souto-Manning & Vasquez, 2011). The illustrations involve children as active participants in the story as they work with the visual to make meaning and as such become authentic readers of text (Prinsloo & Bloch, 1999). In line with early literacy research multiple-cueing systems including, written text and graphics are thought to be necessary for children to become functional users of literacy (Cunningham, 2009).

Lyn also explicitly models book handling skills as in turning the page for the children. Emergent literacy as defined by Seger “refers to the behaviours that children exhibit before they learn to read and write conventionally” (1996: 7). Here children are being orientated around books and develop book appreciation. As emergent readers’ children are learning to display competencies that include holding a book correctly, turning pages and ‘reading’ pictures for meaning. Snow

and Ninio refer to this kind of learning as the “contracts of literacy” (1986 cited in Dixon, 2011). Lyn supports this development when she names the author of the storybook, talks about the front cover and tracks the written words on a page. As children listen to the story they appear to feel confident to ask questions for clarification and share their ideas. The sharing of knowledge brings with it different socio-cultural value options into the classroom where children become ‘critical subjects’ in their early reading careers (Dixon, 2011).

Lyn’s emphasis on the words ‘whooshing’, ‘assorted’ and ‘marmalade’ helps to promote children’s phonemic awareness and vocabulary. Research shows that oral language is crucial for the emergence of literacy and necessary to build children’s knowledge of phoneme-grapheme relations (Roskos & Neuman, 1993). In this classroom children have access to a variety of reading material. During my time of observation this included children’s interactions with the weekly newspaper (figures 4.69 – 4.70). As Tao (boy child pictured) views different designs of text he becomes more print literate. Lyn believes that promoting a love for literature depends heavily on the home-school relation. She recognizes that “if parents are interested in reading, if parents read to the child a lot and if children see their parents reading then they come with those values”. Phatudi (2007: 44) supports this conception as she asserts that “children learn at home as well as at school. No single institution can create all the conditions that children need to learn in responsible ways”. The preschool aims to help children make connections between these two micro-systems through using texts found within both these contexts.



Figure 4.69



Figure 4.70

4.8 CAPTURED through video - A 'READING' EVENT at Oaks Primary School

This reading lesson begins with Patricia telling the children, "Right Grade R sit on your spot, hands on laps and tuck up your legs." Patricia picks up a big book off the carpet. She holds it in her left hand facing the children and points to the title with her right index finger. She asks, "Armani how many letters are in the title of our book?" Armani whispers below her breath and shouts out, "Six!" Patricia points above each word as she recounts them orally. She then points to Jean and says, "Can you tell us what our book is called?" to which he responds, "Plants" (figure 4.71). Patricia says, "That's the name, plants". She then asks, "What do we call somebody who works in a garden?" Lindalani says, "A gardener". Patricia reaffirms his response and says, "Yes, a gardener." Patricia continues "What kind of garden do this farmer and daughter have?" Luca stares at the front cover and answers, "Um... a vegetable garden." Patricia enquires, "What made you think it's a vegetable garden?" to which he responds, "Coz there's veggies.... lettuce".

<u>Figures</u> 4.71 – 4.73 A 'READING' EVENT at Oaks Primary School

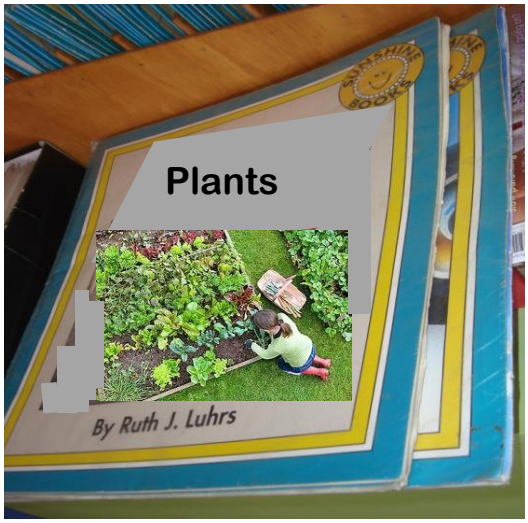

Figure 4.71

During this interaction the children's seating arrangements and body positions are directed by Patricia. One can assume that it is to develop children's sitting postures and listening behaviours in becoming literate subjects (Dixon, 2011). Patricia begins the reading by discussing the title of the book and front cover with the children. In this classroom children learn to work with text at the word level. Here, children gain valuable syntactic knowledge in that individual letters build up words and words construct sentences (Roskos & Neuman, 1993). Patricia's instruction on how words work is explicit but embedded in a shared-reading activity. Freebody (1992) comments that knowledge of the alphabetic principle places children into code-breaker and

text-participant roles to make meaning of print. Patricia draws on children's vocabulary and knowledge of vegetables to allow them to actively engage with the text. Patricia also makes the children view and interpret illustrations to make meaning. Vocabulary is core to Patricia's approach and matches her understanding of literacy "where language is used for different purposes in different situations".

Patricia opens up the big book onto the first double page (figure 4.72). Patricia asks, "What is behind the father? It's here on this page, have a good look" while pointing to the illustration of the garden. Jean picks up his hand and shouts, "A hot house." Patricia follows his response and enquires, "Yes, does anybody know another name for a hot house? Mandla smiles and says, "A greenhouse". Patricia says, "Yes a greenhouse". Patricia extends the children's thinking beyond the text and asks, "Why do we have a greenhouse?" Sam says, "To keep your plants fresh". Patricia extends his explanation, "Yes, to keep plants fresh and make them grow" (figure 4.73). In this incident Patricia regularly repeats key vocabulary for the children. This strategy is important to support children's acquisition of receptive and expressive language. Prinsloo and Stein (2004) comment that repetition help shapes literacy into a set of skills centred on sound-symbol relationships (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004). In this setting children use oral language to communicate and literacy becomes a functional activity of the classroom.



Figure 4.72



Figure 4.73

Patricia turns to the next double page. She gently presses down the fold of the page with her right hand. In comparison to Lyn, Patricia implicitly models book handling skills for the children in the context of this shared-reading lesson. Patricia asks, "What vegetables do we eat the

leaves of?" Abigail stares at the illustration and answers "Lettuce!" Patricia continues and asks, "Can you see another vegetable? Have a good look there" as she points to the picture on the right side of the page. Jody responds, "Spinach!" During this shared-reading practice Patricia continuously guides the children to view and analyze the illustrations. Children name the objects they see and use these contextual cues to make meaning of the written word. Here, children are actively involved in reading for information and understanding. This matches Patricia's understanding of literacy shared through the interview as "the way we communicate with one another whether oral or written". Patricia then says, "Let's have a look if we can find those names. It says plants have leaves. We can eat the leaves of some plants. There is the word lettuce and spinach". Patricia points above each word as they she reads them aloud. Here, Patricia shows the children the relation between the oral and printed word. Children learn about the functions of print in making oral ideas a more permanent record. Children also discover the uses of literacy as they learn to read. Patricia is modelling the middle class practice of labelling objects that Street (2003) describes and hence promotes a particular class-based understanding of literacy.

Finally, Patricia tells Panama to look at the bottom right hand corner and says, "Can you see what those little vegetables are? It starts with a 'r'. Panama shrugs her shoulders. Patricia then says in an exaggerated tone, "Radishes". Patricia reads the successive word beetroot and says to Jean, "Look at this word. What do you notice about the word beetroot?" while pointing to the vowel diagraphs. Jean hesitates and says, "It's got two ...." Patricia intervenes and says, "Come show me the two twin letters in that word". Jean comes up and points to the double oo letters. Patricia says, "Yes and what do we say when they stand together?" to which the whole class responds, "ooh". Patricia continues to teach word level work and says, "By itself it says o but when we put them together we go oooh". Patricia drags her hands across the bottom of the pages and asks, "What do we call the pictures in a row at the bottom of a page? Luca answers, "A pile." Patricia corrects him and says, "A border. If we have illustrations that go around the page we call it a border". During this activity Patricia explicitly develops children's knowledge of phonemic awareness. She uses the beginning sounds of words to help children predict their names. Patricia extends on this by using compound nouns to builds children's phono-graphic knowledge as a building block to phonics. As in the creative art lesson, Patricia also talks about

the design elements of text with the children (Reed, 2006) and encourages them to become familiar with the textual features of print.

In Patricia's classroom this lesson is geared towards teaching children to read. In fact, the children are being orientated to the ways in which English works. The content of Patricia's literacy instruction includes oral vocabulary, print knowledge and the grapheme-phoneme relation (Armbuster et al, 2002). Her instruction is geared towards a bottom-up reading approach where children learn "how to unlock the code of the written word" (DBE, 2002 cited in Dixon, 2011: 103). While this does point towards a more formalized means of literacy instruction that is favoured by the primary school, reading in this classroom is not de-contextualized. The instruction remains meaningful as children actively make sense of text in a critical and meta-linguistic way. Patricia's practice aligns with Theresa's view of literacy as being able "to speak, write, and read in a language and to use it in a proficient way". Recognizing letters and words and knowing how they work builds fluency that leads to the comprehension of text; the ultimate goal of reading (Armbuster et al, 2002). Patricia's practice although more formal than early learning suggests, does enable children to transition more easily into Grade 1.

However, knowledge of the language system is not sufficient to become literate. Patricia also recognizes that literacy learning requires children to develop "a positive orientation towards books". In this lesson children experience reading in an interactive and collaborative way. Patricia uses the storybook to promote literacy beyond the confine of the text (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004). Here, children are able to enquire about words, their meanings and the world in general to extend their imaginations and enquiry. Their ability to remember a hot house and provide a synonym of a building that they are unlikely to have seen is evidence of this. Research shows that early readers must be involved as critical persons in the texts they read (Street, 2005). No children freely visited the book corner during my observation visits. This may be due to the less comforting and eye catching set up of the book corner itself or in respect to the reading event described above, children are involved in an activity aimed at reading for information (schoolification process) more so than for personal pleasure, inquiry or satisfaction.

4.9 A comparison of 'READING' PRACTICES at Sunway Preschool and Oaks Primary School

Prinsloo and Stein (2004: 24) comment that, "Teachers literacy practices govern the texts they teach and the models for interacting around texts they set up and encourage". The classroom observations and video-recordings show that the teachers both value books as a literacy resource. The teachers both focus on teaching the children how books and printed texts work. The teachers use books as a support material for their shared-reading practices through which children use words, illustrations and design elements to make meaning. The emphasis on multi-semiotic modes for literacy learning in Grade R is recognized by the language and print rich environments promoted in both classrooms (Cunningham, 2009). The teachers use body language and action to explain new language children come into contact with. These actions are visible and concrete (Flewit, 2005) and mediate learning for children. In early childhood, drama is a way of living literacy and bringing expression to life. This relates to the teachers social view of literacy through which children use literacy, reading and writing to construct knowledge, take action and learn. Although the teachers' content is similar, their literacy approach differs.

Lyn brings reading into her classroom through reading stories to the children. Here, children listen to stories and have discussions about the book's cover, its content and characters. Lyn promotes literacy in an implicit and contextual way through the social practice of story-reading. Literacy emerges as children develop extensive vocabularies and perceptual-motor behaviours as the foundational skills for formal reading (Excell & Linington, 2011). Reading is modelled by Lyn as a pleasurable and engaging activity allowing children to develop "a love for learning and a motivation for literature". This is also evidenced by children freely choosing to interact in the book corner. For Lyn and the children in this preschool classroom, literacy remains a sensory and "feel the page" kind of activity.

On the other hand, teacher Patricia uses shared-reading to teach children reading behaviours. In this primary school classroom children's literacy knowledge is extended as they learn how English works. This content is focused on introducing children to the phoneme-grapheme relationship that lays the foundation for phonics (Armbuster et al, 2002). Patricia's practice is underpinned by a more definitive reading approach. Here, literacy practice is reflective of the alignment between Grade R and Grade 1. In describing the kinds of similarities children in Grade R in the primary school bring into Grade 1, Theresa says "It is the link between the phonics

programmes where children know the sounds of letters". However, Theresa who teaches children who have come from both school sites does not find one group as being more prepared for formal literacy instruction. In fact she repeatedly emphasized in her interview that difference in literacy competence comes down to "the type of child you work with". This challenges the assumption that a more formalized Grade R programme prepares children better for Grade 1 (House, 2011; Phatudi, 2007) and instead asks one to think more carefully about the different ways in which high-quality literacy programmes may be put in place. This discussion is extended in the conclusion of this chapter.

4.10 Discussion and conclusion

Here I present a final discussion of the main findings collected in the process of the research. In this study I attempted to examine teachers' understanding and enactment of literacy in two Grade R classrooms. The semi-structured interviews revealed some similarities and differences in teachers' understanding of literacy. Both teachers hold a comprehensive and sophisticated knowledge of literacy. The teachers' recognize that literacy is a multimodal system of communication (Souto-Manning & Vasquez, 2011). Specifically, they view literacy as making use of the full range of semiotic and print materials available to make meaning of the objects and artefacts in the world in which we live. The photographs and classroom observations reveal that this understanding has informed the kinds of materials the teachers' use in their enactment of literacy. Both environments are filled with an abundance of materials that allow children to work with texts in an authentic way (Gee, 1996). The array of illustrations, book corners and writing tools include children in a print rich world.

This understanding is rooted within the theoretical underpinnings of the NLS tradition. Here, literacy is seen as "a thought-language in dynamic interplay" (Street, 2003). Patricia attributes literacy to learning about language and the social norms of the contexts in which we participate. Similarly, Lyn asserts that literacy is a functional life skill used in real-life everyday activities. Julie adds that literacy is about making sense of one's experiences in the different settings in which we find ourselves. The teachers' understandings of literacy reflect Streets' (2005) ideological model wherein literacy becomes a powerful construct that shapes knowledge, thought and action. For the teachers in this study literacy is about getting children to make meaning of what

they ‘read’ and transferring understanding into what they ‘write’ to communicate graphically with others. It is more than mastery of skills.

The interviews revealed only a slight difference in the teachers’ understanding of literacy. Lyn emphasizes the importance of perceptual-motor activities. She emphasizes that literacy is about feeling the page, practicing directionality, laterality and motor control and hearing language and viewing illustrations. Although Patricia did not explicitly describe these behaviours, the classroom observations show that she embeds this learning in children’s daily activities. For example, during the art activity children are encouraged to learn how to work within a space and how to manipulate literacy tools (Dixon, 2011).

Similarly, both teachers offer the children enriched and enjoyable literature experiences. Children are read to every day and have independent access to book corners that are filled with picture and story-books and expository texts. Through these literacy practices children use literacy for real purposes where they narrate their own tales. In this way, the enactment of literacy does not only see children as developing literacy but as already being functional users of literacy (Friere, 1976 cited Cushman et al, 2001); involved in a pleasurable act where meaning making is both individual and shared through discussion.

The classroom observations reveal that the Grade R teachers both implement a balanced approach to literacy. In line with early literacy research (Dixon, 2011; Armbuster et al, 2002; Dickinson & McCabe, 2001) the teachers focus on the three building blocks of early reading instruction. The teachers both encourage and include oral language as a natural and ongoing activity of their classrooms. The video-recordings show children actively engaged in singing songs, playing with rhyme, working with words, using dialogue and listening to stories. This matches teachers’ understanding of literacy wherein children’s language abilities allow them to use literacy for the purpose of communication. Oral language is essential to help children become accustomed to the different practices of their social settings and be involved in the social and cultural lives of their communities (Allington & Pearson, 2011).

However, the classroom observations show a difference in the teacher’s enactment of these building blocks. In Lyn’s classroom children are introduced to a general set of vocabulary. When

Lyn reads the children a story she often introduces them to new words and together they discuss their meanings. Similarly, Patricia also provides children with unknown words through meaningful contexts as in language discussions. However, Patricia extends the children to analyse texts at the word level. For example, children learn about the sounds vowel diagraphs make and view their relating graphemes in print (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). It could be argued that this kind of formalized instruction limits children's ability to discover meaning (House, 2011; Spodek & Saracho, 2005). But children also learn about the names of different features of text like a page and border along with their visual cues and illustrations. Here, children are introduced into the reading role of text-analysts which is something that is often lacking in overly formalized and skills based teaching.

Another argument can be made for Patricia's choice as some of the children in her classroom are not home language speakers of English. Children are introduced to English as the LoLT at school. Introducing a meta-language challenges the children to think more critically as they read and write. These children need repetitive and directed experiences that focus on how literacy materials vary from their own cultural settings (Street, 2003). In contrast, the children in Lyn's classroom may be able to generate and internalize the knowledge around texts more easily as they are not involved in a process of interpreting language or code switching (Krashen, 2003). For the children in Patricia's classroom an explicit approach makes more sense to help them develop literacy knowledge and to regulate their literacy behaviours. In this way, children are supported to develop a 'reading habitus' (Dixon, 2011). However, there is some tension between teachers' knowledge and enacted literacy practice. In the preschool classroom, Lyn teaches mostly the way she believes literacy to be. Here, literacy is implicit and a part of children's "everyday learning" as she asserts. Although language rings and creative art have a heavier literacy focus, there are no set times for literacy instruction per se. In contrast, although Patricia views literacy as being "pervasive throughout the day", her enactment of literacy is still mostly reserved at specific times of the day where instruction is explicit.

At the beginning of the research I was expecting to find a huge disjuncture in the approaches to teaching and learning between the school sites. Initially, I thought the preschool through its implementation of a play-based approach would be more informal, while the primary classroom would follow a more formal approach. On a continuum one could argue that Patricia's approach

to literacy is more structured than Lyn's. The classroom observations and video-recordings show that in Lyn's classroom children are able to use literacy as a means of creative expression. Here, children use drawings to create designs that make their meanings known to others. Yet at the same time they learn about words, their meanings and how they can be used in different ways in different settings (Street, 2005). In contrast, teacher Patricia encourages children to use literacy to learn how texts and language work and develop rich vocabularies for how things in their world work.

The observations reveal that in both classrooms children love working with words. All of the children are developing their phonemic awareness and gaining a knowledge of print, the visual and a range of genres (Cunningham, 2009). These building blocks are being established in both classrooms that build a strong foundation for formal reading and writing. The children in both classrooms display an engagement with literacy, language and learning; which in line with ECD research, provides them with a healthy foundation for lifelong learning. Theresa's views are evidence to this as she was not able to determine whether children from the preschool or primary school bring better literacy competencies into Grade 1. None of the approaches are totally play-based or 'mini-Grade 1s' in this study. It seems that neither approach is more or less beneficial in developing emergent literates. Each teacher aims to prepare children for formal schooling and to grow up being literate. While the concern about the increasing formalization of Grade R is valid (House, 2011; Closquin-Johnson, 2011; Phatudi, 2007); the reality is that in high functioning classrooms with well trained teachers the practices that underpin their teaching of literacy are sound (Jensen, 1994) and these cannot be reduced into a simple binary.

Chapter Five – Conclusions and Recommendations

This research is set in the broader field of ECD in local and international recognition it is a high priority area (Phatudi, 2007). With the provisioning of compulsory schooling that includes the implementation of the Grade R year in the Foundation Phase (DOE, 2001) this research is timeous. Research shows (September, 2009) that the restructuring of ECD and the lack of cohesive management over this schooling year places Grade R into a potentially problematic and dangerous position.

Literacy, from a socio-cultural approach, is a key concept that I drew on in this research. As one of the subject areas of the Foundation Phase, literacy is a constant activity of the classroom that is a necessary requirement for the other subjects children learn across all phases of schooling (DBE, 2012). It is in this context that I wanted to understand what teachers understand literacy to be and how literacy practices are enacted in high-quality Grade R classrooms. This research aimed to extend disciplinary knowledge of early literacy and its enactments in practice to help promote quality early education in a diverse South Africa.

A qualitative case study design was used. This decision was made to see if there is a juxtaposition between a site that is characterised by an informal approach to teaching and learning and a formal approach, hence the decision to research Grade R in both a preschool and primary school site. Knowing the affordances and limits of each approach could provide insight into early childhood pedagogy.

5.1 The research

The overarching question examined the link between teacher knowledge and classroom practice:

What do Grade R teachers understand by the term literacy and how is it enacted in classroom practice?

This question encouraged me to explore how teachers understand literacy and determine the theoretical frameworks that underpin their literacy instruction. I was motivated to discover the

kinds of content, strategies and approaches teachers use in their classrooms. This understanding aimed to articulate what the early childhood practices of two experienced teachers are. Hence:

- I aimed to determine Grade R teachers' literacy knowledge and practice.
- I aimed to identify if tensions exist between teacher's knowledge and literacy practice.
- I aimed to compare the approaches to literacy in preschool and primary school sites.

5.2 Key/Main Findings

Semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and documentation comprise the data sets. The analysis of data presented as thick narrative descriptions (Ponterotto, 2006) offered findings on the kinds of spaces, activities and resources that give rise to literacy in two Grade R classrooms and how the social forces at play help shape children's literate selves (Dixon, 2011). The interviews revealed that teachers understand that literacy is a multimodal system of communication. Their classroom spaces are designed to reflect this and encourage children to make use of a range of multimodal and print rich materials. The observations showed that children have access to a wide variety of semiotic materials and tools like charts, images and books; and paper, paint, crayons, glue and scissors that allow them to learn about the uses and purposes of literacy and the handling of literacy tools (Street, 2005). In these classrooms children used these materials to create drawings and design 3D models in their symbolic play. In these settings children are supported to create and recreate texts that reflect their ideas, experiences, feelings and knowledge s (Gee, 1996). In this way, the literacy activities are geared towards children use reading and writing to communicate graphically with others.

However, the extent to which these literacy practices are promoted in each classroom is different. In the preschool classroom children can access the materials with more freedom. Children explore and experiment with the materials in a more open-ended way. For example, children use their bodies (hands) as a printing tool to represent ideas and manipulate paper into different shapes and forms to build 3D superheroes. In this context, literacy is promoted as a creative endeavour (Woodhead, 2008). In contrast, in the primary school classroom children are taught about the features of text and how to properly handle literacy tools for the purpose of inscription. In this setting although literacy is less expressive; the development of motor skills is necessary to build children's literacy behaviours needed for formal writing instruction. These

skills were also important in the preschool classroom where Lyn foregrounded literacy in the development of perceptual-motor behaviours. Although Patricia did not explicitly describe these behaviours herself she embeds these abilities in the children's activities, such as art.

Laman et al (2012) suggests that learning about reading and writing occurs when children see how they are used in the real-life settings of the social practices of which they are part. This is true for both of these classrooms. The observations show that the teachers know that children need to understand the conventions of reading and writing. In these classrooms children use literacy to learn how texts and the English language works. Both teachers make use of shared-reading practices as meaningful contexts in which to teach the technical aspects of language (Prinsloo & Bloch, 1999). As the teachers model reading the children learn about aspects of directionality and laterality as they observe the word tracking of the teachers. As the children learn through the medium of English, they also become aware of how print is read from left to right and top to bottom. It is in these social and shared practices that children learn how words and texts work. In these classrooms children are encouraged to develop a metalanguage around literacy as they label the features of text such as a page and learn about elements of design and visual imagery (Reed, 2006). In these contexts, literacy goes beyond mastery of skills as the teachers view literacy as not learning only a set of skills; but as a social meaning making process.

The teachers' understandings reflect the social nature of literacy. Patricia views literacy as "getting to know the social norms" while Lyn asserts that "literacy is used in real-life activities". The observations reveal that both teachers promote children's active use of language in the classroom where children sing songs, narrate tales, enact stories and engage in discussions. The teachers also encourage children to explore books both individually in the reading corner and in shared discussion that allows them to experience literature in enjoyable ways. Lyn introduces children to a general vocabulary where they learn new words and discuss their meanings. Patricia extends the learning of vocabulary in her classroom as children work with texts at the word level gaining knowledge phoneme-grapheme relations (Armbuster et al, 2002). Children use books to enquire about things in their world and to extend their knowledge. Interestingly, in both classrooms children develop a metalanguage that helps them regulate their literacy behaviours as they emerge as functional users of literacy (Dixon, 2011). It appears as though the activities created in these classrooms are varied and developmentally appropriate where

children use text in multimodal and meaningful ways (Trawick-Smith, 2010). The orientation of teachers' understanding is socio-cultural, drawing on scholarship within the New Literacy Studies approach. In this approach literacy is thought of as social practice not simply a set of neutral skills; that is always embedded in socially constructed conceptions of knowledge (Street, 2003).

The one tension identified in the enactment of literacy practices in these classrooms was in the teachers approach. Lyn's approach is more implicit matching her view of literacy as being "part of everyday learning". In contrast although Patricia sees literacy as being "pervasive throughout the day" her literacy practice is reserved at specific times where instruction is explicit. Yet despite these differences all of the children in both classrooms are gaining a knowledge of print, the visual and a range of genres. These building blocks to reading (Armbuster eta al, 2002) are being established in both classrooms and provide children with a strong foundation for formal literacy instruction (Excell & Linington, 2011). It seems that neither approach is more or less beneficial in developing literacy. Theresa's views are evidence to this as she was unable to determine whether children from the preschool or primary school bring better literacy competencies into Grade 1.

While the concern about the increasing formalization of Grade R is valid (House, 2011; Woodhead, 2008) the reality is that in high functioning classrooms with well trained teachers the literacy practices are sound and the approaches cannot be reduced into a binary. With this being said, it is important to acknowledge that Patricia's more formal approach may not work best for all children who may be better suited to learn through movement and play. However, Lyn's approach is not entirely play-based either and in fact represents a hybrid classroom setting.

5.3 Limitations and Recommendations for further research

This research provided insight into teachers' literacy knowledge and their enactment of literacy in the Grade R classroom. While good literacy instruction does not take place only in the final year of the Foundation phase, strong understandings of what it means to work with emergent literacy in order to produce highly literate children is key.

One of the limitations encountered was the lack of time in which to collect data. A possibility for further research may be to conduct an ethnographic study of children's emerging literacy over a longer period of time. This would be useful to extend knowledge of children's preparation for formal schooling which is under-researched in the South African schooling context. It might also be worthwhile to extend this research and follow children's transition into Grade 1. In this way a deeper analysis could then be presented on the kinds of emerging knowledge of children in the Foundation Phase which is also less known. This research used a small sample and thus the findings cannot be generalized. For further research, it would be useful to include additional Grade R classrooms in preschools and primary schools for a deeper comparison. I chose to work with high-functioning schools to help determine good quality early childhood literacy practice. It would be worthwhile to examine practices in less resourced schools. Work of this kind might inform the need to establish literacy education programmes that partner with parents and the wider community in working to improve the literacy competencies of all our children in South Africa (UNICEF, 2012).

This research was necessary to help build awareness of the teaching and learning practices in early education as the foundation for successful living and lifelong learning (Gordon & Browne, 2008). This is particularly important in the Grade R year and its tenuous position in Foundation Phase and the education system as a whole. Although young children are thought to learn best through play there is tension with the emphasis to "prepare children for formal school" and "getting children learning earlier" (House, 2011). Examining the tensions between a formal and informal education approach and the affordances and limits of each could help establish higher quality early childhood programmes. Higher quality learning environments would encourage children to thrive and develop holistically. Expanding children's knowledge in developmentally appropriate ways would motivate them to become lifelong learners in ensuring they grow up as literate and well informed citizens for a better South Africa (DBE, 2012).

Examining the tensions between the pedagogies in the preschool and primary school would also build understanding of the kinds of transitions children are expected to make from Grade R into Grade one. This understanding could better prepare teachers and the family in helping children positively adjust and successfully learn in school. Understanding the transitions children experience as they move through this phase of schooling would allow teachers to support these

shifts in helping to make school readiness a more purposeful educational aim (House, 2011). This research is the best way in which to begin to theorize early childhood pedagogy, improve teaching and learning and strengthen the quality of education in its entirety.

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Please Note: The school website has been kept confidential to prevent the identity of the schools being revealed.

APPENDIX A: Interview schedule – Principal

1. For how long have you held the position of principal?

2. What kinds of events do you manage upon a daily basis?

3. When was the pre-compulsory Reception/Grade R year introduced into your school?

4. What kind of changes did you and your staff experience with the implementation of the Grade R year?

5. What do you understand by the term 'Reception/Grade R'?

6. What do you think the underlying purposes and aims of the Grade R year is? What has informed your thinking around this?

7. What advantages and disadvantages have you experienced with regard to this pre-compulsory school year?

8. How would you define the Grade R child?

9. Which aspects of the whole child do you think should be developed during this year? Why do you say this?

10. What kinds of learning experiences do you think children should be offered during this school year? Why?

11. What kinds of approaches, methods and strategies do you think the Grade R teacher should make use of? Why do you say this?

12. What level of qualification do you think a Grade R teacher needs to have? Why?

13. What kinds of changes do you think need to be made to this National school year to offer children higher quality education?

APPENDIX B: Interview schedule – Grade R Teachers

1. For how long have you been a Grade R teacher?

2. What do you think the underlying purposes of the Grade R year is? What has informed your thinking around this?

3. What do you understand by the term 'school readiness'? Do you think Grade R appropriately supports children's transition into Grade 1? Why do you say this?

4. What benefits and challenges have you experienced with the implementation of this pre-compulsory school year?

5. How do you think the Grade R year is viewed in the South African education system? Why do you say this?

6. How would you describe the Grade R child and the period of childhood?

7. What kinds of early learning experiences do you promote in the Grade R environment? What value do these have for children's overall learning and development?

8. What factors do you think constitute a high quality early learning environment?

9. What do you understand by the term 'literacy'?

10. How would you describe the Grade R child's stage of literacy development?

11. What kinds of literacy knowledge, skills and values do children bring into the classroom? What factors do you think informs these prior literacy experiences?

12. What prerequisite behaviours do you think children need to develop to formally learn how to read and write?

13. What kinds of literacy activities do you promote in your classroom? How do these fit into your daily programme?

14. What kinds of literacy knowledge and skills do you think children should take with them into Grade 1? Why?

15. How has the implementation of CAPS affected your teaching of literacy? Do you think CAPS offers children sufficient time and space in the day to do literacy? Why/Why not?

16. What kinds of materials and resources do you use to support your teaching of literacy?

APPENDIX C: Interview schedule – Grade 1 Teacher

1. For how long have you taught Grade 1?

2. What are your educational objectives for this school year?

3. What do you understand by the term 'literacy'?

4. What are the prerequisite literacy knowledge, skills, behaviours and values you expect children to bring into Grade 1?

5. Are children displaying these literacy competencies at a sufficient enough level to successfully cope with the literacy demands in Grade 1? Why do you say this?

6. Have you noticed a change in the quality of children's literacy competencies in Grade 1 over the years? If so, what have you noticed?

7. What kinds of similarities and differences in literacy competencies do children in Grade R in the preschool and primary school bring into Grade 1? What might account for this?

8. How do these groups of children fare in their ability to learn to listen, speak, read and write in Grade 1?

9. Do these groups of children present any significant successes or challenges in terms of overall literacy and language development? Please describe these briefly.

10. What content and activities make up your language and literacy programme? What factors have informed your programme?

11. What kinds of methods do you draw on to teach literacy? Why have you selected these?

12. How has the implementation of CAPS affected your teaching of literacy?

13. What kinds of successes and challenges have you experienced working with the Home Language CAPS document?

14. What kinds of educational changes do you think need to be made to improve the literacy rates of children in South Africa?

APPENDIX D: Observation Schedule

DAY: _____ TIME: _____

Nature of lesson/activity	**Lesson/Activity Objectives**	**Literacy Focus**
Content of lesson	**Teachers' pedagogical strategies/approach**	**Teacher's use of questioning**
Teachers instructions, commands, communication	**Teachers support materials**	**Language and Print environment**

APPENDIX E: Principal Information Letter

Wits School of Education

27 St. Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193, Private Bag3, Wits 2050, South Africa
Tel: +27 11 717-3007 ▪ Fax: +27 11 717-3009. Email: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za ▪ Website: www.wits.ac.za

Dear Principal,

My name is Kerri-Lee Schneider (student number 0309992D) and I am currently a student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am currently in my last year of study for a Masters Degree in Education. In order to complete my studies I need to do a research project in the fields of teaching and learning. The title of my research project is, *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms"*.

The reason why I have chosen your school is because it serves a multi-cultural community. Children come from diverse language and cultural backgrounds which would enrich the ways in which they acquire literacy. I am interested in how the school and teachers work together to support children's emergent literacy development. Your school has long been present to the inception of the Grade R year. Insight gained into the Grade R classroom is important as it is the primary site through which literacy is enacted.

I was wondering whether you would consent for you and your teachers to partake in one semi-structured interview of approximately 45 minutes at a time and place of your convenience. The interview would seek to gain insight into your conceptualization of Grade R and to shed light on the teaching and learning approaches adopted in the Grade R classroom. The contribution of your Grade R and/or Grade 1 teachers is integral to discover the meanings and activities they attribute to literacy. At any point during the interview you and the teachers may refuse to answer a question or to discontinue with the interview. I request your permission to have the interviews audio-recorded so that accurate transcripts can be attained. You and your teachers may view the transcripts to check if they accurately reflect your opinions. You may each choose to change them or not have them used in the writing up of this study or in any other academic presentation and/or publication that result from the study.

I would also like to seek your permission to conduct in-depth classroom observations (6 intervals of 30 minutes each) of the teachers' practice to gain insight into the interactions, communication and instructional strategies they enact around literacy. During each observation session field notes will be recorded to document and reflect on things seen and heard. I would like to video record two of the six incidents of observation. Incidents of exemplary practice would be selected to allow me to explore the specifics of quality literacy teaching in greater depth. Video recordings are useful to validate the data and provide a permanent record. Teachers' privacy will be protected as their faces will be blocked should the tapes be used for academic presentations and/or publication purposes. I will adopt the role of a participant observer to establish rapport and interact with the teachers and children, if and only when the need arises. However, I will not comment during their teaching nor disrupt any of their lessons nor children's activities in any way. Children are not major participants in this research. However, because I will be observing literacy practice in the classroom I do need to acknowledge them as participants. Parent consent would be attained as well.

I would also like to seek your permission to collect documentation that would include children's artwork and picture books; teachers lesson plans, curriculum documents and support materials. I am interested in the social processes these artefacts show and what they reveal about teachers' understanding of literacy.

I will consult with you throughout and after completion of the study to share results with you. The study is not an assessment of teaching and learning in your school. Rather, the study aims to explore teachers' understanding and enactment of literacy with the purpose to extend the body of disciplinary knowledge in the literacy domain in the early years. As a lecturer in ECD at the University, I have found that gaps exist between students' content knowledge and their implementation of literacy activities in the classroom. Gaining insight into how teachers practice literacy would help close these gaps in the pedagogical instruction of the teacher training programme I coordinate. The purpose of the study is in line with research that argues for a need to promote the articulation of thoughtful early childhood literacy practice.

All participation is entirely voluntary and participants will not be paid for their contributions to this study. Participants may withdraw their consent at any time during the study without any

penalty being held against them. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study and they will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way should they choose to participate. The name and identity of the school and of all participants will be kept confidential at all times and will remain anonymous in all academic writing of this study through the use of pseudonyms.

All research data will be kept under lock and key at the University. Only I and my supervisor will have access to the data throughout the duration of the study. After a period of 3-5 years the data will be destroyed.
Should you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me further via email Kerri.lee21@gmail.com or by phone on 076-033-0098. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Kerryn Dixon, via email kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za or by phone on (011) 717 3007.

I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient and thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,
Kerri-Lee Schneider

APPENDIX F: Principal Consent Forms

Please complete and return each of the following consent slips below:

Permission to conduct Research Study:

I _____ (principal of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) for Kerri-Lee Schneider to conduct the **voluntary** study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms"* in my school.

- I know that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage being held against me.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the findings of this study may be presented in the form of an academic presentation and/or publication.

- I know that all data collected will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: Kerri-Lee Schneider (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

.....

Permission to be interviewed:

I _____ (principal of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to be voluntarily interviewed by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that I do not have to answer all the questions and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage being held against me.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the findings of this study may be presented in the form of an academic presentation and/or publication.

- I know that the interview transcripts will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Permission to have interview audio-taped:

I _____ (principal of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to voluntarily have my interview audio-taped by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that I can stop the audio-taping of the interview at any time without any repercussion.

- I know that I can review and change the transcripts if need be to reflect my opinions accurately.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the tapes will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: *Kerri-Lee Schneider* (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

.....

APPENDIX G: Teacher Information Letter

Wits School of Education

27 St. Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193, Private Bag3, Wits 2050, South Africa

Tel: +27 11 717-3007 ▪ Fax: +27 11 717-3009. Email: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za ▪ Website: www.wits.ac.za

Dear Grade R Teacher,

My name is Kerri-Lee Schneider (student number 0309992D) and I am currently a student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am currently in my last year of study for a Masters Degree in Education. In order to complete my studies I need to do a research project in the fields of teaching and learning. The title of my research project is, *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

The reason why I have chosen your school is because it serves a multi-cultural community. Children in your classroom are from diverse language and cultural backgrounds which may affect how they acquire and how you teach literacy. Children in Grade R are at a formative time of development when their literacy knowledge and behaviours are emerging. I am interested in working with you to find out more about how you identify these emerging practices and the strategies you enact to support this development.

I was wondering whether you would consent to partake in a semi-structured interview of approximately 45 minutes at a time and place of your convenience. The interview would seek to gain insight into the knowledge s, meanings, activities and 'theories' you hold and attribute to literacy. To discover what teachers know about literacy is significant to extend the body of disciplinary knowledge in the literacy domain in the early years. At any point during the interview you may refuse to answer a question or to discontinue with the interview. I request your permission to audio-record the interviews so that accurate transcripts can be attained. You may view the transcripts to check if they accurately reflect your opinions. You may choose to

change them or not have them used in the report of the study or in any other academic presentation and/or publication that may result from the study.

I would also like to seek your permission to conduct in-depth observations (6 intervals of 30 minutes each) in your classroom. The data I gather will aim to discover the content, behaviours, interactions and instructional strategies you practice around literacy. During each observation session field notes will be recorded to document and reflect on things seen and heard. I would like to video record two of the six incidents of observation. Incidents of exemplary practice would be selected to allow me to explore the specifics of quality literacy teaching in greater depth. Video recordings are useful to validate the data and provide a permanent record. Your privacy will be protected as your face will be blocked should the tapes be used for academic presentations and/or publication purposes. I will adopt the role of a participant observer to establish rapport and a trusting relationship with you and to interact with you and the children, if and only when the need arises. However, I will not comment during your teaching or disrupt any of your lessons nor children's activities in any way. Children are not major participants in this research. However, because I will be observing literacy practice in your classrooms I do need to acknowledge them as participants.

I would also like to seek your consent to collect documentation that would include children's artwork and picture books and your lesson plans, curriculum documents and support materials. I am interested in the social processes these artefacts show and what they reveal about your understanding of literacy.

I will consult with you throughout and after completion of the study to share results with you. The study is not an assessment of teaching and learning in your school. Rather, the study aims to explore your understanding and enactment of literacy with the purpose to extend the body of disciplinary knowledge in the literacy domain in the early years. As a lecturer in ECD at the University, I have found that gaps exist between students' content knowledge and their implementation of literacy activities in the classroom. Gaining insight into how teachers practice literacy would help close these gaps in the pedagogical instruction of the teacher training programme I coordinate. The purpose of the study is in line with research that argues for a need to promote the articulation of thoughtful early childhood literacy practice.

All participation is entirely voluntary and you will not be paid for their contributions to this study. You may withdraw your consent at any time during the study without any penalty being held against you. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way should you choose to participate. The name and identity of you and the school will be kept confidential at all times and will remain anonymous in all academic writing of this study through the use of pseudonyms.

All research data will be kept under lock and key at the University. Only I and my supervisor will have access to the data. After a period of 3-5 years the data will be destroyed.

Should you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me further via email Kerri.lee21@gmail.com or by phone on 076-033-0098. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Kerryn Dixon, via email kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za or by phone on (011) 717 3007.

I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient and thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,
Kerri-Lee Schneider

APPENDIX H: Teacher Consent Forms

Please complete and return each of the following consent slips below:

Permission to be interviewed:

I _____ (teacher of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to be voluntarily interviewed by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that I do not have to answer all the questions and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage being held against me.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the findings of this study may be presented in the form of an academic presentation and/or publication.

- I know that the interview transcripts will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: Kerri-Lee Schneider (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

.....

Permission to have interview audio-taped:

I _____ (teacher of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to voluntarily have my interview audio-taped by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that I can stop the audio-taping of the interview at any time without any repercussion.

- I know that I can review and change the transcripts if need be to reflect my opinions accurately.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the tapes will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: *Kerri-Lee Schneider* (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

Permission to be observed:

I _____ (teacher of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to have my classroom practice voluntarily observed by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage being held against me.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the field notes from the observations may be presented in the form of an academic presentation and/or publication.

- I know that the field notes will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: Kerri-Lee Schneider (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

.....

Permission to have observation video-taped:

I _____ (teacher of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to have my classroom practice voluntarily observed and video-taped by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage being held against me.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that snippets from the video may be presented in the form of an academic presentation and/or publication although my face will be blocked if I so wish.

- I know that the tapes will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: *Kerri-Lee Schneider* (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

Permission to have documents collected:

I _____ (teacher of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to have my literacy support documents and my children's literacy activities voluntarily collected by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage being held against me.

- I know that copies of documents that include children's artwork and picture books and my lesson plans, curriculum documents and support materials will be used for this study and may be presented in the form of an academic presentation and/or publication.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the tapes will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: Kerri-Lee Schneider (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

.....

APPENDIX I: Teacher Information Letter

Wits School of Education

27 St. Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193, Private Bag3, Wits 2050, South Africa

Tel: +27 11 717-3007 ▪ Fax: +27 11 717-3009. Email: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za ▪ Website: www.wits.ac.za

Dear Grade 1 Teacher,

My name is Kerri-Lee Schneider (student number 0309992D) and I am currently a student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am currently in my last year of study for a Masters Degree in Education. In order to complete my studies I need to do a research project in the fields of teaching and learning. The title of my research project is, *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms"*.

The reason why I have chosen your school is multi purposeful. It serves a multi-cultural community and children come from diverse language and cultural backgrounds. This diversity would enrich the ways in which children develop their literacy knowledge, skills, behaviours and values. The school serves as a feeder school for children who enter formal schooling in Grade 1 both from the on-site Grade R and the Grade R in the nearby preschool. Your participation is integral to this research as your understanding and experience can help shed light onto the similarities and differences in literacy competencies children from the preschool and primary school bring into the Grade 1 classroom. This would allow me to pursue one of the aims of the research which is to compare the approaches of literacy teaching and learning in preschool and primary school sites.

I was wondering whether you would consent to partake in a semi-structured interview of approximately 45 minutes at a time and place of your convenience. The interview would seek to gain insight into your understanding of literacy as well as your understanding of children's different level of competencies in literacy and possible factors for these differences. To discover what you know about literacy is significant to extend the body of disciplinary knowledge in the

literacy domain in the early years. At any point during the interview you may refuse to answer a question or to discontinue with the interview. I request your permission to audio-record the interview so that accurate transcripts can be attained. Audio recordings are useful to validate the data and provide a permanent record. You may view the transcripts to check if they accurately reflect your opinions. You may choose to change them or not have them used in the report of the study or in any other academic presentation and/or publication that may result from the study.

I would also like to seek your consent to collect documentation that would include children's artwork and picture books and your lesson plans, curriculum documents and support materials. I am interested in the social processes these artefacts show and what they reveal about children's understanding of literacy and their level of competence in literacy activities.

I will consult with you throughout and after completion of the study to share results with you. The study is not an assessment of teaching and learning in your school. Rather, the study aims to explore teachers' understanding and enactment of literacy. As a lecturer in ECD at the University, I have found that gaps exist between students' content knowledge and their implementation of literacy activities in the classroom. Gaining insight into how teachers practice literacy would help close these gaps in the pedagogical instruction of the teacher training programme I coordinate. The purpose of the study is in line with research that argues for a need to promote the articulation of thoughtful early childhood literacy practice.

All participation is entirely voluntary and you will not be paid for your contribution to this study. You may withdraw your consent at any time during the study without any penalty being held against you. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way should you choose to participate. Your name and identity and that of the school will be kept confidential at all times and will remain anonymous in all academic writing of this study through the use of pseudonyms.

All research data will be kept under lock and key at the University. Only I and my supervisor will have access to the data. After a period of 3-5 years the data will be destroyed.

Should you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me further via email Kerri.lee21@gmail.com or by phone on 076-033-0098. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Kerryn Dixon, via email kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za or by phone on (011) 717 3007.

I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient and thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,

Kerri-Lee Schneider

APPENDIX J: Teacher Consent Forms

Please complete and return each of the following consent slips below:

Permission to be interviewed:

I _____ (teacher of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to be voluntarily interviewed by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that I do not have to answer all the questions and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage being held against me.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the findings of this study may be presented in the form of an academic presentation and/or publication.

- I know that the interview transcripts will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: *Kerri-Lee Schneider* (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

.....

Permission to have interview audio-taped:

I _____ (teacher of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to voluntarily have my interview audio-taped by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that I can stop the audio-taping of the interview at any time without any repercussion.

- I know that I can review and change the transcripts if need be to reflect my opinions accurately.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the tapes will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: *Kerri-Lee Schneider* (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

Permission to have documents collected:

I _____ (teacher of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to have my literacy support documents and my children's literacy activities voluntarily collected by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage being held against me.

- I know that copies of documents that include children's artwork and picture books and my lesson plans, curriculum documents and support materials will be used for this study and may be presented in the form of an academic presentation and/or publication.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the tapes will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: *Kerri-Lee Schneider* (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

.....

APPENDIX K: Parent Information Letter

Wits School of Education

27 St. Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193, Private Bag3, Wits 2050, South Africa

Tel: +27 11 717-3007 ▪ Fax: +27 11 717-3009. Email: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za ▪ Website: www.wits.ac.za

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Kerri-Lee Schneider (student number 0309992D) and I am currently a student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am currently in my last year of study for a Masters Degree in Education. In order to complete my studies I need to do a research project in the fields of teaching and learning. The title of my research project is, *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

The reason why I have chosen your child's/wards class is because it represents a rich multi-cultural community. Children are from diverse language and cultural backgrounds which may affect how they acquire literacy and how the teacher in turn teaches literacy. Grade R is a fundamental year of your child's/wards schooling as it is a primary site through which literacy learning is promoted. Your child/ward, in Grade R, is also at an optimal time of development. I am interested in working with the teacher to gain insight into how she understands literacy and the strategies she uses to support your child's/wards emerging literacy development.

I would like to invite your child/ward to be part of my research project. To collect data for the study requires that I conduct in-depth observations (6 intervals of 30 minutes each) of the teachers' classroom practice. The observations would focus on the teachers' use of content, behaviours, interactions and instructional strategies around literacy. During each observation session field notes will be recorded to document and reflect on things seen and heard. Your child/ward will **not** be the focus of the observation. However, because your child/ward will be in the classroom I need to rightfully acknowledge him/her as a participant. I would like to request your consent to be present in the classroom. I will adopt the role of a participant observer to

establish rapport and a trusting relationship with the teacher and children, and to interact with them if and only when the need arises. I will not comment during the teachers' lessons nor disrupt children's classrooms activities in any way. If your child/ward feels uncomfortable by my presence in any way, we can make arrangements for their seat to be changed or for me to stop observing the class.

I would also like to video record two of the six incidents of observation. Incidents of exemplary practice would be selected to allow me to explore the specifics of quality literacy teaching in greater depth to extend the body of disciplinary knowledge in the literacy domain in the early years. Video recordings are useful to validate the data and provide a permanent record. Your child's/wards face will be shadowed should he/her enter the video frame. I would like to further seek your permission to have possible snippets of the shadowed videos used in published and written data resulting from the study. If your child/ward feels uncomfortable by the presence of the video camera in any way, arrangements can be made for me to stop videoing the teacher.

In addition, I also request your permission to collect documentation of your child's/wards activities that may include his/her artwork, activity sheets and workbooks. I am interested in the kinds of literacy practices these artefacts show and what they reveal about the teachers understanding and enactment of literacy.

All of the information obtained for the purpose of research will in no way affect your child's/wards assessment in school. In addition, your decision about whether he/she participates will not affect his/her academic progress in any way. The study is not an assessment of your child's/wards learning in school. Rather, the study aims to explore teachers' understanding and enactment of literacy. As a lecturer in ECD at the University, I have found that gaps exist between students' content knowledge and their implementation of literacy activities in the classroom. Gaining insight into how teachers practice literacy would help close these gaps in the pedagogical instruction of the teacher training programme I coordinate. The purpose of the study is in line with research that argues for a need to promote thoughtful early childhood literacy practice.

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and your child/ward will not be paid for his/her contribution. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study and your child/ward will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way should you consent to his/her participation. You can be reassured that he/she can withdraw at any time during this project without any penalty. Your child's/wards name and identity will be kept confidential at all times and will remain anonymous in all academic writing of this study through the use of pseudonyms.

All research data will be kept under lock and key at the University. Only I and my supervisor will have access to the data. After a period of 3-5 years the data will be destroyed.

Should you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me further via email Kerri.lee21@gmail.com or by phone on 076-033-0098. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Kerryn Dixon, via email kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za or by phone on (011) 717 3007. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient and thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,

Kerri-Lee Schneider

APPENDIX L: Parent/Guardian Consent Forms

Please complete and return each of the following consent slips below:

Permission to be observed:

I _____ (parent/guardian of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to have my child/ward voluntarily be present in the classroom to be observed by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that my child/ward may withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage being held against him/her.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information and my child's/wards name and identity confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the field notes from the observations may be presented in the form of an academic presentation and/or publication.

- I know that the field notes will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: Kerri-Lee Schneider (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

.....

Permission to have observation video-taped:

I _____ (parent/guardian of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to have my child/ward present in the classroom while video-taping is voluntarily conducted by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that my child/ward may withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information and my child's/wards name and identity confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the snippets from the video may be presented in the form of an academic presentation and/or publication although my child's/wards face will be shadowed.

- I know that the tapes will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: *Kerri-Lee Schneider* (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

Permission to have documents collected:

I _____ (parent/guardian of) _____ give/do not give* my consent (*please delete as appropriate) to have my child's/wards literacy documentation voluntarily collected by Kerri-Lee Schneider for the study entitled *"A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms".*

- I know that my child/ward may withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage being held against him/her.

- I know that copies of documents that include my child's/wards artwork, , activity sheets and workbooks will be used for this study and may be presented in the form of an academic presentation and/or publication.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep all information and my child's/wards name and identity confidential in all academic writing through the use of pseudonyms.

- I know that the data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact person: Kerri-Lee Schneider (Email: Kerri.lee21@gmail.com/Mobile: 076-033-0098)

.....

APPENDIX M: Child Information Letter

Wits School of Education

27 St. Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193, Private Bag3, Wits 2050, South Africa

Tel: +27 11 717-3007 ▪ Fax: +27 11 717-3009. Email: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za ▪ Website: www.wits.ac.za



Hello,

My name is Kerri-Lee. I am so happy to meet you!

I am a teacher. I go to University which is like a school for grownups! I learn about all the fun, interesting and exciting things you do at school! Your teacher tells me you draw beautiful pictures, you play with special toys, you learn about words and have a bookshelf with scary, funny and colourful books! That is so cool! I love to read stories! Adventure stories are my best!

I would love to get to know all about the words, books and stories you talk about in your class. Your teacher says she can help me if I visit your class. Then I can see all the cool things you do! But you are a very important person too. You must feel safe and happy for me to visit. You are special and your words count a lot! I want to ask if it is okay with you to spend some time in your classroom. I will sit in your class and see what your teacher does to help you learn about words and things. I hear you are a very busy class! To help me remember all the exciting things I see I need to draw pictures and write words. You can tell me if you happy or unhappy to let me do this.



I also need to ask if it is okay with you to bring a video in your class while I visit. I am going to make a short video of your teacher. I need to remember all the things she says.



Because you in the class you might walk in front of the camera. If you do, I will block your face. You are very important and I have to keep you safe! You are also big now. I need your help to make this important decision! You must tell me if you happy or unhappy to let me bring the video in.

Wow! I have asked you so many things! You are great help! I have one last thing to ask you! I want to make copies of your beautiful work! I want to know if it is okay with you to do this. Your work will give me clever ideas about the kinds of words and stories you learn about! You can choose if I use your work or not.



You don't have to let me visit your class. If you let me and then decide you don't want to anymore this is okay too! You can say no or stop at anytime. Nothing will happen if you choose to stop. You will not get any presents if you let me watch your class, take the video or have your work. I can only give you a high five and sharp sharp! I will also not let anyone know your real name! I will give you a pretend name when I write about your work. This is like when you play pretend in the play corner! Strangers do not need to know your name or anything about you! I will keep your work safe! I will not keep it forever. I will keep it with my teacher for a little bit. After that I will keep it in a safe box!

Your mom or dad or the person who looks after you says I can visit your classroom. But you also have to choose! You need to colour in the faces on the page I give you. You must colour the face which makes you most happy.

You can ask me any questions or draw me a picture at anytime.If you want to ask me something in private, you can ask your mom, dad or carer to call me.



Thanks a lot for all your help!

Kerri-Lee



APPENDIX N: Child Consent Forms

I need your help ☺ Please colour in one face for each sentence. Show me how you feel. You can choose to have me in your class or not.

It is fine for you to visit my class.			
It is fine for you to watch my class.			
It is fine for you to video-tape in my class.			
It is fine for you to take my work.			

Things I know:

☻I can choose to be part of Kerri-Lee's project. I don't have to.



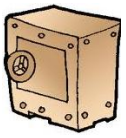
☻I can stop being a part of it any time I want. Nothing bad will happen if I want to leave the project.



☻Nobody will know my name. Kerri-Lee will use a pretend name for me. I must be kept safe.



☻Kerri-Lee will not keep my work forever. She and her teacher will look at it. She will keep it in a safe box.







APPENDIX O: HREC Ethics Approval Letter

Wits School of Education

7 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa
Tel: +27 11 717-3064 Fax: +27 11 717-3100 E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za Website: www.wits.ac.za

Student Number:
0309992D
Protocol Number:
2012ECE131

Date: 07-Aug-2012

Dear Kerri-Lee Schneider,

Application for Ethics Clearance: Master of Education

Thank you very much for your ethics application. The Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate has considered your application for ethics clearance for your proposal entitled:

A case study of teachers' understandings of literacy and its enactment in two Grade R classrooms

The committee recently met and I am pleased to inform you that clearance was granted. The committee was delighted about the ways in which you have taken care of and given consideration to the ethical dimensions of your research project. Congratulations to you and your supervisor!

Please use the above protocol number in all correspondence to the relevant research parties (schools, parents, learners etc.) and include it in your research report or project on the title page.

The Protocol Number above should be submitted to the Graduate Studies in Education Committee upon submission of your final research report.

All the best with your research project.

Yours sincerely,



Matsie Mabeta
Wits School of Education
011 717 3416
Cc Supervisor: Dr. K Dixon