

The Congruency between Home and School Literacy Practices in a South African Primary School.

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ABSTRACT

South Africa has undergone widespread changes in the educational system and previously racially segregated schools have been opened to all races since the early 1990's. The new multi-cultural composition of many suburban schools has raised the question of the extent of congruence between school literacy practices and those in households originating in different cultural contexts. Accordingly, this study examined the congruence between home and school literacy practices and values and its impact on scholastic achievement.

A broad literature survey was conducted which distinguished three streams of research and theory, namely the cognitive stream, the educational stream and the socio-cultural stream. The socio-cultural paradigm was adopted to examine the literacy practices of diverse cultural groups. Reference was also made to interactive information-processing models and schema theory.

An appropriate multi-cultural school was identified for observation of dominant socio-cultural values, specific school literacy practices, discourse patterns and expectations of parental involvement in the children's education. Ten children in two classes were selected for further study on the basis of geographical, racial, cultural and economic diversity, school achievement and parental interest in schooling. Children from both the suburbs and the townships were included, together with a mixed category comprising township families who had recently moved into the suburbs, the child of a domestic servant and a black child who lived with a white suburban family.

A number of themes were explored in the home context and related to school performance, namely socio-cultural identity and values, parental role and support in schooling, discourse patterns, literacy practices and availability of resources.

The main findings of the research were firstly that socio-cultural values provided a broad context for achievement, although the lack of value congruence affected only a few children. Secondly, middle-class family literacy practices were congruent with school literacy practices and the children of these families all performed well at school. However, certain students could perform scholastically in spite of a lack of congruence in literacy practices, provided they had parental support. Thirdly, children from a variety of socio-economic and cultural contexts who received direct curricular assistance with homework achieved average or above average results at school. However, the direct help which they received may only have short-term positive effects on school achievement because the children did not acquire the background schemas to enable generalization and integration. Finally, in middle-class households where a broad literate orientation was adopted, and where the parents provided extended, decontextualised support beyond the curriculum, more generalized changes in thinking were likely to occur, with these children more likely to deal effectively with new learning situations and incorporate new information.

In conclusion, it is argued that congruency needs to go beyond literacy practices and values to embrace broader school and home values. Suggestions are made for achieving greater congruency by effecting changes in practices and values in the classroom and the home.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university.

M. Mabasa
25/1/1998.

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PROBLEM STATEMENT - THE MEANING OF LITERACY

Print literacy remains central in school learning and for the participation in contemporary society, despite the fact that increasing quantities of sensory data are received through non-print media. The illiteracy problem in South Africa seems to be severe. A recent literature survey by Fuller, Pillay and Sirur (1995) revealed that 80% of black South Africans were unable to comprehend and read Standard 5 writing and 40% of whites could not comprehend Standard Seven level text. The national press and the authors stated that these findings suggest high levels of illiteracy in South Africa.

However, the measures of literacy which were used reflect a very narrow view of literacy, namely in terms of formal school achievement. Implicit in this view of literacy is that people are either literate or illiterate and there is only one form of literacy. Street (1984) has called this model of literacy the autonomous model. In this model literacy is viewed as is a single unified thing, a neutral technical skill. People who do not possess these skills or sets of skills are seen as deficient.

Street (1996) has contrasted this model with the ideological model. Theorists and researchers who are orientated towards this model, believe there is a multiplicity of literacy practices which cluster into coherent literacies. Literacy practices are related to specific cultural contexts and they are associated with relations of power and ideology. Literacy must be understood in the context and practice of people's everyday lives. Literacy is tied to a particular situation and literacy practices are particular to a specific community at a specific point in time.

Literacy practices are common patterns in using reading and writing in a particular situation. They are general cultural ways of using literacy. Literacy is a cultural activity reflecting a web of expectations, values and interactions. It is necessary to understand the purposes for which people use reading and writing, the nature of literacy interactions and the value placed on literacy. Viewed in this way, literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon, defined across different groups, including family groups, communities, schools and professional groups. The group or community defines what counts as literacy.

Teale (1986) who views literacy as the social practices of reading and writing, found that all low income Anglo-, African, and Mexican American families in a study he conducted were literate according to the more flexible view of literacy presented above. He concluded that there is not a lack of literacy in low income families but the difference lies in the way in which reading and writing is perceived and the purposes for which these activities are used. He found that 80% of reading and 90% of the writing that occurred in the families that he observed was not directed toward the act of learning, but rather at the organisation of everyday life. Literacy is embedded in people's everyday lives, whether they regularly read or do much writing (Barton 1994).

Central to this view of literacy is that there are multiple literacies. As well as different literacy practices associated with different cultural groups, different literacies are associated with different professions and different literacies arise in different domains of life- home, work, school and church. However not all literacies have equal status. Dominant literacies originate in dominant institutions of society and these institutions define the most highly valued forms of literacy.

Home literacy practices are variable but practices in specific work places and schools are homogenous. The literacy practised in educational institutions is the form of literacy described by Gee (in Devine 1994) as "essay-text". This is one cultural way of reading and writing which is associated with mainstream middle-class and upper middle-class groups.

South Africa is culturally and linguistically diverse and this diversity is reflected in the suburban State Schools. Thus the home literacy practices of the children of the children who attend these schools can be expected to be very diversified. On the other hand, the classroom literacy demands and norms are homogeneous in these particular South African schools. Curricula and teaching methods are highly prescribed and standardized "essay-text" literacy is subscribed to. For the school child much of the literacy encountered in the school classroom may be quite unlike that in the home. Community and home literacy practices are very variable and many home practices don't prepare the child for school literacy practices. There is frequently a lack of congruency between home and school practices. Heath (1983) has shown that when there is a lack of congruency children do not achieve at school.

In this study the congruency between home and school practices and the impact that these practices have on school achievement will be examined in the context of a South African State School. Given this background a theoretical framework needs to be adopted which makes it possible to assess this congruency. Evaluation of congruency must be based on current understanding of the reading and writing processes. Some of the more influential paradigms will be reviewed so that their effectiveness for this purpose can be evaluated in a South African context and to highlight major questions which this study will attempt to address.

Chapter 1

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO LITERACY

1.1 Literacy Paradigms and Research Approaches

Ferdman and Weber (1994) have divided the large volume of research generated by literacy into three distinct streams. The three research orientations are underpinned by related theoretical positions. The streams distinguished by these researchers are cognitive, educational and social. This categorization has the advantage of being comprehensive and serves as a useful framework to provide a broad examination of literacy research and theory.

1.1.1 The Cognitive Stream

The mentalistic approaches draw on and contribute to cognitive psychology. The focus is on the psychology of reading as a visual and linguistic process. The reader's skills and strategies in finding the meaning of the text is also examined in some of this research. Reading is regarded as a set of developing skills that are shaped by individual cognitive strengths and limitations as well as by the reader's constructive strategies. The individual learner is the unit of analysis and the environment, culture and society is only relevant in so far as they influence individual features, cognitive structures and processes.

Most of the approaches in this category have developed and attempted to test and verify information processing models of reading. The early models depicted reading as a linear process in which information flows in a series of discrete stages (Stanovich, 1980). In these bottom-up models theorists conceptualized the process as moving from incoming textual data to higher level encodings. It was argued that the meaning of the text is built up from the smallest to largest units of text. Given the focus on encoding and decoding, the role of the reader's background knowledge and the content of the text was not emphasized.

The **psycholinguistic** perspective as proposed by Goodman (1967, 1982, 1985) and Smith, (1971) was/is an influential paradigm that stimulated a great deal of research. The emphasis was on the significance of constructing meaning during the reading

process. Goodman (1967) describes reading as a 'psycholinguistic guessing game' in which the reader "reconstructs the message encoded by the writer as a graphic display" (Goodman, 1967). The reader relies on existing semantic and syntactic knowledge structures, so that reliance on text is minimized. The efficient reader does not use all the textual cues. The better the reader is able to make predictions, the less confirming via the text is necessary.

The psycholinguistic perspective has served to emphasize the role of language in reading. The extensive research and debate generated by this paradigm has resulted in a wide acceptance of a positive relationship between reading and language proficiency. Proficiency in the language that a child is learning to read in is regarded as a fundamental component for reading acquisition (Carroll, 1985; Clay 1991). Furthermore development of efficiency in reading skills, when the child uses reading to acquire other knowledge, is directly dependant on overall language proficiency (Clarke & Silberstein, 1987).

During the eighties and nineties **schema theory** and **interactive information processing models** have dominated cognitive psychological approaches to literacy.

Schema theory provides a perspective in the structure of knowledge as it is represented in memory as well as explaining learning. New information, new concepts, new ideas can have meaning only when they can be related to something the individual already knows. More specifically schema theory emphasizes the central role of the individual's experience and background knowledge in reading. The application the reader's knowledge to text assertions is the basis for comprehending the text. Comprehension is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text (Anderson, 1985).

Schemas are a person's organized knowledge of the world, a property of mind. Schemas are arranged hierarchically, from most general at the top to most specific at the bottom. The top level schemas are sufficiently general to include all the important aspects of a class of knowledge. In schema theory a reader understands textual input if he has a schema which gives a good account of the textual message. All levels of text, even very simple literal texts require the reader to have the appropriate schemas. The process of interpretation is guided by the principle that every input is mapped against some existing schema and that all aspects of that schema must be compatible

with the input information.

These principles result in two basic modes of information processing, bottom-up and top-down processing (Adams & Collins, 1985). Bottom-up processing is evoked by the incoming data; the features of the data enter the system through the best fitting bottom-level schemas. As these bottom level schemas converge into more general higher level schemas, these too become activated. The process moves upwards through the hierarchy, becoming increasingly more general. Top-down processing works in the opposite direction where the reader searches for more specific information to clarify more general schemas. Bottom-up processing is therefore called data driven while top-down processing is conceptually driven.

Top-down and bottom-up processing is interactive (Swaffar, Arens & Byrnes 1991; Anderson, 1985) and should occur simultaneously rather than sequentially (Samuals & Kamil, 1988). Carrell and Eisterhold (1987) discuss the importance of this interaction in comprehending text. The data that are needed to instantiate, or fill out the schemas become available through bottom-up processing. Top-down processing facilitates their assimilation if they are anticipated by or consistent with the reader's conceptual expectations. It is the reader's task to construct meaning and to this end he uses his background knowledge and text structure. The key to successful interactive processing seems to be what Carrell (1988) calls "bidirectional processing" - a blend of text-based (bottom-up) and knowledge-based (top-down) processing.

The most significant advantage of schema theory and interactive models is that it assumes that meaning is derived from several knowledge sources (Stanovich, 1980). It takes into account how the reader's background knowledge is used to construct meaning from text. However the concern is not with how background factors are *constructed*. Nor are the social factors which contribute fundamentally to the development of background factors the focus of interest and investigation within this paradigm. Social and cultural factors are variables which impact on reading. The primary concern is to explain the reading process. Schema theory falls within the individual skills paradigm.

The individual skills paradigm overlooks the ways in which reading, writing and communication activities are systematically fitted to the characteristics of the social situation in which such activities occur (Reder 1994). Other paradigms must, therefore,

be examined.

1.1.2 The Educational Stream

In this stream the focus is on the teaching, understanding and assessment of literacy as an educational objective in schools. One question which is of central importance in this stream is the extent to which reading and writing should be taught as independent skills through direct instruction or fostered through purposeful and authentic reading and writing from the outset. Goodman (1985), Smith (1971), Weaver (1990) and Adams (1990) are some of the advocates of this stream of thought.

One view of literacy which has been at the root of much educational practice has been that of treating it as a number of skills or set of skills. This has been very powerful in the design of reading programs at all levels of education. The act of reading is broken down into a set of skills or secondary skills. These skills are ordered into a set of stages starting with pre-reading skills and then taught in a particular order, each skill building upon the previous. Opposed to this is whole language instruction where the focus is on the child's quest for meaning in text. The teacher's task in this model is to facilitate learning by providing purposeful, relevant learning experiences.

The psycholinguistic paradigm discussed in section 1.1.1 often provide the theoretical underpinnings when research around this question is conducted. The level of analysis is often at the individual level although the school and instructional approaches in the classroom could also be the unit of analysis. In this approach socio-cultural practices are important to the extent that they help improve educational practices. It does not explicitly consider the role of culture in literacy acquisition.

1.1.3 The Sociocultural stream

From this perspective reading and writing are viewed as practices occurring in a social context, guided by intention and loaded by values. This approach recognizes different routes to becoming literate. For many researchers who operate from this perspective constructivism is the fundamental theoretical paradigm and they often cite Vygotsky (Barton, 1994).

Vygotsky places culture at the centre of the emergence of a qualitatively new thought processes. The development of human thought is first experienced in communication with other human-beings. During the course of development this is internalized.

"Any function in children's development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category and then within the individual child as an intrapsychological category" (Vygotsky, 1978 p 57).

The psychological tools, signs and sign systems, which have developed in the course of the historical development of a society are the means by which the transformation from elementary to higher mental processes takes place. Higher mental processes are distinctly human ways of thinking such as problem-solving, abstract thinking and planning. Psychological tools include language, maps, writing systems, algebraic symbols and diagrams. Since these psychological tools are sociocultural products, the development of higher order thought processes are heavily influenced by the sociocultural means that mediate them.

Vygotsky places mediation at the centre of the development of this mode of thinking. Cognitive development depends on the social interaction between the child and his teacher or peers who function as teachers. In this regard Vygotsky (1962) distinguishes between spontaneous and nonspontaneous or scientific concepts. Spontaneous concepts are defined in terms of perceptual, functional or contextual learning. Scientific concepts "implies a certain position in relation to other concepts" (Vygotsky, 1962 p 93). They are organized into a set of systematic, organized relations. They are acquired when a mediator deliberately imparts knowledge to the child. They develop as a result of classroom instruction. On the other hand, spontaneous concepts are formed out of personal, everyday experience. When the child is taught systematic knowledge he learns about things he cannot see or touch and hence develops abstract thought.

The child becomes conscious of spontaneous concepts relatively late. The ability to define them in words, to operate with them at will appears long after he/she has acquired the concepts. The development of scientific concepts, usually begins with their verbal definition and is only used in non-spontaneous operations later on in the child's development. In the ideal case scientific concepts eventually acquire concrete meanings for the child and spontaneous concepts in time will become rational and accessible to his or her conscious volitional verbal strategies. Though spontaneous concepts develop in reverse directions, the two processes are closely connected. The development of a spontaneous concept must have reached a certain level for the child

to be able to absorb a related scientific concept.

Vygotsky (in Tulviste, 1991) generated two hypotheses concerning the factors that transform thinking in school. The first factor, which is discussed extensively in Vygotsky's work, is the transforming effect of becoming literate. The second factor is presented by implication. He connects changes in the structure of thinking with the specific content of what is taught.

The first factor is becoming literate which is part of the general hypothesis that higher mental processes develop from mediated sign systems. According to this hypothesis, written language is more removed from reality than spoken language. It represents a word that represents an object and for this reason written language is more abstract than spoken language. Research conducted by Vygotsky appeared to support this view.

In the early 1930's Vygotsky and Luria (Luria, 1979) undertook field research in Uzbekistan and Khirgizia in Central Asia. These areas were undergoing rapid socio-economic and cultural change as a result of collectivisation. The subjects were presented with categorization tasks that could be solved either in a functional-graphic way, or in an abstract way. They could solve deductive reasoning problems by using what they knew of the world or by using the information given in the problems which went beyond their experience and deduce the answer. Luria observed that traditional, illiterate, non-technological people responded to tasks in ways that were systematically different from people who had been involved in collective agriculture and/or schooling. Traditional people solved problems and categorized stimuli on the basis of purely concrete and situational thinking. They found that graphical-functional thinking was replaced by at least the rudiments of theoretical thinking in people who had been exposed to some schooling. Thinking became more abstract and free from immediate experience.

Accordingly Vygotsky and Luria (Luria, 1979) proposed that major differences exist between literate and non-literate subjects in the uses of abstract reasoning processes. However in the Vygotsky/Luria study it was unclear whether the results were caused by literacy, by schooling or even the new social institutions of the Russian Revolution to which these subjects were exposed. It is difficult to separate the effects of schooling and literacy since the two go together. A student is involved in learning a set of

complex role relationships, general cognitive techniques, ways of approaching problems, different genres of talk and interaction (Wertsch, 1985).

A series of studies conducted in the late sixties and seventies by Cole and his associates served to separate the confounding effects of schooling and literacy. They undertook replications of the experimental procedures followed by Vygotsky and Luria amongst the Vai in Liberia. They included studies of syllogistic reasoning and classification modelled on Luria and Vygotsky's work, along with a large variety of studies on memory, classification and reasoning used in study of adult cognitive processes in the United States (Scribner and Cole 1981, Cole 1988).

Scribner and Cole (1981) found that among the Vai, literacy and schooling are not always contiguous. They found that three different literacies operated amongst the Vai. These were English literacy, acquired at school and used in government and education, Arabic literacy, which was used for religious ends and there was also an indigenous Vai script used for keeping records and for letters. Each literacy was used in a particular context, demonstrating the importance of the situational use of literacy.

They replicated Luria's observations on syllogistic reasoning and classification to a remarkable degree. However these changes in thinking were only associated with the school-linked literacy. Their results indicated that literacy in itself did not produce changes in thinking. Only school-based literacy was associated with changes in thinking.

Furthermore they found that seemingly minor variations in content or procedures in many cognitive tasks could lead to substantial qualitative and quantitative differences in performance. Superior performance of educated people depended strongly on particular content and procedures. This is in accordance with Vygotsky's (In Tulviste, 1991) second hypothesis about the origin of scientific concepts. Thinking changes in the course of schooling because school children master specific knowledge and methods of solving problems.

Thus the claims for substantial and universal skills and global changes in thinking resulting from literacy in itself was brought into question. Rather, it seems that specific procedures and knowledge that is imparted during formal schooling results in changes in cognition. Formal schooling involves a new kind of institutionalized activity

in which qualitatively new kind of activity, "educational activity" develops. It may well be the case that specialized cognitive structures arise in connection with this form of activity, as Vygotsky and Luria suggest.

It is misleading to imagine that the changes coincident with formal schooling and modern industrial labour have a uniform impact on all life contexts. The very distinctiveness of school contexts is a major reason for the lack of transfer of knowledge between school and other settings. Cole (1988) argues that classroom instruction is so specialized that these methods do not generalize to after-school activity which presumably bears a close relationship to schooling. Insofar as schooling and modern systems of labour create qualitatively distinctive contexts within which qualitatively distinctive forms of activity occur, the associated functional cognitive systems require specialized skills for their mastery.

Thus several assumptions were challenged by these findings. The first of these is that there is only one literacy, namely that practised at schools. Rather Scribner and Cole's findings show that there are a multiplicity of literacies which are used in specific contexts. The second widely-held assumption that was disputed was that literacy in itself causes global changes in thinking. Instead specific practices which the child experiences during schooling cause fairly specific changes in thinking. The question which arises is whether and which home practices enable the child to cope with the specific specialized skills required at school.

This question was addressed by Heath. Heath (1983) described how children in three different communities in the Piedmont Carolinas in the United States acquired literacy in the process of becoming socialized into the norms and values of the community. She called the communities Maintown, Roadville and Trackton. Maintown is a black and white middle class community, Roadville a white, working class community and Trackton a black working class community. She found that divergent orientations to literacy and learning introduce children to different ways of knowing that include the incorporation of literacy in culturally specific ways. Some of these are closer to the ways of schooling than others. She found that only mainstream, middle class families socialized their children into the discourse patterns and literacy practices which prepare them for essay-text literacy at school. Only these children achieved long term success at school.

1.1.4 Implications for this Study

In this study the main theoretical orientation will be the sociocultural paradigm. It will be shown that this paradigm is most appropriate in attempting to examine how the literacy practices of diverse cultural groups which are represented in South African Schools influence the acquisition and development of knowledge, skills and values associated with literacy and how they affect school achievement in general. One dimension of this is the technology of reading and writing. Since schema theory and the interactive information processing models provide a comprehensive understanding of the skills involved in reading, occasional reference will be made to them.

The sociocultural perspective has emphasized the importance of the child's social world in the development of literacy. The home is the first agent of socialization thus the focus of this research will be on home literacy practices and their influence on school achievement.

A great deal of research has examined the relationship of home and community factors on literacy development. Some research has focused on how broad measures of family circumstance affect literacy development. Studies which have tried to determine the effects of family environmental factors, such as socioeconomic status (SES), occupational levels, educational levels and race, on literacy have produced conflicting findings. For example some researchers have found a positive relationship between SES and various measures of reading achievement. Thorndike (in Spiegel, 1994) collected data from 13 nations. He found positive relationships between SES and measures of reading achievement. Walberg and Tsai (in Spiegel, 1994) looked at National Assessment of Educational Progress data for 13-year olds in USA and concluded that there was a positive relationship between SES and reading achievement. On the other hand Dunn (in Spiegel, 1994) did not find a relationship between SES and overall reading achievement. Wigfield and Asher (in Taylor, 1995) also found no relationship between occupational and educational level and reading achievement.

When literacy activity is compared in various racial or ethnic groups, similar contradictory findings emerge. For example Marjoribanks (1979) found that academic achievement (including word comprehension and word knowledge) varied widely for children from different ethnic groups. Similarly Fuller, Pillay and Sirur (1995) found that the ability of different South African racial groups to comprehend and read text varied

greatly.

Spiegel (1994) argues that these contradictory results call into question the utility of simply examining these broad measures such as race and socio-economic status with reading achievement. They only supply an index of presumed differences in home environment. Accordingly Spiegel (1994) states it's not what parents are or what they have that is significant in the reading process, but rather what they do in their homes that has the most effect on their children's literacy development. This opinion is shared by Kazemek (1995) who believes that literary educators should resist abstractions and generalizations. They should focus on the particular, intricate relationships that exist in families.

This reflects the view of ethnographers of literacy such as Heath (1983), Taylor (1983, 1986), Teale (1986) and Wells (1986) and other workers who have examined the processes of literacy. These workers have identified home literacy practices factors which play a significant role in the development of literacy. These factors will be examined and the congruency between these factors and school literacy practices will be examined.

1.2 Congruency Between Home and School

1.2.1 School and Home Literacy Practices

The acquisition of literacy is a social and cultural process. The literacy skills, values and beliefs that the child acquires through community and family are profound and pervasive. The home and community environments are very important in shaping literacy. The literacies practised in homes and communities are variable, whereas the literacy demands at school are fairly invariable and inflexible. School-based forms of literacy are only one form of literacy. There is schooled literacy and this has become the accepted literacy, to some extent marginalizing other literacies (Street, 1996). As an institution school has distinct ways of doing things and, more specifically, a set of practices around language use and around literacy. School consumes a large part of children's lives and forms a significant reference point for their values and attitudes. The impact of home and community literacy practices cannot be viewed in isolation from school, the most important context in which formal literacy is acquired and practised.

As part of their formal schooling, children encounter the preferences of the educational system, the school and teachers regarding which behaviours to emphasize. Other messages are conveyed through family and peers. They have emergent theories about what language is, about what literacy is and about how to learn (Barton, 1994). The literature suggests that when community and school practices are congruent, as they are in middle-class communities, children's progress in literacy acquisition is facilitated. When there is a lack of congruency school achievement is impeded (Erickson, 1984; Ferdman, 1990).

The emphasis on congruency is in line with the rejection of a deficit model. Some theorists, for example Auerbach (1989), view schools as institutions which set up non-elite children for failure by defining learning tasks to exclude them. The home, on the other hand, has been regarded as not able to provide the necessary background to foster learning. Erickson (1984) believes that the point is not to view the school as a victimizer of the low achieving child, nor should the home literacy practices be viewed as inadequate. The researcher should look at what is happening in the school and how it is culturally congruent with home literacy practices.

An important question which arises out of this viewpoint is what dimensions of school practice must be examined in order to determine congruency? Literacy is a central

function of the school but there are other matters which are part of the school's agenda. Erickson (1984) suggests that social sorting, the maintenance of high levels of literacy as items of cultural capital, child care for working parents and keeping young people of the labour market are equally important roles of the school's activities. This perspective has implications for how the congruency between home and school is examined. One cannot focus only on the processes which are overtly involved in literacy such as reading and writing instructional practices and the explicit curriculum of school matter. It is also necessary to look at the broader social milieu, the values and beliefs of the participants and the unstated agenda of the school.

Assessment of congruency will, therefore, take a wider view. Not only will formal school literacy practices be considered, but also the broader social environment in which these practises are enacted.

1.2.2 Identity and Literacy

Street (1984) argues that literacy practices are tied up with cultural identity and personhood. Notions of personhood are tied up with values, meaning and judgements of the community as to what constitutes "moral" and correct behaviour. What it is to be moral and human in cultural contexts is frequently signified by the kind of literacy practices in which people are engaged. Whichever forms of reading and writing we learn are associated with certain social identities, expectations about behaviour and role models. The meaning and consequences of becoming literate are intertwined with one's membership to an ethnocultural group (Ferdman 1990).

Literacy practices reflect a particular reality or world view and are a strong expression of personal and cultural identity. Thus if the child is placed in a situation where he/she has to engage in practices which may be incongruent with those encountered in the community, he/she may experience this as an identity crisis. As well as experiencing difficulty with the cognitive demands of the foreign task, the sense of self may be threatened. Scollon and Scollon (1981) provide a detailed study of the discourse practices and world view of the Athabaskans in Alaska and Anglo-American and Anglo-Canadian society which illustrate this point. Literacy in European-based education is essay-text literacy, a "reality set" associated with modern consciousness. This reality set is consonant with particular discourse patterns that one finds in Anglo-American and Anglo-Canadian society. The discourse patterns of the Athabaskans is not congruent with this reality set. For example one Athabaskan pattern of interaction is

that people in subordinate positions do not "show off". In mainstream American society children are supposed to display their abilities. The production of an essay constitutes a major display and for Athbaskan children this represents a crisis of ethnic identity. It constitutes a breach of the values and ways of being that forms part of the group's identity.

1.2.2.1 *Ubuntu* -Individualism versus Communalism

The question which arises is which aspects of personhood or cultural identity could conflict with the school system and impact on school achievement? In the South African context it is commonly accepted that *ubuntu* or humanism is the common ideal value amongst the black population (Koopman, 1994). This value promotes the well-being of the group rather than individual development. Kindness and sharing are important aspects of this concept.

Thus in black communities communalism rather than individualism is an important ethic. In traditional African communities most social activities are cooperative. This collective activity is demonstrated in work parties. For example the community works together to clear one person's field. Koopman (1994) believes that the same ethos is to be found in the black urban communities. During five years of observation in a business context he found that group cooperation and shared goals remained an important value amongst black employees. He contrasts this with individualism and competitiveness in Western cultures. He argues that low levels of productivity are a result of a mismatch between the competitive structure of most companies and the worker's communalistic ethos.

If this notion were to be extended to learning it is clear that most black children would feel uncomfortable in schools which are based on individual excellence and competition. If non-congruency between the ethos of the workplace and that of the workers results in decreased performance, the same process could occur if there were a mismatch in the school ethos and that of the learner in this regard. Decreased performance would be reflected in poor results on achievement tests. The norm of independent work is strongly advocated in South African schools. Children sit in individual desks, are not permitted to talk to their peers while they work, are rarely given group tasks and are assessed individually. Curriculum 2005, which will be discussed later, will however attempt to change classroom practices in this regard. This value is encouraged and reinforced in white, middle-class homes.

The value of *ubuntu* may also have a direct impact on reading practices. A distinction has been made in the literature between private and public reading. Barton (1994) has described how storybook reading starts off as a shared experience and gradually becomes a private experience in a middle-class family. In the early stages of storybook reading the parent chooses the book and completely structures the interaction by drawing attention to certain aspects of the book. The adult mediates the child's behaviour. Children gradually take over, developing their own practices. They choose their own book and start initiating interactions by asking questions and commenting on the text. In the next stage they start browsing through books on their own. Gradually the interactions become internalized and reading becomes a private, solitary experience. Thus in a middle-class Western context, reading increasingly becomes a solitary, private activity. The intermental becomes the intramental.

This development has been contrasted in other contexts. For example Heath (1983) found that in Roadville children are expected to answer questions and read books cooperatively. In Trackton the evening newspaper, circulars and letters are read communally and the meaning jointly negotiated. Fingeret (1983) provides an example which is more directly relevant to literacy and *ubuntu*. In the community she observed, people who were able to read did so for the whole community. In return the people who could not read offered the skills which they possessed.

1.2.2.2 Communication patterns and identity

Cultural identity is developed through aspects of self which are shared by members of a cultural group. This sharing develops through communication. The cultural form of communication apart from the content of what is spoken forms part of a group's identity. The tone, the rituals, the metaphors which are used as well as factors like conversational turn-taking are shared by a group and serve to define a group (per comm J.K McNamara). When these factors are distinguishable they form part of the group's identity.

Erickson (1984) argues that when there is no congruency between the discourse patterns at home and school the child does not learn the skills demanded at school, but more importantly it effects the relationship between the child and the school. The relationship between the child, teacher and school is central in the learning process. The teacher is most directly involved in this relationship and so deserves special note. Erickson (1983) cites instances where children respond and achieve best when they are

taught by members of their own cultural group. Members of the same group share the same patterns of communication and this affirms their identity.

One of the issues which may affect the relationship between the child and teacher and which is a reflection of the cultural group of the child is conversational turn-taking. Cultural differences in conversational turn-taking can also be a source of misperception. Gomes (1979 in Erickson, 1984) reported the case of a kindergarten teacher misdiagnosing a Cape Verdean child as emotionally disturbed, partly because he continually interrupted her and the other children. However the child was only responding in the way which was normative in his home. The teacher's assessment was based on a misperception of the meaning of the child's actions. Although the teacher's response was somewhat extreme, children could very easily be regarded as impolite and poorly disciplined if the patterns of turn-taking which the teacher regards as acceptable, are not congruent with that which the child has learnt at home.

The positive effect on school achievement when there is congruency between the child's home and school experience concerning conversational turn-taking has been noted by Au and Mason (1981, in Erickson, 1984). They report a study involving Hawaiian children. Working class Hawaiians discuss in small groups and simultaneous speech is not seen as impolite, but as comfortable engagement and as evidence of interests by others. These researchers found that when children could respond in a similar way during story reading, they learnt more than they did when lessons were conducted in a one speaker at a time pattern.

In most countries one finds that minority groups are not taught by their own cultural group. The apartheid policies in South Africa, which are reflected in educational policies and practices, have resulted in the unusual situation where majority black children are taught by minority group white teachers in many schools. To explain how this circumstance arose, it is necessary to examine some aspects of the history of education in South Africa.

In the past, education for different population groups was conducted in different education departments. Children were taught exclusively by their own cultural group. In 1990 attempts were made to desegregate formerly white, indian and coloured schools. The move was intended to take the strain off congested township schools. The parent body of the school elected a model of school from several options. Most

parents opted for the model C option (Chisholm & Kgobe, 1993). Under this option governing bodies were granted extensive powers over admission policies and could limit access to black children on the basis of language competency tests and through high school fees. At the beginning of 1995, however discriminatory admission policies and the right to refuse a child admission on the basis of an inability to pay school fees was prohibited. This resulted in a substantial increase in the numbers of black children entering desegregated schools (Chisholm, 1995).

Thus many South African schools are no longer monocultural institutions and many children are now taught by a teacher belonging to a different cultural group from their own. The teachers may not be sensitive to the norms and values of other cultural groups. In this case the expectations and patterns of interaction are not congruent for many children in the class.

1.2.3 Parental Support and Involvement in the School

The significance of parental support and involvement in school and its positive effect on school achievement in general, and literacy in particular, is well supported by research. Wells (1986) found, for example, that other than storybook reading, the amount of help that parents gave with schoolwork and the model they provided of the value of literacy in their own lives were the most significant factors contributing to school success.

Heath (1983) found that Maintown parents support the school ideologically, in that they reinforce school values and the behaviour demanded at school. Furthermore they are frequently involved in the school. Roadville parents prepare their children for school, but once children actually start school, they are observers rather than participants. The domain of school and home is separate. The high degree of literacy success in Israel and Japan can be attributed to the interest shown by Israeli (Feitelson) and Japanese (Sakamoto) parents in their children's schooling (Feitelson, 1973; Sakamoto, 1976 in Spiegel, 1994). Ingham (in Spiegel 1994) reported that none of the parents of infrequent readers talked to their children about their schooling. Other researchers, (Pyzkowski; Sticht & McDonald; Frediericks & Rasinski, in Taylor, 1995) have found that a lack of parental involvement in school is associated with poor reading achievement.

Chall and Snow, (in Auerbach, 1989) provide one explanation for these effects. If

parents are involved in the school they are able to play an advocacy role. In this role they can ensure that their children's cultural identity is protected and they can positively influence the teachers' perceptions of their children. In addition it is reasonable to assume that if parents support the school, children will have a more positive attitude towards their schooling.

A number of explanations as to why minority group parents do not get involved in the school have been provided in the literature. Auerbach (1989) argues that minority groups feel isolated from the power structures in schools. They do not join parent teacher associations and their interests are not represented in the schools. Furthermore participation in school activities may be a challenging task for low income, minority parents. Work schedules, health problems and fears for safety may inhibit participation in these parents. In a governing body survey conducted at the school in 1996 it was found that 76% of the parents didn't attend meeting because of fears of travelling at night. Many families also live far from the school and 43% of the parents gave transport problems as one of the reasons for non-attendance at meetings. Parents may also be reluctant to intervene on behalf of their children because of perceived power differentials. Olive (in Auerbach, 1989) argues that cultural differences may be seen as impediments to participation. Some parents, for example, come from cultures that view education as the exclusive domain of schools, or deference to authority may be a cultural norm.

Teachers at formerly white schools frequently complain about the lack of parental involvement amongst black children at the school. The question which arises is, which of these factors explains the lack of involvement? There is no research which answers this question, but popular wisdom has it that black parents tend to see formal education as the responsibility of the school. It is argued that this is a legacy of the apartheid era, which created a culture of dependency. However it may be that both the fact of non-involvement and the explanations provided for it are stereotypes and this will therefore be one of the areas of inquiry in this research.

The fact that parental support and involvement in the school has been shown to have a positive effect on schooling and that black parents seemingly view formal education as the exclusive responsibility of the school can be a source of conflict in desegregated schools. In these schools the expectation is that parents assist their children with homework and provide support in the school community by, for example assisting with

transport for outings, serving in the tuckshop or catering for school functions. The difference in expectations in this regard can be a source of conflict. Parents may believe that teachers are not adequately fulfilling their responsibilities if children have to complete tasks at home. Teachers may believe that parents are neglecting their duties as parents if they do not assist their children with their homework. In addition parents whose ideology is more congruent with that of the school, may feel that parents who do not get involved with school functions are not pulling their weight and may feel resentful towards them.

1.2.4 Literacy Practices

Normative patterns of communication may also promote or vitiate chances of success at school. Many of these patterns of communication are completely interlinked with literacy processes and events. A literacy event as it is used here includes any activity which involves the printed word. However as Barton (1994) points out, literacy events are not clearly demarcated from those that do not directly involve reading and writing. There are many events where the purpose is to learn about literacy and where there is no actual text present, thus print need not actually be present to constitute a literacy event.

Certain home literary events have important consequences for the child's ability to cope with the literacy demands made at school. The literature suggests that picture and story book reading, parental modelling of reading and the presence of resources in the home have a significant impact on school achievement. They play a significant role in developing modes of thinking which promote the child's ability to cope with school. There is disagreement about whether the ability to read and write in itself results in global changes in thinking but there is widespread agreement that high levels of literacy in the home does promote the appropriate behaviours, values and knowledge which both prepare children for school and support their learning once they are at school. Issues which have received particular attention in the literature are labelling, decontextualization, storybook reading, parental modelling of reading and writing, the presence of resources and the ability to respond appropriately to questions.

1.2.4.1. Labelling

In middle-class families picture book reading plays an important role in developing labelling behaviours. Ninio and Bruner (1978) conducted a longitudinal study in which they observed a mother and child dyad in joint picture book reading. Picture book

reading was observed by Ninio and Bruner (1978) mainly when the child was between eight months and one and a half years old. Their findings strongly suggests the universal role of picture book reading in developing labelling schemas in children. During the book reading dialogue, the mother directs the child's attention to the book and labels the items on the page. The items are two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional objects so the child becomes accustomed to seeing real objects as two-dimensional representations.

Discourse patterns which the child will experience repeatedly at school are initiated at home, principally during picture book reading. The following example is provided as an illustration.

Ninio and Bruner (1978, p 6)

M: *Look* (focuses attention)

C: *Touches picture* (child response)

M: *What are those?* (question)

C: *Vocalizes and smiles* (child response)

M: *Yes, they are rabbits* (feedback)

Such protoconversations are observed repeatedly. The adult structures the interaction and even turns the child's sounds into answers which act as turns in the conversation. The adult creates the child's meanings. The child learns to take part in simple conversations. Conversation contains the beginnings of common conversation cycles in the classroom. The cycle of getting attention, asking a question, providing an answer (child response) and giving feedback is a common pattern of classroom discourse.

Heath (1982, 1983) has extended her observations on labelling beyond the story book routine. In Maintown and Roadville labelling occurs during the storybook routine and this is extended to other linguistic contexts. Other investigators have also found the same occurrence. In middle-class families labelling behaviours are taught in direct interaction with books as well as in other linguistic contexts. Studies carried out in European languages show that parents modify their speech when talking to young children in a number of ways. They keep their utterances short, grammatically simple and use exaggerated intonation. They emphasize key words, pointing to objects in the environment, thus making use of contextual cues (Wells, 1986).

There are indications that these protoconversations and modification of adult speech when they talk to children is a Western middle-class phenomenon. For example Heath (1983) found that in Trackton Talk is not specifically directed at children and there is not a specific register for talking to children. Early sounds made by the child is regarded as "noise". Children pick up whole phrases and clausal utterances. Parents don't separate the elements of the environment for them, so they learn chunks. Furthermore there is no storybook routine to develop labelling behaviours. The children are not exposed to the type of materials which will promote labelling such as picture books. Nor is labelling developed in other linguistic contexts. Trackton children do not learn to name the attributes of items.

While not providing specific word labels of their environment, Roadville parents don't ask questions of their children which would require the children to provide such labels. Preschoolers are not asked "what" explanations of their environment, but rather questions which call for non-specific comparisons. These test the child's ability to see similarities in their environment. Heath (1983) cites the following examples. Trackton children were asked questions such as "What dat like" or "What you think you are", while they are hopping about or dragging themselves over the furniture (p 105). Children are expected to learn their world through direct experience and seeing regularities and contrasts.

In the regularities of school interaction there are obvious similarities with the labelling practices common in child rearing practices in middle-class culture. The practice of asking a question that the questioner knows the answer to is one such practice. This display is very common practice in school. This practice actually stops at home before school entry but it is introduced again in school.

1.2.4.2 The Storybook Routine

The value of storybook routine is widely acknowledged in the literature. Research demonstrates that children who begin to read early and effectively, were read to more often by their parents (Durkin; Clark; Tobin in Sulzby, 1994). Children who are read to regularly score higher on traditional measures like readiness or reading achievement tests (Teale 1981). Wells (1986) found that the children who were read to regularly during their preschool years, performed better at school. He followed the progress of a group of children from preschool until they were ten years old and they consistently achieved better results at school. He found that children who had been read to, had a

larger vocabulary, could narrate a story better, describe a scene, follow instructions and could understand the teacher's language .

A number of researchers and theorists, working from different perspectives have detailed the ways in which the storybook routine prepares the child for formal learning. Some theorists have examined the impact that preschool exposure to storybook reading has prepared the child for dealing with the technical aspects of reading (Clay, 1991; Goodman, 1986). The main emphasis by these workers has been how exposure to storybooks teaches children important concepts about print. They learn how print can be turned into words, how to manipulate books, directional principles and the spatial layout of print. Children also learn that print is a communicative device, and that print carries a meaningful message. Story books teach narrative schemas, the structures of plots and the anticipation of events.

However these views are limited to the consequences in the very early stages of school literacy and to mainstream children. Heath (1982, 1983) has shown that the storybook routine has longer term consequences for the child's schooling. She has also described the consequences of not being read to, for the non-mainstream child. In Trackton there is no storybook routine so that when they go to school they are unfamiliar with classroom discourse patterns. In both Maintown and Roadville the story book reading is a regular event, the specific rituals and practices differ markedly. One of the main differences lie in the extent to which the child can participate during reading. Talk around text is equally important as the text itself. It is richer in variety and complexity of linguistic structure than everyday talk. In Roadville children participate vigorously physically and verbally during bedtime story reading in the first three years. After three years of age however, parents expect children to sit and listen to a story and participative interaction is discouraged during reading. Reinterpretation or questioning of the text is not allowed. In Maintown, children learn the norms of participation which are demanded at school. In playgroups storybook reading is an integral part of their structured activities. Children are expected to listen quietly until the reader indicates that they can participate. Children can discuss the story and respond to a variety of questions posed by the reader. These book readings provide opportunities for the children to display their knowledge.

A more specific discussion of the talk around books and the consequences of this will be discussed in the section on questioning and decontextualization.

1.2.4.3 Exposure to Print

Clay (1991) has emphasized the need for preschool exposure to print and places a positive value on this. Heath (1982, 1983) has shown, however, that different forms of exposure has different consequences for children. In Trackton children have no books and they are not read to. They find their reading tasks in the house and shopping centres. All exposure to print is highly contextualized. Reading materials are not accumulated. Whatever comes into the community is burnt or used for other purposes. Roadville children, on the other hand, grow up surrounded by print. Their room decorations, books, toys and religious materials provide them with print exposure. Parents also point out environmental print when they go on trips. Reading material is consciously collected for adults and children. In Maintown written material acts as "a backdrop for talk" (Heath 1983, pg 255). Children's rooms are decorated with literacy materials, they have educational toys and books.

1.2.4.4 Parental Modelling of Reading and Writing

Teale (1986) and Heath (1982, 1983) found that literacy events occur in all income and cultural groups. However the purposes for which various communities read and write differs. Anderson and Stokes (1984) examined the home literacy experiences in different ethnic groups. They found significant differences in only four of nine domains which they investigated, including differences in the duration of activity in the domains of daily living and entertainment. In the domains of religion and literacy skills and techniques significant differences were found in the frequency of occurrences. Black and Hispanic families engaged in more religious reading. In Anglo families adults initiated more activity which involved teaching children literacy skills and techniques.

Similarly in low income groups most literacy activities are functional, directed to the organisation of life. Educational or recreational reading is not a common occurrence in groups which do not have high literacy levels. Teale (1986) also found that little work-related literacy spilt over into daily home routines. On the other hand reading for education, occupational literacy activities and recreational reading appears to occur more frequently in groups which are regarded as having high literacy levels. Taylor (1995) found that reading for enjoyment and pleasure, educational and occupational reading occurred regularly in Icelandic families, who have high literacy levels. Heath (1983) found the same pattern in Maintown where reading occurred not only instrumentally but also for recreation, occupation and education. Wells (1986) found that parent's own interest in literacy was important in school achievement. The number

of books they owned and how much they read and wrote in accomplishing their own purposes was significant. They found that children of nine or ten years of age who were the most accomplished writers were most likely to have parents who themselves wrote frequently, particularly lists, memos and notes. These forms of writing are very visible, rather than writing in secluded study.

Parental modelling of reading will effect their children's attitudes to reading. Some researchers (Ingman; Neuman in Spiegel, 1994) have noted the relationship between parent's enjoyment of reading and the likelihood that children will also learn to enjoy reading.

Modelling of writing has also been identified as an important variable affecting children's attitudes to literacy processes. Wells (1986) reported that the two best predictors of children's success in school were firstly being read to by their parents during the preschool years and secondly seeing their parents write. Parents and other adults in the middle-class communities which Heath observed frequently responded to everyday life demands in writing and occupational writing was common. Roadville residents only used writing when they had to, for example as a memory aid, to help them buy and sell things and to keep in touch with family members.

1.2.4.5 Literacy Resources

Heath (1982, 1983) has shown that the communities she studied differed in terms of the literacy materials which were available to the children. In Maintown there was a wide range of books and educational toys. In Roadville books which taught discrete items of information or which promoted a moral were favoured. Literacy materials most commonly found in Roadville homes were books which create sensory involvement and which provided opportunities for practising skills, alphabet books, animal stories, nursery rhymes and simplified Bible stories. There were no reading materials especially for children in Trackton. Toys were bought at Christmas time but these were trucks, dolls, balls or toy cars, rarely construction toys or puzzles.

Spiegel (1994) has stated that it is the literacy practices that parents engage in and not their physical resources which influence literacy development. In the next section I will attempt to show that preschool materials do play a role in developing reading schemas.

1.2.4.6 Learning to Read and Write

The most important challenges facing the child in the junior primary phase are learning the technicalities of reading and writing. For one thing the child has to learn and automatize bottom-up processing skills.

Bottom-up schemas required for effective processing are as follows:

- There must be an awareness that speech is made up of sound units and the ability to analyse the flow of speech into component sounds (Carroll, 1985; Speaker & Ruddell, 1985; Lerner 1985; Clay 1991)
- There must be recognition and discrimination of the shape of letters and graphemes (Carroll 1985)
- An association must be made between analysed speech sounds and analysed visual data. There must be an awareness that there are patterns of highly probable correspondence between letters and sounds (Carroll, 1985)
- The phonemes must be blended to form words.
- The child must have an understanding of the spatial organization of text. A time-space transformation must be made. Sound patterns which follow one another in time have to be matched to letter symbol/word/sentence patterns which are spread out in space. Spaces and punctuation are used to mark off words and phrases, and also used to indicate pauses and intonation.
- The child has to learn the directional principles of print. He must know which is the front and which the back of a book, the left page must be read before the right, print is arranged from top to bottom and left to right in successive lines (Goodman, 1985; Clay, 1991).

Stanovich (1980) has argued that in order to develop these schemas the child requires assistance from top down schemas. Higher order knowledge structures compensate for poorly developed lower order structures. Carrell & Eisterhold (1987) provide a useful distinction between these higher order schemas. They distinguish between content schemas and formal schemas. Content schemas refer to the reader's background knowledge of the content area. Formal schemas refer to a background knowledge of the organizational structures of different types of texts. Readers could be expected to have different expectations and knowledge of the organizational structures of different genres such as fables, simple stories, poetry, scientific texts, newspaper articles and so forth. Activation of these schemas requires the child to organise, store retrieve,

compare, categorize and reconstruct information.

The question which must be addressed is how community literacy practices equip the child for acquiring the schemas to enable them to face the challenges of their first literacy experiences at school. For the purposes of this discussion it will be assumed that the communities which Heath (1982, 1983) identified and described are represented in South African schools. They will be used as metaphors or ideal types for this discussion.

In order to acquire bottom-up schemas, the child needs the assistance of formal and content schemas. Children who have had early experience with written materials, such as those in Heath's mainstream communities, will have developed the formal schemas which will assist them. When they go to school they have been exposed to books and are familiar with how books work. In addition the knowledge they acquire by exposure to books and the numerous visits and outings they have, will develop content schemas. Top-down processing can support the acquisition of bottom-up schemas.

The support provided by top-down schemas is important in the first school years, but certain home literacy practices directly effect the acquisition of bottom-up processes. Clay (1991) highlights the significance of reading as a visual process. Reading is an activity which demands the analysis and synthesis of complex visual stimuli. Factors that can influence this process are labelling behaviours and the toys to which children are exposed.

Labelling schemas enable children to separate and name elements of their environment. The ability to analyse and give meaning to discrete units of information is required to develop many of the bottom-up reading schemas, for example the analysis of phonemes and graphemes. Thus children who have acquired labelling schemas in the preschool years, such as the Roadville and Maintown children, will be better able to cope with tasks requiring analysis. On the other hand children whose experience is completely contextualized, such as the Trackton children, may find that print in isolation is meaningless. Phonic analysis will also be extremely difficult.

The ability to analyse components of print is also associated with the type of materials the child is exposed to during the preschool years. Construction toys and jigsaw puzzles develop the ability to analyse and synthesize components. Manipulative toys

develop part-whole relationships, skills necessary for early reading.

The impact of home literacy practices is based on certain assumptions about instructional practices at school. The most important assumption that is made here is that schools use decontextualized methods, such as phonic and sight word practices, for teaching reading. In this case skills such as the ability to see part-whole relationships, to analyze and synthesize and to label are very significant. In families and communities where preschool learning is highly contextualized and holistic, there will be a fundamental discontinuity between home practices and school demands. Methods which allow children to learn bottom-up skills in a meaningful context, such as whole language methods, may be more salient and easily assimilated than methods of literacy instruction where skills learning is decontextualized. The congruency between early literacy experiences and school experience will be greater.

In most South African schools a combination of phonic teaching and whole word teaching is the predominant method of reading instruction. In many schools children do not receive their first "reader" until they have been taught all the words in isolation.

The discussion on formal literacy acquisition has focused purely on how home literacy practices impact on the child's ability to master the cognitive demands made at school. Learning, however is not only a question of cognition, but also a matter of value and belief. Literacy not only involves being skilled in methods of representation, such as the alphabet and books. It also involves familiarity with cultural configurations of meaning, the ways in which cultural norms and beliefs are represented. It extends to the maintenance of contact with the collective symbols of a group, and doing so in a culturally prescribed manner (Ferdman, 1990).

The argument provided by Ferdman (1990) provides an explanation for the research findings of Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1984). They reported a case of a refugee Sino-Vietnamese family, living in Philadelphia. This home environment was not typical of one usually associated with high school achievement. There were few books or writing materials in the home, the parents did not engage in recreational reading and they did not read to their children. In spite of this fact the children made excellent progress in acquiring school literacy. Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1984) argue that even if their environment is not literate in some sense, as part of a culture with one of the oldest traditions of literacy, their ideology is. Reading and writing letters are

important in their lives. The children play a very important role in transmitting the literary knowledge they acquire at school to their parents and facilitating their parents entrance into a new society. Thus the children are not only practising the skills they learn at school in a meaningful way in the community, the message that is being conveyed is that their knowledge is valuable. By accepting the children's knowledge the parents are supporting the school ideologically. This finding indicates that it is not only the formal cognitive skills that are acquired, but also the value placed on literacy which contributes to the acquisition of literacy.

1.2.4.7 Decontextualization

Bernstein (in Wells, 1986) found that middle-class families engaged in context-independent conversations where universal meanings were expressed, while working-class families engaged in context-bound conversations where they expressed particularistic meanings.

Wells (1986) found, however that these types of utterances were not specifically directed at children, irrespective of class. He found that there were great differences in the number of utterances amongst the families they studied, although these differences were not class-related. There were also big differences in the quality of interaction amongst individual families, but again these were not class-related. Even the frequency of disembedded uses of language was not more common in the lower and upper end of the family background continuum. He found that the most common form of verbal interaction between parents and children of all social classes were event-casts. Here the speaker provides a narrative of events currently happening. Wells (1986) found that children often helped their parents with activities. The shared activities provide highly contextualized opportunities to learn about the activities and also the words that refer to them.

They concluded that there was no evidence to justify the belief that there are strong class differences in the ways in which parents talk with children on school entry. However when children came to school the picture changed. They found that there were class-related differences to cope with tests and test-like situations. The children who achieved relatively higher scores on knowledge of literacy tests were likely to have parents who read to them more and owned more books.

The central significance of storybook reading for Wells (1986) is that through stories

children vicariously extend the range of their experience far beyond the limit of their immediate surroundings. In the process they develop a much richer model of the world and a vocabulary with which to talk about it. The content of the school curriculum is beyond what can be experienced first-hand. Children who have been read to, have had experience with dealing with decontextualized knowledge.

In ordinary conversation the meanings that are communicated arise for the most part out of the context of ongoing activity or out of past and future events in which the participants have shared knowledge or expectations. To understand what is meant they can use the context to help them interpret what is said. In this context written language, by contrast the situation is different. There is no contextual support except that created by the text itself as a carrier of meaning, although the reader does bring general expectations and personal experience to the text.

Through stories the child learns to discover the symbolic potential of language and therefore its power to create imaginary worlds through words by representing experience in symbols that are independent of objects and events. Relationships are symbolized that can be interpreted in contexts other than those in which the experience originally occurred.

Wells (1986) has emphasized the significance of storybook reading for decontextualized thinking. He found that this rarely extended to conversations outside of this practice. Other researchers have, however found that this was not the case. They found that in highly literate families initial interactions are context-bound and pragmatic but mothers and other caretakers shift to interactions which are independent of the immediate context.

Nevertheless storybook reading and other children's literature still serve as the stimulus for these decontextualized interactions. Heath (1982, 1983) has shown how this form of interaction plays a role in the development of literacy. In Maintown modes of speaking, reading and writing are highly interrelated. Children learn to talk about literacy events in other contexts. During this process they learn to separate their knowledge of the real world from the message contained in print. They learn "the distinctions between contextualized first hand experience and the decontextualized representations of experience" (Heath, 1983 p 256).

The ability to engage in decontextualized thinking becomes increasingly more important as the child moves through school. The child encounters more and more curriculum content that can be brought to the classroom symbolically. Children need to engage in disembedded thinking and handle ideas of a more abstract kind for which own personal experience may provide only minimal support.

The ability to enter into decontextualized relations is, according to Vygotsky (1962), a necessary requirement for the formation of scientific concepts and the development of abstract thought. Vygotsky has emphasized the important role that schooling has on the development of scientific concepts and systematic thought. The research of Wells (1986) and Heath (1983) has shown that certain home practices enable children to deal with decontextualized knowledge better at school. Storybook reading in particular provides the opportunity for parents to engage in decontextualized conversations.

1.2.4.8 Questioning

Heath (1982) contends that middle-class parents recurrently direct questions that elicit the type of responses that the child will have to produce at school during book reading. Not only are the responses of the same type that will be required at school, each storybook reading reflects the sequence of events that occur over the school years. During the reading "what" questions, reason explanations, questions where they predict events and affective commentaries follow one another. In the Junior Primary phase of schooling, factual questions to which the adult knows the answer predominate. Heath (1983) found that the nature of the questions that children are expected to respond to are more varied and complex in later stages of primary schooling. Together with having to answer factual questions, they also had to deal with affective commentaries and reasoned explanations.

This questioning also occurs beyond the storybook routine. Throughout the preschool years, Heath (1983) found that questions are the most frequent type of talk addressed to children. (Although Wells 1986 found that teachers asked a higher proportion of questions and made more requests than parents did). Initially most questions are of the type where the questioner has the information requested. Later these questions are less common and questions become more varied. During story reading Roadville children are expected to sit and listen quietly, but after story reading they are expected to respond to questions. The questions are simple questions and require a factual response for which the adult knows the answer.

The congruency between home and school in both the nature and the sequence of questions in middle-class children contributes to greater school achievement in these children. Roadville children cope very well with the cognitive demands placed on them in the early school years. Like Maintown children they can deal with discrete items of information and questions which require factual responses. However when they are required to deal with inferential and interpretative questions in senior primary school they experience difficulties. On the other hand "what" questions were unfamiliar and difficult for Trackton children who have difficulty responding to factual questions early in their schooling. By the time they reach the senior primary phase and the questions they are asked are more familiar, they have become so lost that they cannot benefit from this. The sequence of questioning is not congruent with their home experience.

In addition to the direct cognitive effects of questioning, it is reasonable to assume that unfamiliarity with the discourse patterns at school effects the relationship between teacher and child. The inability of children to respond to the teacher's questions will inevitably lead to frustration on both the part of the teacher and child.

It is self-evident that if congruency exists between home and school literacy practices children will achieve better at school. Erickson (1984) suggests that the reason for this is that the task is simplified if there is congruency. When familiar patterns of interaction are followed, the child can attend to the content of the task.

Obviously not all middle-class students acquire literacy skills with equal ease or engage in literacy behaviour to the same extent and with the same success but for the majority of these students the demands of literacy education do not represent a fundamental challenge to literacy values and practices of their homes. They are socialized early into the type of literacy encountered at school. For minority students, school is not an extension or repetition of practices found at home. It may entail trial and error discovery of the preferred behaviour. This strategy is not necessarily productive and vagueness may predominate.

1.3 Implications for Research

The view that has been adopted here is that literacy is a social process that must be understood in the context of people's lives. Accordingly, this review has evaluated theoretical models in terms of the extent to which they incorporate and explain the role

of background factors and the social lives of the participants of literacy. Research which relates to home and school literacy practices was also reviewed.

In terms of this above-mentioned criterion, the socio-cultural paradigm has been the most useful. This paradigm is most appropriate in attempting to examine how the literacy practices of different cultural groups which are represented in South African Schools influence the acquisition and development of knowledge, skills and values associated with literacy and how they affect school achievement in general. One dimension of this is the technology of reading and writing. Since schema theory and the interactive information processing models provide a comprehensive understanding of the skills involved in reading, occasional reference will be made to them.

The research findings which were reviewed fall into two main categories, research which has tried to establish a statistical relationship between broad environmental issues and literacy, and ethnographic research. Studies which have tried to determine the effects of broad factors such as socio-economic status and ethnicity statistically, have produced conflicting findings. Ethnographers of literacy are of the opinion that one must examine more specific home literacy practices. This research suggests that mainstream, middle-class literacy practices promote school literacy achievement. Heath's findings, for example, show that only mainstream patterns of interaction provide children with literacy skills that enable them to be fully successful at school.

This finding raises important issues of a sensitive nature in a post-apartheid South Africa. Heath's findings have been taken by some researchers to mean that non-mainstream families are inadequate. It has also been suggested that children from low SES homes come to school with a dearth of literacy experience. Heath (1983), Teale (1986), Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) and Moll (1994) found that all children in a literate society such as urban South Africa have numerous experiences with written language. Nevertheless middle-class practices do provide children with literacy skills which enable them to be successful at school. Auerbach (1989) has argued that it is not home literacy practices which are inadequate or inappropriate, but rather school practices which are inflexible and do not promote alternative cultural expressions.

The general view that will adopted here is that neither school nor home must be viewed as necessarily deficient. The key to learning lies in establishing congruency between school and home as mutually supportive learning environments. A person

becomes literate according to a particular definition of literate behaviour. People are trained to internalize behaviours which are appropriate to be a functional member of a specific social group. For a majority child in a majority school appropriate behaviours and skills are transparent. They don't consciously have to attend to this actively. For minority students the process is less smooth. They can experience conflicts between what they learn at home and what they learn at school.

The central question which this theoretical review has identified is to what extent are home and school literacy practices congruent in desegregated South African schools? The aim of this study was to answer this question through naturalistic observation of

- home literacy practices with children who are representative of certain broad cultural groups in multicultural schools.
- school literacy instruction practices.

A number of themes or factors which have been shown to be significant in reading by ethnographers of literacy. Arising from the literature review, the following factors were deemed to be significant in determining the congruency between home and school literacy practices:

- identity issues which includes congruent values and discourse patterns
- parental support and involvement in the school
- labelling practices
- storybook reading
- exposure to print
- parental modelling of reading and writing
- availability of literacy resources
- decontextualization
- questioning

Observation of the home and school was directed by the factors listed above.

However these findings emerged in a different social context. It was felt that in a South African context other factors could emerge and the interactions with the school system could also impact differently. Since the significant factors which contribute to non-congruence have not been identified in a South African context, an exploratory case study methodology was adopted.

Chapter 2

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

2.1 Methodology

Two contrasting research methods can be identified in social enquiry, namely the positivist and contextual approaches. The fundamental assumption behind the positivist, quantitative paradigm is that there is an objective truth which can be revealed through scientific method. In the problem statement of this proposal the difficulty of defining literacy was discussed. Definition depends on the purposes for which it is used and the demands of the social groups. A method which is contextually based, which takes into account the meaning which the participants attribute to literacy and which views literacy as a social process is most appropriate. A case study approach allows the researcher to find out what literacy means to the child, his/her family and the school. Without consideration of what literacy means for different social groups, it is not possible to assess the question of congruency between home and school literacy practices. A case study method is more suitable for discovering meaning than is a positivist approach.

In addition, a number of themes have emerged which explain the impact of how home and school literacy environments interact with one another. In the South African context, which is a unique sociocultural environment, this has not been investigated. Some of the home and school factors on which congruency can be assessed, have emerged in other contexts. However new themes may emerge, or identified factors may interact differently in the South African context. Thus the variables which impact on the process are not clearly defined. Case study research, which uses qualitative methods, permits one to locate the relevant variables as they emerge from the situation and thereby construct ecologically valid descriptions.

A further rationale for using this method lies in the complexity of literacy issues. An enormous number of factors impact on these processes. It is difficult to control for all the extraneous variables which fall outside one's line of enquiry. Thus most research in this field has been correlational. Teale (1986) has stated that ethnographic research which results in rich, thorough descriptions allows one to go beyond the calculation of correlations and enables one to infer causal relationships.

The changing population in desegregated schools necessitates the introduction of new instructional practices. These practices should be based on an in-depth understanding of the problems and careful identification of the areas that can be influenced. This knowledge can only be gained by an understanding of all the participants in the system, not by limited responses on a questionnaire or by simple manipulation of dependent variables.

Accordingly, ten case studies were built up using a context-rich ethnographic method. This study was an attempt to further the ethnography of the South African classroom in so far as it attempted to develop context-rich observation. However because the period of observation was of a fairly short duration, it must be seen as a limited ethnography.

A number of features characterize this method:

1. The primary source of information was the perspectives, values, beliefs, expectations and acts of the participants in the research.
2. Observation was naturalistic, that is, data was collected in context which was disturbed as little as possible (Macdonald, 1990).

Literacy events were observed as people engaged in their normal routines in the school and the home. The investigator assumed the role of participant observer and attempted to interfere as little as possible in normal home and school activities and routines. For this reason, field notes were the most important means of data collection.

3. Different forms of information counted as data.

Observations, interviews/discussions/conversations, documentary data (mainly past school reports), samples of children's work and performance on standardised tests formed the data base. Observations were made of the social literacy processes and the physical environment in which these processes occur. Observations and interviews were directed by, but not restricted to, the areas of inquiry identified in Appendix 1 and 2. In keeping with ethnographic methods, rigid categories for inquiry were not adhered to.

Interviews mainly took the form of discussions and conversations. During the observation period, numerous discussions were held with the teachers at the school, particularly those who taught the classes which were observed. I also returned to the school to attend special functions or to clarify issues after the main observation period. Conversations with the teachers and parents at these times added further insights and information about the children. In addition at the end of the observation period a more structured interview was conducted with the two classroom teachers and the principal of the school.

I was given access was given to the school records. The school data which was used were the children's past school reports written by teachers, psychometric reports, newsletters and school policy statements. In addition use was made of the findings of a parent survey conducted by the governing body which represented an 85% sample of the families at the school. The survey was conducted in the same year as the field work for this study.

All these sources of information were integrated in order to develop a holistic description and account of the home and school environments of the ten children selected as case studies in the assessment of cultural congruency.

The inclusion of standardised tests would appear to be contrary to the fundamental tenets of the method. However Cassel and Symon (1994) argue that ethnographic research does not exclude this form of data, provided they are not seen as more important than other forms of data. Techniques are not of themselves ethnographic - "it is how they are used and how the data is interpreted that defines the epistemological assumptions on which they are based" (p. 3). They state one should "count what is countable" (p. 4). Children's qualitative and quantitative responses on standardised tests contributed to an understanding of the situation was one means of evaluating congruency between home and school literacy practices.

4. The focus of the research was not the collection and comprehension of objective data, but the interpretation of literacy events.

Given this framework a number of tasks had to be fulfilled. First participants are active constructors of meaning and have explicit views on literacy. I had to

identify and understand this theory of meaning as well as the participants' explicit beliefs and attitudes towards literacy. However, some acts have implicit effects not fully understood by the participants. A second task was to make explicit the effects of these acts. Furthermore there were times when the participant's explicit, stated theories, attitudes and beliefs were not congruent with practice. A third task was to make explicit this lack of congruency.

5. The mode of reasoning that was adopted in this study was inductive and hence the focus was more on theory-building rather than on theory testing (Harste, 1994). The particular situation was examined before trying to establish any generalities. However, observations were theory driven.
6. Relevant socio-cultural theories were applied which served as significant guides to observation, particularly schema theory as well as the factors which previous research has shown to be significant in the matter under investigation. It was not the intention to test the "truth" of these factors or theories, but rather to use these as a means of formulating critical research questions and defining and refining observations.

2.2 Procedure

This research was conducted in two phases. The first phase of the investigation was conducted in the school environment. The second phase was conducted in the homes of selected children. These two phases were repeated for Grade Two and Standard Two pupils. The children's grade level at school has been referred to in terms of the naming in operation at the time of the study, that is Standard Two (now Grade Four) and Grade Two.

2.2.1 Phase One

The research was conducted at a co-educational, multicultural state school (ex-model C), in a middle-class suburb of Johannesburg. Details of the characteristics of the school will be discussed in Chapter Three, when the school is described.

A class of Grade Two pupils and a class of Standard Two pupils were included in the study. These levels were selected because they represent critical periods in the reading process. Children in Grade Two have had a year of formal reading instruction and more able readers have reached a high level of competency in bottom-up processing. The extent to which children have mastered these skills could be assessed at this stage. Children with difficulties in this area could be identified. Content subjects are introduced in Standard Two and children are expected to be able to read in order to learn. Bottom-up processing should by then be automatized and the focus should be on comprehension of content areas and the production of independent work such as creative writing and projects. I was able to evaluate how well Standard Two children were coping with these demands.

Data collection took place over a three-month period in the school. Two continuous weeks were spent in each of the Grade Two class and the Standard Two class. Three weeks were spent collecting documentary data. I returned to the classrooms on isolated days for further observation when specific events were occurring or when there were issues which I wished to clarify. In addition I attended sports meetings, parents association meetings, parent education evenings and other special school events.

Two main objectives were achieved during this period, namely assessment of the school ethos and the literacy processes at the school and selection of subjects for phase two.

2.2.1.1 Assessment of the School Ethos and the Literacy Processes at the school.

To assess ethos I took part in the usual school and classroom routines. Discussions were held with the children, the teachers, the principal and parents who assist with the school. Observation occurred in the classroom, the staff room, school assemblies and parent body meetings. Documentary data, such as policy statements and past school reports were also collected.

Amongst other things a checklist (Appendix 1) was developed to collect information on the general school milieu, literacy practices and values and discourse patterns. General categories included in the checklist were:

- The classroom rules
- The norms for oral participation
- The nature of classroom discourse
- The frequency and format of storybook reading
- The reading instruction method (grade 2 only)
- The type of written assignments which children have to complete
- Opportunities for parental involvement in the school
- The role that parents were expected by the teachers to play in the education of their children
- Emphasis on group or individual learning and assessment
- Environmental print and literacy materials in the classroom

2.2.1.2 Selection of Subjects for Phase Two

Phase Two involved the selection of subjects. In the selection of specific children for case study follow-up the following criteria were considered:

- race and residence
- culture and socio-economic status
- school achievement
- parental interest in schooling

Race and Residence

At the outset it is important to recognize in selection of case studies that the majority of pupils at the school were still drawn from the traditional white feeder neighbourhood.

For this reason the sample had to include children from that context. However the school has become increasingly multi-racial following the opening of schools to all races. The case studies eventually selected needed also to reflect that changing reality and to include children commuting from the township setting. At the same time a gradual process of change in the racial make-up in the surrounding suburbs have been taking place, with the result that an increasing number of black pupils have started living nearby. To the extent that the increasing racial integration of former white suburbs represent a significant emerging trend, it was also considered important to include case studies of children in that category. In addition since formerly white only schools were opened to black children, many domestic workers who were employed and who lived in the area have started to send their children to the school. Accordingly black children who lived in the suburbs surrounding the school were included in the case studies.

Accordingly the eventual case study selection of 10 pupils reflects these critical race and residential categories. This approach made it possible to investigate and compare the impact of culture and values surrounding education in a range of racial and residential contexts, as well as to consider the relevance of changing cultural values in relation to schooling.

Cultural and Socio-economic Diversity

Assessing congruency between home and school literacy practices was the main purpose of this investigation. These practices signify or are indicators of different cultural orientations towards education. Culture is understood here to refer in general terms to different values, beliefs, perceptions and behaviours associated with the schooling of children. In order to test the extent of congruency between school and home it was necessary to include a sufficiently diverse range of family background and socio-economic status in the study.

School Achievement

In selecting children for school achievement an attempt was made to select children with a range of scholastic abilities. Most of the children eventually selected were either doing very well at the school or achieved results within the average range of their classes. This was a reflection of the dominant standard of performance in the school. However, it was also clear from observation and performance data that some children were struggling to perform at average levels. Accordingly two children who were

having difficulties with schoolwork were included as case studies in order to establish comparison and contrast in exploring the impact and relevance of cultural congruence.

A number of data sources were used to assess the pupils' school performance. These were measures on standardised reading tests, discussions with teachers and school reports.

■ Measures on standardised reading tests.

- * A measure of reading accuracy (word recognition) and comprehension was obtained on the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability. This test was administered individually. Accuracy and comprehension scores were collected.
- * The Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test: Subtest Reading Comprehension was administered to the children in groups.

The Red Level of this test was administered to children in Grade Two. Reading comprehension is assessed by means of sentences and short reading passages. The test consists of two parts. In part A a picture which best describes a printed sentence or a riddle must be identified. In part B children have to respond to short passages in a multiple choice format. Various types of sentences are included in order to provide a measure of the child's understanding of syntax.

The Brown Level of the test was given to Standard Two pupils. This test gives a measure of inferential and literal comprehension. Testees respond to a number of reading passages in a multiple choice format. The reading passages are either textual (material which is found in textbooks), functional (material typically encountered in everyday life) or recreational.

- Discussions with the classroom teachers provided information about the most recent marks that the children were obtaining.

- School data records were used to obtain information about the pupil's performance in previous years.

Parental Interest in the Child's Schooling

A further consideration that was taken into account was the extent to which parents were concerned with the education of their children. My intention was to investigate how modes of interaction and literacy practices support or discourage the child at school. If the parents were obviously uninterested in what the child did at school this would have resulted in the study becoming a test of parental commitment rather than of the extent of congruence between home and school environments. It will be noted in the course of the description that parents in the case studies were committed to their children's education but lacked the knowledge to translate this commitment into domestic practices which would assist their children at school.

Accordingly discussions were held with the class teacher regarding the interest shown by the parents in the child's schooling and this information contributed to the selection of the case studies.

2.2.2 Phase Two

Phase Two involved a series of home visits to the homes of the children selected as case studies. Two home visits were conducted for each of the ten families. One visit occurred during the working week and one over the weekend. Each family was observed for approximately eight hours. Although it was my intention to observe without interacting with the families, I inevitably got drawn into the family discussions and interactions. At the end of the second visit an interview was conducted with the parents.

Naturalistic observation, discussions, field notes and interviews were the main sources of data. Field notes were expanded immediately after the visits. Observations and discussions were directed by a checklist (Appendix 2) which includes the following areas of inquiry:

- Family values and identity
- Parental support and involvement in the school
- Verbal interactions:

- *topics of conversation
- *decontextualization
- *conversations stimulated by text
- Direct literacy practices:
 - *the storybook routine
 - *exposure to print
 - *parental modelling of reading and writing/the purposes for which family members read
 - *literacy materials

The questions included in both the school (Appendix 1) and home (Appendix 2) checklists were extensive. Although data was collected for most of the questions, not all the data was included in the final document.

Once I had collected the data, I charted all the categories which came up repeatedly. On the basis of this various themes emerged. The themes that emerged as significant were not necessarily the ones that were identified as significant at the outset of this study.

Chapter 3

THE SCHOOL

3.1 Milieu and Climate

The study was conducted at a small, co-educational, state school situated in a middle-class area of Johannesburg. There were 450 children at the school. A survey of 85% of the 358 families represented in the school revealed that the majority (68%) of the children lived in the suburb in which the school was situated or in adjoining suburbs. Twenty-one percent of the children commuted daily from Soweto township and the remaining 11% of the children lived in other areas which were further afield.

English was the medium of instruction at the school, although it was not the home language of all children. Whereas the majority of the children (61.1%) reportedly spoke English at home, other home languages included Zulu (10,2%), South Sotho (6,3%), Tswana (5,6%), North Sotho (2,6%), Chinese (2%) and Afrikaans (1,3%). At least 4,6% of the school population claimed to be bilingual. The remaining 5,3% of the families spoke a variety of other home languages including Venda, Shangaan, Japanese, Greek, Bulgarian, Swedish, Urdu and Hebrew (Governing Body Survey, 1996).

There was considerable support for the school by the parent body. The governing body survey revealed that 90% of the parent body were satisfied or very satisfied with educational standards. Ninety-four percent of the parents gave teacher competency a rating of excellent or very good and 88% felt the school cared for the welfare and happiness of the children because the teachers were supportive, helpful and caring. Most felt that the teachers and principal were approachable and that opportunities were available to talk to the teaching staff.

The immediate impression of the milieu and climate of the school was of a well-appointed, clean and orderly environment with numerous shady trees, paved areas and a wide range of educational and sports facilities, including a large central sports ground, a large swimming pool, tennis courts and play ground equipment. The school also had a library and media centre as well as an extensive computer centre and a large assembly hall. The school was fenced and located in a quiet neighbourhood.

The children were generally courteous to strangers although there was a fairly high noise level in some classes during lessons. In spite of the noise level, overall there was a high level of organisation and structure, including a fairly strong theme of discipline maintained by a firm headmistress and staff. For example, immediately after the bell rang to signal the end of break, the children assembled in their class rows in a central paved area. Within five minutes each child had moved from this point into the classroom.

The explicit policy and goals of the school were contained in its mission statement:

"N---- Primary School aims to provide each of its children with happy memories of their primary school career.

We are committed to the development of an educational environment in which the intellectual, creative, emotional, spiritual, social and physical capabilities of our children will flourish.

We strive to prepare each child to become a meaningful contributor to our ever-changing South African society and to realise personal fulfilment in it."

It was further stated that :

"Policy development in our school is based on the values of:

**** courtesy, tolerance and self control;***

**** equality of opportunity;***

**** fairness and non-discrimination;***

**** parental participation and cooperation; "***

****recognition of the rich diversity of cultures and religions."***

The children's happiness was stated as a clear goal. N----- was a small school and the community feel of the school was highly valued. When the children entered the school they were welcomed into "the N---- Family". The headmistress and the teaching staff prided themselves on knowing, not only most of the children in the school, but also their families. The sense of family and community was reinforced by the continuity in the school. Many of the children had siblings at the school or siblings who went to the school earlier on. Some of the children had parents who attended the school. Most of the teaching staff had been at the school for many years. There were also several

mother/daughter dyads who both taught at the school. In two cases three generations of mothers and daughter taught at the school and two generations were still present at the time of the study.

This stable community ethos of the school was a legacy of its long standing status as a "white" school and more latterly a model-C institution. However the school had also successfully embraced aspects of multi-culturalism, as will be discussed later.

While the school was a familiar place for most of the white children and parents, either because they themselves had direct involvement in the school or because they attended a school which was similar, for most of the black parents and children it was arguably less familiar. Nevertheless Ms S, the headmistress, said it was her goal to make the school a familiar, friendly place for all the children. She felt this was particularly important for the township children. Many of them lived in dangerous circumstances and she wanted to make the school a place where they could feel safe.

Parental involvement in their children's education was encouraged by the school. However, Ms S identified a problem in this regard. She believed that while most of the suburban parents knew "the system" and knew how to assist their children, the parents of children coming into the school from the townships were reportedly less able to do this. These parents were very committed to their children's success, but did not know how to assist them in order to achieve success. She also stated that at first these parents expected that if they paid the school fees success would follow. In other words, education was perceived as a commodity which could be purchased. Ms S felt that this was still the case with some parents but that many parents had started to recognize the role they needed to play in their children's education. She cited as evidence the increasing number of black parents who attended the parent education programmes offered by the school. However she was still disappointed by the overall number of black parents who attended these programmes.

One of the stated goals of the school was fairness and non-discrimination. The fact that 87% of the parents felt that respect for diversity in the school was excellent or good was an indication that they were succeeding in this goal (Governing Body Survey, 1996). Observation in the classroom, during extra-mural activities and even while teachers had private conversations in the staffroom revealed no indication of discrimination against any child on the basis of group membership. The values, beliefs

and norms of the different cultural groups at the school were respected.

There were many instances where "the rich diversity of cultures and languages are recognized" in the general extra-classroom activities at the school. N----- had attracted children from a very wide spectrum of cultural groups before schools admitted black pupils and prided itself on recognizing this diversity. Admission of black pupils had merely been an extension of what had occurred before. During the valedictory assembly children greeted the assembly in twenty-eight languages. School fêtes were organised around the theme of "a world in one school" in which parents set up food stalls to sell the food typical of their culture.

One of the ways in which fairness and non-discrimination was interpreted by the teaching staff was to provide additional assistance for children who were struggling. A number of "catch-up" programmes were offered by the school for the children. Remedial lessons were offered to children with specific learning disabilities and language enrichment classes were held for children who spoke English as a second language. These programmes were free. The school also ran an after-care programme where there were trained teachers available to assist children with their homework.

The teaching staff also tried to develop the parents' skills in assisting their children with schoolwork through a number of specific programmes. Parent information evenings were arranged for each grade level where teachers informed the parents about the work they expected to cover during the year, the approach they would follow and what expectations they had of the children. Parent education programmes were also organized from time to time. These programmes were mainly directed at helping parents to assist children with reading in the Junior Primary phase and with Maths.

In respect of embracing diversity, the general ethos of the school and events that occurred in the general life of the school could be contrasted with curricular learning in the classroom. In an information brochure sent out to parents of new children to the school, it was stated that education in the classroom was tailored to the individual child. The child was able to work at his or her own tempo because the school adopted a teaching style where the child worked individually or in small groups. However, with the exception of the division of children into reading ability groups in the Junior Primary phase, I saw little of this implemented. In later sections the limited adaptation of classroom processes to meet the individual needs of children and the limited

recognition of cultural diversity in curricular learning itself will be discussed.

Multiculturalism was recognized to some extent in the classroom. In particular the school made provision for the main religious groups. During religious instruction lesson, the children split into Jewish and Christian groups and received separate instruction. There were quite a number of Moslem children in the school and a special teacher came in to give them instruction a few times a week. I observed instances of religious tolerance in the day-to-day functioning of the school on several occasions. On one occasion the children were making Christmas cards during an art lesson. Children who weren't Christian were permitted to engage in other activities. The Jewish children drew a star of David. Important festivals of all the religious groups were acknowledged and the parents and children wished well during these periods.

However for the most part the when it came to processes and content of what occurred in the classroom the cultural values, beliefs and norms of the teachers were predominant. The school allowed for a diversity on cultures as long as it did not interfere with what was valued as learning.

One value which I found which was pervasive and which wasn't stated in any of the official policy statements was a preoccupation with marks. The teaching staff, the principal, the parents and the children were all very preoccupied with results. The teaching staff were, in theory, very concerned about assessing children on a very broad base and I observed several meetings where the question of modifying assessment procedures was discussed. However, in practice the assessment followed tradition patterns. In both the Senior Primary and Junior Primary phase pupils were evaluated on content tests, projects and oral work which asked standard questions and which were most often completed individually. Assessments of the children's intelligence were based on evaluations of their performance on these activities.

The staff tried to provide many opportunities for children to give expression to their interests and extracurricular abilities. For example during the period I visited the school two such events were organized. On one occasion, which was called "entrepreneurial day", the children organized a fête where they sold various products they had produced or organized entertainment. They did all the advertising for their contribution, made the products for sale, set up of stalls, displayed their products and sold their

goods. On another occasion the children demonstrated their extracurricular interests to parents on an open day. Although the staff believed experiences such as these were an important part of the children's education and useful to help "build their confidence", the children's performance on tasks such as these did not form part of their definition of school achievement. Talent or competence on these types of activities did not constitute part of their evaluation of a child as "bright" or "stupid". Achievement was measured in marks and children who achieved high marks were accorded rights and given status.

The activities mentioned here, particularly the "entrepreneurial day" involved a high degree of consumer literacy. It was noted that the ability groups which were very apparent in the classrooms were not clear cut in this context. In the classroom children from middle-class families performed well while the other children did not fare so well. (See next section). On the other hand the children's entrepreneurial skills did not seem to be linked to any class pattern. This purposeful activity seemed to neutralize any differences. However, teachers did not take this opportunity to formally acknowledge these skills.

For the teachers the introduction of black children was not perceived as a problem at all. On the other hand, Ms S explained that they were frequently distressed about education policy changes for which they felt inadequately prepared. She explained that they often first heard about changes in the newspapers and did not know which of the items were rumours and which were real. She saw one of her tasks as trying to keep up to date with changes and to keep rumour-mongering in control. Keeping "the ship steady, and keeping the staff on an even keel" was one of her perceived roles. She said it wasn't easy because with all the changes it wasn't possible to plan three months ahead in some areas of school life.

To examine in more detail the educational processes in this school, two standards were selected for observation, namely Standard Two and Grade Two. The main focus of the account will be on the physical organization of the class, the role of the teacher, the classroom routine, the children's mode of response and questioning procedures. The literacy practices and discourse patterns which were identified in Chapter One will be discussed within these categories.

3.2 In the Classroom: Standard 2

3.2.1 Physical Organization of the Classroom

The most striking impression of the Standard Two classroom was one of crowdedness. The school was built in an era when the class sizes were generally smaller. They were designed to cater for the white children in the surrounding suburb and there were previously about 25 children in each class in the school. When the schools were opened to all racial groups, an agreement was reached between the government and nine different teacher's unions to increase class size in formerly white schools. The goal was to take the strain off the very crowded township schools. Accordingly, there were 34 children in the Standard Two class when this study was conducted.

The crowded nature of the classroom was quite possibly the factor determining the way in which the classroom was organised. The desks were arranged in horizontal rows with a boy sitting next to a girl. There was a small carpet in front of the blackboard where the children sometimes came and sat when the teacher gave some explanations. There were no independent work stations. There was a small reading corner with a collection of old books. These children were not observed making any meaningful use of this facility.

The back wall of the classroom was covered with a number of large pin boards. Material relating to the theme are pinned on these boards. This material was added to regularly and many of the children went and looked at this board when they have completed their task or before they went out at break. The children's art work was also displayed in the classroom. There were a few reference charts on the walls. A chart which demonstrated cursive letters, a number line and a 24 hour time chart was present.

3.2.2 The Teacher

In an interview Ms P reported that she perceived her main goal as a teacher was to develop a work ethic in her class. She stated that she would like the children to take pride in their work, in their property and themselves. This view was stated overtly to the children from time to time. On one occasion, some children didn't complete their homework in the manner they were instructed to. Ms P stated that she didn't mind if they didn't do the homework as they should. "If you don't do well it's your problem and your responsibility," she said. She continued to give them a lecture on wanting to do

well for yourself, on personal responsibility, effort and achievement. There were also instances when reflections of this viewpoint were observed directly in Ms P's interactions with the class. After the children had completed a spelling test the children were required to complete corrections. She stated that if the children made one or two mistakes, they should write the word out a few times. If they made many mistakes they should rewrite the whole paragraph. Ms P told the children that they should decide for themselves whether they needed to do individual words or the whole paragraph.

In spite of overt statements that children were responsible for their own achievement, in reality Ms P structured a lot of the children's learning and took on a great deal of this responsibility. This was reflected in her frequent drills and her practice tests. Tasks were very carefully structured and were almost exclusively defined by the teacher. In a Friday grammar test, the teacher read through the entire test with the class before they started the test. The children asked many questions and all these were answered before the test was started. This had the effect of creating a high degree of dependency in the children. The children seemed to find it very difficult to work independently. During this grammar test period which lasted one hour, children came up to the teacher's desk 38 times to ask questions. This was an indication of both the children's dependency and Ms P's accessibility.

The teacher believed that children were driven by extrinsic rewards because this was the mode they were accustomed to at home. She reported that at the beginning of the year some of the children actually asked her what she would give them if they completed a task. In spite of her overt rejection of this value, the question arises as to whether Ms P wasn't contributing to this mode of functioning herself. Although she did not approve of material reward, she very strongly emphasized the issue of marks. She stated that she wanted the children to achieve, and marks were a reflection of this effort, an indication of achievement. She used the issue of marks repeatedly to motivate the children. Nearly all the tasks that the children were asked to complete were for marks. Included in the instructions for the completion of most tasks was the warning that the task "is for marks". Task intrinsic motivation was not a consideration.

The attitude held by Ms P reflected the broader ethic of the school, where marks were emphasized. Much of the school routine was directed to assessment. The children were given a test every Friday, and the week's teaching was directed to those tests. The teacher also gave "practice" tests. Many activities were awarded a mark.

Ms P treated the children with great respect and she was always extremely polite to the class. She tried to teach them respect by modelling. For example when one child was talking while she was teaching she said, "D——, please try very hard not to talk".

Ms P always explained her positive or negative responses to the children and by so doing she modeled self-regulation. She tried to make it very clear why she was responding in a particular way. For example she was very displeased with a particular set of test results and insisted that some children repeat the test. She explained that she was displeased because the test was not at all interpretive. It involved straight forward recall, she had provided them with a lot of time to complete the learning and had given them many opportunities to learn. On another occasion she stated that she was very pleased with the children's behaviour. She said they were controlling themselves in spite of being very excited because they were going on a field trip.

Ms P's explanation of her responses was an acknowledgement of the children as rational beings and served to develop clear cause/effect thinking in the classroom. It also served to satisfy the highly developed sense of fair play which Ms P. stated the children have. There were also other circumstances in which she tried to be absolutely fair. For example she tried to give each child a chance to provide an example of a concept she was teaching on some occasions.

Literacy was regarded as very important to Ms P. She stated in an interview that one of her main tasks was to establish the basis for reading and writing. All learning depended on this. The children couldn't cope with content subjects if this was not firmly established.

3.2.3 The Classroom Routine

Time was divided fairly strictly and each day there were common and repeated activities. The school day started with a religious event. The children either went to a school assembly where they sang a hymn and said a prayer, practised hymn singing or said a prayer in the classroom. The Lord's Prayer was recited in chorus by the class. This was followed by a Maths and English lesson each day. According to Ms P's timetable six hours a week were allocated to Maths, five hours to English, four hours to Afrikaans and one hour each to Bible Study, History, Science, Geography, Art, Creative Movement, Computer Studies, Guidance and Physical Education. During the period in which I observed the class, this timetable was followed to a large extent.

The formal learning started with a **maths** lesson. The children changed classes for maths. The top maths students joined Ms P for maths, the other children went to another teacher's class.

The school's stated approach for maths was the problem-solving approach. In this approach children construct their own means for solving maths problems. There is not just one method given for solving problems. This approach was partially used for maths teaching by Ms P. She believed that repetition and practice were very important elements of learning and this was used in combination with the problem-solving approach. Frequent repetition of tables and straight forward computations were a reflection of this. Most practise was conducted in the following format. The children wrote down responses to orally posed questions. Answers were given orally by the children in chorus. Straight-forward computations were answered in chorus. However, more complex questions were addressed to those children who were regarded as more competent.

The children were provided with many opportunities to repeat work. They had a maths test on Friday and on the following Monday Ms P went through the test. She was not satisfied with the performance of all the children. She felt that although they were coping with the classwork, they did not do equally well in the test situation. The class were required to redo each algorithm in class on their white-boards. After she had given the children some time to complete the question they were required to hold up their white boards and she checked the work. After the children had attempted to do the algorithm on their own, she completed the problem on the board. Explanation was completed in a turn-taking, almost conversational manner. Ms P asked questions which highlighted the steps which were involved in solving the problem. The questions emphasized the thinking strategies required for the problem. The children responded in chorus to the questions which were posed. While going through the problems the teacher referred to common errors and tried to explain the incorrect reasoning or assumptions.

The problem-solving, constructivist approach was implemented when new work was introduced (Murray, 1993). The following procedure was used when she explained how to do long division using a two digit divisor. The children had already learnt how to do long division when the divisor consisted of one digit, and the dividend of three digits. Ms P wrote the algorithm on the chalk board and asked the children to try and perform

the operation using the same strategy as they used in the previous instance. The children attempted the problem independently on their white boards. Ms P looked at the way in which the problem was solved when children held up their white boards. She then explained one procedure which many of the children adopted by directing questions at the children. The resulting explanation was therefore, directed by the teacher but given by the children. The explanation was directed by specific sequenced questions. At the end of the first explanation Ms P noted that some children used another procedure to solve the problem. She then asked this group to explain their procedure, using the same approach as for the previous method.

Ms P related new knowledge very clearly to previous knowledge. An introduction to decimal fraction, was preceded by a brief recapitulation of the principals involved in common fractions and the knowledge they have of hundreds, tens and units. She then made the transition to decimal fractions. Again the explanation was conducted by questioning the children.

Ms P. stated that she teaches **English** thematically. In the two week period in which I was present in the classroom however, there was not much evidence of this. On the first day that I was in the classroom Ms P. introduced a theme, namely the Olympics which was in full swing at the time. A short discussion on the Olympics was conducted in a question/answer format. Words relating to the theme were written on flashcards and shown to the children one at a time. Other related stimulus materials (a map, pictures, newspaper headlines) were shown with the words. Words that the children didn't know were explained as they arose. For example some children didn't know what the word 'continent' meant and this was explained. The words and other materials served as a spring-board for a discussion. Ms P provided some information about each word and the children also contributed to the discussion.

The children became very excited and they couldn't wait for one person to complete their story before making their contribution. They took turn-taking into their own hands. The discussion became quite rowdy with this mode of simultaneous conversation. Ms P did not approve of this mode of response and said "you were not all going to shout out and tell me different stories". In this way she attempted to control the discourse by controlling what constitutes polite interaction. She repeatedly asked the children to put their hands up and wait until they were called upon to respond. They were able to do this to some extent, but generally they were very excited and could not wait for

other children to complete their stories before making their own contribution. They tended to respond with their own story before the previous child had completed his/her story. Most often this was not a development of what was narrated earlier.

The entire interaction took about 35 minutes. This was the only direct reference to the Olympics. Apart from some spelling words which were related to the theme and a paragraph that they had to write on the Olympics in their weekly class test no work was centred around the theme. Ms P added to a display about the Olympics throughout the week but the theme was not referred to directly and was not developed in any meaningful way.

Most of the subsequent language class work was centred on grammar and practice of the spelling words. The children learnt parts of speech, degrees of comparison, converting nouns to adverbs by adding "ly". They were also introduced to the terms homonym, synonym and antonym. Ms P briefly defined the terms and provided a few examples. The children provided further examples drawn from a work-sheet and the children filled the work-sheet in while the examples were discussed in class.

As with maths there was a great deal of oral work and an enormous amount of drill and repetition. Ms P gave the children many exercises which they completed on their white-boards.

3.2.4 The Children's Mode of Response

Most pupil participation was provided by answering questions asked by the teacher. Two modes of interaction occurred most frequently in the class. Firstly when **new concepts or information** were introduced Ms P provided a very brief explanation which was followed by questioning. Explanations were further developed in a question/answer format. Ms P asked sequenced questions and the children responded. The explanation was constituted by the teacher's questions and the children's responses. Secondly when material was **revised or reinforced** Ms P asked drill type questions which the children answered in chorus.

In both instances the pattern identified by many ethnographers, namely teacher question, child response, teacher feedback was also observed here (Bloom and Green in Barton, 1994). Furthermore the type of questions that were asked were of the type identified by other researchers (Heath, 1982; Wells, 1936; Hammerley 1990). Ms P

almost exclusively asked closed questions, where there was only one correct response and for which the teacher knew the answer.

In both instances the mode of response was predominantly oral. From time to time the children had to write a brief response on their white boards and were called upon to give their answer. Nevertheless this did not change the fact that the predominant mode of response was oral with the whole class involved in the same activity. Although the responses were oral, they were directly related to text. A large variety of texts structured or served as the stimulus for discussion. Textbooks, storybooks, work sheets and teacher tests were some of the materials that were discussed.

The stated rule was that children should put their hands up before they respond, except when Ms P did revision quizzes and everyone was expected to respond to drill-type questions in chorus. This rule was not adhered to in practice. The hands-up rule kept breaking down. There were limited opportunities for official participation and the children knew that the teacher evaluated them on their participation. Many members of the class were competing for the same slot to participate in the official means of participation, so it was not surprising that the rule kept breaking down. Pupils demonstrated their intelligence and knowledge to their teacher and peers by getting their answers heard. As (Hammersley, 1990) pointed out, there was always the danger that another pupil would come up with the right answer and prevent the pupil from claiming it as his own. Hence the children could not endure the tension that was generated by having to wait for the teacher to appoint them to answer.

Thus the mode of response was not conversational turn-taking, rather overlapping responses. Ms. P. did not absolutely insist on the hands-up rule most of the time and seemed to be quite happy with the way in which the children responded. From time to time she did refer to the rule but neither the teacher or the children took it very seriously. Nevertheless the existence of the rule did serve to give some structure.

In the two week period that I observed the class the children were only once given a task which required them to work on their own for a sustained period of time. The atmosphere in the class was generally calmer. However, very few of the children were able to work independently for any length of time. They frequently came to Ms P's desk to ask for assistance. Most questions were not directed at the task content, but at organisational matters.

This mode of response where the children responded orally and where the teacher directed operations had a number of effects. First, explanations occurred in quite a fragmented way because they were constituted both by the teacher and the children. Those children who were actively involved with the co-construction of the lesson could follow the lesson, but for those who were not involved it was quite confusing. Second, explanations occurred against quite a noisy background. Third, choral responses meant that some children would not respond at all and this would go unnoticed. Fourth, a high degree of dependency was shown by the children and they found it difficult to complete tasks without assistance. The level of difficulty of the written tasks was not greater than the difficulty of the oral tasks. In fact most of the children's questions were not directed at the content of the tasks, but the layout. The children's lack of practice made this very difficult for them.

Some children, particularly children who spoke English as a second language, found it difficult to follow classroom interactions. They could not always understand the explanations and they sometimes missed instructions. For the majority of children who were able to follow the classroom processes, the relaxed informal atmosphere was pleasant and made them feel comfortable about their schooling. Most of the children reported that they liked school.

3.2.5 Questions

The questions that were asked by Ms P were almost exclusively of the type where the teacher knows the answer to the question. The questions were not usually requests for information, opinions, experiences unknown to Ms P. The responses were then judged to be correct or incorrect by Ms P and contributed to the point she was trying to make.

Most of the questions asked by Ms P orally were drill-type questions which served to examine whether the children could recall work that had been taught previously. For examples, the children were asked tables virtually every day. Ms P also read a short paragraph with expression and then she asked: "How do we know when raise our voices, stop reading etcetera." A few children called out "punctuation marks". Ms P revised the function of punctuation marks by questioning the children. She drew all the major punctuation marks on the board and asked what each one meant. She frequently gave the children a number of sentences and asked the children to identify the parts of speech in the sentences.

The construction of the questions were simple although in some cases the content was complex. In order to identify parts of speech for example, the child needed to categorize words into abstract groups. When new information was taught using oral explanations, the questions had the same simple construction although the level of abstraction of the content was high. An examples of a question asked in this context was "Who knows what a continent is?"

More complex questions, where the content was abstract and where the children had to perform complex operations, were asked in association with print. There were two different circumstances when this occurred; first the children were given notes written by Ms P and then had to answer questions based on those notes; second during storybook reading. Wells (1986) has stated that parents ask more complex questions during storybook reading and this also occurred in Ms P's classroom. Generally more complex questions were asked when print was involved.

The following was a selection of questions taken from the children's History, Geography and Science notebooks. The children were required to read the notes and then answer the questions in writing, working independently:- Name two groups of people who used to live in the Melville Koppies? (Identifying detail). How do we know that the iron-age people kept animals? (Inference). What is a missionary? (Definition). Name the three astronauts who landed on the moon? (Factual recall). How do you know that Shaka was not accepted by other children? (Inference). Why did Shaka allow white people to settle in an area where he was ruler? (Interpretation and inference). Why does an aeroplane take off against the wind? (Cause and effect relations).

During the two-week period that I observed the children Ms P read with the children twice. On these occasions the type of questioning changed dramatically. She asked more complex, open ended questions although they were still of the type where the teacher had a particular answer in mind when she asked the question. For example Ms P read a descriptive passage to the children from "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe". She asked the children what the author had done to create the atmosphere in the passage. In this context she also asked predictive questions. For example she said, "This chapter is called 'Into the forest' - What do you think is going to happen next in the story?. What do you think the white witch is going to do to the fawn?" She also asked questions which called for affective commentary. For example, "How do you think Lucy is feeling?"

Many of these questions required completely different skills for the different children in the class. For example answering the question "In what part of Russia did Florence Nightingale work?" was a task of different levels of difficulty for children who had different exposure to decontextualized information. On another occasion it was established that some children did not know what a continent was. When Ms P tried to explain this to them they had difficulty understanding there were other land masses and had no knowledge of countries outside of South Africa. Without the relevant content schema, the question was very abstract for them. On the other hand some children had extensive exposure to atlases and many had travelled to other countries. The concept of continents, countries and parts of countries were well established. These children merely had to establish the information which was asked in the question.

Nearly all the questions that were asked during the period that I observed the class were decontextualized. It was only during Guidance lessons that the children were asked questions where they could use their own experience. They were asked questions such as; "Am I happy at school? Do I concentrate in class? Am I satisfied with my results? Do I like all my subjects? If not, why not?" The children were asked to consider and write private responses. Those children who wished to use their responses in a subsequent discussion could do so.

The general milieu of the Standard Two class was one of enthusiastic participation in a loosely structured environment. Most of the participation was on task although here were some children who used the general rowdiness in the classroom to engage in off-task behaviour. Most of the work was conducted orally although print served as a stimulus for discussion. These oral interactions were directed by Ms P through sequenced questioning. Most of the time all the children worked on the same task with Ms P setting the pace.

3.3 In the Classroom: Grade Two

3.3.1 Physical Organization of the Classroom.

The Grade Two classroom was much more spacious than the Standard Two classroom with only 24 children in the class. The parent body of the school employed an extra teacher for each year of the Junior Primary Phase so the classes were relatively small. The headmistress and the governing body of the school were adamant that small classes were essential in the first years of schooling when literacy and numeracy were being established. In large classes difficulties which the children were experiencing may go unnoticed and the children would not "have a firm foundation".

The desks were arranged in two semi-circles. There was a large space in front of the desks with a carpet where the children sat whenever the teacher explained things and when she read stories. Behind the desks there was a book corner with a good collection of storybooks and non-fiction. There was also a games table with jigsaw puzzles, maths games, word games and construction toys. Between the book corner and the games table there was a carpet with cushions.

The back wall of the classroom was covered with pin boards which contained materials related to the theme the children were studying and which contained samples of the children's art work. The theme which was displayed when I visited the classroom was "birds". There were pictures of a variety of birds and short articles on birds. There were also questions on birds, the answers to which could be found in the articles. For example "Why are flamingoes pink? Can penguins fly? Why is this bird's beak hooked?" These displays changed quite frequently. There was also a more permanent display of literary characters and the names of different types of literary genres. A number of reference charts were also displayed. These included a chart of cursive writing and letterland graphics of consonant digraphs.

The classroom rules were displayed on the main notice board of the classroom. The rules were as follows 1. Use a person's name when speaking to them. 2. Be courteous and help anybody in need. 3. Stand and greet a visitor. 4. No swearing, fighting and pushing. 5. No bullying 6. No stealing, ask before taking or borrowing. 7. Always try to do your best.

3.3.2 The Teacher

Ms F reported in an interview that she believed her role as a teacher was to meet the needs of each child in her class as best she could. She felt responsible for the children's academic, physical, social and behavioural needs. In her capacity as a Junior Primary teacher she **viewed her role more broadly** than most Senior Primary teachers do. Senior Primary teachers are mainly concerned with their pupils' academic performance.

During the period that I visited Ms F's class I saw her fulfill this broadly defined teaching role. She was extremely observant and took note of many aspects of the children's life at school. If she believed that one of the children in her class was experiencing a problem she took action immediately. Some examples of this were as follows. One of the children in her class was having difficulty concentrating. She immediately made a referral for an assessment and did all the paperwork which was required by the Education Department when making such a referral. When she noted that one of the children in her class did not have anyone to play with, she organized that he join a group of children to play with during school breaks. She felt one of the children in her class was over-weight to the extent that it was affecting her health negatively. She spoke to the child's mother at the next parent/teacher conference about this and persuaded her to put her daughter on a diet.

Very little escaped Ms F notice although she did not act on it or say anything to the child when she felt it would not particularly benefit the child. She noticed that a child's shirt hadn't been ironed, that someone wasn't supplied with all the correct stationary, that a child was suddenly very withdrawn and quiet and that a certain child had once again lost a work sheet.

Since Ms F was concerned about so many aspects of the children's functioning, she was very knowledgeable and interested in their home circumstances. She was also aware of how home factors impacted on the child in the classroom and made allowances for the impact of upheavals in the home on the child's behaviour in the classroom. She mentioned that one child was always losing work sheets and coming to school unprepared because he was neglected at home. One little girl was silly or withdrawn in turn since her mom had a new baby. One child became very anxious when things were unsettled at home. She said that parents were quite good about warning her about changes in home circumstances, although white parents did this far

more frequently than black parents.

The quality of the children's work also reflected in the support they received from home, according to Ms F. She believed it was most important in the Junior Primary phase for the children to be assisted by their parents. At this stage the children became very anxious if their homework was not completed correctly or if they produced a project which was not of the same standard as the other children's. They also need help with organizational matters such seeing that they had the correct stationary and books. Most importantly parents needed to be available to listen to their children's reading on a regular basis and to take part in paired reading with them.

Cultural and ability **diversity** in the classroom was one of the issues with which Ms F was concerned and which she tried to address. To deal with differences in academic ability she differentiated maths groups and reading groups. For silent reading comprehension the children used the SRA and each child worked on their own level at their own pace. Ms F also prepared differentiated work sheets.

The culturally diverse nature of her class was a factor which Ms F took into account when she considered the nature and amount of background information she needed to supply for some tasks. For example at the beginning of the year she and the children investigated different literary genres. One of the genres that she dealt with was fairy stories. She found that most of the black children were far less familiar with these stories than were most of the white children who have had greater exposure to them. The characters that appeared in fairy stories like gnomes and elves were often unknown to the black children and she had to make use of far more visual material, videos etcetera. (Ms F recalled that when she was explaining what gnomes were, one child said "it's like a tokoloshe".) The meaning attached to known words was also very different. White children, for example viewed "witches" as imaginary, fantasy characters. The black children thought of a witch as a "sangoma", a real person in their community environment.

Ms F's Grade two classroom was very **calm and quiet**. In addition to the stated rules above, the rule which controlled all the classroom interactions and which all the children adhered to, was that only one person speaks at a time while Ms F was teaching or giving instructions. Ms F controlled the classroom discourse completely. While she was teaching, the children were only permitted to intervene if they put their

hands up to ask or answer a question. They only answered when they were called upon to do so by Ms F. Conversational turn-taking was strictly enforced in this classroom.

Ms F structured every classroom event in minute detail. Very precise instructions, particularly in respect of organizational matters, were only given once. For example the children were lined up outside their classroom after break. Before they were permitted to go into the classroom Ms F prepared them very precisely for their next activity. They were told to clear their desks, get out their paired reading book and come to the carpet.

Ms F placed great value on the ability to **listen to and follow instructions**. She stated that one of her main goals as a Grade Two teacher was to develop listening skills. She believed that many children live in home circumstances where there was so much noise and activity that they "switch off" and don't listen. She also believed that children aren't expected to listen in their homes. The importance that Ms F places on this ability was seen in many aspects of her teaching. She very often did specific listening skill exercises. A listening comprehension task was completed at least twice a week. In addition she constantly gave instructions, both to structure tasks and to help the children with basic organization.

Most of the time the children followed the classroom activities and routines. They appeared to know what was expected of them and they seemed to know how to complete the tasks they were given. The children were able to this because there were so few other distractions and the instructions were very clear and explicit.

Ms F expected the children to listen not only to her, but to the other children. When she gave lessons where the children's answers to questions formed part of the explanation, she did not repeat the children's responses. In contrast to Ms F's approach, teachers often repeat children's responses if they believe their contribution is important. The assumption held by these teachers is that the children only listen to the teacher and do not believe their peer's responses to be important. This has the effect of devaluing the children's contributions. Ms F did not make this assumption and she gave the message that the children's contributions were important enough to stand on their own, thereby affirming the children. Ms F also indicated to the children how important their contributions were by responding routinely to every one of their answers. She added to what they have said or complimented a correct response.

When the children give an incorrect response Ms F explained why it wasn't correct but the child was still made to feel their contribution was significant. No negative consequences followed an incorrect response.

Absolute quiet was expected when they did listening comprehension exercises and when they did handwriting. However, they were permitted to chat to one another when they were cutting or colouring and to a lesser extent when they did maths and language work sheets.

Comprehension was the most important dimension of all teaching for Ms F. Understanding of written and oral material was the means by which she defined a good learner. The key to comprehension for all learning, including maths, was understanding language. The focus of Ms F's language teaching was semantics. Accordingly she spent a great deal of her class time explaining the meaning of words and often tried to explain words by relating the meaning to something the children were familiar with.

Consistent with this general orientation, for Ms F reading comprehension was the most significant dimension of reading and most teaching time allocated to reading was spent on this dimension. As a result the children frequently did silent reading comprehension tasks. When the children couldn't read a word she invited them to work out what the word was by examining the context, rather than decoding it phonetically. When the children didn't understand a word which they were reading she also asked them to try and work out what the meaning was from the context. Ms F said that she did some phonic decoding when she worked with some of the children individually. I did not observe this in the time I was in the classroom.

3.3.3 The Classroom Routine

As in the Standard Two class each day there were common and repeated activities. This was followed by a Maths and English lesson each day. According to Ms F's timetable five hours a week were allocated to Maths, seven hours to English and Book Education. Three hours a week were allocated to Environmental Studies which was the integrated study of Science, History, Natural History and Health matters. Time allocations for other studies were Afrikaans (one hour), Handwriting (one and a half hours), Bible (two hours), Art and Music (two hours) and Physical Education (one hour). During the period in which I observed the class, these timetable allocations were

followed to a large extent, but Ms F was flexible about the amount of time she spent on various activities each day. Thus depending on what type of exercise she was conducting, she would spend two hours on Maths one day and half an hour the next day.

As in the Standard Two class the day started with some form of religious instruction. The children either went to assembly, practised hymn singing or they had a Bible lesson. When they had a formal Bible lesson the children swapped classes so that the Christian children attended one class and the Jewish children another. No special provision was made for children of other religious groups at this time but a part-time teacher gave the Islamic children instruction at some point in the week.

Religious instruction was followed by a **handwriting** lesson. The handwriting lesson was combined with phonics instruction. Before the children started writing they were asked, for example, what two letters make the /kw/ sound. The put their hands up and one child said "qu". Ms F then spoke about how the letters should be formed and spacing. She wrote one word and the children did the same word in their books. She spoke about spacing and wrote the next word on the board. The children copied this. The rest of the handwriting lesson continued in the same fashion where the children wrote one word only at a time. Ms F walked around the classroom all the time checking letter formation and spacing.

The daily **maths** lesson followed. A problem-solving approach was implemented by Ms F. At the start of each maths lesson the children were called to the carpet with their white boards and abacuses. Before the children came to the carpet they were told to pack certain materials away and put others on their desks. Ms F gave them a number of computational oral exercises which developed their number sense. For example they were asked to add 5 and 3, then fifteen and three and the fifty five and three etcetera. They were also asked to double and halve numbers and to count in groups. She then presented the children with a number of word problems to solve. They could use their white boards if they needed to write things down. Once the children had reached a solution they were asked to explain the method they had used. The children returned to their desks to complete a written mathematical exercise.

When Ms F taught new concepts she used concrete aids. Each child was supplied with his or her own set of materials (counters or matches in bundles of ten). The link

between the concrete and representational symbols was made very clear. A variety of forms were used to reinforce concepts. Besides the work on the carpet, games were used extensively. On one occasion pairs of the children made a game by following the teachers rather complex oral instructions and then played it with their partners.

Seven teaching hours per week were allocated to first **language** teaching. During this period a variety of activities were conducted. At the start of each Monday the children came to the carpet and gave an oral account of what had happened to them over the weekend. Each child was given a turn to speak. The others were not permitted to interrupt the child but they could ask questions after the child has finished speaking. Ms F responded to each child's contribution. She focused entirely on the content of the stories and developing broad story-telling skills, rather than on grammar. For example, one child spoke about his visit to The Lion Park and said that the lions were "fed" by the park attendants. Ms F ignored this error but did ask him several questions to clarify the sequence of events.

At least twice a week the children did a **listening comprehension** exercise. The SRA reading laboratory was used. The teacher read them an extract and thereafter asked the children questions. The questions involved sequencing, inference, factual recall. Each child had their own workbook in which they responded. They responded by answering in a yes/no form on a preprepared grid. After the exercise the children marked their work and completed a graph which was a record of their progress. The children and the teacher had a simple means to monitor progress.

The listening comprehension tasks provided the observer with an opportunity to assess how Ms F prepared children for a task. She told them it was a folk tale and asked them if they knew what a folk tale was. Several of the children were able to supply the answer. She read a story which was set in Mexico. Before she started reading she spoke about Mexico, where it is, who lives there. Thus she spoke about the content and the form in which the piece was written. During the reading Ms F kept pausing to pose thought-provoking questions to the children.

Reading constituted a significant dimension of Ms F's language teaching. Three different programmes were followed. The children used the SRA Reading laboratory. This program consists of a number of graded reading cards on which there were short extracts and a number of questions based on these extracts. The children kept their

own records and knew exactly what card they were busy with. As soon as the lesson started they went and collected the card they needed and started reading. Most children did this silent reading comprehension exercise independently. Children who were experiencing difficulties went up to Ms F's desk for assistance. She sometimes called on children who she knew were not coping, to work with her. When the children had completed this session, Ms F checked to see what progress each child had made.

A basal reading series was also used. The children were placed in reading ability groups. Each member of the group was issued with the same book. The children were given reading homework and then they read to Ms F. The whole group came to the carpet to read to Ms F. The groups had different tasks to perform and received different assistance. The top group read in unison. In the other groups the children read individually. Generally, even with the less able readers she emphasized the meaning of the text. She assisted some children with decoding but this was not the main emphasis.

The third reading programme which was followed in class was a paired reading program. This is a parent/child programme which focuses on developing reading comprehension and fluency. The child reads and as soon as he can't read a word the parent reads with the child. The child signals to his parent to stop reading with him as soon as he feels he wants to read on his own again. The children chose the books they want to read from a collection each Junior Primary teacher had in her classroom. The parents of all the children in the Junior Primary phase were given training in implementing the program with their children at home.

One of the two computer lessons of the week provided another opportunity for reading. Each of the children had their own terminal and headphones. The school has a number of interactive reading and cognitive programmes which were utilized during these lessons.

3.3.4 The Children's Mode of Response

The children in Ms F's class only responded when they had been given permission to do so by Ms F. They raised their hands and answered questions which had been posed by Ms F when called upon by her to do so. Because Ms F controlled the discourse and other behaviour to a large extent it is quite difficult to determine the children's more individualistic mode of response. Their responses tended to be very

uniform, only acting in the range permitted by Ms F. Permissible responses were the asking and answering of questions. Spontaneous expressions of mirth, interest or disapproval were also permitted during story reading or when the children told their news.

Although Ms F controlled the discourse it does not mean that the children made no contribution to classroom processes. Ms F asked the children many questions and most of her explanations were constituted by a combination of her questions and the children's answers.

3.3.5 Questions

A varied, interesting range of questions were asked by Ms F. She frequently asked questions where the children's answers contributed to the phenomenon she was explaining to the class.

In the Standard Two class, drill questions where there was only one correct response were asked most frequently. In the Grade Two class Ms F asked this type of question but they were more unusual in her class. Open-ended questions, where there was more than one correct answer, were asked frequently. The questions asked showed degrees of open-endedness. Many questions only permitted a limited range of correct responses. The children were asked, for example, to supply the correct word to complete a sentence. A further instance in which open-ended questions were asked were in work sheets where the children had to respond in writing. One of the themes the children were studying in English was "Stranger Danger". After viewing a video on the topic and a class discussion the children had to complete a written work sheet. They were asked questions such as "What should you do if a stranger knocks on your door?"

Questions where the children were asked about their own experience allowed for a much wider range of responses and were asked frequently. For example Ms F told the story of the good Samaritan and afterwards asked the children if they had helped someone in need recently. On another occasion she asked the children about any problem they were having and how they could solve it.

Although the questions were more open-ended and the teacher didn't always know what response the child would give she still controlled the discourse. The range of correct responses still limited. Even when the questions required the children to give

an account of their own experiences, the significance of those experiences were filtered by Ms F.

During the period that I observed the Standard Two class, Ms P only asked questions which required the children to relate their personal experience on one occasion. The child-centred element diminished. On the other hand in the Grade Two class this was a frequent occurrence. Ms F frequently asked the children which required the children to give an account of their own experience to illustrate a point she was making. She tried to contextualize the children's learning. By Standard Two this did not occur and the older children increasingly had to engage in decontextualized thinking which was reflected in the more abstract nature of most of the questions they were asked.

However there were times when Ms F asked complex questions. Again, as in the Standard Two class, it was during story-book reading that more difficult questions were asked. She asked some very thought-provoking, challenging questions. Questions which required affective commentary, reason explanations and knowledge of the use of literary devices were asked. (Why are the people crying? What can you learn from this story? Why do you trust this person? Why was this story scary? Why is the wolf making his voice softer in this story?) She also asked questions to remind them of strategies to work out word meanings. For example a child did not know what the word "drab" meant and asked Ms F. She replied, "Instead of me telling you the meaning how else can you work it out". The children responded that you could read the sentence in which the word was found. "Yes," said Ms F, "see if you can work it out". The children then offered a number of alternatives and eventually came up with the correct answer.

3.4 A Comparison of Teaching Practices in the Standard Two and Grade Two classes

In contrast to the Standard Two class, the Grade Two class was very quiet and orderly. Ms F dominated and controlled all the classroom processes and the range of responses which she permitted the children to make were very restricted. The children could ask and answer questions and produce spontaneous expressions of their feelings during story-reading or story-telling. Although it could be argued that this approach was authoritarian and restricted the children's self-expression and creativity, it appeared to

have a positive effect on most of the children. It was mentioned earlier that for minority students who are not prepared for school practices, learning the preferred behaviour is a trial and error process. In Ms F's classroom, where all classroom events were highly structured and where instructions were extremely clear, the expected behaviour was obvious, so trial and error behaviour was reduced. Most of the township children, who represented a minority at this school, seemed to be aware of what was expected of them, both in terms of tasks and general behaviour. They seemed to be happy and secure.

In both the Grade Two and the Standard Two classes, the discourse was dominated by and organized around print. The predominant conversational cycle was teacher-question, pupil-response and teacher-feedback. The stimulus for this cycle was printed material distributed to the children. Most of the questions asked by the teachers, particularly the Standard Two teacher, were drawn from printed material. The most frequently used material was teacher-produced worksheets, although textbooks and storybooks were also used.

Although print played a central role in both classes, the form that the literacy experiences took was different in the Grade Two and Standard Two classrooms. There was a great deal more story-reading, by both the teacher and the children, in Grade Two than there was in Standard Two. The story-reading which occurred in Grade Two was aimed at improving reading comprehension, accuracy and fluency skills. In Standard Two the children mainly read factual information from notes written by the teacher or from textbooks. In Standard Two the assumption was that the children had mastered the skills of reading and were expected to read to learn. The only direct reading instruction that occurred was an occasional lesson which aimed to develop reading comprehension. In Grade Two, on the other hand, reading or listening comprehension exercises occurred daily. Most of the children had learnt bottom-up reading skills so this instruction was not part of the regular reading programme. There were however, a few children who were still struggling to acquire these skills and they were given individual help with decoding from Ms F while the rest of the children completed other tasks. It was noted that two groups of children had difficulty in this regard. Firstly children who had specific learning disabilities. Secondly children who had limited pre-school experiences which developed analytic thinking and labelling behaviour. The latter will be discussed further in subsequent sections.

The children were presented with decontextualized information in both the classes but there was increasing decontextualization in Standard Two. Much of the discourse in the Grade Two was rooted in the children's own experience. The Grade Two teacher also tried to develop content and formal background schemas before she embarked on a task. In spite of her intention to build up the children's schemas she could not build the basis of every schema. She had to assume that some schemas were in place. There were a few of the children who could not follow the classroom discourse in spite of the extensive preparation provided by Ms F. In the Standard Two class the teacher rarely included the children's own experiences in the lessons. Far more assumptions were made about the children's background knowledge. School was becoming increasingly difficult for children whose home experience was highly contextualized.

The general feel in both classes was that most of the children were coping both scholastically, socially and emotionally. Few overt tensions were apparent although there were indications of non-congruence between some children's learning and the classroom processes. In order to examine this issue it was necessary to look at the home environments of some children in more detail. Accordingly ten children were selected for further examination. The following chapter provides profiles of the home environment of the selected children.

Chapter 4

CASE STUDY PROFILES

This chapter will provide a descriptive account of the ten children selected as case studies. As indicated earlier, in Chapter Two on methods, the children were selected primarily on the grounds of racial and geographical diversity to ensure inclusion of variations in cultural diversity. Accordingly the ten children comprised:

- five white children who lived in middle-class suburbs (Joshua, Lisa, Taryn, Nina, Michael)
- three black children who lived in middle-class suburbs (Diketso, Agnes, Lindiwe)
- two black children who lived in the townships (Thandi, Ephraim).

In the South African context the children could be described in three broad geographical and cultural categories in terms of their home environments. Eight children resided in established middle-class Johannesburg suburbs, five of which were white and three were black. Two other black children lived in a township environment. Viewed within the context of South Africa's social and political transformations relating to race and residence, the first category reflected the older context of segregated suburbs, together with the third category of township dwellers. The second category, namely black children who were now residing in the former white suburbs, reflected the changing reality of increasing racial integration in the main feeder suburb within which the school was situated.

The following case studies are presented in a particular sequence. The first five children were in Standard Two and the remaining five were in Grade Two.

4.1 Standard Two Case Studies

4.1.1 Joshua

Joshua lived three blocks away from the school, in a middle-class area of Johannesburg. English was the only language which was spoken in the home. He lived with both his parents, Mr and Mrs L. The marriage was Mrs L's first marriage and Mr L's second. There were four children in the family altogether, two by the first marriage and Joshua and D by the second. Joshua was ten and he had a younger brother, D, who was five years old. Joshua's mother was trained as an occupational

therapist. She worked in a clinic at RAU University in this capacity two mornings a week. In addition she had developed an interest in aromotherapy and saw clients from home. Mr L was qualified as an accountant and had a MCom. He worked as a financial director.

The Ls are an Orthodox Jewish family. They followed the traditions but according to Joshua's mother they were not particularly religious. Nevertheless Mr L, D and Joshua went to shul every Friday and this was followed by a traditional Friday night supper. Festivals were celebrated with the extended family. Mr L stated that the children mainly learnt about their culture informally, although Joshua attended Hebrew lessons.

The L household was extremely well organized. The children had a very disciplined weekly routine. They came home from school, did their homework, had a bath before their dad came back from work at about 7.00 pm and had a family dinner. After dinner the children cleared the dinner plates, chatted to the family for a while and then went to bed. Although it did not occur on a daily basis, storybook reading was a part of the family's routine. Mr L usually read to the children. He saw storybook reading as an opportunity to interact with the children on a regular basis during a busy working week. When I visited he was reading "The Hardy Boys" to Joshua and D.

Other indications of the organization of the family was apparent in the way in which resources were organized. There was a tremendous quantity and variety of resources in the L home. There was a large video collection, predominantly children's videos. There were a number of sets of Encyclopedias and about 400 children's books in the room shared by Joshua and D. There was a large collection of non-fiction books covering topics such as astronomy, dinosaurs, Bible Stories, Jewish holidays. Joshua had always shown an interest in maps and in response to this interest his parents bought him a number of atlases. Fiction included nursery rhymes, Dr Seuss, folktales, traditional fairy stories, modern stories and traditional stories.

The walls of the bedroom were decorated with educational materials such as a times table chart, a number chart, a clock on the walls. Photographs recognizing the children's achievements were also on the walls. Cricket, tennis, soccer and chess team photographs were framed and on the walls. Karate certificates were also displayed in this way. Toys included a large collection of board games, I spy, fractions, electro, number rings, tic tac toe, Junior scrabble, a Compendium of games, checkers. The

children had many jigsaw puzzles, sports equipment, action men, Barbie dolls, masks, pens and pencils and crayons.

The resources were organized so that they were extremely accessible to the family. The daily newspaper was kept in the same place in the kitchen. Writing materials, videos, reference books, a computer was present in the family room/study and all materials were in a specific place. If a family member used materials they were required to (and did) return them to the correct place. According to their mother the children adhered to this because they had been brought up to keep things in order. It saved time and energy to keep things in order. The children's toys and books were categorized for easy reference. The extent of the organization of toys was best demonstrated by B's organization of the jigsaw puzzles. Each jigsaw puzzle had its own number and each piece was numbered so if a piece was confused it could be placed in the correct set without any difficulty.

Mrs L described herself and Mr L as extremely methodical. She provided the following example to demonstrate how organized Mr L was. When he ran he logged his time systematically and also recorded which shoes he wore each time. She said that she very rarely found herself in the situation where she was unprepared for an event. She said she tried to develop the same behaviours in her children. She tried to teach them to plan. She believed her teaching had been effective because the children were very responsible.

The L family was very hard-working and industrious. Mr L only came home from work at about 7.00 pm and usually worked in the evenings as well. His study was in the family room. He enjoyed the company of his family in the evenings and this arrangement enabled him to interact with his family and complete his work. Joshua did his homework in this room and Mrs L also did her activities here. Mrs L attributed Joshua's work ethic and self-initiated projects to the fact that this was how he saw her and Mr L functioning.

School Performance

Joshua did very well at school. He had performed above the class average since Grade One (See Appendix 9). Comments on his Junior Primary reports indicated that his teachers were very pleased with his academic performance, although they were not always pleased with his behaviour. One teacher said that he talks excessively,

interrupts and alienates other children. His Junior Primary teachers all commented positively on his reading, creative writing and his interest in environmental studies.

In Standard Two his average performance for all his subjects was amongst the highest in his year group. (Overall Average 83%, Overall Class Average 64%). Joshua did best at the content subjects (History 84%, Geography 89%, Science 87%) and Mathematics (85%). He obtained 75% for the two languages, namely English and Afrikaans. Although these were his lowest marks, these results were still about 10% above the class average.

Joshua was very articulate. He was able to label events and objects very accurately. He had a very good vocabulary. He was able to relate stories very clearly. Joshua was quite anxious about performing perfectly. This anxiety sometimes prevented him from understanding oral instructions or quite complex oral information. Joshua wrote clearly and logically when he answered factual questions. His creative work reflected his exposure to print but he did so in a very stylized manner so that his creative writing was somewhat stilted and contrived. He seemed to be very fearful of taking risks because of any negative evaluation which may be consequent on this, so he used a formula he felt safe with. His writing was grammatically correct but his spelling was rather poor. Joshua reads quite fluently and few words were read inaccurately. Joshua's reading comprehension was excellent.

Although Joshua performed considerably above his class average in the Junior Primary phase, his performance wasn't exceptional. This may be related to the different requirements and priorities in the Senior Primary phase. The Junior Primary teachers referred to spelling, reading fluency and so on. In the Senior Primary phase the ability to read with comprehension, to write well and to understand content subjects was more important. There were indications of this earlier on. His Junior Primary teachers commented favourably on his reading comprehension, his ability to write stories and his interest in Environmental Studies. The ability to read accurately and spelling are less important in the Senior Primary phase.

Joshua's performance on standardized tests was consistent with his school performance. His reading accuracy score on the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability was approximately two years above his chronological age. His reading comprehension score was 13+, that is, it was off the top of the scale. He obtained one of the highest

scores in his class on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (21 literal, 22 inferential). (See Appendix 5 and 7).

4.1.2 Thandi

Thandi lived in Soweto when this study was conducted. She lived with her mother, Mrs Z, and several other members of the extended family. The home was owned by Thandi's grandparents who lived in one of two inside bedrooms. Mrs Z's brother and his son, L (18), each had their own room. L slept in the other bedroom in the main house and Mrs Z's brother slept in an outside room. Mrs Z's sister's two daughters, T (16) and P (14) also lived in the home. T's two year old child, Po, was the other regular member of the household. Mrs Z, Thandi, P, T and Po shared one room. Each of the single men in the family had their own room, while five women and female children shared a room.

Mrs Z matriculated and had the highest level of education in her family. She was educated in Soweto until she completed Standard Six. Thereafter she went to boarding school in Kwazulu Natal. This school closed down and she was then sent to a boarding school in Nelspruit where she matriculated. She was sent to boarding school because her parents wanted a better education for her in a safe environment.

Mrs Z took Thandi and one of Thandi's classmates to school in her car every morning. He lived near to the Z's and he was in Thandi's class at school. They left at 7.00 am and arrived at school at 7.45 am. Mrs Z then went on to work where she worked as a book-keeper for a direct sales company. In the afternoons Thandi went home with the father of one of her classmates. He was able to do the afternoon lift because he had his own business and was able to structure his day so that he could fetch the children.

Mrs Z felt comforted that when Thandi went home her grandparents were there. In spite of this she said that she dreamt of being able to purchase a home outside of Soweto. She believed that a woman of her age should not live with her parents. She also expressed concern about the safety in Soweto and she feared that Thandi would develop the "wrong" values in this environment. She was particularly concerned about teenage pregnancy amongst the Soweto youth. This fear seemed to very well-founded since Thandi, P, T and Po were all born out of wedlock.

Although there were many people in the home, there was not much conversation. The television was the centre of all social activity in the Z household. The television set was on all the time while I visited the Z's. There was very little conversation while the television was on and most conversation was related to events which were taking place on the television programmes. The news, politics, sport programmes and entertainment shows provoked the odd comment, although there wasn't any sustained conversation.

Mrs Z reported and I also observed that there wasn't a clear routine in the household. Mrs Z's mother made a cooked meal every night which the family ate in front of the television set but that was where the routine ended. In particular there was no routine for Thandi in respect of bath time, homework time and bedtime. Mrs Z said she felt so exhausted when she came home from work, that she found it difficult to make sure a routine was followed.

There was some printed material in the Z household, but resources which directly assist children with school work were very limited. Several cards and a calendar were present. A set of encyclopedias (Websters) were displayed on a wall unit which also housed a television set and video cassette recorder. Thandi had a school dictionary. Several versions of the Bible were found in the home, including a child's Bible. In addition there were about twenty books of a religious/moral nature. No children's books, other than the Bible and a Sunday school book were present in the home.

The reading and writing which Mrs Z engaged in was directed at the management of everyday affairs and religious reading. Mrs Z and her brother were the only adult family members who could read. Thomas was rather remote from the rest of the family so it was Mrs Z's task to read notices and official letters for the rest of the family. On one home visit a friend of Mrs Z's father asked her to read a letter pertaining to his pension scheme payments. The letter was read out loud and translated from English into Zulu and discussed by all adult members of the family. The family members collectively tried to interpret the meaning of the letter. Mrs Z also filled in forms for all the family members.

Thandi was not read to when she was very young. During the two years she was at preschool Mrs Z read to Thandi on the advice of her nursery school teacher. There are no children's books in the home but Mrs Z read the books that the nursery school

teacher gave her to read. Mrs Z could not provide specific information about the titles of the books but she said it was "things like Mickey Mouse". She was read to at night when the teacher supplied the books.

School Performance

Thandi came to my attention quite soon. She spoke out of turn quite frequently and was often reprimanded. She was singled out when the whole class was misbehaving and reprimanded.

In the Junior Primary phase of her schooling, Thandi's results were in the class average range. Her Junior Primary teachers commented that she struggles with phonic sounds and spelling but most other comments about her work were positive. Comments about her attitude and behaviour were very positive. Comments such as "she appears to be very happy; displays a conscientious attitude; an endearing child; she relates well to peers" were made.

She started experiencing difficulties in Standard Two. She passed most subjects in the first quarter, only failing History and Geography. At the end of the year she only passed Mathematics, Afrikaans and Science (See Appendix 9). Her teacher stated that she did not prepare adequately for her final exams and the results were disappointing. In the Junior primary phase the home could support her learning but this didn't happen in the Senior Primary phase.

Her performance on standardized tests also indicated that there were problems. She obtained one of the lowest scores in her class on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading test (10 literal, 11 inferential comprehension). On the Neale she scored three years below her chronological age for accuracy and four years below her age for comprehension (See Appendix 5 and 7).

4.1.3 Lisa

Lisa lived in a middle-class suburb three kilometres from the school with both her parents, Mr and Mrs C, her 11 year old brother and her grandmother. Mr C was a computer lecturer. The family had experienced some financial difficulties in recent years as a result of the fact that Mr C had to take a cut in salary. Mrs C went back to general clerical work to supplement the family finances. Gran worked in the mornings, but in the afternoons she was available to care for the children and supervise their

homework.

The children's lives were highly structured with very clearly defined rules and strong routines. The control of household matters was firmly in Mrs C's hands and she controlled her children's life at school in the same way. She took on the responsibility for organizing their lives and left little control and responsibility to the children. Mrs C did not have interests outside of her job and her family. Her children's lives were her central interest, and supporting their schoolwork was seen as the most significant dimension of this concern. Both parents saw this role as essential because it took the pressure off the children in a world where the demands made on them were enormous. Although Mr C also stated this opinion he did not provide much of the basic day to day assistance and he was frequently away from home, either working or pursuing his own interests. Rules were stated explicitly. Mr C, in particular, was a strong disciplinarian and was very firm about daily routines and what they believed constituted good manners. The parents discussed why rules had to be enforced with the children but the rules were not negotiable.

Mrs C was a member of the local library and regularly took books out of the library. She reported that she couldn't fall asleep unless she read. She read romances (Sydney Sheldon), science fiction and thrillers. Mrs C enjoyed sharing her literary experiences with her children. When she read anything interesting in the local paper she told her children about it and got them to read it as well. Mrs C also read for practical purposes but she said that she hardly ever wrote. Mr C only read computer manuals for work purposes. Thus modelling was not particularly extensive.

In spite of the fairly limited modelling by her parents, Lisa was an avid reader and her knowledge of children's literature seemed to have exceeded Mrs C's. She read a wide range of children's fiction, including fantasy, ghost stories and adventure/crime (Nancy Drew) stories. As well as leisure reading, Lisa also read for information. She kept many pets and read books and pamphlets on pet care. Lisa spoke about literature with ease and placed books into genres categories and gave a very succinct description of books. In addition to completing all the written work required for school, Lisa wrote long letters to her parents regularly.

Storybook reading was not a regular occurrence in the C household. Mr and Mrs C read to the children intermittently. Mrs C tried to recall something she had read to the

children and mentioned that she read "Ronald Dahl" rhymes. Lisa immediately corrected her on several counts. "Roald Dahl Mom. You read them to M, not to me. I think they are disgusting," she said. She went on to tell me why she thought the rhymes were so dreadful. She was very indignant about the fact that the author had changed the classic Cinderella story and that the wicked sister's head gets chopped off.

Other than the free, local newspaper, the C household did not get newspapers. There were some books for recreational reading in the house. Mr C had about 250 books in his study, most of which were fiction. However he said he was given these books by a friend of his years ago and he had not read them. The children had about 40 books. A number of these were comics (Beano, Archie, Asterix). They had fairy stories, adventure mysteries, fantasy books and traditional children's fiction. Mrs C's personal collection of printed material was very limited. She regularly took books out of the library but she owned very little. She got a variety of magazines (You, Your Family, Fairlady, Cosmo) passed onto her from her mother-in-law and she had a few cookery books.

There were a limited number of reference books in the house, including English and Afrikaans dictionaries and a number of atlases. The children also had "Tree of Knowledge" magazines which Lisa's father categorized and organized into files. Mrs C reported that the children frequently used these for projects. In addition Lisa's mother collected a pull-out page from one of the magazines she was given by her mother-in-law. These pages deal with a specific topic in every issue of the magazine. There were also a number of maths books and computer manuals to which Mr C referred.

The C's had a television which was kept in a television room. The children were only permitted to watch television when they had finished their homework. There were two computers in Mr C's study. However there were few programmes which were specifically for children and the children didn't use the computers very often. Although there were few toys in the house, Lisa reportedly loved doing jigsaw puzzles and playing with lego and blocks when she was younger. She went to nursery school from when she was 3 years old and so she had considerable exposure to these and to perceptual games. When the study was conducted Lisa had a collection of soft toys and a number of music tapes.

School performance

Lisa sat in the front of the class. She was quiet and attentive. She focused completely on the teacher and was very responsive. She also sat very close to the teacher whenever they had to work on the carpet. She often engaged in a private conversation with the teacher from her seat. Lisa quite often spoke out of turn, interrupting explanations but because she did this very quietly and because her interruptions were always on topic, she did not appear to annoy Ms P or the other teachers who taught her Art and Health.

Lisa performed very well at school. Her school records show that she performed above the class average in all subjects except Afrikaans in the Junior Primary phase. Her Afrikaans performance fell in the modal group for her class. Her Junior Primary teachers commented on her conscientious attitude, cheerfulness and interest. They also noted that she was confident and worked neatly and accurately. The teachers also commented on the interesting, imaginative content of her written work and her talented art work.

At the end of Standard Two Lisa received an 82% average. She achieved marks in the high 80% in her content subjects (Geography, History, Science) and Mathematics and she scored 79% for English and 77% for Afrikaans (See Appendix 9).

Lisa's performance on standardized tests was above her age and grade level. Her reading accuracy score on the Neale Analysis Reading Ability was approximately two years above her chronological age. Her reading comprehension score was 13+, that is it was off the scale. She obtained one of the highest scores in her class on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (21 literal, 22 Inferential). (See Appendix 5 and 7)

Lisa expressed herself very clearly. She understood the meanings of a wide range of words and expressed ideas and concepts very clearly. She also showed a very mature understanding of social interactions. During a guidance lesson Ms P was addressing the problem of teasing. Lisa suggested that the best way to reduce teasing was to ignore it because you would not give the perpetrators the desired satisfaction of a response. She also cited a very relevant example from her own experience to illustrate her point. It should be noted that this comment was addressed to Mrs P, as were all her other comments even though it would have made a valuable contribution to the class discussion.

4.1.4 Diketso

Diketso lived in a suburb close to the school. She lived with Mr and Mrs H and her grandmother. Until recently Mr and Mrs H's two biological children also lived in the home. However these children had completed their schooling and had both gone to live abroad, one in Germany and the other in London. Mrs H was trained as a remedial therapist and had worked in this capacity in a number of schools. She also started the first bridging school in Johannesburg, Dunctonwood. Just recently Mrs H made a major career change and she and Mr H started their own decorative glass business.

Diketso's grandmother worked as a domestic for Mrs H and Mr H and had done so for twenty seven years. Diketso came to live with the family because her biological mother neglected her to the extent that she suffered from malnutrition. The H's and the grandmother decided that Diketso should be cared for by the H's as the grandmother felt she was not able to do this on her own. Thus since she was three years old Diketso was cared for by the H family. She was entirely supported by the family financially. Mrs and Mr H paid for her education, food and clothing.

Diketso had a bedroom in one of the rooms in the house while her grandmother lived in quarters in the garden. Mrs H said that Diketso wanted to live in the house rather than in the outside rooms because her grandmother watched television until late at night and Diketso was getting to bed too late to be ready for school the next morning.

Diketso spent the week days and some weekends with the H's. Some weekends were spent in Soweto. Her grandmother visited a friend in the township and Diketso accompanied her. During the December and Easter holidays she went "home" to Lichtenberg with her granny. Her grandmother owned a small farm in this area where the family grew mealies and ran some cattle.

Diketso lived in a number of different contexts, and her experience with print and the value placed on it was very different in these various contexts. With Mrs and Mr H her literary experience was typical of a middle-class Western family. They read to her, modelled reading and writing, used print as a stimulus for conversation and had an extensive variety of printed materials in their home. In contrast, Diketso's grandmother was virtually illiterate although she greatly valued the fact that Diketso was literate. She respected and admired her for this but did not regard it as important in her own life and felt her level of literacy was adequate for her life-style needs. She was able to

read product logos, so she could do the shopping.

Diketso was read to from when she was about four years old until the end of grade one. Mrs H or her two children used to read to her. Alphabet books, counting, colour and time books, were read as well as storybooks. Fairy stories, Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton were read most frequently.

Her guardians modelled literacy extensively. As well as practical reading, Mrs H and Mr H were keen leisure readers. Mrs H read contemporary literature and they both enjoyed science fiction. In addition to seeing the adults in the family read, the H's son was an avid reader and used to model reading as a pleasurable and significant activity. Mr H also did some work-related reading. He also read several newspapers each day and his newspaper reading was the main stimulus for conversation. He read sections of the newspaper out loud and he and Mrs H discussed the issues that were raised. Mr and Mrs H did the writing which was required for the organization of their lives. They filled in forms, kept memory aids and did some writing at work. In addition Mrs H frequently wrote to her children and often sent cards.

Diketso was fairly unresponsive to the various inputs she encountered in the H household. She rarely joined in the conversations, didn't read any of the books in her room except, occasionally, a "Sweet Valley High" book.

School Performance

Diketso looked older than the other children in her class. She sat at the back of the class and appeared to be disengaged from the processes occurring in the classroom. Most of the time she appeared to be bored.

Diketso's school records showed that she performed within the class average in most subjects in the Junior Primary phase. An exception to this was her below average performance in Environmental studies in Grade Two and her below average result in Mathematics in Standard One (See Appendix 9). Her Junior Primary teachers commented favourably on her attitude and behaviour, but comments in respect of her work weren't always positive. For example she was described as a co-operative, friendly, well-mannered member of the class. The teachers went on to say that her sentence structure was poor and that she had difficulty with Maths. One favourable comment that was made concerning her work was that she read fairly fluently.

In Standard Two Diketso's overall percentage for all her subjects was 4% above the class average (Diketso-68%, Overall class average 64%). She scored within 10% of the class average for all her subjects (See Appendix 9).

No major change had occurred in Diketso's results in the Junior Primary phase and the Senior Primary phase. She scored in the average range in the Junior Primary phase and her first year of the Senior Primary phase.

Diketso read accurately and quite fluently. Occasionally she "sounded out" words which she was not familiar with. She found it difficult to talk about books and other materials that she had read. However this may be related to a broader inability to express herself clearly. On written tasks Diketso's spelling and grammatical structure was very poor. The content of her writing reflected her own experience and as such had more depth to it than some of the writing of her peers. However she did not always respond appropriately to the stimulus material or answer the question which is set. She was able to write a story in a logical sequence.

Diketso's performance on standardized tests was below her age and grade level. Her reading accuracy and comprehension scores on the Neale Analysis Reading Ability were both approximately two years below her chronological age. Her score on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test fell within the average range of her class (20 literal, 16 Inferential). (See Appendix 5 and 7).

4.1.5 Taryn

Taryn lived in a suburb 3 kilometres from the school. Taryn's parents were divorced and have been so since the children were two years old. Taryn lived with her mother Mrs P, her twin brother and a man friend of Mrs P's.

Mrs P worked for the Gauteng Education Department where she was involved in policy and strategy development. She had a trade union background and was a self-proclaimed unionist in all her thinking in education and other aspects of social life. Mrs P's whole working life had been directed to the "struggle" and she spent two years under banning orders for her political involvement.

Her political stance not only determined the dominant value in the home, but determined the way in which the family's daily life was enacted. Mrs P had always

worked very long hours. In addition she would not have any domestic help because she believed it was morally wrong to have other people doing "your dirty work". The effect of this was that her children had been in care since they were six months old. They went to a full day crèche at six months, followed by a full day nursery school at 3 years of age. When they started school they went to aftercare. They spent their school holidays at a recreation centre.

Mrs P managed to meet her demanding work and family commitments by having a very well-organized, clearly defined weekday routine. She allowed herself a half hour of leisure each day when she got home from work. She poured herself a drink and watched one of the soap operas for half an hour. The children had to amuse themselves or complete their homework during this period. As soon as the soap opera ended Mrs P prepared supper and the children bathed. When the children had had their bath, they came into the kitchen where Mrs P helped them with their homework if this was required. They watched TV for a short period before dinner. Almost immediately after dinner they went to bed at 8.30. Mrs P tidied up the dishes and then went to work on her computer.

Mrs P supported her children's education by encouraging the love of learning. In spite of her very busy schedule, she also provided a lot of practical assistance with the children's homework. She was very well-organized and because she had a very disciplined routine she found time to help the children with their schoolwork. She was very firm about the routine and the children had very little say in any deviations from the patterns although she respected the children's opinions about other matters and the conversational exchanges were very democratic. When they were not directly involved with schoolwork Mrs P ensured that they were actively involved in various activities. She also provided many physical resources in the home which meant a minimum of effort needed be made to collect resources for project and other reference work.

There were books and other printed material in virtually every room in the house. In the living room there were several older sets of encyclopedias and other general reference books. In Mrs P's study there were a large number academic books reflecting the areas of study in which Mrs P was involved. Mrs P's collection of fiction reading was also found here. Political posters covered the walls (Workers Unite, One Country, One Federation). In addition to her books there was a large collection of

board games in the study. There was a computer and keyboard in her study. Grolliers encyclopedias and the Eyewitness Encyclopedia of Nature (Eyewitness) were on the computer.

There were also a collection of books in each of the children's rooms. Each child had a set of children's encyclopedias in their room. They each had about a 100 storybooks which included contemporary children's fiction, traditional stories, comic books and a number of fairy stories. They also had non-fiction reference books. There were no toys in Taryn's room. On the contrary, her desk was filled with a large collection of quite adult toiletries. Taryn had very clear notices on her door warning other family members to keep out of her room.

There was a very old television set in the living room. Television viewing was strictly controlled. There were specific programmes that the television was switched on for. Mrs P watched her daily soap opera, the family watched the news together and the children had a number of programmes which they watched regularly.

Mrs P reported that bedtime storybook reading was started when the children were six months old. She read to them every night until they were about seven years old and were able to read themselves. Mrs P's father reportedly also read to them during the day. He would say rhymes and poems with them endlessly. Mrs P's father loved literature, particularly poetry and he would read poetry to them. Mrs P reported that he would do anything to get them interested in literature, as he had done for her when she was child. A large variety of books were read to the children, including alphabet books (Ritchard Scarry) nursery rhymes, storybooks and traditional tales. She also read a great deal of non-fiction, basic general knowledge books and many books which focused on environmental issues. The children continued the pattern of a bedtime story but they read it themselves now. Taryn read a variety of contemporary children's fiction.

Reading was an integral part of Mrs P's life and the children had seen her read for a variety of purposes. Mrs P continued to extend her qualifications in her adult life. Ten years after she completed her Bachelors degree she did an Honours degree in Applied Linguistics and after that she completed a Masters degree in Adult Education. As well as reading for educational purposes she had to do a great deal of reading and writing for her job. She spent most evenings writing on the computer. She read novels at

night when she went to bed and read the newspaper daily. She read recipes, street-maps, she wrote shopping lists and memory aids.

School Performance

Taryn was a lively, interactive member of the class. She presented as a very confident girl. Taryn was equally as comfortable with her teachers and her peers. In spite of the fact that she was one of the younger children in the class, she seemed to be more mature than the other children. She interacted in a relaxed down to earth manner with the boys and girls in the class.

Taryn's school records showed that she performed considerably above the class average in all subjects except for Afrikaans throughout the Junior Primary phase. Her Afrikaans performance fell in the modal class in Standard One. In the same year she was one of only three children who got a rating of one for Mathematics and English. Her Junior Primary teachers commented on her excellent spelling, well structured creative writing and her excellent oral language abilities. They also commented positively on her number concept and reading abilities.

Taryn was one of the top students in the Standard Two group. She received an 84% average. She scored about 15% above the class average in all her subjects except for Afrikaans (See Appendix 9).

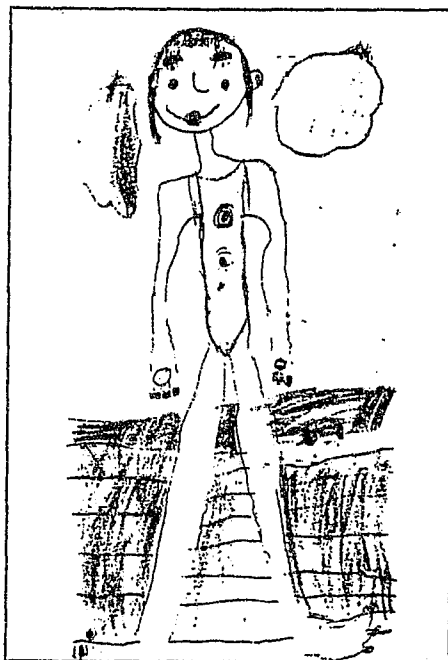
Taryn's performance on standardized tests was above her age and grade level. His reading accuracy score on the Neale Analysis Reading Ability was approximately one year above her chronological age. Her reading comprehension score was 2 years above her age level. Her score on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (21 literal, 18 Inferential) was above the class average (See Appendix 5 and 7).

Taryn expressed her ideas clearly and logically. She was able to relate a story logically and clearly. Taryn's social intelligence was very sophisticated. Taryn's open ended written work was markedly better than that of her class mates. She wrote a logical, imaginative story, her sentence structure was very good and she used grammar flexibly. Her spelling was not very good but that did not inhibit her from using her rich vocabulary.

4.2 Grade Two Case Studies

4.2.1 Nina

Nina lived in a suburb 2 kilometres from the school with both her parents. Her father, Mr R came from a Catholic background and her mother, Mrs R was Jewish. Neither of the parents were religious, so their different religious backgrounds had not been a source of conflict. Nina had two older sisters, aged thirteen and eleven. Nina's grandmother lived in a cottage in the garden. Both of Nina's parents were medical doctors. Her father had a Ph.D in occupational health and was the Acting Chief Director in the Department of Health. Her mother had specialized in community health and was a medical consultant for programmes which aimed to educate the public on primary health care issues. She played a role in developing and evaluating radio and television soap operas with a health message.



Self-portrait by Nina

A very strong work ethic operated in the family and they were all involved in a number of enterprises. Mrs R had studied for her specialisation, held down a demanding job and organized and cared for her family in the period just before I met the family. The children put a great deal of effort into their schoolwork, as well as participating in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Mr R, in particular, gave the impression of being a tireless worker.

Nina was the youngest child in a very articulate, talented family. They were all very kind to her, even indulgent. Nevertheless Nina appeared to be slightly out of step with the rest of the family. Mrs R said she felt guilty that she had not done as much for Nina as she had for the other children. She mentioned that she stopped work for two years after her older daughters were born but only stayed home for three months after Nina was born. She stated that she also forgot to do "little child things, like going to the zoo" with Nina. When she remembered, she and the rest of the family sprang into action

and did all the things they thought they should be doing for her.

This pattern was observed in the family's verbal interactions. Dinner time was a period of furious conversation with ideas and information flying thick and fast. Nina tried to make a contribution from time to time but her comments weren't quite on the mark and were largely ignored. Every now and then she would try to make her point very loudly. The rest of the family fell silent and all tried to respond to what she was saying. They showed an almost contrived interest in her views.

The R family was highly literate. Mr R believed that expert information was to be found in print, whereas oral information was not to be trusted. This did not mean that printed matter could not be disputed and several printed sources needed to be consulted. Printed material was not only an important source of information, but many of the family interactions were organised around and stimulated by the printed word.

The family had many literacy resources, the children were read to regularly and engaged in reading and writing. The parents modelled literacy extensively and the children saw Mr and Mrs R reading for a wide range of purposes. Reading was an integral part of their jobs. Nina's father read reports and journal articles and Mrs R often had to bring work home. The children also saw their parents studying to extend their education. Both parents engaged in leisure reading. A newspaper was delivered to their home and was read daily. Mr and Mrs R also read and wrote to organize their day to day living.

Bedtime reading was a regular occurrence in the R household. A story or non-fiction was read to the Nina almost every night. Mr and Mrs R took turns to read and sometimes Nina's grandmother did the reading. They started this practice when the girls were one to two years old and continued reading to the girls until they were able to read fluently by themselves (around ten years old). They still read to Nina although she was quite a fluent reader. A large variety of books had been read to the children, including alphabet books, picture storybooks and nursery rhymes. Letter and stories were read to Nina when it was noted that she had difficulties learning phonics. Mrs R stated that she preferred contemporary stories, but that Nina loved the traditional fairy stories, so she had read these to her. She had also read some non-fiction to all the children.

The children read a variety of texts. They did the reading they had to do for their routine schoolwork. For project work they mainly used Groliers Encyclopedia which was available on computer. They also took books out of the library on project topics. At the time of the visits, Nina had not yet done project reading independently. At Grade Two level they did not have many projects, and when they did Nina asked her parents to help her look for suitable books, and they also helped her with the reading.

The family also engaged in a great deal of leisure reading. The children regularly took books out of the library and received books as gifts from their parents and their Granny. Kate read the newspaper regularly. They all read games instructions. The children wrote quite frequently as a means of communicating with each other. They had post-boxes outside their bedrooms and wrote each other letters. Nina had written three of her own stories (The Tiny Valley, The Volcano Erupts, Tiger). She typed one herself on the computer and the other two she dictated to Kate and Sue.

There were many resources in the home, including a large collection of adult fiction comprising detective stories, fantasy, feminist literature and some classics. Reference books included medical books, recipe books, child care and gardening books. There was a collection of books in each child's bedroom. In Nina's room there were a number of reference books including a set of children's encyclopedias. The fiction collection included traditional fairy tales and contemporary children's stories. Posters were another form print in her room. An alphabet chart, African Bush animals and Birds of Africa charts were found. There was also other printed matter in the home, including a large collection of medical journals. A newspaper was delivered daily and there was a large notice board in the open plan kitchen/diningroom. Photographs, accounts, school and other notices were pinned up on the board. This notice-board illustrated the accessibility of printed material in this household. Materials were ordered and available to all family members.

The children had very few toys. Nina's only toys were a few dolls and a pair of roller-skates, but she did have a number of board games, including Monopoly, Cluedo, Trivial Pursuit for Juniors and Scrabble for Juniors. There was a computer in Mr Rand Sue's bedroom loaded with two encyclopedias, namely Encarta and Groliers. The children used Encarta very regularly. A television was housed in a separate room and was not switched on unless a specific programme was being watched and television programmes could not be viewed unless homework had been completed.

School performance

Nina was identified as having a specific learning disability in Grade One but still performed in the average range for most subjects. When she started Grade Two processing difficulties prevented her from making adequate progress with reading and spelling and she obtained the lowest rating (5) for both of these areas (See Appendix 10). Nevertheless her teacher commented that she was "very interested in all reading activities".

Her parents decided that she should repeat Grade Two. Her results at the end of her second year of Grade Two showed a marked improvement. She received a rating of 1 for reading and a 2 for both spelling and independent written work. Nina still displayed many behaviours typical of children with learning disabilities. For example her spelling on written tasks where spelling was not specifically being tested showed reversals and other errors typical of learning-disabled children. In addition she was easily distracted and immature. It may have been that her excellent oral language skills and her knowledge about how books work helped her overcome her problems with reading and writing.

Nina's oral language skills were excellent. Her vocabulary was extensive and she had a very good understanding of word meanings. When her teacher asked for a word meaning, Nina was most frequently the person who supplied it. She gave very succinct, accurate definitions of the words. Nina's story-telling ability was also very good. She gave a logical, detailed, articulate account of events, expressed her ideas very clearly and related events meaningfully. She was very responsive during story reading, often being familiar with the stories that her teacher read because she had read them at home. She made insightful comments and was able to identify very complex issues in stories. For example, irony was very apparent to her. Her intellectual sophistication stood in contrast with her emotional immaturity and the immature way she interacted with her peers.

Nina's written work reflected her exposure to stories, in particular in the sense of drama she tried to create with her flexible sentence structure. For example she started one story with "Three pigs set of to find their desdne" (destiny). She wrote imaginative stories but the impact was often lost because her spelling was poor and her grammar muddled. (Poor grammar is certainly only a feature of her written language). Nevertheless this did not inhibit her from using her rich vocabulary or experimenting

with a variety of sentence types.

Nina's reading accuracy score on the Neale Analysis Reading Ability was approximately one year below her chronological age. Her reading comprehension score was at her age level. Her score on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (26 sentence reading, 18 paragraph reading) was above the class average (See Appendix 6 and 8). Thus Nina's performance on the silent reading comprehension was better than her performance on the oral reading task. She was also in a higher reading group in class for silent reading tasks as well. It may have been that she felt less anxious when she read silently because her difficulty with decoding was not exposed and she could focus on the meaning of the text.

4.2.2 Agnes

Agnes lived in the suburb in which the school was situated, sharing a single room with her mother, Mrs M, and a one month-old baby sister. The room was situated on the property of Mrs M's employers. The baby's presence dominated the space, with a large, very ornate cot taking up about 1/4 of the room space. Large, ornate congratulatory cards were pasted all over the room. Mrs M was a full-time domestic worker in the T household where she had been working for five years. Mrs M's brother lived in another room on the property and worked as a gardener. Mrs M had a home in Zimbabwe where she spent her Christmas holidays. She had a ten year-old son living with her family in Zimbabwe.



Self-portrait by Agnes

Mrs M was not married to Agnes's father and had lost contact with him. She had recently married the baby's father. They did not live together, however because he worked as a gardener in another area of Johannesburg and lived at his place of employment. They stayed with each other over weekends.

During both my visits there was very little conversation during the visit. Most of the

conversation that did occur centred on routine activities, such as caring for the baby and making breakfast. Mrs M's husband's sister was also visiting. The adults conversation with each other was sparse, but even less was said to the children. Mrs M didn't say anything at all to the baby while she worked with her, changing her nappy or feeding her. The church played an important role in the family. Mrs M belonged to the charismatic "Universal Church", and attended the church regularly before she had her baby. Her husband and his family also attended church and it was an important arena for socializing.

Mrs M was educated in Zimbabwe and passed Standard Seven and hence was able to read and write. However in literate terms she could be described as naïve. She believed that books were sometimes true but insisted that the information contained in newspapers was always true because "they can't tell the whole world lies". Literacy played an insignificant role in her life, being confined to reading recipes and dress patterns. The Bible was read regularly, as were letters from her family in Zimbabwe, implying that she read to stay in touch. She occasionally (about once a month) read the newspaper if her brother had bought a copy. Her brother also bought a magazine from time to time which she borrowed to read.

Mrs M read to Agnes occasionally when she was at nursery school which she attended for one year. She read the books supplied by the school or her older son's old school books. She also read to her before the baby was born as part of the paired reading programme. Since the baby's birth, however, her mother had not read much to Agnes and Mrs M was not able to provide specific detail of what she had read to her daughter, mentioning only nursery rhymes and Bible Stories. She said she read whatever books Agnes brought home and said that they did not talk much while the reading took place. She felt that Agnes sometimes asked her "stupid" questions such as "Why do people have two legs and dogs have four legs?" (Quite a significant question, I feel).

Agnes herself read her school basal readers. Mrs M was not always available to listen to her reading. There were very few resources in the room and very little printed material in Mrs M's room, apart from a Bible and the cards which Mrs M received on the birth of her baby. Some of Agnes's Grade One exercise books and a few of her brother's school books were kept in a chest outside the room. Moreover Mrs M was not aware of resources which were available. For example she was not aware that the

local public library could be used without having to pay for the loan of books. Thus Agnes did not have much opportunity to read independently, reading only the paired readers she brought from school.

There was a television in the main house to which Agnes had access. She watched cartoons in English and some of the Zulu serials. There was no computer in the main house. There was little evidence of Agnes's interest or concerns in the room that she shared a room with her mother. There are no toys or children's books in the room and the only item in the room which reflected Agnes's presence was a framed photograph of her in her school uniform. In contrast there was a large cot with very decorative bedding and various other items of baby equipment. There were also no toys for the baby.

School performance

Agnes had performed at or below the class average in most subjects in the Junior Primary phase (See Appendix 10). Comments made by her Grade One teacher indicated that her entry into Primary school was successful: "Agnes had coped well with the introductory perceptual programme, she copes well with story sums, she is reading well and can construct simple sentences". Comments made by her Grade Two teacher suggested that Agnes started experiencing difficulties in Grade Two. Report comments made by Ms F were, "Agnes is a fluent reader but she didn't always understand what she reads. She is confused with vowel sounds, maths performance is erratic". Although comments about her work became more negative, comments about her attitudes and social interactions remained consistently positive. She was described as polite, obedient, co-operative, responsible, trustworthy and reliable.

Agnes read slowly and haltingly. Her sight vocabulary (words that she could recognise quickly and automatically) was fairly limited. When she encountered an unfamiliar word she did not try to use the context to work it out, but attempted to decode some words using an oversimplified phonics code. Moreover she had not mastered some basic phonics relationships so this strategy was not successful. Usually she did not attempt to read an unknown word at all, but rather waited for someone to tell her what it was. Agnes's reading comprehension was also below the class average. She was in the lowest reading group on the SRA programme which was directed at reading comprehension. Her reading comprehension on the standardized tests was also below age and grade level.

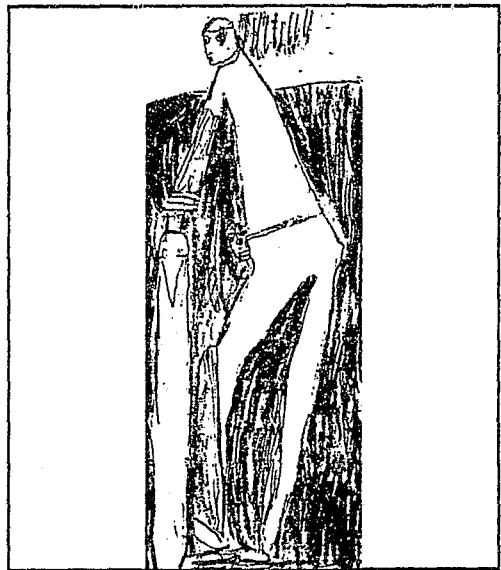
On written tasks Agnes's spelling and grammatical structure was very poor. She was not able to write a story with a logical sequence. Her responses on written tasks, where the responses are circumscribed and the correct response was obvious, were often incorrect and indicated that she had not understood the task.

Agnes's performance on standardized tests was below her age and grade level. Her reading accuracy score on the Neale Analysis Reading Ability was approximately two years below her chronological age. Her comprehension score on this test was about one year below that expected for her age. Her overall score on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test was below the class average. Her score on sentence reading was slightly above the class average (25; CA = 24,7). Her score on the paragraph reading Subtest was considerably below the class average (8; CA = 14,8). The low score was partly a result of the fact that she did not complete the test. It was noted that she read very slowly on oral reading tasks. (See Appendix 6 and 8)

4.2.3 Michael

Michael lived in a suburb 5 kilometres from the school with his mother and father, Mrs and Mr K. He had a ten year-old brother and a five year-old sister.

Mr K worked for the Rand Afrikaans University as a lecturer in the English Department. He was doing his Ph.D and preferred to work at home where he would not be interrupted. Mrs K was a trained teacher, but had chosen not to continue working in her profession and was a housewife. Thus both parents were at home for much of the day. Michael's older brother was in Standard Three at the same school as Michael and his sister attended a nursery school.



Self-portrait by Michael

Education was of primary importance in the K family and was the issue around which important family decisions were made. Mr and Mrs K decided that it would be most

beneficial for the family if Mrs K applied her teaching skills to her own children rather than practise her profession. She had taken this decision very seriously. Not only did she help her children with homework, as other parents may have done, but she spent several hours each day teaching her school-going children. This activity was seen to be more important than the financial contribution she could have made by going to work.

Other sacrifices were also made to support the children's education. Mrs and Mr K bought very little for themselves and could not afford to go out, but the children had extensive resources to promote their education. In fact Mrs K had sacrificed not only her own job, but also her own interests to help the children. There were few indications of Michael's mother's interests in the household.

The K family were highly literate. I observed Mr K discussing books with his sister. He said he continuously and constantly tried to use literature to develop cognition. However I didn't observe this happening. The conversations that I observed between Mrs K and the children took the form of instruction and were completely controlled by Mrs K.

The children witnessed extensive modelling of literacy events by their parents. Mr K did a great deal of reading and reported that he always read three books at a time. He read one book for the research he was conducting, one for teaching purposes and one for leisure reading. Mrs K said she loved reading but did not find the time to read during the school term, saying she "had too much schoolwork to do." When she found time she read novels set in a medical setting and psychology. She read recipes and endlessly read the children's schoolwork. Mr K wrote continuously for work purposes. He worked at home for much of the time so this occupation was very visible to the children. Mrs K and Mr K both wrote for practical purposes. Mr K kept a diary of upcoming events and he noted events that affected the whole family, whereas Mrs K wrote memory aids and sometimes wrote letters to her family while the children were playing.

Mrs K reported that storybook reading was started before the children were a year old. At this stage they mainly read nursery rhymes. They joined the library and started taking books out every two weeks before the children were two years old, a practice which they continued. She read to them about three times a week. Mr K or Mrs K

read to them at any time of the day, not necessarily at bedtime. They still read to Michael's sister regularly and tried to read more advanced books to the boys. However Mrs K said that school project work was very time-consuming so that there was not always time for leisure reading. A large variety of books were read to the children, including alphabet books, counting books, nursery rhymes, storybooks and traditional tales. Mr K often read Tin-Tin and Asterix with the boys. Non-fiction which was read was directed to school work.

There were many literacy resources in the home. These materials were all very well-organized and easily accessible to all the family members. The library books were kept on the coffee table in the living room and the children picked one up and read a bit from them at intervals during my visit. Also in the living room were a number of magazines. The daily newspaper was also lying around in this room. There was a big collection of adult fiction, mainly novels and poetry. Reference books included an Encyclopedia Britannica, several dictionaries and nature reference books. There was also a collection of books in each of the children's rooms. There were several sets of children's encyclopedias in the room Michael shared with his older brother. Other non-fiction included a number of children's dictionaries, several wildlife books and instruction books on how to build models. They had about 70 storybooks which included contemporary children's fiction and comic books such as Biggles, Asterix and Garfield. The boys had a very large collection of toys, including construction toys (lego, blocks jigsaw puzzles, electronic kits), art materials, board games (Scrabble, Trivial Pursuit, Cluedo, Chess, cards), dressing-up clothes and a few cars and trucks. There was a desk in their room with a large supply of pens and pencils and a tables chart on the wall. Michael's sister also had her own collection of books in her room.

There was a television set in the living room which was switched on for specific programmes. It was not permissible for the television to be switched on during meal times or while homework was being completed. For the rest any family member could watch whatever they chose to, whenever they wished. However the children seemed to be very selective about television viewing and watched a few programmes. The fact that they had to spend so much time doing schoolwork may have contributed to this preference. When they had free time they preferred playing outside.

Mr K had a computer in his home office. The children had access to this computer. They had several educational games (Maths, Spelling) on the computer. Michael's

brother typed his school projects on the computer and Michael had started using it to write stories.

School Performance

Michael was very reserved and most of the time appeared tense and anxious in the classroom.

Michael achieved above average results in Grade One and was one of the top students in Grade Two. He received a rating of 1 for English, Maths and Environmental studies. Comments about his work, study habits and attitudes were consistently positive. His Grade One teacher said his number concept was good, that he read with fluency and understanding and that he could read sentences accurately. Similar comments were made by his Grade Two teacher. In addition she commented on his creative writing abilities. He was described as co-operative, obedient, independent and conscientious. Ms F stated that he followed instructions and listened well.

Michael was capable of expressing his ideas clearly and logically. However, he was very inhibited and unsure of himself so he didn't often present his ideas in class. When the children told their news, Michael said very little.

Michael was in the second highest reading group in the class on both the SRA and on the basal reading programmes. His reading comprehension was excellent and he was probably not in the top groups because he read rather slowly. This was a feature of the way in which Michael worked. He was fairly slow, careful and accurate. He was fearful of being wrong so would not take any risks and only responded orally or in writing when he was confident of being correct.

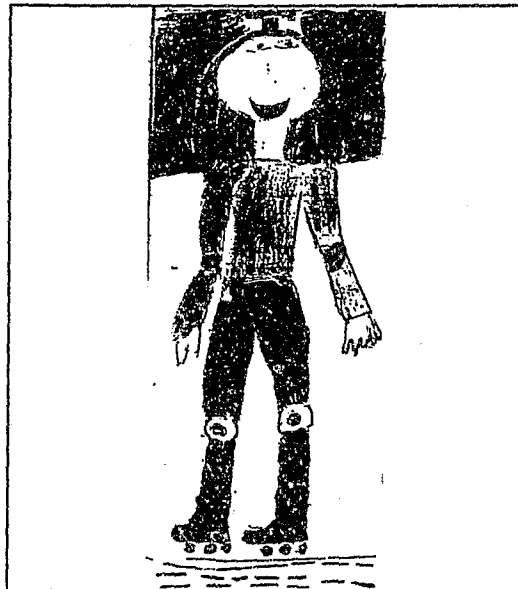
Michael's open-ended written work was better than that of most of his class mates. He was able to write a logical, cohesive story. His sentence structure and spelling was very good. His story writing reflected his exposure to storybooks. He completed written tasks where the responses were more circumscribed. He gave clear, accurate responses.

Michael's reading accuracy score on the Neale Analysis Reading Ability was approximately one years below his chronological age. His reading comprehension score was 2 years above his age level (See Appendix 8). The significant discrepancy

between his accuracy and comprehension score indicated that he could understand what he read from minimal textual cues. Thus his understanding was assisted by his existing knowledge which included knowledge of how language and stories worked. His score on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test was above his class average for sentence reading (28, CA=24,7) and paragraph reading (18, CA=14,8) (See Appendix 6).

4.2.4 Lindiwe

Lindiwe lived in the suburb in which the school was situated with both her parents and her 10-year old brother. Her father, Mr LM, was the sub-editor of the Sowetan. Her mother, Mrs SM, taught Business Economics at high school level in Soweto. Both parents had post-matric qualifications. Mrs SM had a B Com from Fort Hare and a Higher Diploma in Education from WITS University. Mr LM completed a Diploma in Journalism. The older brother was in Standard One at the same school as Lindiwe. He was at a remedial school previously because he had learning difficulties. He had only main-streamed during the year in which this research was conducted.



Self-portrait by Lindiwe

Mrs SM had a very rigid routine for weekdays. She said this was essential because she and the children only get home at 5.30. Mr LM often only got home at 9.00 pm. She believed that the only way in which she could get the family through all the things they needed to do with little assistance was by following a very tight schedule. Mrs SM cooked while the children complete their homework at the kitchen table. They attended after-care but they didn't always finish their homework during this time. They often attended extra-murals during this time or played with the other children. In addition Lindiwe's brother had learning difficulties so he worked rather slowly. Mrs SM said she didn't mind if the children completed their homework in the evenings with her because they had the opportunity to play with other children at aftercare. There were not enough

children in their neighbourhood and they needed to play with other children. At exactly 6.00 pm the children took a bath and at 7.00 the children had supper in the television room. After supper the television was switched off so that the children could read to their mother. After the reading session the children were permitted to watch one television programme in their bedroom before going to bed. Mrs SM watched the news on television while they did this. Mr LM usually came home after the children had already gone to bed.

Mr LM and Mrs SM were generally happy with the school but Mr LM was concerned that their life-style, which included the children's schooling, was resulting in a loss of cultural identity and the children were turning their back on their tradition. He was particularly upset that the children didn't interact with the extended family who lived in the townships and that they spoke their home language, Zulu, very badly. Black consciousness was not an important issue for Mrs SM and it would seem that in this she determined the values for the children. She did not share Len's concern with language and she was instrumental in organising their extra-mural programme which had a Eurocentric orientation (ballet, drama, swimming, computers).

The M family could be described as a culture in transition, a New-middle-class. As such they showed a combination of literacy practices which couldn't be described as typically middle-class, nor were the practices they adopted typical of working-class, black families. Many of the literacy practices which Mr LM and Mrs SM adopted with their children were not a continuation of what occurred in their homes when they were children and were new to them. They were followed because they were advised to do so by teachers or other professionals. Story-book reading was one such example.

Mrs SM started reading to the children when they went to nursery school. Their nursery school teacher noted that Lindiwe's brother had language problems and Mrs SM started taking him to speech therapy. The therapist recommended that she read to him which she did, using books supplied to them by the nursery school. She continued to read to the children each night until they learnt to read themselves. Children's storybooks, fairy stories and sometimes magazines were read to the children. Mrs SM couldn't remember any specific titles. She said she just read whatever the children brought home with them from nursery school and later from school.

The parents modelled literacy quite extensively. Mr LM was a newspaper journalist so

he earned his living reading and writing. He did not often write at home so this activity was not very visible to the children. On the other hand he brought several newspapers home each day which he read at home. Mrs SM also brought work home occasionally. Most of the time she went to visit her parents in Soweto after work and did her work there. Both parents engaged in leisure reading. Lindiwe's father read political literature and her mother preferred "light stuff", mainly magazines. Mrs SM also engaged in a practical reading. She often cooked using recipe's and uses street maps. She also engaged in religious reading and reads her Bible regularly. Writing was an important aspect of both parent's jobs. Mrs SM also wrote in order to organize her life. She kept a diary as a memory aid, wrote shopping lists and filled in forms and she occasionally wrote letters.

The children read their set school reading to their mother every night during the school week. Mrs SM regarded this as an extremely important activity and only did it when she was able to give it her undivided attention. She concentrated fully on providing the children the correct cues and prompts while they were reading. She implemented the information she received during the parent information evenings at the school where the study was conducted and at Lindiwe's brother's previous school during these sessions. She told me she learnt the significance of reading during these programmes which was why she emphasized it so much in their daily routine.

Lindiwe enjoyed reading but there were limited materials available to indulge this interest. There were only eight children's books in the household. Lindiwe read one of the children's books (*Snow White*) over and over again. She also paged through the entertainment sections of magazines and read the cartoons. Mrs SM said that she felt it was a waste of money buying children's books because they only use them for short periods of time. This was stated in spite of the fact that there appeared to be no shortage of money in the home. Every mod con was present in the house - television, video recorder, microwave oven and new expensive furniture.

Although there were so few literacy resources specifically for children in the home, there was quite a large collection of adult books. Most of the books belonged to Lindiwe's father. They reflected his black consciousness and dealt with African interests and issues. There were many political titles such as "South Africa's war against Capitalism", "Trade Unions Guide from Below" and "Riot Politicking in South Africa". There were also books which reflect South African social and cultural issues such as

"Stokvels in South Africa". Len's fiction collection also contained predominantly African authors such as Chinua Achebe. This preoccupation with African culture was also reflected in the presence of a large New South African flag draped over the fire-place in the lounge. All the paintings in the house were done by African artists and depicted African themes.

There were a few reference books in the house, "Your Medical Guide", several dictionaries and a set of encyclopedias (Fink and Margraff). There was a large collection of magazines in the home (People, Bona, Ebony South Africa, TV guides, Garden and Home, Cosmo). None of the magazines were specifically children's magazines. Mr LM brought several newspapers home from work each day including The Sowetan, The Star, Business Day and New Nation. These were only referred to by Mr LM and occasionally by Sibusiso. Mrs SM preferred to watch the news on television and the children only read the cartoons.

The M's had two televisions, one in the parents' bedroom and one in a television room. Television viewing was controlled by Lindiwe's mother, particularly during the week. The children were permitted to watch children's programmes, a number of sitcoms, and sport programmes. Mrs SM and Mr LM watched the news and films. There was a computer in the home but it was only used by the children when they played computer games. Mr LM couldn't use it because it was outdated. He used his computer at work, hence he came home from work very late.

There were a few toys in the bedroom which was shared by Lindiwe and her brother. There were a few lego blocks, two jigsaw puzzles, Barbie dolls, some trucks, a musical box, boxing gloves and five tapes. The tapes had nursery rhymes and children's songs on them. There were no writing materials other than the stationary required at school and here the children were very well supplied. Lindiwe's brother's certificates which he received at the remedial school were the only wall decorations. There was no desk or bookshelves in the room.

School performance

Lindiwe sat near the front of the class. She was quiet and passive. She was very shy and she did not like being singled out in the classroom for any reason.

Lindiwe's Grade One results were "Average". She showed an improvement in Grade

Two and obtained above average results for all her subjects except environmental studies, for which she achieved average results. Lindiwe's oral interactions were very limited in the classroom. She said very little in the classroom even when the children had to report their own news. However on written tasks she expressed herself clearly. She was able to write interesting, logical, coherent stories. She completed structured written tasks quite well where there was only one correct response.

Lindiwe was in the second highest reading group on both the SRA and on the basal reading programmes. Her performance on reading and other language tasks was above the class average but her Mathematics was considerably below the group average.

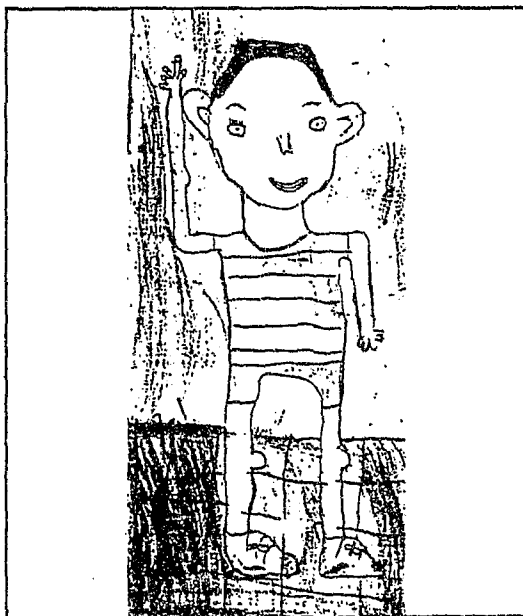
Performance on standardized tests

Lindiwe's performance on the Neale Analysis Reading Ability was at her chronological age for reading accuracy and reading comprehension. Her score on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test was above her class average for sentence reading (28, CA=24,7) and paragraph reading (17, CA=14,8). (See Appendix 6 and 8)

4.2.5 Ephraim

Ephraim lived in one of the more affluent areas of Soweto. He lived with his mother, Mrs S, and three older siblings. A twenty year-old brother attended Vista University and two sisters were at the same school as Ephraim. The older sister was in Standard Five and the other sister in Standard Three. Mrs S worked as a dental nurse in a private dental practice.

Mr S died when Mrs S was five months pregnant with Ephraim. This caused major changes in the family. Mrs S decided that she needed a professional qualification and started studying for her nursing exams. To get through this difficult



Self-portrait by Ephraim

period financially the two younger children, Ephraim and his younger sister, went to live with Mrs S's mother. Ephraim's two sisters started their schooling in a local township school. When Mrs S completed her training Diketso was transferred to a private convent and Thato started school there. At the beginning of 1995 the girls were transferred to N----- and Ephraim started there a year later.

Mrs S worked a long way from home and relied on public transport. This meant her working day was very long. She left home at 6.30 am and got back after 7.00 pm. In spite of this the family was well organized and the children were well cared for. This could be attributed to the co-operation amongst the family members. The children all helped with household chores and the older children helped the younger children with their homework. When I arrived at the family home on a Saturday afternoon with Mrs S who I fetched from work, Ephraim's older sister was cleaning the kitchen floor, Ephraim was doing the dishes and Mrs S's sister was ironing. The minute Mrs S walked in the younger sister collected her shopping and made her some tea. They all helped to make lunch. Shortly after lunch Mrs S got up and started cleaning because Saturday was the day for cleaning the house.

While the family were cleaning there was a very festive atmosphere in the home. Music was playing and everybody was chatting and laughing. On a subsequent visit, the same cheerful, busy atmosphere prevailed.

The literacy practices and assistance with schoolwork was a reflection of the cooperative practices in the home. Ephraim had only started reading independently. He read his set school reading and tried to read the paired readers to his mom or to one of his siblings regularly. Either Mrs S or Ephraim's brother made sure that Ephraim's homework was completed. The older sister helped her younger sister with project work. All the children's homework was signed and checked each day.

Reading and writing was modelled for Ephraim most clearly by his older siblings. The reading and writing which his mother engaged in was mainly directed at the management of everyday affairs and religious reading. In the past she read to further her education and she occasionally read a novel. She kept a written diary as a memory aid and sent cards to friends. As well as reading and writing for his studies, Ephraim's brother also read spy stories. His older sister read a novel about every three weeks, while his younger sister read extensively and she got through about three books a

week. His younger sister also modelled writing for pleasure and at the time I visited the family she was writing a ghost story.

Ephraim was not read to when he was very young because he and his sister lived with their granny. Mrs S occasionally read to him before he went to school. She read Bible Stories and school books to him. At the beginning of his Grade Two year she attended a parent education programme which stressed the importance of reading to children and since then she had read to him about twice a week.

There was some printed material in the S household. Other than a Bible and a sociology text book, most of the books that were present were children's educational books. Most books were text books issued by the school. There was also one children's encyclopedia, a parent/child maths programme, an ABC colouring book and dictionaries. As a result the reference books for project work were very limited. Ephraim's older sister had a small collection of Archie comics. His brother had a collection of books in his extremely organized, tidy bedroom. He had the textbooks which were required for his studies and he also had a collection of novels. His whole fiction collection consisted of spy thrillers. Mrs S bought the City Press occasionally on Sundays and she also brought magazines home from work from time to time (Personality, Drum, You). There were cards in the house and a calendar.

Although the family did not own much printed material, they read quite extensively. The girls occasionally made use of the local library which was less than a kilometre from their home. Much more frequently they used the school library. This was used for both project work and for leisure reading.

There were three television sets in the home, one in the lounge, one in Ephraim's brother's room and one in Mrs S's bedroom. The television set in the living room was not on unless a family member was specifically watching a programme but they did watch quite a lot of television. Mrs S watched the news and the children enjoyed cartoons. The whole family watched dramas, sport, movies and one sister enjoyed nature programmes. There was not much conversation while television was being watched, although they occasionally laughed uproariously at certain points during viewing. The children often did something else while they watch television and they got absorbed in this other activity and drifted away to focus on that activity. For example one afternoon all the children were watching television. At the same time the older

sister was reading an Archie comic, the younger sister was writing her book and Ephraim was making a cardboard lady-bird. The younger sister and Ephraim moved away to the dining room table where they found it more comfortable to work.

Each child had a collection of toys. The toys were realistic toys or sports equipment. No construction toys were visible. There was a collection of teddy bears, Barbie dolls, a skipping rope, a tennis racquet, a collection of trucks and cars, drawing materials, marbles, a ball and a toy radio. Ephraim had two games both of which were educational (String-a-long, and the Lion King). There was no computer in the house. There was a radio to which the children listened preferring Radio Metro.

School Performance

Ephraim sat near the front of the class. He was quiet but appeared to be interested and engaged in all the classroom events. He needed a little bit of coaxing to respond orally but when he did his responses were to the point and accurate.

Ephraim performed at the class average in Grade One and in Grade Two he performed above the class average in most subjects. Ephraim was in the second lowest reading group on the SRA. Most of his written work was good. He wrote clear, grammatically correct sentences and logical, cohesive stories.

Ephraim's performance on the Neale Analysis Reading Ability was below his chronological age for reading accuracy and reading comprehension. His reading accuracy score was approximately 6 months below the expected level and his comprehension score was 1 1/2 year below age level. His score on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test was above his class average for sentence reading (28, CA=24,7) and paragraph reading (17, CA=14,8). Thus Ephraim's performance on the silent reading comprehension was better than his performance on the oral reading task. It may be that he felt less anxious when reading silently. (See Appendix 6 and 8)

4.3 The Standard Two Children at School

The previous section has attempted to present an outline of the "whole child" as a means of assessing congruency with their home environment and the school milieu. To clarify the ways in which these environments interact it is necessary to locate each child within the context of his/her school environment.

The five Standard Two children who participated in this study, all followed the general school rules pertaining to school and other children's property, punctuality and absenteeism. None of the children were regarded by the school as "problems". However there were also specific, implicit and explicit classroom rules relating to written tasks, the regulation of behaviour and oral participation which not all the children observed.

4.3.1 Task Behaviour and Completion

Joshua, Lisa, Diketso and Taryn all followed the rules relating to tasks. The children were expected to start working on tasks as soon as Ms P had given the instructions and continue to work, without distraction, until the tasks were complete. They were expected to ask her to clarify issues if they did not understand the instructions.

All the children completed their classwork tasks. Joshua completed his tasks beyond the requirements in the class, frequently completing self-initiated projects at home which he brought into school to discuss with Ms P. He was organized and completed tasks within the expected time limits, although he took longer to complete tasks than the other top performers because he spent some time clarifying the instructions and panicking. He was particularly anxious when tasks were "for marks". During one test he came up to the teacher seven times to ask for help in the hour.

Lisa and Taryn completed assigned classwork activities quickly and correctly. When the task instruction was given they usually understood what was required of them immediately. Occasionally they were unsure of something and asked Ms P for clarification. They worked independently in an organized manner until they completed the task. They did not distract other children nor were they distracted themselves. Homework tasks were also completed well. Taryn attended the homework class in aftercare and completed most of her homework before her mother fetched her. She worked out her own study schedule during exam times and worked conscientiously in the homework class. The only work which she did at home was projects because she

liked to use "Enkatha", the encyclopedia they had on computer at home for project work. She also continued studying at home because her mother insisted on this but it was probably unnecessary.

Diketso completed assigned classwork activities without disrupting the other children. She worked on her own until the task was completed. She worked rather slowly and steadily and managed to complete the tasks. She was able to understand simple oral and written instructions, but she sometimes had difficulty following complex instructions, particularly if they were given orally. When she didn't understand she very rarely asked Ms P for clarification. She looked around at what the children sitting near her were doing, and took her cue from them. Macdonald (1990, 1993) has identified this as a black mode of functioning. It is not normative in black communities to make explicit a lack of understanding but rather to take cognitive and social cues from other learners around you.

Thandi had difficulty completing classwork activities. She couldn't get on with the task and frequently engaged in off-task conversations. She was easily distracted from the assigned task. However this behaviour was most likely related to an inability to understand the content of the work and the task instructions, rather than an unwillingness to complete the work. This view is consistent with her mother's report on how Thandi worked at home. Mrs Z described A as "a very willing somebody". She reportedly sent Thandi back over and over again to redo homework tasks and Thandi did not complain, but tried to complete the task successfully.

4.3.2 Oral Participation

The rules for oral participation in the classroom were not all stated explicitly so my view of the expected behaviour in Ms P's classroom was based on observation as well as informal conversations with Ms P. When she did revision work and asked drill type questions she expected all the children to answer in chorus. When she asked questions that were related to new work the children were expected to listen and participate by putting their hands up and waiting for her to call on someone to answer. However she was not insistent on this and tolerated a fairly high degree of "calling out."

Joshua, Lisa and Taryn were all very active participators in classroom activities. They were very responsive to all the teacher's questions. However none of the children followed the "hands up" rule. Joshua went through the motions of putting his hand up

but he did not wait for the teacher to ask him to respond. He shouted out the response, frequently while other children were talking. Lisa did not like put up her hand to ask and answer questions or make comments. She preferred to do these things from her seat in the front of the class. All the comments that she made were made very quietly from the front row. Even when she was responding to a comment made by one of the children in her class, she responded directly to the teacher so that the children could hardly hear her. She often engaged in a private conversation with the teacher from her seat. Lisa quite often spoke out of turn, interrupting explanations but because she did this very quietly and because her interruptions were always on topic, she did not appear to annoy Ms P or the other teachers that taught her Art and Health. Taryn sometimes lost concentration during class discussions and had off-task conversations with children sitting near her or wandered around the classroom.

Diketso followed all the rules for oral participation passively. She did not talk out of turn and was polite and co-operative. However she did not make any active contribution to the classroom processes. She never initiated any interactions in the classroom. She did not answer any questions nor did she ask questions when she didn't understand the work. In a study conducted by Zanger (1994), Hispanic students reported that they were "not joined in". These students felt the social distance was associated with the teachers refusal to recognize their cultural identity. In the same way Diketso gave the impression of being disengaged or "not joined in".

Thandi did not follow the classroom rules for oral participation and appeared to be very confused about the classroom processes. She didn't make any contribution to the classroom discussions and did not respond to questions when choral responses were expected. She did not ask questions when she didn't understand the work. She did not initiate classroom events although she frequently initiated off-task private conversations with the person sitting next to her in class. These conversations were unrelated to the subject matter being taught and often took place while the teacher was explaining other matters.

None of the children followed all the rules for oral participation, possibly because Ms P was fairly flexible about the rules, particularly the rule about calling out. Nevertheless an interesting contrast was observed in her response to Thandi and Joshua. Joshua often spoke out of turn, put his hand up but did not wait to be asked to respond and shouted out, made direct comments about being bored and interrupted other children.

On one occasion the children were being evaluated for their ability to read a prepared passage aloud. While one of the children was reading he came up to the teacher and asked her a question so that she wasn't able to attend to the child who was reading. Ms P did not reprimand him, she answered his question and did not seem to think this was inappropriate at all.

There were other occasions when quite a few children were talking when they were supposed to be working quietly. Joshua and Thandi were both part of the group. Thandi was reprimanded but Joshua was not. On another occasion Ms P put the names of the children who were "misbehaving" on the chalk-board but Joshua wasn't included in these while Thandi's was, although their behaviour was very similar.

The explanation for this difference may be traced to the fact that Joshua was a high achiever. Ms P recognized and admired achievement. It was possible that the rules were bent for Joshua because of his academic achievements. Thus his grade one teacher wrote, in the same sentence, that "Joshua's behaviour is erratic and he is a pleasure to teach". On the other hand Thandi did not achieve and the same allowances were not made for her misdemeanours.

A similar pattern was noted with Lisa. Ms P tolerated a high degree of interruption and interaction so it was not surprising that she allowed this with Lisa. However the two other teachers who taught the class for Art and Health were generally less accepting of interruption and usually insisted that children raise their hands to ask questions when they were explaining work or giving instructions. They allowed interruption from Lisa, without appearing to be irritated at all. Possible reasons for this were that Lisa did it very unobtrusively. Another reason was that Lisa did very well at school and they too made allowances for children who do well academically. In fact it appeared to be a general trend throughout the school. Children who did well were often spoken about in the staffroom as being nice children and were credited with a range of positive attributes which were not related directly to their academic performance. Performance seemed to influence how behaviour was perceived.

4.3.3 Meeting the Children's Needs in the Classroom

The classroom processes and academic demands met Taryn, Joshua and Lisa's socio-emotional and cognitive needs. On the other hand the classroom environment seemed to be incompatible with Thandi's needs. The classroom was fairly noisy and

instructions were frequently given in a background of some activity and buzz. Against this background Thandi frequently missed the instructions. Most often she was not aware an instruction had been given. On one occasion an instruction was written on the board and given orally against quite a high level of background classroom noise. Thandi did not notice the instruction on the board and did not attend to the oral instruction. Thandi did not initiate any action on the basis of the instruction and continued talking to the person she was sitting next to her, seemingly oblivious to the instruction. At a later stage Ms P insisted that the class was quiet and that they repeat the instructions she had given. Thandi listened to the choral response of the class and immediately started the task.

There were times when Thandi not able to selectively focus on the instruction in her very vibrant class. Another source of difficulty was that she found it difficult to follow and understand much of the classroom discourse. Most of the interactions in the classroom were decontextualized and based on written text. Decontextualized conversations did not occur in her home and the television, rather than written text stimulated conversation. Accordingly the mode of discourse was unfamiliar to her. Providing appropriate responses assumed background knowledge she did not have. This was alluded to in the description of her home circumstances and will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

A further difficulty for Thandi was the speed at which the children were expected to complete tasks. She was also not able to cope with the pace. The explanations were too fast and she couldn't complete tasks within the set time limits.

There were indications that Diketso's needs were also not met in the classroom. She coped adequately with most of the work but she was passive and withdrawn. This contrasted with her behaviour at break when she was playing with her friends. Diketso tended to associate with the children who came into the school from the townships. This was rather unusual because most of the black children who live in the suburbs surrounding the school found their friends amongst other suburban children. When she was with her friends she was friendly and confident. She played very cheerfully with the township children, involved in games which the children played in the townships. In this group she played a leadership role and she also worked very well.

Ms P very rarely gave the children tasks to complete in a group, and most of the time

when she did this, she assigned the children to a group. During the period that I observed the children I only saw the children doing one group task where they were able to select the group members themselves. The children had to practise and present an Afrikaans poem to the class. They were able to go outside and practise their poems. Unaccustomed to this break in routine, most of the children did very little work on this task and wasted the time assigned for the task. Diketso and her group, however used the time very constructively. They used the entire time assigned to them work out an interesting routine and to work on their pronunciation and fluency. Diketso's behaviour was markedly different from her usual classroom behaviour. She was animated, interested and confident. The group gave a very successful presentation of the poem.

Learning in groups represents a different paradigm which is linked to the broad *ubuntu* value. It is possible that Diketso was drawing on a cultural orientation with which she identified, that facilitates more effective task completion in a group. This issue will be discussed more fully in Chapter Seven on identity.

4.4 The Grade Two Children at School

Ms F controlled the discourse in her class so it was not possible to observe wide variations in the responses from the children, apart from those allowed within the range permitted by Ms F.

Like the Standard Two children, the five Grade Two children who participated in this study, all followed the general school rules pertaining to property, punctuality and absenteeism. None of the children were regarded by the school as "problems". There were also specific classroom rules relating to written tasks, the regulation of behaviour and oral participation which the children adhered to variably.

4.4.1 Task Behaviour and Completion

Ms F gave very precise instructions for the completion of classwork. The children were expected to start working on tasks as soon as she had given the instructions and continue to work, without distraction and most often in silence, until the tasks were complete. They were permitted to ask her to clarify issues if they did not understand the instructions but she expected the children to understand her instructions most of the time. The only regular homework the children were given were their daily reading which their parents were expected to listen to and help them with.

Nina, Michael and Ephraim all followed the rules relating to tasks. They completed classwork tasks correctly, within the set time limits. This group of children all understood simple and complex oral and written instructions. Michael and Ephraim worked independently in an organized manner without distracting other children. They took great pride in their work and tried to complete it as well as they were able. Nina was alert to how the children around her were working, but this did not distract her from the task significantly. However this behaviour earned her the reputation of being something of a tattle-tale. She watched the work of the children sitting near her and frequently complained about them to Ms F. In particular she was the self-appointed watchdog of W—, the boy who sat next to her. She frequently made comments such as "Ms F, Wesley's copying my work. Ms F, W— is using a pencil not a crayon. Ms F, W— hasn't got his book out". Ms F tried to ignore these comments. The reading homework was regularly completed by this group of children and signed by their parents.

Lindiwe followed most of the rules governing tasks. She attempted all assigned

classwork tasks. She worked quickly and efficiently when she understood what to do and on these tasks she completed the work well within time limits. She did her own work without disrupting others. Lindiwe was able to complete most tasks without any assistance but she had difficulty with mathematics. She did not ask for assistance when she did not know how to complete a task. She attempted to complete the task on her own but she didn't make much progress. She looked confused and continued trying in spite of the fact that her efforts didn't lead to any success. Ms F often went to check up on her because she knew she had difficulty with maths and she didn't ask for help. Lindiwe was able to follow simple written and oral instructions but when instructions were complex she seemed to flounder.

Some of the rules governing tasks were followed by Agnes. She was not always sure of how to complete assigned classwork activities. She did not ask Ms F for assistance but she occasionally asked the child that she sat next to for help. She constantly looked at the work of neighbouring children and did not start her own work before she glanced at the other children's work. These activities did not appear to disturb the other children. She worked rather slowly and did not always manage to complete the tasks. She was able to understand simple oral and written instructions, but she had difficulty following complex instructions. Homework tasks were not always completed. There were times when her home reading assignments were not done and the one project they were required to complete was not handed in.

4.4.2 Oral Participation

The restrictive rules for oral participation were made very clear while the rules which called for positive participation were implicit. My views on the latter were, therefore, based on observation. When Ms F asked questions the children were expected to listen and participate by putting their hands up and wait for her to call on someone to answer. She was insistent on this and did not tolerate "calling out." Children were permitted to ask her questions and make appropriate spontaneous comments. They were expected to tell their news during the assigned time.

Nina participated actively within the limits set by Ms F. She asked and answered questions. She frequently raised her hand to answer questions. When the question involved defining or giving a synonym for a word, Ms F most often selected her to answer the question. Apart from her tendency to tattle-tale she obeyed the rules for oral participation in class. She asked for assistance appropriately when she didn't

understand what she had to do and also when she wanted more information. She also used polite forms and put up her hand to answer questions. She was a responsive member of the class and expressed her appreciation or interest vociferously. Ms F drew a puff adder on the board to explain the word "puff" to one of the children. Nina exclaimed that "that's a brilliant drawing of a puff adder." She sometimes got out of her seat when she shouldn't and was reprimanded for this by Ms F. She tended to argue about these admonishments and from her own perspective gave very reasonable explanations for her behaviour. She found it difficult to understand, though, what impact it may have had on other children. On one occasion the children were writing a test. Nina completed the test early and immediately started walking around the classroom and scratching in her bag. She found it difficult to understand that she was disturbing the other children.

Ephraim and Michael were both quiet, compliant members of the class. They rarely spoke when they were supposed to be quiet and were polite and co-operative. They answered questions when they were called upon to do so. They raised their hands and waited patiently for Ms F to call upon them to answer. Even on the rare occasions when class discussions become looser and the other children were commenting or answering questions without raising their hands, they both still followed this rule. Both of these children asked a question when they were not sure of how to follow an instruction, although Michael rarely needed to do this.

Lindiwe and Agnes followed all the rules passively. They did not talk out of turn and were polite and co-operative. On the other hand they didn't initiate any interactions. Neither of the girls volunteered to answer questions individually but did respond when choral responses were permitted. In a group context they didn't ask questions when they didn't understand the work. When the children were working independently they occasionally came up to Ms F's desk to ask her a question.

4.4.3 Meeting the Children's Needs in the Classroom

The organized structured environment created by Ms F meant that most of the children in this group were able to complete most of the tasks they were expected to do without any anxiety. They felt secure in the fact that they knew what to do most of the time. For Agnes, however this was not the case. Agnes found it difficult to follow the classroom discussions and was falling behind her peers in acquiring literacy skills. Like Thandi in Standard Two, Agnes had limited exposure to decontextualized

conversations and literacy experiences at home. This had a negative impact on her ability to cope with many of the classroom tasks.

Like Thandi and Diketso in Standard Two she did not ask questions when she did not understand task instructions or requirements, but looked around the classroom to find cues from other learners. This indirect route to finding information was less effective than simply asking the teacher for clarification and she fell further behind. Furthermore her mother, particularly after the birth of the baby, did not provide her with sufficient support by regularly listening to her reading homework.

Several critical features have emerged from this discussion on how different children respond in the classroom. Firstly children who were exposed to limited literacy experiences and who had few decontextualized conversations at home found it difficult to cope with classroom processes. Secondly the township children seemed to enjoy group work more. Thirdly it is clear that the children from traditional middle-class white suburbs generally displayed a high level of assertiveness. While most of their assertive behaviours were overt and in some cases dominating, such as Joshua, one these children presented her assertiveness in a quieter but emphatic way. In strong contrast to this general pattern all the black children from both the traditional township setting and the integrating suburb near the school all displayed a pattern of passivity and non-assertiveness. This did not mean that all the black children were withdrawn and marginalized from classroom processes. Whereas all the black girls did not ask any questions when they did not understand the work, the one black boy in the sample Ephraim, retained a discrete but enquiring role. Fourthly high achievers are given more social latitude than children who performed poorly.

The origins and explanations for these issues will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5

THEMES

This chapter will attempt to identify and discuss the critical issues and themes which have emerged in the home contexts of the ten children who formed part of this study.

All the parents that I visited valued education and wanted their children to be successful at school. They supported, encouraged and showed an interest in their children's schooling. All the parents in question visited the school to attend individual parent-teacher conferences. They all went to sport meetings and other events in which their children were directly involved. They kept mementos of their children's successes and tried to help them if they experienced difficulties. However families could be distinguished in terms of two broad factors, which had a direct relationship on literacy practises, on the nature and extent of the parents' involvement in their children's education and on scholastic achievement, namely:

- their understanding of the nature and scope of education.
- the parent's perception of the relative responsibilities of the school and home for the education of their children

5.1 Parents' View of the Nature and Scope of Education

In the home environment, educational and literacy practices were closely linked to the parents view of education, namely those which adopted an extended view of education and those who adopted an instrumental view of education. Parents who adopted an extended view saw education as a broader pursuit, going beyond the school curriculum, and requiring adaptability and informed judgements. The instrumental view saw education as confined to the school curriculum.

The parent's view of education was adopted as an organizing principle in this study because this factor most clearly defined literacy behaviours and values. The subsequent discussion will show that families who adopted an extended view of education adopted Maintown, middle-class literacy practices as described by Heath (1982, 1983, 1986). This group of families was also clearly defined in terms of factors

such as class and professional status. All the other parents adopted very similar literacy practices which were a combination of the Roadville and Trackton practices. However they represented a very heterogeneous group in terms of background and were not easily categorized in terms of these factors. All the indices which defined class culture were variable in this group and they did not constitute a cohesive community. The parents' job status was variable, some of the families lived in the suburbs and some lived in the townships and the families were also a mixed group racially. They were, however united in their view of education, namely they adopted a narrow, instrumental view of education.

Joshua, Taryn, Nina and Michael's parents and Diketso's guardians all saw education as broader than the school curriculum. They all had post matric qualifications and at least one of the parents had a profession. These families could be described as middle-class. Diketso's grandmother was a domestic worker with no formal education but her guardians had taken complete responsibility for her education.

Diketso's guardian stated the position adopted by this group of parents explicitly. In her opinion schools didn't necessarily develop the qualities which she regarded as important for an educated person and that parents had an important role to play here. She believed that the schools offered a very limited education which was controlled by rigid syllabi and timetabling. There was no in-depth exploration of a topic. Large classes also mean that children's individual needs and interest couldn't be pursued effectively. Schools offered a limited perspective, consequently she felt that as well as helping with schoolwork directly, parents had to broaden their children's range of experience.

Although these parents expressed their opinions differently, their view of a well-educated person had a number of recurring elements. Well-educated people did not merely have a specific body of knowledge related to their occupations but had a broad knowledge base and were well-read and worldly. They were able to use their knowledge to cope in a variety of situations, find things out for themselves. Educated people were adaptable, were able to learn a wide range of new skills, and made informed judgements. These were qualities they admired and strove for in their children. They believed that it was primarily the role of parents to develop these qualities.

On the other hand Ephraim, Lisa, Thandi and Agnes's parents all narrowly defined education as that which was taught in the curriculum at school. They tended to view education functionally and their reasons for wanting to give their children a good education was usually instrumental to another goal. These parents made statements such as "it's the platform from which you can get a good job" or "you cannot get a job without an education". Ephraim's mother equated education with being literate. The main advantage of being literate was functional. She stated that, "Reading books helps you understand. If you can't read and write you can't understand letters and accounts. You have to rely on other people and they may not give you the correct information."

These dichotomous positions influenced the actions of most of the parents. The parents who adopted an extended view of education tried to increase their children's knowledge beyond the set school curriculum in a number of ways. They included their children in conversations which extended their knowledge, read to their children, encouraged extra-mural participation and supplied them with resources which promoted and extended school learning.

Lindiwe's family formed an exception to this general trend. Lindiwe's parents viewed a well educated person as someone who was knowledgeable about the world, was broad-minded, insightful and who had the ability to conceptualize. Although their conception of a well-educated person was similar to that of the other middle-class, professional families it didn't impact similarly on their child-rearing practices pertaining to schooling. Although the parents had made a variety of extra-mural activities available to their children, and they had read to their children, other, less visible, typical middle-class practices weren't followed.

These broad distinctions between parents who viewed education in global terms or instrumentally, were indicators of differences in a range of factors, particularly verbal interactions, relationship to printed material and the presence of literacy resources.

5.1.1 Verbal Interactions

5.1.1.1 Decontextualized Conversations

All the families discussed the things that had happened to them during the day. In all the families a high proportion of utterances that were addressed to the children were contextualized. With the exception of Michael's family, the families spoke mainly about what they saw or heard or what was going on. Their work, school events, what their

friends and colleagues did and had done to them were the most-discussed topics. Forthcoming social events and plans for future events such as holidays were discussed by all the families. Sport and family finances were also widely discussed. The families conversations differed in number of ways however, one of which related to the extent to which they included decontextualized knowledge in their conversations. Much of the conversation in families who adopted an extended view of education was decontextualized, that is directed to events and knowledge outside of the family's immediate experience, while in the other group who had an instrumental view of education, discussions tended to be contextualized.

The pursuit of knowledge was very important in Joshua's household. Having knowledge was valued highly. This concern was observed in many aspects of the family life. The conversations conducted by family members were frequently about decontextualized events. For example during one meal Mrs L spoke about how she had been quizzed by Joshua earlier that day about when the first heart transplant occurred. They went on to discuss the event and where they were at the time. This was followed by a discussion of other recent major medical advances. A further instantiation of this concern with having decontextualized knowledge was indicated by Joshua's mother's attitude to V---, her step-daughter. She said that her own, much younger children, had a better general knowledge than her step-daughter. She was critical of V--- because she did not have any interest in acquiring knowledge and was ignorant of current events. She never picked up the newspaper which was kept in the kitchen so that it was easily available to all family members.

Joshua's mother believed that V---'s early socialization had resulted in her relative lack of interest and curiosity in developing her knowledge. V--- had only been living in their household for three years, previously she had been living with her natural mother. Her mother ran a religious Jewish household and V--- went to a religious school. The religious nature of the school and home placed severe sanctions on the material to which the children could be exposed, implying restricted access to knowledge.

Social and political issues were important topics of conversation in Nina and Taryn's households. They didn't just discuss the immediate impact that these topics had on them but saw them in a broader moral framework. The parents also showed an interest in the specific material that the children were learning at school and added their

knowledge and experiences with a particular topic.

The conversations that I observed in Michael's household, between Mrs K and her children, represented the most extreme example of the development of scientific concepts in the home context. In the other families where decontextualized information was exchanged the interaction took the form of informal conversation. Formal schoolwork was sometimes the stimulus for broader conversational exchanges on a particular subject but most often the interactions flowed naturally from something that one of the family members read or from something they had heard. In Michael's household most verbal interactions took the form of instruction and were completely controlled by Mrs K.

Mrs K informed me that she normally worked for three hours with Michael's brother every weekday afternoon during exam times and also worked with Michael for at least half an hour. They had a shorter session than usual because I was present. The seriousness with which Mrs K took her role as teacher to her children became very apparent during a visit which took place on a Saturday afternoon. Mrs K and Michael's brother were sitting in the lounge going through a grammar book. Mrs K was reading lists of adverbs and asking Michael's brother to remember them because "they would help him when he wrote essays." She then started doing a comprehension with him. Halfway through the comprehension exercise Michael's brother started complaining because he wanted to go and join Michael who was playing a ball game in the garden. Mrs K insisted that he first finish the comprehension with her. "You said that you find comprehension exercises difficult didn't you, so we must practise and then you will get better at them," she said. After they had completed one comprehension exercise she told him he could have a short break and then they would do another one.

During the course of the afternoon Mrs K found opportunities to instruct in every situation and most often she was concerned that all their experiences elevated their school performance. Michael came into the lounge and started paging through a puzzle book. She immediately tried to extend his observations. When Michael's brother returned to his Science and Technology book after completing the second comprehension she said, "We should think about doing one of your orals on a famous scientist. That would be interesting wouldn't it." The television was put on so that the family could watch an important soccer match. Mrs K told Michael he must watch the moves very carefully so that he could learn something from it!

In strong contrast to Michael's household, conversations in families who adopted a narrow definition of education were almost exclusively contextualized. Conversations in these families were stimulated by two main circumstances, namely television and events.

In the previous group, sustained conversations occurred during meal-times and decontextualized information was exchanged as part of the general conversation. Most of the families who took an instrumental view of education ate their meals in front of the television set and they commented on material that was being viewed. However there was no sustained discussion during television viewing. Television items which stimulated comment were news items which directly affected the family or which were linked to their immediate experience. Generally, though comment was very sparse and for the most part the television was viewed passively

The other stimulus for conversation was what Heath (1983) has described as eventcasts. The family members commented on things they were busy doing. The activity provided the context for the conversation. Family members also spoke extensively about events that occurred to them during the day or about future events, making arrangements and planning. Much of this conversation was directed at school life. Mrs C, for example, showed a great interest in and was very knowledgeable about developments at the school, the teachers and her children's classmates. Most of the families in this group did not discuss school work itself though, unless the parents were directly helping the children with homework. Nevertheless within these narrow confines this did constitute some decontextualized conversation. Insofar as parents helped their children with their homework they discussed news, knowledge or events outside of their immediate experience.

All these families reported that finances was a frequent topic of conversation. The families gave two reasons for family discussions of their finances. Firstly, the parents felt that the children needed to develop an understanding of why they could not have everything they wanted. This reason was given by all the parents in this group. Secondly, reasons were given that alluded to the communal nature of family functioning. Ephraim and Thandi's mother said that family discussion of finances was important because family members made joint contributions to various home projects and they worked out the budget together.

In all the preceding cases there was a clearly identifiable relationship between the parents' view of education, the nature of the discourse in the home and the extent to which the children displayed an interest in ideas and knowledge of the world which was removed from their immediate experience. The general pattern was that parents who had an extended view of education, included scientific concepts in their conversation and the children tended to have an interest in broader issues. On the other hand in families which had an instrumental view of education, discourse was limited to events and information which had an immediate impact on the family members' lives. The children had a parochial world view and showed no interests in acquiring knowledge which was not of significance in their everyday lives.

The preceding cases only demonstrated a general trend and there were cases in this study which were exceptions to this trend. Lindiwe and Diketso's family proved to be departures from the general pattern. Diketso's guardians adopted a very broad definition of education and they made every effort to extend Diketso's education beyond the confines of the school syllabus. In spite of this, Diketso showed little interest in the world beyond her immediate experience. Diketso's resistance to the interactions to which she was exposed, may be associated with issues of cultural identity and will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Lindiwe's parents adopted a broad view of education, but unlike the other parents with this point of view, they did not try to extend their children's knowledge beyond the school syllabus and the children didn't have a desire to know things beyond their own experience. Lindiwe's parents discussed issues, each contributing equally to the conversation. The news, politics, sport and social issues were discussed, with an emphasis on African issues. The children did not participate in these discussions and their parents didn't try to include them in these conversations. In the other families who adopted a broad view of education, the parents attempted to draw their children into conversations by responding with great interest to any contribution they made or by questioning them. In contrast, Lindiwe's parents not only excluded their children from these conversations, they actually believed that children should be protected from these discussions. The children spoke about social events, their schoolwork and events which occurred to them in their daily lives with their parents.

As discussed previously, in the Grade Two classroom some of the lessons were frequently linked to the children's direct, personal experiences, but already at this

level, the children were exposed to a great deal of decontextualized knowledge. By the time the children had reached Standard Two, although there was an atmosphere of real intimacy and warmth in the classroom, the tasks required that the children understand explicit, decontextualized, detached language. In order to succeed at school the children needed to be able to engage in decontextualized thinking and develop scientific concepts. In Thandi and Agnes's families decontextualized conversations didn't occur at all. In Lisa, Ephraim and Lindiwe's families these only occurred when the parents were helping the children directly with schoolwork. Thus we can assume that they were not exposed to this mode of discourse before they started school. These children would be at a distinct disadvantage to those children who had this exposure at home before they even started school. For the children who were exposed to decontextualized discourses from the outset, there was no discontinuity between the discourse at home and at school.

5.1.1.2 Conversations Stimulated by Print

In Joshua, Taryn, Nina and Michael's families most decontextualized conversations were initiated by material which they had read. Diketso was again subject to two sets of practices and values. Her grandmother didn't read at all, while for her guardians print was the main stimulus around which conversation occurred. On both occasions that I visited the family Mr H read the newspaper during the meal. As noted previously this was not a solitary activity. He read silently for a while and then initiated a conversation on the basis of what he had read. Most often Diketso didn't contribute during these discussions. Mrs H would try to interpret and explain what Mr H had read but Diketso didn't respond and appeared to be uninterested.

The only time Diketso responded to a news item was when Mr H read and commented negatively about Mozambican immigrants being allowed to enter the country. She said that this was only happening because President Mandela was having an affair with Graca Machel. She also stated that she didn't like President Mandela because of this. At this time I had heard several people from the townships expressing the same opinion so Diketso may have been expressing an opinion that was reflective of the attitudes in the townships. She appeared to be more receptive to information received in that context.

There were many instances when the other families actually read in the company of other family members and read parts of what they were reading aloud. This served as

a stimulus for conversation. As with Diketso's guardians the newspaper was most often read in this fashion. This pattern of interaction was also observed in Taryn, Joshua and Nina's households. In Nina's family they discussed various things which they had read in the newspaper earlier, during meal-times.

Information contained in print was the most obvious and direct stimulus for the conversation in Nina's family. Mr R read an article written by a friend in a medical journal. This sparked off a conversation about what the friend was doing in his life. They also spoke about the content of the article and this led to a conversation about other related issues. The television guide was referred to and a discussion followed. All the family members were variously involved in these discussions.

Print did not play a significant role in the lives of Agnes, Ephraim, Lisa and Thandi's families and therefore very little conversation was stimulated by print. However this did not mean that printed matter never stimulated conversation in these families. During one of my visits to Thandi's family I observed an instance where print was read aloud and used as a stimulus for conversation. However the purpose of the reading aloud was different. In the previous instances the reader only read small sections of the print and then commented. The purpose of the activity was to express an opinion and in form other participants. In the interactive event which I observed in Thandi's household the material was read aloud in its entirety so that all the listeners could assist in the understanding of the material.

The families who adopted an extended view of education were also the families who engaged in decontextualized conversations. Newspapers, books, or other printed matter were often the stimulus for these decontextualized conversations. Since decontextualized conversations were often stimulated by print, those families in which print played a less important role engaged in less discourse of this nature.

As noted in the previous chapter, most discourse in the classroom was organized around print. This mode of discourse was, therefore congruent with the home experience of Joshua, Taryn, Michael, Diketso and Nina. For the other children it was less familiar. They not only had to contend with the content of the material they were learning, but also it's mode of presentation.

5.1.2 Direct Interaction with Print

Literacy enables people to gain knowledge beyond their own experience. It frees people from their immediate context. The parents who viewed education broadly and tried to extend their children's knowledge also valued books as a significant source of this knowledge. They read to their children, encouraged them to read and referred to books to verify or expand their knowledge. In the middle-class families many activities were structured around print and it mediated many family activities. The print environment to which the children were exposed was extensive. Both inside and outside their homes the children lived in a world of signs in their suburban homes. In contrast there were few signs in the townships. For example there were very few street names and landmarks such as "the big tree" were used to give directions. Maps couldn't be used in the townships because street names were not in evidence and most of the streets were not named.

5.1.2.1 Storybook Reading

All the families which I visited had read to their children to a greater or lesser degree. At the one end of the continuum was Agnes's mother who had read less than ten books to her at the time when this study was conducted. At the other end of the continuum was Taryn's mother who started reading to her children regularly every night from when they were six months old. Nevertheless it was the professional, middle-class parents (Joshua, Taryn, Nina, Michael and Diketso's guardians) who felt that storybook reading was an integral part of their parenting responsibilities. These parents had been read to by their parents and they felt it was part of their family tradition.

The children were read to regularly from an early age, before the children started pre-school. They started reading wordless picture-books, then picture-story books, rhymes, alphabet books, counting books. They progressed to more complex contemporary and traditional storybooks where there were fewer pictures. Some books such as the traditional fairy tales were reread.

The other families did not read to their children regularly and did not see it as an integral part of early childhood parenting. Lisa's mother read to her children from time to time, at her children's request. She didn't initiate storybook reading herself and did not see it as part of her parenting functions. Storybook reading was not a regular occurrence in her household.

Lindiwe, Thandi and Ephraim's families reported that they started reading to their children when they were at pre-school or at school. They started reading to their children on the advice of either the nursery school teachers, primary school teachers or, in Lindiwe's family's case, a speech therapist. Storybook reading was not regarded as a normal part of child-rearing practices.

The value placed on storybook reading by these parents directly reflected the views of the teachers or therapists who had encouraged them to read to their children. Lindiwe's mom said that the speech therapist who she had taken Lindiwe's brother to see explained that storybook reading would improve his language abilities. This stimulated her to read to him and also to Lindiwe. The other black parents couldn't offer an explanation as to what benefits storybook reading had for their children but they told me they read to their children because they had been advised to. They also believed that it would improve their children's performance at school.

The inputs Lindiwe's mother received from the speech therapist and teachers about the value of storybook produced a different response than was the case with the other black families. Lindiwe's mother read to her and her brother regularly and joined a library to ensure that she had books to read to them. On the other hand the other parents read to their children sporadically. They only read the books that were supplied by the teachers, seeing the whole exercise as part of the children's school and homework.

Storybook reading was invariably accompanied with discussion and questioning. Nina's mother said that storybook reading often stimulated long discussions. The children regularly asked questions or commented during storybook reading. They sometimes asked for specific information - "What's that?". Predictive questions, where the children tried to establish where the story was leading were also common, - "What do you think is going to happen?". Questions where they tried to establish the causal relations in a story were asked - "Why did that happen?" or "Why did the people do that?" The children also questioned their parents when they were unsure of the vocabulary.

Most of the parents tried to answer the children's questions directly. Joshua's mother responded differently. If her children asked her questions Mrs L. tried to encourage them to think for themselves. Thus questions were often deflected. "What do you think?" was a frequent reply to questions.

The literature indicates that parents asked questions during storybook reading. In this study however, the parents said that they commented during storybook reading or pointed things out to the children, but didn't ask the children questions. The questions that the children themselves asked though were very similar to the questions asked by their teachers.

5.1.2.2 Parental Modelling

All the parents of all the families that were visited engaged in some reading. All the parents read and wrote for practical purposes to assist with the organization of their lives. They read recipes, street-maps, instruction manuals and forms and they wrote shopping lists, filled in forms and wrote memory aids and budgets.

All other categories of parental reading were associated with particular groups of parents and separated the parents into cultural or class groups. The reading categories that were considered were religious, leisure, news and reading for work.

A very clear cultural pattern emerged in respect of religious reading. All the black mothers engaged in religious reading. Ephraim, Thandi, Lindiwe and Agnes's mothers read the Bible regularly. Diketso's grandmother couldn't read but she said that the only reason she would want to learn to read was so that she could read the Bible. Not one of the white parents engaged in religious reading although Joshua's mother said she enjoyed reading "esoteric stuff".

All the parents except Ephraim, Agnes and Thandi's engaged in some leisure reading. For many of the mothers in this study the bedtime story routine still applied, except they read for themselves now. Lisa, Taryn and Nina's mothers all reported that they had to read every night and couldn't fall asleep unless they read. They reported that they read pure escapism at this time. The fathers who engaged in leisure reading, were more serious about it. They read biographies, travel stories, political literature and historical works.

The pattern that emerged in this study is that professional parents, that is the parents who had an extended view of education, predominantly read the newspapers to keep up to date with current events. They also watched the news on television but they read the newspaper on a daily basis. With the exception of Lisa's mother, the non-professional families were also concerned with keeping up to date but they did this by

watching the news on television. They all said they occasionally read a newspaper, sometimes only every few months, in Agnes's mother's case. Mrs C read the local free newspaper.

Most of the parents believed that what was reported in the newspaper could be disputed. There were two exceptions to this general trend though. Mrs C said she believed that the information contained in newspapers was absolutely true. So too did Agnes's mother who said that "books are sometimes true but the information contained in newspapers is always true. They can't tell the whole world lies."

A further very clear distinction was apparent between professional parents and other parents. Reading and writing were essential activities to fulfill the job responsibilities of professional parents. These activities were an integral way of organising and conducting their working lives. Extensive reading and writing was an integral part of at least one of the parent's jobs in each of the professional families. In addition they read beyond their job requirements to extend their knowledge in their field of work. For example Nina's father read reports and journal articles and her mother read extensively in order to obtain her specialization in community health. Many of these parents had to bring work home. This meant that these literacy events were very visible to the children. The children have seen their parents incorporate reading and writing into their value and behavioral systems.

In the group of parents who adopted an instrumental view of education, written materials were not a major source of new information. Literacy did not bear any direct relationship to job status and upward mobility. The children had not seen their parents incorporate information from written materials into their value and behavioural systems. Thandi's mother stated this viewpoint explicitly. Although she showed an immense desire to learn, Mrs Z did not enjoy learning by reading and writing. One home visit occurred at the end of a long weekend. During the course of the long weekend the church which the family attended had organised a series of lectures given by a number of guest speakers. Mrs Z attended every one of the lectures and animatedly related what she had learnt during these lectures. Mrs Z also stated explicitly that she preferred to learn by listening than by reading. She said "Books back me up. Through listening I learn most." She also said that she only wrote when she had to and she said that she could "talk all day, but I don't like writing".

Lisa's mother too, said she only wrote when she had to. This was also indicated by the way in which she maintained contact with the school. This contact was exclusively oral. Mrs C used to make a point of speaking to each of her children's teachers in person at least once a week. Since she went back to work, she was not able to do so any more but she informed me that she had the teachers' telephone numbers and contacted them whenever she felt it necessary to talk to them.

5.1.2.3 Resources

All the families live in an urban context, so it is not surprising that they had some printed material in their homes. Forms, greeting cards, calenders and magazines were found in all the homes.

All the families claimed to read a **newspaper** although it was a regular resource only in some homes. All the middle-class families got one or more newspapers daily. Thandi and Ephraim's mother reported that they sometimes got a newspaper on Sundays, but these were not visible in the home. Agnes's mother's said she got a newspaper about once every two months. Other than the free, local newspaper, Lisa's family do not get newspapers. Thus the professional families regularly got newspapers. The daily newspaper served as a stimulus for conversation and was the most important means of keeping people in touch with current events. Mrs SM and the parents who viewed education instrumentally, preferred to watch the news on television. Thandi and Ephraim's mothers and Lisa's father also kept themselves informed about current events by watching television.

Each family had at least one **adult book**. However the quantity and range of these books varied enormously. At one extreme was Agnes's mother, where the only book she possessed was a Bible. Thandi and Ephraim's mothers had less than twenty-five books. In Thandi's home several versions of the Bible were found. In addition there were about twenty books of a religious/moral nature. The professional families had an extensive collection of adult fiction. Each family had a selection of between 200 to 800 books.

The families differed most dramatically in terms of the **resources** they had available **for children** and the differences were clearly defined by race. In all white families there were books for children, books to read to children and books for children to read themselves. There are a tremendous quantity and variety of resources for children in

Joshua, Taryn, Michael, Diketso and Nina's homes. They had an extensive collection of children's fiction and non-fiction. Lisa had fewer books than the other white families but still considerably more than the black families. The children had about 40 books. In the black families, even Lindiwe's family which had quite an extensive range of adults books, there was dearth of children's books. There were less than ten children's books in each of these families.

As well as general reference works the white families also had reference works specifically for children. There were a limited number of reference books in Lisa's home, probably because they had been going through a difficult period financially. They had English and Afrikaans dictionaries and a number of atlases. The family were resourceful in trying to ensure that the children had some reference materials for school. They bought "Tree of Knowledge" magazines which Mr C categorized and organized into files. In addition Mrs C collected a pull out page from one of the magazines she was given by her mother-in-law. These pages dealt with a specific topic in every issue of the magazine.

The walls of the children's rooms were decorated with educational materials. There were times table charts, a number charts, a clock on the walls. Posters are another form print in her room. An alphabet chart, African Bush animals and Birds of Africa charts were found.

There were few reference books for children or adults in the homes of the black families. Resources which directly assist children with school work were very limited in these households. The children used their textbooks that the school supplied.

Computers

All the families except Thandi, Diketso, Ephraim and Agnes's had a computer with a keyboard and printer. In Taryn, Joshua, Nina and Michael's families the computer was used as an educational resource. These families had encyclopedias or educational games on computer. Groliers encyclopedia and Encarta was most common. In addition the children were using the computers to assist their writing. They were using them to write their school projects and were experimenting with story writing.

In Lisa and Lindiwe's homes there were computers present but they were not used for educational purposes. There were two computers in Lisa's father's study but there

were few programmes which were specifically for children. They had a few games which had little direct educational value, for example Pacman and Black Jack. The computer in Lindiwe's home was only used by the children to play games on. Mr LM used his computer at work, hence he came home from work very late.

Toys and Games

The professional parents educational orientation was also apparent in the type of toys they bought their children. When their children were younger they bought them construction toys and other toys which involved visual analysis and synthesis. Thus the children were exposed to jigsaw puzzles, lego and building blocks. Board games with an educational function were favoured for school going children for this group of parents. The other children had realistic toys such as trucks and dolls or sports equipment. No construction toys were visible. There are no writing materials other than the stationary required at school.

Television

All the families had at least one television in the household. Agnes's mother did not have one in her room, but there was a television in the main house which Agnes had access to. In Michael, Nina, Taryn, Joshua and Thandi's families there was one television per household. In Diketso and Lisa's households there were two television sets but one of the sets was in separate living quarters used exclusively by one member of the family. Lindiwe's had two television sets, one in the parents' bedroom and one in a television room. In Ephraim's household there were three television sets in the home.

The families differed most markedly in the amount of time spent watching television, how programmes were selected and how much control parents exercised over television viewing.

In Thandi's family there was a colour television set in the lounge and this was the centre of family activity. The family watched TV 1, a channel which presents programmes in vernacular languages. The television was on all the time and it was watched continuously. There was no question of controlling television viewing for the children because it was on all the time and formed a continuous backdrop to family life. In all the other families television was controlled to a greater or lesser extent. A consistent racial pattern that emerged in this study was that in white families the

television set was switched off during meals. Dinner time was regarded as an important period for conversation and the families felt that the television intruded on this activity. In the black families meals were eaten in front of the television set, almost in silence.

Although Lindiwe's mother organized meals in front of the television set, in other respects television viewing in her household was subject to the same restrictions as occurred in the middle-class households. All these families did not allow the television to be switched on until homework was being completed. There were specific programmes that the television was switched on for. The parents did not try and control the specific programmes that the children watched.

Middle-class families tended to own more books and magazines. white middle-class families had many materials specifically for children. Most noticeable was the amount of resources they had to assist the children's schooling and to develop the type of thinking required at school. However although some of the other families did not own many materials, they read quite extensively. In Ephraim's family the girls occasionally made use of the local library which is less than a kilometre from their home. Much more frequently they used the school library. This was used for both project work and for leisure reading.

In this section a distinction is made between families who held an extended view of education and those who had an instrumental view. The following are the most notable differences between the two groups:

- The families who held an **extended view of education** were highly literate. Reading and writing was central to the lives of these families and was incorporated into their behavioural systems. The significance of literacy was manifested in many behaviours or practices. Newspapers were the most important means of obtaining information to keep up to date with current events. Print was used to access and verify information and thoughts. The parents wrote extensively, both to organize their daily lives and to fulfill their job requirements. Storybooks were read to the children from an early age and later when the children could read themselves, they were encouraged to read.

Printed material was frequently the stimulus for decontextualized conversations, although decontextualized conversations were not necessarily stimulated by

print.

13 In contrast print played a less important role in the lives of the family members in those families who had an **instrumental view of education**. Most reading was restricted to practical, religious or sometimes leisure reading. The parents tried to avoid writing and stated that they only wrote when they had to. They kept themselves informed of current events through the television which was usually viewed in silence. The storybook routine was not part of the families' tradition.

Conversations that had their source in print tended to be decontextualized. The centrality of print in itself contributed to the greater frequency of decontextualized conversations in families who were highly literate. However decontextualized conversations weren't restricted to direct literacy events. This mode of discourse was also stimulated by things a family member had heard during the day or by the television.

Since print was not given a central role in the families who viewed education instrumentally, conversations were not regularly stimulated by print. This fact in itself meant there were fewer opportunities for this form of discourse. Decontextualized conversations weren't stimulated by other sources either, for example the extensive television viewing stimulated very little conversation, decontextualized or otherwise.

It was noted print organized many activities at school. The main discourse pattern was organized around and was stimulated by print. In addition discourse became increasingly decontextualized as children progressed through higher levels of schooling. It is therefore apparent that congruency existed between the literacy patterns adopted by those families who held an extended view of education and that of the school. On the other hand there was non-congruence between the families who had an instrumental view of education and the school in terms of the literacy issues which were discussed in this section.

5.2 Parents' Perceptions of The Role of the School and the Home in Education

All the parents involved in this study believed that they had some role to play in the education of their children. They all showed their interest and concern by attending individual parent-teacher conferences. All the parents supported their children by attending sports meetings, concerts, award ceremonies and other school events in which their children were involved if their work commitments did not prevent this. They differed, however, in the way they dealt directly with their children's schoolwork itself and the type of assistance they believed should be offered.

The forms of parental assistance can be categorized into three groups:

- Direct assistance and overall control of homework
- Support and encouragement of independent, responsible homework by the children themselves
- Limited assistance.

There is some overlap between the categories and certain families could be placed in more than one group. Nevertheless the families could still be meaningfully categorized on the basis of the predominant clusters of characteristics which they showed in respect of assistance with homework.

5.2.1 Direct Assistance with Homework

Michael, Diketso, Lindiwe, Lisa, Ephraim.

With the exception of Ephraim, all the children lived in families where there were at least two adult care-givers. Most of the children lived with their biological mothers and fathers and their parents had never been divorced. Diketso lived with her guardians and her grandmother and Ephraim with his widowed mother. Although there were fathers living in the homes, they were in most cases busy with their careers or pursuing their own interests and didn't play an important role in helping their children with their homework. Even Michael's father who was present for much of the time and was very interested in his children's education, did not help directly with homework and in this case too, assistance with homework was seen as the mother's responsibility.

Education was of primary importance in these families. The children's schooling was given priority in the households. With the exception of Linuwe's family, the school fees, transport costs and uniforms constituted a considerable portion of the family income. The children were not short of anything required for school. The families planned and budget for all their requirements. Ephraim's mother even had a fund for unexpected events so that their children could participate in all the school outings and social activities.

The mothers in this category took responsibility for their children's school work by providing direct assistance with homework. These mothers were very well informed about what schoolwork the children had to complete and about forthcoming school events. Various methods were employed to ensure that they knew about school events. Ephraim's mother, Mrs S, kept track of all school events by keeping a diary. The children were required to let her know about these events as soon as they were informed at school. When Mrs S came home from work the children brought her a cup of tea, brought her the school notices and let her know what was happening at the school. Lisa's mother, Mrs C kept in touch by regular oral contact with the teachers and other parents. Michael's mother kept in contact by speaking to other mothers and by regularly consulting the children's school diaries. The other parents relied on the children's school diaries.

All the mothers in this group were extremely well organized. The mothers ensured that the children's school life was organized and supported. They attended to every detail. Their children had all the correct stationery, they had all the materials they needed for projects, forms were filled in and returned on the due dates. Their organizational skills included the planning of their children's homework schedules where they made decisions about time management, resources required and how work should be completed. The parents in this group took on the responsibility for organizing their children's lives and left little control to the children.

In all cases except Michael's the mothers in these families worked but in spite of this they assisted their children with their schoolwork and organized their school lives. In most cases they expected their children to complete their homework while they are at work. When they come home from work they checked their children's homework and provided them with assistance.

5.2.1.1 Diketso

Mrs H, Diketso's guardian, provided Diketso with a tremendous amount of assistance with her schoolwork. Diketso attended aftercare at the school and completed most of her routine, drill homework at the school. A teacher supervised aftercare and was available to assist the children. However Mrs H quizzed her on material which she had to learn for tests and exams and helped her with the more demanding tasks such as projects, speeches and creative writing. Diketso kept Mrs H informed about tasks they had to complete for school and they start working on them well ahead of their due dates. Mrs H broke the tasks into units and stated which part they are going to do and when.

On both occasions when I visited the family they were involved in working on schoolwork. During one visit they worked together on a water pollution project. Mrs H tried to establish what Diketso already knew about the topic before she made any contribution. She asked her "have you learnt anything about it yet?" Diketso didn't respond. Mrs H asked her again if she had learnt anything about the topic at school. Diketso replied that she couldn't remember. Mrs H continued to ask her questions. "What is pollution?" Diketso replied "Like dirty". They continued in this fashion with Mrs H questioning Diketso in an attempt to extract information and to direct Diketso's understanding. Diketso's responses were minimal and it was a very slow process. Mrs H contributed most of the information and after they had discussed some of the set questions, Diketso went to her room to write the answers down. Mrs H adopted a similar approach when she helped Diketso with a speech on another occasion. They read through all the speech topics which Ms P had set and Mrs H asked Diketso questions to try and elicit what she knew about the topics. Diketso was very unresponsive and Mrs H ended up having to explain the topics to her.

For example

- B: The stuff of what heros are made. What do you think that means? What is a hero?
- K: No response
- B: It's someone who is very brave, and.....
- K: No response

Mrs H tried one of the other topics.

- B: Mmm My dreams. What's a dream?
K: No response
B: Come on Diketso! (giggle) You know what a dream is!

After a number of prompts Diketso eventually said she dreamed of becoming a masseur or a "gladiator" when she started working, a far cry from her rural family's expectations of her becoming a doctor.

Mrs H asked Diketso which topic she would like to write her speech on and Diketso was typically unresponsive. After a great deal of prompting and probing by Mrs H, Diketso eventually decided to write a speech on "My Dream". Again Mrs H helped her structure her speech by a great deal of questioning.

Diketso's grandmother was not able to assist Diketso with her homework but she supported Diketso's schooling by showing interest and pride in Diketso's achievements. She went through all Diketso's reports very carefully with Mrs H and then filed them. She was very proud when Diketso was awarded merit badges and all her school photographs were framed.

5.2.1.2 Lisa

Mrs C ensured that the children's school life was organized and supported. She attended to every detail. Before she went back to work, she used to sit with the children in the afternoons and help them with their homework. When she went back to work her mother adopted this role. When Mrs C came home from work she started cooking and while she cooked she checked the children's homework and questioned them on their schoolwork if they had a test or exams coming up. Mrs C knew exactly what tests, projects and other homework assignments they had coming up and made sure that the children started completing these tasks timeously.

5.2.1.3 Ephraim

In Ephraim's case the siblings assisted each other with homework. The older children acted as mediators for the younger ones. Mrs S also assisted them with homework when this was required and ensured that it was completed thoroughly. She only signed their homework diary when she had checked that all the work was complete. The older girls studied for exams without assistance but Mrs S tested Ephraim's spelling and maths. The older children or Mrs S assisted Ephraim with his project work.

5.2.1.4 Lindiwe

Mrs SM, Lindiwe's mother went to great lengths to ensure that the children's schoolwork was well completed. Mrs SM assisted her children with homework regularly. She structured their work routine, ensured that tasks were completed and explained work that they did not understand. She took on the responsibility for organizing their lives and left little control to the children.

When I visited the family during the week Mrs SM's assistance and supervision of homework started as soon as the children arrived home from school after having attended after care. While Mrs SM cooked the children had to complete their homework at the kitchen table. Lindiwe's brother asked her questions when he did not know what to do and she checked up on him from time to time.

Lindiwe did not get much homework but she was required to read to her mother every day. Mrs SM regarded this as a very important activity so she did not do reading while she was cooking. She also did Lindiwe's brother's reading with him later when she was able to give this activity her full attention. Her brother and Lindiwe read to their mother in turn. Mrs SM attended completely to the task and provided excellent tuition during the reading sessions. She drew the children's attention to print characteristics ("why is this word written in capital letters?"), as well as the content of the story. She asked them questions which enabled them to relate elements of the story to their own experience and also got them to articulate their own response to the story.

Mrs SM told me she attended parent education programmes at the school and her son's previous school where they had given parents guidelines about how to assist their children with reading. Mrs SM reported that although she was completely committed to helping her children with their schoolwork and she felt confident about helping them with most of their homework she believed she was poorly equipped to help with the project work conducted at the school. Mr LM expressed the same sentiment and said that he would never have believed that children at the level of his children could complete this standard of work. He said he had difficulty assisting the children because he didn't know what was expected.

5.2.1.5 Michael

The children's schoolwork was controlled by Mrs K, Michael's mother. Thus all the reading they had to do for school, including project work, was completed with

extensive assistance. Not only did Mrs K structure the work for them, but she actually did most of the reading. Mrs K was very concerned about her children's school performance. She was completely preoccupied with the fact that they remain in the top group in their respective classes. She was happy to sacrifice their general education and interests to achieve this goal.

Both Mr and Mrs K believed that parents had a very substantial role to play in the education of children. The school laid down the curriculum but the rest of the task was the parent's responsibility. They said that parents were the prime educators and as such must motivate children as well influencing the values they have regarding learning. Parents should also teach children proper study habits and discipline. They believed it was more important now than it was in the past to assist children because class sizes were increasing and abilities within a class were very dispersed so teachers couldn't provide the quality of education they would have liked for their children.

Mrs K provided a lot of practical assistance with the children's homework. She entirely took on the responsibility of planning work schedules from them. She controlled what they should study and for how long. Michael's brother worked with her every afternoon for at least two hours. She worked with Michael for at least half an hour every day. She also provided many physical resources in the home. In addition she took complete responsibility for selecting and collecting resources from the library. She paid lip-service to doing these activities in a democratic consultative fashion, but in reality she completely controlled her children's home learning. Teaching study habits and discipline was the stated goal but Mrs K focused far more on directly teaching the curriculum to her children (see 5.1.1.1).

Michael's mother and Diketso's guardian were trained teachers so they were well equipped to help their children with their homework. The other parents are not always able to render direct assistance to their children but through their resourcefulness had devised ways and made use of opportunities to ensure that their children received the assistance they required. Mrs C's older son was experiencing difficulties at school. The family were struggling financially at the time and could not afford to pay for remedial therapy or for extra lessons. Mrs C did not have the skills to provide the necessary assistance herself but she solved the problem by organizing a peer study group. One of each child's parents (except Mrs C who did the organizing) undertook to

help with a subject and was available to assist the children. Mrs S enlisted the help of her older children when Ephraim needed assistance with some areas of his schoolwork. Her older children, for example, helped Ephraim with his project work. Lindiwe's mother attended every parent education programme that was offered by her son's previous school and her children's present school.

5.2.2 Extended Support for Learning

Taryn, Joshua, Nina

Parents in this group took a broad view of education and tried to develop their children's knowledge and experience aside from the school curriculum. They did not take responsibility for organizing their children's school schedules by directly planning and organizing their schoolwork. They did however, try to develop organizational and planning skills in their children in many other aspects of their home lives and assumed these skills would transfer to the school situation. These parents tried to develop responsibility and independence in their children so that they were able to take control of their schoolwork themselves.

In order for the children to take control and work independently the parents provided many physical resources. There were many reference books in these home. They had several sets of encyclopedias both on computer and in book form, dictionaries, atlases and other reference books dealing with specific topics.

Although the children in these families worked independently, their parents were available to them if they needed help. The children worked independently and came to the parents if they needed some help. Their parents were also available to question them when they learn for exams.

5.2.2.1 Joshua

Mrs L, Joshua's mother, was available to assist Joshua with his homework but he tended to complete most of the work independently. He did not need encouragement to complete homework tasks as he was very driven to do well. During one visit I was sitting with Mrs L in the living room while she was busy wrapping some gifts. The children were not anywhere to be seen. At one point there was a cry from one of the other rooms of the house. Mrs L explained that Joshua was upset about the fact that he hadn't completed a homework task earlier. "He usually starts working on tasks well ahead of time. He is obsessed with getting things right and tries to get things done as

soon as possible," she said. He was a bit unsettled in this case because he had been ill and hadn't been able to start a project which was due for the next day.

Joshua worked independently but came to his mom for help when required. Joshua had completed the earlier task and was busy making a musical instrument, a task they had to complete for history. Joshua came into the living room and said good evening to me very politely. He asked his mom for sticky tape and showed her why he needed it for his project. Mrs L explained where the sticky tape was, but during the explanation she examined the instrument and suggested that he rather uses double-sided tape.

5.2.2.2 Taryn

Taryn's mother reported that the children completed most of their homework at school during after care. Project work was usually done at home because they liked using the encyclopedias they had on computer. Taryn was able to complete projects on her own although she discussed her ideas with her mother. Taryn's brother needed more help from his mother on project work.

In spite of Mrs P's very busy schedule, she also provided practical assistance with the children's homework when this was required. She was very well-organized and because she had a very disciplined routine she found time to help the children with their schoolwork. She also provided many physical resources in the home which meant a minimum of effort had to be made to collect resources for project and other reference work.

5.2.2.3 Nina

Mr and Mrs R, Nina's parents, believed their children were competent and needed to take personal responsibility for their work. The two older girls studied for their exams independently while I was visiting. They worked in their own rooms. From time to time they joined their parents in the kitchen where they were cooking and they made a comment about the work they were studying or mentioned the questions they had been asked. Their parents were very responsive to their comments and added further information. The girls were quite critical of some of the questions and expressed their opinion in a very articulate fashion. The parents also supported this show of critical thinking. Nina needed some help with reading and they provided this regularly. They helped her directly and took her for remedial reading and occupational therapy.

The parents showed an interest by attending to all the children's activities and by responding to the specific content of what they were learning and adding their own knowledge and experiences with a particular topic. The first thing Mr R said when he saw his oldest daughter when he came home from work was "How was your exam? What are you writing tomorrow?" Similarly with his other daughter "How was the maths? What did they ask you? Did you check your work? What did you eat for breakfast?"

Michael was placed in the previous group because of the extent that Mrs K provided direct assistance with homework and because she did not allow the children to be responsible for their own work, the most salient characteristics of the previous group. However certain practices relating to learning of this group were also features of the practices occurring in Michael's home. Although Mrs K was concerned with schoolwork, Mr K tried to develop problem-solving skills. They also had a wide range of reference books in the home for the children.

5.2.3 Limited Assistance

Thandi, Agnes

Both Thandi and Agnes were cared for by their mothers and their fathers' whereabouts were not known. Both mothers supported the idea that their daughters should get an education but didn't know how to provide their children with practical assistance with schoolwork. Mrs Z expressed it as follows. "It is the school's task to provide knowledge. Teachers are trained to do it. They can take it step by step". They believed it was the teacher's job to teach their children and placed the responsibility for the children's education in the hands of the school.

Although Mrs Z and Mrs M both believed that it was the school's responsibility to educate their children, they differed in the way they viewed their own other responsibilities in regard to their children's education. Mrs Z believed it's the parent's task to show that education was important. Parents were also responsible for financing the child's education. Mrs Z made many sacrifices to pay for her children's school fees and pay for the transport costs to and from school. She had also started paying for extra English lessons. On the other hand Agnes's school fees were very much in arrears. The school had to make special arrangements to try and assist Mrs M financially but she did not take the initiative to contact them.

The organization found in the other groups was not evident in these households. Homework tasks were not always completed because neither the children or the mothers had a system for keeping track of what work had been assigned. Tasks which required forward planning were not started timeously. Books and forms were often not returned on the dates when they were due.

Both these mothers did not feel confident about helping their children with their schoolwork. Mrs M, Agnes's mother felt she was able to help Agnes with her routine spelling and reading work. However she said she didn't know what to do about projects and didn't think they were important anyway. The only routine homework the Grade Two group had was reading. Mrs M used to help Agnes with her reading quite regularly but since her baby had been born, this assistance had been sporadic. They also had to complete one project which Agnes did not hand in because it was incomplete. She said she had only completed "the pictures and not the writing" by the time the project was due. Mrs M wasn't even aware that Agnes had a project.

Mrs Z, Thandi's mother said she was able to help Thandi in the Junior Primary phase of her schooling but she didn't know how to help her anymore. Thandi did well in the Junior primary phase but she had encountered real difficulties and her performance had decreased drastically when she entered the Senior Primary phase of her schooling.

Assistance with project work in particular, presented difficulties and in this area Mrs Z felt she lacked the skills to provide help for Thandi. One home visit occurred at a time when Ms P had given the class a number of projects to complete. Before supper Thandi had started a project that had to be presented in game format. This project was not due for another week. I asked her if she had completed the project on water pollution due for the next day and found that she hadn't started it. After supper Mrs Z told Thandi to start the water pollution project. She went to her room and emerged an hour later at 8.30 pm. and showed her mom the work she had produced. Thandi had drawn a pond with some cans and other pollutants in it on a piece of A3 paper. Her mom looked at the paper in complete confusion and asked Thandi what this was about. Thandi explained what she had drawn and told her mom that she also had to write some sentences. "What sentences?" asked Mrs Z. Thandi didn't know. I reminded Thandi that Ms P had given the children a sheet with some questions on them. Mrs Z sent Thandi to fetch the questions but they had been lost. I told them what the questions were. This wasn't very helpful. Mom and Thandi were at a loss about how

to proceed. They tried, without success, to get some information from Thandi's school dictionary. They tried to construct something from their own experience. No success. Unable to stay removed from the despair that was apparent in Mrs Z, I suggested that they use the encyclopedias that were displayed on the wall unit in the lounge. Mrs Z stated that they didn't use the encyclopedias, the salesman hadn't explained how to use them. When I left the Z household at 10.30 pm very little progress had been made on the projects and Thandi was still awake.

Thandi's mother, Mrs Z, was very concerned about the decline in Thandi's performance. She said she didn't understand why there was this decline and felt that the school was responsible. She said that for all these years Thandi was doing so well and now there was this "drop". She felt that it was very worrying because Thandi was very hard working. She said that she had spoken to the teacher to get extra help but nothing had happened as a result. However there seemed to be a different perception between Mrs Z and the teachers. The teaching staff felt concerned that Thandi didn't make use of the free language enrichment and remedial lessons offered by the school. Mrs Z felt that Thandi didn't attend the lessons because attendance wasn't enforced and she couldn't convince her to go.

Apart from not knowing how to help their children with specific school tasks, both these parents did not know how to enlist help from other sources or to use the resources that were available. Thandi was struggling in Standard Two and yet she did not make use of the assistance offered by the school for children in this position. Thandi was supposed to do her homework at school while she waited for her lift but usually did not complete it during this time. She did not make use of the homework classes where a teacher was on duty to help children with their homework. In addition she did not attend free language enrichment and remedial lessons offered by the school. Mrs Z wanted to assist Thandi and felt she needed an outside agent to provide her with this help. She did not know the system and had no network of contacts to get the help she required. For example she did not know where to start looking for an extra-English teacher and needed my assistance in this regard. Mrs M found similar problems getting help for Agnes who was not coping with Grade Two.

5.2.4 Implications

School consumes a large part of the children's lives. Barton (1994) has argued that it formed a significant point for the development of values and attitudes. These values

and attitudes continued into adulthood and were reasserted when adults have children. The school values entered the home. This assertion by Barton was demonstrated in this study. The values that the parents acquired at school affected the practices in their homes. Prior to 1992 government schools in South Africa were strictly segregated on racial grounds. The values and practices at the school where this study was conducted to a large extent still reflect those of the formerly white-only schools. The white parents in this study were, therefore, on familiar turf. Their values in respect of learning were congruent with that of the school. They knew to what extent the school expected them to get involved with their children's learning and how to render assistance. If they could not render assistance themselves they knew how to mobilize help their children as in Mrs C's study group and the remedial assistance organized for Nina.

None of the black parents in this study was educated in the same system as their children. Although two of the black families have found ways of learning "the system". Lindiwe's mother had attended every parent education programme offered by the two schools her children attended. She felt confident about helping her children with schoolwork in all areas except project work. She had also become integrated into the school by rendering assistance to the school. In these activities she had become part of the information network. Ephraim's mother had enlisted the help of her older children who have been through the system to help the younger children.

For Thandi and Agnes's mothers, however the whole system was largely mysterious. They didn't believe they should be expected to help their children with schoolwork. They didn't know how to help their children and showed some passivity in using the remedial programmes offered by the school. They didn't have the social network to learn the system. There was the expectation that the school should take full responsibility for ensuring that their children do well at school.

In the preceding discussion in this chapter two important factors, namely the parents' view of education and parental support for schooling have been identified. The parents' view of education was also associated with literacy practices. The relationship between these factors, as well as their impact on school achievement will be further explored in concluding chapter.

5.3 Parents' Work Ethic and Organizational Skills

5.3.1 Parents' Work Ethic

A strong work ethic was a further factor which distinguished some families. In Joshua, Diketso, Taryn, Lisa, Nina, Michael, Ephraim, and Lindiwe's families at least one parent, but most often both parents had a very strong work ethic. This group corresponded to the first two groups in the previous section. Ephraim's mother, Diketso's guardians and Lindiwe and Lisa's fathers came home late from work. In the other families with a strong work ethic the parents brought work home and the children saw them working, thus modelling work in a very direct fashion.

All these parents showed a strong commitment to their jobs. They expressed satisfaction with their work and found the work they did intrinsically motivating. Many of them studied further to become more qualified to improve their work.

Thandi and Agnes's mothers, on the other hand, had a very explicit transactional attitudes to their jobs. They expressed general dissatisfaction with their jobs. They were not concerned with the nature of the work itself, but spoke about other issues related to their jobs with which they were dissatisfied. For example when I gave Thandi's mother a lift home from work on one occasion she spontaneously started complaining about the fact that she had been working for her company for several months and she had not yet been given a promotion.

There seemed to be a broad relationship between the parent's work ethic and the children's school achievement. The children whose parents were intrinsically motivated by their work and who had a personal investment in their jobs performed better at school than those parents who expressed dissatisfaction with their work. Modelling work attitudes and behaviours appears to be another factor which affects school achievement and which plays a role in forming children's attitudes to their schoolwork.

5.3.2 Organization Skills

A further diagnostic factor in this study was the extent to which the parents applied organizational skills. This organization related to two areas. The first area in which some parents showed a high degree of organization was their children's school lives. Well organized parents were aware of what was going on at the school. They knew what work their children were doing at the school as well as other extra-curricular

school events. They ensured that their children had all the materials they needed, forms were returned on time, money was paid on time and lifts were organized. Second they had an organized routine at home. The parents organized their children's extramurals, homework times, television viewing times, bath and bed times.

The parents who were well organized with respect to the children's school life were also the parents who had a regular, predictable routines in other aspects of the children's lives. Joshua, Diketso, Lisa, Taryn, Lindiwe, Michael, Nina and Ephraim's parents were well organized. This group of parents again corresponded with the first two groups in the previous section.

With some variations, the following pattern was adopted in these families. Most of the parents worked, so they set up a system to ensure that their children's routine homework was completed while they were at work. Some of the children went to aftercare and it was completed where there were trained teachers available to assist them if required. Taryn, Diketso and Lindiwe used this facility. Joshua and Michael's mothers did not work so the children came home in the afternoons and did their homework at home if they didn't have extra-murals. Joshua got on with it on his own in the time the afternoon and early evening. Michael worked in the afternoon under his mother's direct supervision. Lisa's grandmother supervised her homework in the afternoon and Ephraim's older sister's helped him in the afternoon on the rare occasions when he had to complete tasks that were time-consuming and more demanding.

Early evening was the time when the well-organized working mothers updated themselves on school events and helped their children with the homework they could not do themselves. Taryn, Lindiwe, Nina and Lisa's mothers helped their children with their homework while they cooked. In Ephraim's home his mother or his older brother took turns to cook or to help him with his homework. Diketso's guardian helped her with homework at this time while Mary did the cooking.

By the time supper came round the children were finished with their homework. In families where they ate quite late the children had a bath. For those that ate earlier, the children bathed after supper. Shortly after supper, at between 7.30 and 8.30 pm, the children went to bed. They were read to or read themselves for a while before they fell asleep.

This organized routine was contrasted with the events in Thandi and Agnes's family. The children's lives weren't structured and there did not seem to be a clear routine in the family for example, there wasn't a set time for doing homework, having a bath and going to bed. There was also no place in either of these homes for the children to do their homework in comfort. In Thandi's family this lack of routine was set against a background where there were people coming in and out of the house and where the television was on continuously.

Chapter 6

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND HOME LITERACY PRACTICES

In a previous section I discussed two factors which distinguished the families and separated them into groups; these factors were the parents' understanding of the nature and scope of education and the assistance given for homework. As stated previously the first factor divided the families into two groups, namely families who adopted an extended definition of education and families who saw education instrumentally. Parents who fitted into the first group were professional parents. They corresponded to what Heath (1983) described as "Maintown" communities and displayed literacy behaviours typical of that group. The other group was racially and culturally heterogenous but showed very similar literacy practices. The second significant factor was the nature and extent of the parent's assistance with schoolwork. Three groups were distinguished in this regard; parents who gave direct assistance and controlled their children's homework schedules, those that were available to assist the children but left the responsibility for their learning to the children, and those who were disorganized and offered limited assistance.

6.1 School Performance

In this section the impact that the factors identified above had school achievement will be discussed. The children who obtained very good results in Standard Two were Joshua, Taryn and Lisa. These children obtained a overall average for all their subjects that was at least 15% higher than the class average. They also performed above the class average during the Junior Primary phase of their schooling. Diketso performed at the class average in Standard Two. Her school records showed that she consistently performed in the modal class for all her subjects except mathematics in the Junior Primary phase of her schooling. She obtained results slightly below the class average for mathematics and environmental studies in one year of this phase of her schooling. In the Junior Primary phase of her schooling Thandi's results fell in the modal class for most of her subjects. In Standard Two she started experiencing difficulties at school. Her overall average was 16% below the class average.

In Grade Two class, Michael was one of the top scholars in his year group. Nina had specific learning disabilities so she had difficulties in the second year of her schooling and had to repeat that year. However in spite of these difficulties she performed in higher modal class in a bimodal distribution in her second year in Grade Two. Ephraim and Lindiwe's overall results fell in the higher modal classes for most subjects in Grade Two. Agnes's results fell in the lower modal class in a bimodal distribution.

Figure 1 below summarizes the relationship between the children's school achievement and the factors identified as discriminating between families and which divided them into groups.

School achievement has been placed into three categories, above average, average and below average. The criteria for placing children in these categories are as follows:

Standard Two

Above Average-	children who obtained ten percent and more above the class average
Average-	children who obtained five percent above or below the class average
Below Average-	children who obtained ten percent below the class average

Grade Two

Above Average-	children who obtained results above the modal class for most areas of study
Average-	children whose results fell within the modal class for most subjects, or whose results fell in the higher modal class in Grade Two
Below Average-	children whose results fell below the modal class for most subjects

Figure 1

A categorization of school achievement, the parents' view of education and support for schooling.

View of Education				Support for schooling					
<i>Extended</i>		<i>Instrumental</i>		<i>Direct Assistance</i>		<i>Child Responsible</i>		<i>Limited Assistance</i>	
Child	School performance	Child	School performance	Child	School performance	Child	School performance	Child	School performance
Joshua	Above Average	Thandi	Below average	Michael	Above Average	Joshua	Above Average	Thandi	Below average
Taryn	Above Average	Agnes	Below average	Lisa	Above Average	Taryn	Above Average	Agnes	Below average
Nina	Above average	Lisa	Above average	Ephraim	Above Average	Nina	Above Average		
Michael	Above Average	Ephraim	Average	Diketso	Average				
Lindiwe	Average	Lindiwe	Average	Lindiwe	Average				
Diketso (guardians)	Average	Diketso (grandmother)	Average						

The children of the parents who adopted an extended definition of education and who followed typical middle-class practices all achieved above average results. Lindiwe and Diketso both obtained average results. In Lindiwe's family's case, the parents adopted an extended definition of education but followed literacy practices which were not typical of middle-class families as they have been described in the literature and which were present in the other families. Diketso's guardian's adopted an extended definition of education but her grandmother saw the value of education instrumentally. Diketso was subject to two fundamentally different sets of literacy values and practices. Diketso's receptiveness to these varying practices was tied up with identity issues to be discussed in the next chapter.

In the group where the parents held an instrumental view of education and where

middle-class practices were not adopted the relationship between school achievement and literacy practices was even less clear. In this group results varied from above average to below average. Lisa was one of the top achievers in her year group and yet her parents did not adopt typical middle-class literacy practices. Thandi succeeded in the Junior Primary phase of her schooling and only started experiencing difficulties when content subjects were introduced into the curriculum in Standard Two. Agnes too coped with the first years of her schooling although she achieved below the class average and was learning the skills of reading and writing with greater difficulty than her peers.

On the other hand the relationship between school achievement and assistance with school work was clearer. Children who were given direct or indirect assistance with their school work achieved average or above average results at school without exception.

6.2 Explanation for the Results

6.2.1 Literacy Practices

6.2.1.1 The Junior Primary Phase

The most important challenge facing the child in the Junior Primary phase of schooling is learning the technicalities of reading and writing. The child has to learn and automatize bottom-up processing skills. These include an awareness that speech is made up of sound units, the ability to analyse the flow of speech into component sounds, recognition and discrimination of the shape of letters and graphemes, an association between speech sounds and visual data. The child must have an understanding of the spatial organization of text. The child has to learn the directional principles of print (Goodman, 1985; Clay, 1991).

Acquiring the technicalities of reading requires the child to analyse and synthesize language into letters, sounds and words. The child must be able to separate and isolate discrete items of information and reconstruct that information. The literature indicates that certain home reading practices develop the ability to develop these analytic skills which are associated with learning the skills of reading and writing. As discussed previously in middle-class homes the parents use of language is such that the children learn that it is an artifact that can be examined in bits and pieces, that can be named and analyzed. Picture-book reading and playing with construction toys assisted this process.

Learning to read however is not merely a question of the analysis of text. Stanovich (1980) has argued that in order to develop these bottom-up technical schemas the child requires assistance from top down schemas. Higher order knowledge structures compensate for poorly developed lower order structures. Storybook reading is one of the home reading practices that is widely recognized as being associated with the development of higher order schemas. Children learn that print is a communicative device and that print carries a meaningful message. Storybooks increase vocabulary, teach narrative schemas, the structures of plots and the anticipation of events (Durkin; Clark; Tobin in Sulzby, 1994, Teale 1981, Wells 1986).

In this group all the children succeeded in the Junior Primary phase of their schooling. They all learnt the technicalities of reading and writing and performed at least within the low average range in their classes. However for Agnes and Thandi these skills were acquired with greater difficulty. Comments on their school reports showed they had some difficulty acquiring the technicalities of reading such as establishing sound symbol relationships which requires analytic abilities. They were not exposed to the home practices associated with success in this first stage of literacy learning at school. Agnes and Thandi's homes were very similar to the Trackton communities described by Heath (1982, 1983, 1986). The homes were literate in the sense that the primary care-givers were able to read printed material encountered in their everyday lives and engaged in religious reading. They could occasionally produce a written message. Written material was not a major source of new information. They didn't read alone, reading was a group activity. Thus reading and writing was not modelled extensively.

The practices which promote the development of analytic thinking were not followed. In Thandi's household there was a young child present. No conversation was specifically addressed to her and the adults' speech was not modified when they spoke to her. They did not ask questions which isolated elements of their environment for the child and frequently ignored the child's utterances. As in the Trackton community the belief was that "children learn to talk- adults don't teach them how to talk" (Heath, 1986 pg 221). In both these homes there was no picture-book reading and only a few realistic toys were present. Furthermore practices which develop top-down schemas such as storybook reading and decontextualized conversations did not occur.

Although the teacher's overall assessment of Agnes fell in the low average range, some of specific comments she made indicated that there were problem areas in

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