

**PLURALIST PERSPECTIVES OF A LITERACY POLICY
IN THE WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE**

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**Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Education
(Education Policy Studies)
at
Stellenbosch University**

The image shows the crest of Stellenbosch University, which is a shield with a blue and red design, topped with a crown and surrounded by a red and white wreath. Below the shield is a banner with the Latin motto "Pectora roburant cultus recti".

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March 2009

DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores pluralist perspectives on literacy in the context of the Literacy and Numeracy (LITNUM) Strategy of the Western Cape Education Department. My argument is that we need to move beyond functional or technical conceptions of literacy towards a recognition of its transformative potential. That is, the concept of literacy needs to be stretched to incorporate pluralist perspectives in order to achieve developmental aspirations. Following a literature review approach, I construct three constitutive meanings of literacy, namely “cognitive skills”, “social context” and “development”, and I investigate how the LITNUM Strategy conforms to these constitutive meanings of literacy. My finding is that LITNUM is based on a constructivist learning theory. I caution that when understandings of learning theories are viewed exclusively from one perspective, literacy becomes “compacted”, and we miss out on important considerations of literacy and its transformative potential. I show that LITNUM discusses several social contextual factors related to literacy; a recognition of the impact of social issues on literacy. Regarding LITNUM’s concern with development, I conclude that both functional and critical literacy as important aspects of development are not sufficiently addressed. In a nutshell: LITNUM focuses on technical skills, which need to be balanced with the notion that literacy is a social act, and that it has the potential to transform societies. I propose a “literacy of thoughtfulness”, based on compassion, love and care. This proposition forms the basis for possible future research.

KEYWORDS: Literacy, pluralist perspectives, constitutive meanings, transformative potential, development.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis ondersoek pluralistiese perspektiewe ten opsigte van geletterdheid binne die konteks van 'n strategie vir geletterdheid en syfervaardigheid, die sogenaamde “Literacy and Numeracy (LITNUM) Strategy” van die Wes-Kaapse Onderwysdepartement. My argument is dat ons verder moet beweeg as funksionele of tegniese begrippe van geletterdheid na 'n erkenning van die transformatiewe potensiaal daarvan. Dit wil sê, die konsep van geletterdheid moet verruim word om pluralistiese perspektiewe in te sluit ten einde ontwikkelingsaspirasies in te sluit. Deur middel van 'n literatuuroorsig konstrueer ek drie konstitutiewe betekenis van geletterdheid, naamlik “kognitiewe vaardighede”, “sosiale konteks” en “ontwikkeling”, en ondersoek ek die wyse waarop die LITNUM-strategie by hierdie konstitutiewe betekenis van geletterdheid aanpas. Ek het bevind dat LITNUM op 'n konstruktivistiese leerteorie gegrond is. Wanneer leerteorieë uitsluitlik vanuit een perspektief bekyk word, word die konsep “geletterdheid” vereng. Gevolglik bly ons onbewus van belangrike beskouinge van geletterdheid en die transformatiewe potensiaal daarvan. Ek toon aan dat LITNUM verskeie maatskaplike kontekstuele faktore wat met geletterdheid verband hou, aanspreek. Met betrekking tot LITNUM se betrokkenheid by ontwikkeling, kom ek tot die gevolgtrekking dat sowel funksionele as kritiese geletterdheid as belangrike aspekte van ontwikkeling nie genoegsaam aangespreek word nie. Kortom: LITNUM fokus op tegniese vaardighede wat in balans gebring behoort te word met die nosie dat geletterdheid 'n sosiale handeling is, en dat dit oor die potensiaal beskik om gemeenskappe te transformeer. Ek stel 'n “geletterdheid van bedagsaamheid” voor wat op deernis, liefde en sorgsaamheid gebaseer is. Hierdie voorstel dien as grondslag vir moontlike verdere navorsing.

SLEUTELWOORDE: Geletterdheid, pluralistiese perspektiewe, konstitutiewe betekenis, transformatiewe potensiaal, ontwikkeling.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to:

- My Heavenly Father, for the wonderful privilege of being my Guide and Comforter, and for granting me the undeserved gifts of wisdom, courage, strength and perseverance.
- My husband, Edwin, for his unconditional love, support, patience and devotion.
- My parents for their constant support and prayers.
- All my family, friends and colleagues for their interest.
- My supervisor, Dr Berte van Wyk, for his wholehearted support, commitment and encouragement.
- Mrs Ella Belcher for her kindness and superb assistance with the language editing of this thesis.
- The examiners of this thesis for their insightful comments.

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ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS USED

ANC	African National Congress
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HCDS	Human Capital Development Strategy
LITNUM Strategy	Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
NIEO	New International Economic Order
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTUALISATION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

“Literacy” is a social concept which can be described in many different ways. Traditionally it has been described as the ability to read and write. More recently, however, the concept has taken on several meanings. Dictionaries, as well as electronic and other sources, apart from revealing several definitions, distinguish between different kinds of literacy, such as information literacy, health literacy, family literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, visual literacy, cultural literacy and scientific literacy, to name but a few (Web Definitions 2008). This suggests that the concept of “literacy”

[L]ike sand, [it] is without intrinsic shape, defined and redefined over time” (Venezky, Wagner & Ciliberti 1990:ix).

Who is literate depends on how we describe literacy – whether it refers to minimal ability, evidenced by the oral pronunciation of a few simple lines, or a more advanced set of skills, requiring numeracy, writing and reading together. In many instances such uncertainty of terminology might only be challenging to academics, but for literacy the stakes are much higher, involving opportunities for personal development and participation in the work force (Venezky *et al.* 1990:ix).

This assertion is powerfully illustrated by the following quotation:

Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt
(Wittgenstein 1922).

This quotation from Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, translated into English, means “The limits of my language means the limits of my world” (Wragg, Wragg, Haynes & Chamberlin 1998:5). It implies that, without the written and spoken word, many functions and transactions we take for granted in adult life would be impossible.

Discussions and debates about literacy have therefore been ongoing for many years. Historically, literacy was seen as being able to read and write. Over time, however, the concept of “literacy” became intertwined with larger issues such as:

- Social and political history;
- Economic development;
- Educational priorities; and
- Social equity and the responsibility of the state to redress past patterns of discrimination (Walter 1999:1).

In recent years, especially, literacy has become a cause for great concern world-wide, also in South Africa. Countries around the world have developed a greater awareness of literacy problems and the consequences of being illiterate (Verhoeven & Durgunoğlu 1998:ix).

In South Africa the challenge of trying to raise literacy levels is enormous. Being literate in South Africa is made more complicated by the multilingual nature of society (Forrester 2002:1). To make the issue even more complex, there is a legacy of “illiteracy” amongst many youngsters, which is a consequence of the apartheid past, where the education system was divided on racial grounds and the provision of education was unequal (Khoza 2000:1-2). This legacy poses a serious threat to economic stability and sustainable development (Forrester 2002:1), and can be linked to what Fleisch (2007:1) calls a “bimodal distribution of achievement”, stemming from a description of the South African economy by President Thabo Mbeki. In a now well-known African National Congress (ANC) newsletter, President Thabo Mbeki speaks about South Africa’s development challenge:

Our country is characterised by two parallel economies, the First and the Second. The First Economy is modern, produces the bulk of our country’s wealth, and is integrated within the global economy. The Second Economy (or the Marginalised Economy) is characterised by underdevelopment ... contains a big percentage of our population,

incorporates the poorest of our rural and urban poor, is structurally disconnected from both the First and the global economy, and is incapable of self-generated growth and development (Mbeki 2003).

The quotation above aptly contextualises South Africa's developmental challenges. My opinion is that these challenges should be attended to if we want to improve our country's literacy needs.

An example of how greater national awareness of literacy in South Africa has spilled over to provincial level is the case of the Western Cape. In the Western Cape, this type of awareness has been triggered by the results of systemic tests such as the first Western Cape Grade Six Learner Assessment Study in 2003, which indicated that an alarmingly low percentage (only 35%) of learners were performing at a Grade Six level in literacy (WCED 2004). In response, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) introduced a Literacy and Numeracy (LITNUM) Strategy with the aim of trying to improve low levels of literacy and numeracy amongst primary school learners in the Western Cape. LITNUM is still in its infancy and only subsequent developments will tell whether it has made any significant impact to raise the levels of literacy of learners in the Western Cape.

Even though the LITNUM Strategy addresses both literacy and numeracy, this research focuses on literacy. The aim is to explore pluralist perspectives on literacy in the context of the LITNUM Strategy through the theoretical framework of critical theory. It is an attempt to highlight the importance of having an understanding of different perspectives on literacy, for what purposes it is used, what difference it makes in a person's life and its role in development, particularly within the context of a democratic South Africa with its apartheid inheritance. The study also aims to show that "literacy" is a social concept which cannot be isolated from economic and other issues.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

I believe that this study is important because literacy crises have become commonplace. The Western Cape, as mentioned earlier, is no exception, and the local

literacy crisis has received much attention in the past decade. This is mainly reflected in the launch of the LITNUM Strategy of the WCED in 2006 (WCED 2006a).

Strategies such as LITNUM can be found world-wide. Recent decades have seen a wave of similar educational reform strategies in many countries of the world. Examples are the National Literacy Strategy in England, the Reading Recovery Programme in New Zealand, the First Steps and Early Years Literacy Programmes in Australia and Success for All in the United States of America (Wyse 2003:904). Each of these programmes includes its own intervention strategies, especially focusing on reading and literacy.

One of the theoretical underpinnings on which LITNUM is based is epistemology. Epistemology refers to theories of knowledge acquisition (Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2008). Since education is about the acquisition of knowledge, I believe that trying to make sense of any educational policy or strategy starts with having a thorough understanding of how knowledge is acquired. The process of knowledge acquisition has changed over the years. In fact, the LITNUM Strategy reminds us that there has been a world-wide movement away from static, passive knowledge to active knowledge. For educators to embrace this shift and to be more adaptive and active, understandings about epistemology must surface. The LITNUM Strategy states that if one wishes to train or teach others, one must possess sound understandings of epistemological issues and how they impact on thinking and practices in general (WCED 2006a:1). The implication is that educators need to understand what epistemology is all about, because it will guide them towards a better understanding of knowledge and associated conceptual developments, in this case, literacy.

Not only does this study have the potential of revealing the pluralistic nature of literacy, but also of serving as a tool which educators can use to improve their understanding of literacy. This, in turn, will hopefully make the task of interpreting and analysing LITNUM easier.

1.3 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

According to Wragg *et al.* (1998:139), educators use a wide range of reading approaches and strategies when teaching reading, an important component of literacy. Often these strategies are determined by the interaction between educators' personal beliefs and the detailed context in which they find themselves. In addition, I believe that they are also determined by their exposure to information on new reading and literacy practices. Yet the tendency is, no matter what curriculum changes are introduced, to revert to traditional patterns of teaching, which is what Smith, Hardman, Wall and Mroz. (2004) found in a British study on interactive whole class teaching. Retaining old practices for teaching literacy is not always desirable, especially in the context of South Africa, because it implies sustaining practices formulated in the pre-democratic era, characterised by feeding knowledge to passive learners, without allowing them to actively invent knowledge as they encounter and engage with it. The implication is, as Forrester (2002:4) states, that many learners will be unable to actively engage with or access the curriculum effectively.

For literacy to be truly functional, it needs to be constructed within the contexts in which it operates (Forrester 2002:4). The social practices approach conceptualises literacy practices as variable practices which link people, linguistic resources, media objects, and strategies for making meaning in contextualised ways. These literacy practices are seen as varying across broad social contexts, and across social domains within these contexts (Prinsloo 2005:1). The role of the school is to ensure that learners are capable in terms of accessing information, and transmitting this information in different situations and for different purposes (Gambell 1989:273).

One of the key questions in literacy circles is whether literacy leads to development. This debate in itself signifies the potentially important role literacy has to play in attaining developmental aspirations. Even though some observers believe that literacy followed development rather than having driven development, others believe that without literacy, no development would have taken place in the way that it did in some European and North American countries (Walter 1999). I would like to concur with the view held by many pragmatists today that literacy is a necessary condition

for development. It must be acknowledged that this process begins in school and that, as educators, we are all responsible for helping to transform society so that, in the words of Mr Cameron Dugmore, Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Education in the Western Cape,

... our children are not prisoners of their inability to read, write and calculate but are empowered to direct their own affairs and realise their full potential (Western Cape Provincial Government 2007).

1.4 INTRODUCTION TO KEY CONCEPTS

This section is a short introduction to the two key concepts in this study, namely “literacy” and “development”. A more detailed discussion will follow in Chapter Three.

1.4.1 Literacy

At first glance, “literacy” would seem to be a fairly straightforward concept. There is, however, no standard international definition of literacy which captures all its many different facets (UNESCO 2006:30). The concept of “literacy” has proven to be both complex and dynamic, being interpreted and described in multiple ways. The task of trying to describe the concept “literacy” is difficult. Literature reveals many different definitions of literacy, to which Bhola (1994:26) refers as the “many faces of literacy”. He identifies the following reasons for this (Bhola 1994:28):

- The languages of literacy are different: Chinese *versus* Hindi.
- Different levels and standards of literacy skills are possible: some people can read better and faster than others.
- People prepare themselves to read different kinds of subject matter: historians *versus* logicians.
- People differ in their objectives: workplace literacy *versus* literacy for liberation.

An interesting attempt at defining literacy is made by Baynham (1995), in his book *Literacy Practices – Investigating Literacy in Social Contexts*. He starts by quoting the following graffito from a London playground:

Sharon S is illiterate (Baynham 1995:5).

Baynham argues that this graffito gives an indication that the concept “literacy” is a loaded one, with various associations and ideologies attached to it. He suggests that it is a concept that can be critiqued, a suggestion which perfectly complements this study. The author furthermore suggests that we need to “problematise” literacy, to show that it is not something that can be neatly and easily described and that any definition is likely to be contested. Even from the brief example above, it can be seen how literacy describes itself, as it often does, through its opposite, “illiterate” (Baynham 1995:6).

Literacy is not the same thing to everyone, but a whole complex of ideological positions which are most often used as bases to formulate policies. People’s notions of what it means to be literate or illiterate are influenced by factors such as cultural values and personal experiences. In the academic community, theories of literacy have evolved from those focused solely on changes in individuals to more complex views encompassing broader social contexts. As a result of these and other developments, understandings in the international policy community have expanded, too: from viewing literacy as a simple process of acquiring basic cognitive skills, to using these skills to contribute to socio-economic development and personal and social change (UNESCO 2006:147).

UNESCO (2006:148) identifies four discrete understandings of literacy, which I think is a good starting point in trying to understand the concept:

1. Literacy as an autonomous set of skills;
2. Literacy as applied, practised and situated;
3. Literacy as a learning process; and
4. Literacy as text.

Each of these four understandings of literacy will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Having studied the literature on literacy, it is clear that there is a growing awareness of the social contexts in which literacy is developed. Literacy is no longer an individual transformation, but one in which context plays a vital role. It is my contention that policy makers should pay careful attention to the approaches mentioned, if they want to make any difference in linking literacy to development.

1.4.2 Literacy and development

As alluded to earlier in this chapter (1.3), like Walter (1999), I ask myself whether literacy does lead to development. For many years there has been an understanding that literacy does indeed lead to development. However, many countries that have invested billions in education and literacy, have seen poor results in terms of development (Walter 1999). Because of this, scholars began to doubt whether literacy is a necessary condition for development. Critics have responded to this wave of doubt by arguing that literacy is a necessary condition for economic growth and national development. For example, the World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy (held in Tehran, 1965) stressed the interrelationship between literacy and development, and highlighted the concept of “functional literacy” (UNESCO 2006:153). Instead of it being an end in itself, Yousif (2003:9) argues that literacy should be regarded as “a way of preparing man for a social, civic and economic role that goes beyond the limits of rudimentary literacy training consisting merely in the teaching of reading and writing”. This argument clearly illustrates the role of literacy in development.

For literacy and development in the context of South Africa, I find the work of Street (2006:22) particularly useful. He equates a social practices approach such as community action to conscientise, liberate and empower. These are all aspects that can be attached to development. He furthermore suggests exploring the relationship between texts and practices as a sound starting point for new approaches to literacy development programmes in development contexts.

It is clear that literacy in itself is not the answer to development. It is but one element of development. Literacy has to be placed in the broader context of social and economic needs if developmental aspirations are to be attained.

1.5 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The research procedures for this study include the research question, research methods and research methodology.

I formulated the research question against the following background: my interest in the LITNUM Strategy stems from my experience as literacy coordinator. As a result of engaging with the strategy, I noticed a disturbing gap insofar as describing the concept “literacy” is concerned. I realised that researching the concept “literacy” could equip me with the ability to analyse it and, in this way, help me to make a meaningful contribution to the discourse.

As I seek a better understanding of the concept “literacy”, I contend that the value of considering pluralist perspectives of literacy is important for developing critical awareness. However, no single perspective should be singled out. Even though I appreciate the uniqueness of South Africa’s transformation process, my argument is for a movement beyond narrow, limiting conceptualisations of literacy towards recognising its transformative potential. To achieve this, we should try to develop an understanding of different perspectives, and focus on applying an appropriate perspective to an appropriate context. This should be especially useful since literacy impacts on social, economic and other issues. I agree with Stake (1995:15-17) that such issues are not simple, but intricately linked to political, social, historical and personal contexts. Stake argues that perhaps the most difficult task of the researcher is to design a good research question. Continuing this argument, Van Wyk (2004:24) adds that the design of all research requires conceptual organisation, ideas to express needed understanding, conceptual bridges from what is already known, cognitive structures to guide data gathering, and outlines for presenting interpretations to others.

It is against this background that I formulated the procedures for this research. The research procedures chosen are motivated by the strength that the comprehensiveness of perspectives offers me as researcher, as I try to link it to attaining development.

In the following sections I shall discuss the research question, research methods and research methodology used in this study.

1.5.1 Research question

The key research question for this study is:

“Are pluralist perspectives on literacy in the context of the LITNUM Strategy useful or not?”

Linked to the research question formulated above are certain research objectives for this study. These objectives have been determined in order to address the research question. When describing literacy, different people emphasise different aspects of literacy. These have important policy consequences. Your main emphasis might be a shortcoming in my definition, and vice versa, but it does not change the starkly different conclusions we draw from our contrasting definitions (Venezky *et al.* 1990:64). We need to become aware of different conceptualisations of literacy and realise that such pluralism may jeopardise developmental aspirations if not handled with great care and insight. My argument is that, in order to attain development, no one specific perspective should be singled out. There should rather be an understanding of different perspectives, so that the most appropriate perspective (or perspectives) can be applied to the most appropriate context or situation. This is especially applicable in the specific context of our country, since literacy impacts on social, economic and other issues.

The following are the primary objectives of the study:

- to identify several perspectives of literacy
- to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the concept of literacy.

The following key questions relating to literacy will also be addressed against the backdrop of LITNUM:

- How can approaches to teaching literacy be changed to ensure that the Western Cape produces citizens that have the requisite knowledge, skills and values to compete in a rapidly globalising world?
- How does LITNUM ensure that the focus on literacy becomes a means to development and not just a prescribed formal learning outcome?
- How can educators be equipped to enable them to raise the standards of literacy and to improve the life-chances of thousands of learners?

1.5.2 Research methods

The research methods for this research can be described as methods of generating knowledge and perspective on literacy.

In my choice of research methods, I was guided by the work of Burbules and Warnick (2003), who discuss ten methods for doing research in the field of Philosophy of Education. These methods are analysing, deconstructive critique, exploring the hidden assumptions, reviewing, questioning, proposing, speculating, the thought experiment, exegetical work, and synthesising.

Since I am interested in studying pluralistic perspectives on literacy, I most identify with three of these methods: conceptual analysis (linked to constitutive meanings), deconstructive critique, and questioning. These methods will allow me to identify internal contradictions in uses of the concept “literacy”. Firstly, conceptual analysis (linked to constitutive meanings) will enable me to investigate and analyse the meaning of the concept “literacy”. Secondly, deconstructive critique aims to show that there is always more to be said (Burbules & Warnick 2003), as in the case of this research where I argue that the emphasis should not be on one specific perspective of literacy, but that there should be an understanding of different perspectives. Thirdly,

the method of questioning will be applied to the LITNUM Strategy as I try to identify the perspectives on literacy employed by the strategy.

1.5.3 Research methodology

In this study, a particular framework of thinking (paradigm) constitutes the research methodology. Research methodology is regarded as different from research method, which involves a specific technique for gathering evidence, such as listening to informants, observing behaviour, or examining historical traces and records (Waghid 2002:43).

For this research I have chosen critical theory as a methodology. Unlike a positivist approach, with the emphasis on facts, or an interpretivist approach, with the emphasis on reason to try and explain facts, a critical approach will enable me to explore the values and assumptions which underlie different conceptualisations or perspectives on literacy (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry 1997:37).

Edmundson and D'Urso (2007:2) write about the importance of being critical in education policy study. Unlike what the authors call a camp of "functionalists, progressivists and technical instrumentalists" who regard the purpose or utility of education as serving capitalism, they see themselves as critical educators with a dream of an "educated hope" that will change prevailing conditions so that children can be educated and cared for differently in an unjust world.

The next obvious question is how to go about such study characterised by critical theory. Engaging in research through a paradigm characterised by critical theory has certain implications for the way research is approached. Research using critical theory aims to promote critical consciousness and to break down social inequalities (Henning 2004:23). Critical theorists are guided by the work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who is best known for developing an emancipatory theory of society.

According to Waghid (2002:51), Habermas argues that critical inquiry ought to be grounded on the notion of "Enlightenment". This notion has two dimensions, namely the "ideal speech situation" and the "reform of institutions". The "ideal speech

situation”, in the context of education, concerns the mutual communicative relationship between teacher and learner, in which the learner is able to hold his or her own views in a relatively open manner. Education is therefore organised around enlightenment instead of indoctrination. The second dimension, “reform of institutions”, involves reforming institutions, freeing them from bureaucratic and technical interests.

Drawing on the work of Habermas, Waghid (2002:51) suggests key practices for promoting critical consciousness in education policy matters which could be useful for analysing the LITNUM Strategy. These are:

- Using and creating conditions for self-reflective critique;
- Replacing distorted education policies;
- Discouraging indoctrination and domination;
- Decentralising administrative needs of institutions;
- Freeing educational institutions from bureaucratic interests;
- Re-theorising the roles of egocentric members (such as education policy makers);
- Producing and reproducing more rational and informed education policy rules; and
- Offering guidance and new knowledge in education policy formulation.

It is hoped that the critical theory methodology will strengthen my argument and fulfil the objectives of the study.

1.6 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The rest of the study will consist of the following five chapters:

Chapter Two will provide an in-depth discussion on the research methods and methodology for this study.

In *Chapter Three*, a theoretical background to the study will be given, focusing on literacy and development. The pluralist nature of literacy will be revealed and an attempt will be made to construct a few key meanings of literacy against the backdrop of development.

Chapter Four will focus on the policy aspects of LITNUM. In this chapter I examine the LITNUM Strategy with reference to the constitutive meanings of literacy constructed in Chapter Three. My aim is to identify policy gaps (which can be weaknesses, shortcomings, or omissions), which may impact negatively on the transformative potential of literacy.

Chapter Five will focus on the results of the research. These results will be discussed, explaining possible reasons for the findings of the study. Conclusions and recommendations, based on the findings, will be formulated.

In the final chapter, *Chapter Six*, I reflect on my journey through the study. The challenges encountered will be described, and an account of the degree of intellectual growth will be given. This will be followed by a list of references.

1.7 SUMMARY

Chapter One fulfils several functions. Firstly, it introduces the reader to “literacy” as a social concept which is described in many different ways. It furthermore suggests that literacy has become a cause for great concern the world over, also in South Africa. What makes the South African case so special is the country’s apartheid inheritance which has important implications for development, since this inheritance has an impact on teaching and learning (including literacy). Chapter One continues to discuss the significance of the study as being situated in the fact that literacy crises have become world-wide phenomena. The rationale of the study is also discussed as having its foundation in the important role of literacy in attaining development. This is followed by a short introduction to the key concepts of the study, namely “literacy” and “development”. Next, the research procedures are described. This gives the reader a sense of the research question, research method and research methodology. For the

purposes of locating the reader in terms of the contents of the rest of the study, a chapter outline has been given.

To summarise, Chapter One alerts the reader to the focal issues of pluralist perspectives on literacy and its role in attaining developmental aspirations of schooling.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this research project, I used different research methods framed within a particular research methodology. The aim of this chapter is therefore to introduce the research methods and research methodology used for this research. Since different researchers attach different meanings to “research methodology” and “research method”, I think it is important to clarify the difference between the two in the context of this research.

This thesis distinguishes between research methods and research methodology in the following way: research methods involve specific techniques for gathering information, while research methodology refers to a particular framework of thinking or paradigm. I like to think of the research methodology as a theoretical point of departure. In other words, the research methodology provides the rationale for this research.

2.2 RESEARCH METHODS

Drawing on the work of Harvey (1990), I shall first explain what is meant by the concept “research method”. Method refers to the manner in which empirical data is collected. It can range from asking questions, reading documents or observing particular situations. While some methods lend themselves more readily to certain epistemological perspectives, no method of data collection is inherently positivist, phenomenological or critical (Harvey 1990:1).

The research methods used in this study are conceptual analysis (linked to constitutive meanings), deconstructive critique and questioning. In this chapter I shall attempt to discuss these three research methods separately, starting with conceptual analysis, followed by deconstructive critique and questioning.

2.2.1 Conceptual analysis

The following discussion of conceptual analysis involves an analysis of its central features, as well as an assessment of the point (or purpose) of conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis will also be linked to constitutive meanings.

2.2.1.1 Central features

I regard the work of Van Wyk (2004:3) as a useful starting point for explaining and clarifying what is meant by conceptual analysis. Like Van Wyk, I think it is important to first examine the concepts “analysis” and “concept” separately before describing “conceptual analysis” in more detail.

Hirst and White (in McLaughlin 2000:445) describe “analysis” as:

... the elucidation of the meaning of any concept, idea or unit of thought that we employ in seeking to understand ourselves and our world, by reducing it, breaking it down, into more basic concepts that constitute it and thereby showing its relationship to a network of other concepts or discovering what the concept denotes.

Analysis in this sense is not only concerned with the meaning of beliefs, but also with their justification and truth. Here the “connective” character of analysis should be emphasised: the investigation of “how one concept is connected in a complex web of other concepts with which it is logically related” (White & White, in McLaughlin 2000:445). From this discussion, one already gets an idea of the meaning of “conceptual analysis”. What follows next is a discussion of what constitutes a “concept”.

Barrow (in Barrow & Woods 1998:ix) draws a clear distinction between words and concepts or between verbal and conceptual analysis. His view is that there is a difference between words and concepts. This implies that linguistic analysis cannot be co-extensive with conceptual analysis. The task of the philosopher should therefore be to arrive at a set of clear, coherent and specific concepts, having taken into account

the hints or clues he (or she) gets from linguistic patterns. Barrow argues that we need to have clarity of concepts before we can assess them. Analysing a concept should not be regarded the same as defining a word. Philosophical analysis is ultimately concerned with the clear articulation of ideas rather than with definition of words.

Hirst and Peters (1998:30) question what philosophers do when they analyse a concept. They argue that if a concept exists when one has the ability to use words appropriately, then philosophers examine the use of words in order to see what principle or principles underlie their use. If philosophers can reveal this, they have uncovered the concept. Philosophers such as Socrates attempted to do this by trying out definitions. In such cases, there is a strong and a weak sense of “definition”. The weak sense is when another word can be found which highlights a characteristic which is a constitutive meaning condition for the original word. The strong sense of definition, on the other hand, is when conditions can be produced which are logically both necessary and sufficient. Since tight sets of defining characteristics are seldom found, conceptual analysts usually settle for the weak sense of definition.

Even though Hirst and Peters (1998:31) allude to the fact that much of what has been called conceptual analysis seems to consist of looking for constitutive meanings for the use of a word, they warn that we may not always be successful in our search for these conditions. Wittgenstein (in Hirst & Peters 1998:32) makes two very important points in this regard. The first is that we must not look for defining characteristics in any simple, stereotyped way, with the paradigm of just one type of word before us. The second is that concepts can only be understood in relation to other concepts. Both of these points are crucial for this study, as it implies that a concept such as “literacy” has to be examined in relation to other concepts in order to gain a deeper understanding of its meaning.

2.2.1.2 The point of conceptual analysis

Having developed a sense of what conceptual analysis entails, I cannot help but to be curious about the rationale behind conceptual analysis. The point of doing conceptual analysis is to understand more clearly the types of distinctions that words have been developed to designate. The purpose is to see *through* the words, to get a better grasp

of the similarities and differences that the analysis is able to pick out, which are important in the context of other questions we cannot answer without such preliminary analysis (Hirst & Peters 1998:33). Furthermore, conceptual analysis helps us to pinpoint more precisely what is implicit in our moral consciousness, but it also enables us to stand back and reflect on the status of the demand to which the word bears witness. It frees us to ask a fundamental question in ethics, which is that of whether this demand is justified. Hirst and Peters (1998:34) contend that there is little point in doing conceptual analysis unless some further philosophical issue is thereby made more manageable.

I wish to summarise what is meant by conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis attempts to establish constitutive meanings for the use of a word or concept. Furthermore, concepts can only be understood in relation to other concepts. Conceptual analysis is about establishing meanings of concepts, and is often linked to justification.

2.2.1.3 Constitutive meanings

Van Wyk (2004:40) shows a conceptual link with constitutive meanings. In his conceptual analysis of institutional culture (Van Wyk 2008:1) he states that a different, but related way of exploring a concept is to construct “constitutive meanings”. In the case of this research, it would mean finding what the meanings are which constitute literacy. Like Waghid (2002), I think it is important to examine the underlying principle or principles that constitute a concept if we want to understand the concept. This implies that one first needs to know the meanings that inform a particular concept before one can grasp its effects.

Constitutive meanings are presuppositions of activities, and as such are not automatically known by those who operate in terms of them (Fay 1996:116). Because of this, three sorts of concepts are identified, namely (1) those we use *in thinking*; (2) those we think *about*; and (3) those we think *with*. I am of the opinion that this means that when dealing with the concept “literacy”, educators may assume that they understand the concept; but to be capable, educators need to be clear about what is meant by literacy. Fay (1996:15) further states that constitutive meanings are the basic

ideas in terms of which meanings of specific practices must be analysed. In other words, there have to be shared understandings amongst educators of what constitutes literacy practice. Similarly, Taylor (1985:22) proposes three articulations for the use of a concept: (1) Meaning for a subject, which, when applied to literacy, refers to the meaning of the concept for the learners involved; (2) Meaning of something, whereby we would be able to distinguish between literacy practice and its meaning; (3) Things only have meaning in relation to the meaning of other things in a field, meaning that changes in other meanings in the field (literacy) can involve changes in the given concept. To summarise: constitutive meanings underlie social practices and make these practices what they are.

I found the insights offered by Fay (1996:115-116), Taylor (1985:22) and Van Wyk (2004:40) regarding constitutive meanings and how this concept can be linked to conceptual analysis useful for this research. Constitutive meanings, in combination with deconstructive critique, which is about disclosing contradictions in the use of a concept, could help to develop a deeper understanding of literacy. A discussion of deconstructive critique will follow next.

2.2.2 Deconstructive critique

Burbules and Warnick (2003:2) describe deconstructive critique as “identifying internal contradictions or ambiguities in uses of (a) the term”.

This description comprises a number of different related possibilities. What they have in common, according to these authors, is that they aim to disclose biases and distortions built into conventional ways of using a concept. Its purpose is to question such conventional ways and, sometimes, to change them. This method of philosophical inquiry may take on several versions, some of which resemble the method of conceptual analysis discussed earlier in the chapter (1.2.1). The emphasis falls on the lack of clarity and precision in key concepts. Furthermore, critique is based on the assumption that a more careful and reasoned approach should re-craft those concepts to be more precise and accurate. Other versions emphasise the politically partisan nature of certain discourses, and highlight the questions of *who* is

promoting particular usages and *who* benefits from them (Burbules & Warnick 2003:2).

Another related possibility of deconstructive critique is critique of an ideological nature. When concepts are critiqued according to this manner, it essentially provides a lens through which to view a larger structure of ruling power. Some researchers may reject the premise that a more rational or objective point of view is possible. For them, critique of a concept may not reveal a better usage of the concept. They regard any concept as implicated in a system of power (Burbules & Warnick 2003:2).

In the context of this research, the philosophical research method of deconstructive critique would make historicising the multiple meanings of literacy possible. In other words, deconstructive critique would enable me to study the different meanings of literacy as it developed historically as I try to link it to developmental aspirations.

Next, I shall break down the discussion of deconstructive critique into two parts. The first part will focus on deconstruction, and the second will briefly compare deconstruction with two other modes of critique, namely critical dogmatism and transcendental critique.

2.2.2.1 Deconstruction

I am aware that deconstruction is mainly used as a research methodology, but this discussion relates to its use as a research method, following Burbules and Warnick (2003). Before entering into a detailed discussion about deconstruction, it is noteworthy that Biesta (2001:126) discusses deconstruction alongside two other modes of critique, namely critical dogmatism and transcendental critique. Deconstruction flows from these two modes, and represents an “improvement” on the two. I shall therefore briefly discuss critical dogmatism and transcendental critique respectively.

Biesta (2001:127) defines critical dogmatism as any style of critique in which the critical operation consists of the application of a criterion. He adds that critical dogmatism conceives of critique as the application of a criterion (Biesta 1998:1). The

operation is critical in that the situation is evaluated from the inside. It is dogmatic in that the criterion is applied from the outside. This gives critical dogmatism a paradoxical character. The question arises: how can critique be effective if it is dogmatic? It is clear from this question that the main problem with this position concerns the justification of the criterion. While some argue that the uncritical acceptance of the critical criterion is inevitable, others have argued that it is possible to justify the critical criterion in a non-dogmatic manner (Biesta & Stams 2001:60). The work of Karl-Otto Apel can be seen as an effort to circumvent this dogmatic element through a re-articulation of transcendental philosophy. He argues that it is possible to articulate a critical criterion in a non-dogmatic way by making a shift from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of language (Biesta 1998:2). Apel hereby brings the transcendental approach into the realm of argumentation and communication. In doing so, transcendental critique not only provides a different answer to the question of the justification of the critical criterion. It also entails a different style of critique. While this conception of criticality provides a more consistent approach to the question of critique, it is still problematic in that it entails a totalising style of critique. Whereas critical dogmatism is concerned with the application of a criterion, transcendental critique is motivated by the principle of rationality (Biesta 2001:130).

The third conception of criticality, deconstruction, can be seen as an attempt to articulate a non-totalising conception of critique. Biesta and Stams (2001:60) argue that while transcendental critique is able to solve some of the problems of the dogmatic approach to criticality, deconstruction provides the most coherent and self-reflexive conception of critique. A crucial characteristic of the deconstructive style of critique is that it is not motivated by the truth of the criterion (as in critical dogmatism) or by a certain conception of rationality (as in transcendental critique), but rather by a concern for justice.

Biesta and Stams (2001:67) describe the critical potential of deconstruction, arguing that the conditions of possibility are never totally external to the system, but are “contaminated” or controlled by the system. They can therefore never have total control of the system. Deconstruction thus tries to open up the system in the name of that which cannot be thought of in terms of the system (and yet makes the system

possible). This reveals that the deconstructive affirmation is not simply an affirmation of what is known to be excluded by the system. Deconstruction is an affirmation of what is wholly other, of what is unforeseeable from the present. It is an affirmation of an otherness that is always to come. Deconstruction is openness towards the unforeseeable incoming of the other. It is from this concern for what is totally other that Derrida (in Biesta & Stams 2001:68) sometimes refers to as “justice”, that deconstruction derives its right to be critical, its right to deconstruct – or, to be more precise, its right to reveal deconstruction.

In an attempt to provide a short summary of what deconstruction essentially entails, the book *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* offers useful insights (Derrida & Caputo 1997). Derrida explains that the very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things – texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices – do not have definable meanings and determinable missions. They are always more than any mission would impose, and they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy. What is really going on in things, what is really happening, is always to come. Every time one tries to stabilise the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away. A “meaning” or a “mission” is a way to contain and compact things into a unity, whereas deconstruction bends all its efforts to stretch beyond these boundaries, to transgress these confines, to interrupt and disjoin all such gathering. Whenever it runs up against a limit, deconstruction presses against it. Whenever deconstruction finds a nutshell, the very idea is to crack it open and disturb this tranquillity. *That* is what deconstruction is all about (Derrida & Caputo 1997:31-32).

Deconstruction is not simply about analysing a concept, but it is about constant questioning. It is a process of gradually coming to grips with the concept through constant reconceptualisation. The deconstructive process is therefore an active process as a deeper understanding of the concept that goes beyond the surface is sought (Harvey 1990:29-31).

Deconstruction is useful in the context of the present research since it has the potential to show that literacy does not have a definable meaning. There is always more to the meaning of literacy, and as such it cannot be compacted into a particular perspective.

The concept needs to be stretched to incorporate pluralist perspectives in order to achieve “justice”.

The difference between deconstruction and critical dogmatism is pointed out by Derrida, who argues that “deconstruction is deconstruction of critical dogmatism” (Derrida 1995:54). The difference between deconstruction and transcendental critique, on the other hand, is that deconstruction is stronger and more critical than transcendental critique (Biesta 1998:7). Deconstruction puts its challenge to the “iron grip” of rationality out of its concern for what (or who) is structurally excluded. It puts its challenge to rationality, in short, in the name of justice.

To conclude my discussion on the topic of deconstructive critique, I wish to concur with Lather (in Waghid 2002:56), who writes:

[Deconstructive scrutiny] helps us to ask questions about what we have not thought to think, about what is most densely invested in our discourses/practices, about what has been muted, repressed, unheard in our liberatory efforts.

Given developmental aspirations, deconstructive critique was an especially useful research method for this research since it encouraged me to consider aspects on the “outside” of the concept of “literacy”, thereby uncovering biases in conventional uses of the concept. This led to a better understanding of the concept “literacy”, complemented by a third research method, namely questioning.

2.2.3 Questioning

The third research method employed by this research was questioning, whereby the LITNUM Strategy was examined and its underlying principles explored, to seek a better understanding thereof.

I liken questioning to “critical inquiry” (Schulkin 1992) and “analytical inquiry” (Soltis 1998). The notion of “critical inquiry” implied that I adopt a critical stance in

my analysis of the LITNUM Strategy. In a troubled world that cries out for justice and human understanding, the good news is that we can still make sense of life's issues because inquiry reaches into everything, and human beings are natural inquirers. Inquiry is not tied to blind positivism, or detached from rationalism, but grounded in mind, body and discovery (Van Wyk 2004:47). Inquiry, along with social intelligence, allows us to participate in the community and to transcend the isolation of solitary thought (Schulkin 1992:106). This is a useful comment in the context of this research, where pluralist perspectives on literacy are considered in terms of its transformative potential.

One of the main characteristics of education policy, according to McLaughlin (2000:442) is that it is a coherent framework for implementation in education systems aimed at bringing about transformation. This transformation can, however, not be reduced to a technical activity that demands the instrumental implementation of policy without taking into account the values and assumptions on which the particular policy is based. Any attempt to understand these values and assumptions requires analytical inquiry or questioning. Soltis (1998:196) writes about analytical inquiry, which I liken to questioning, provided the aim is to be critical. He describes analytical inquiry according to three dimensions: the personal, the public and the professional.

A personal dimension of inquiry is based on a set of personal beliefs of what is good. It requires one to be thoughtful and self-directed in order to gain a better understanding of the educational process in general and one's own belief system in particular. It enables one to gain more insight into policy. Different from analytical inquiry along the personal dimension, is analytical inquiry in the public dimension. Soltis (1998:197) explains that this type of inquiry is everybody's business, and ought to be. The point is to articulate public aspirations and educational values, give sense and purpose to the cooperative public enterprise of education, and to provide opportunity for thoughtful participation by those who care about education. Even though a public dimension of analytical inquiry offers space for debate and critique, it is not substantive enough to examine education policy related to education change or transformation. In this sense, Soltis (1998:199) suggests that the personal and public dimensions of inquiry should be integrated with "professional space". Professional analytical inquiry requires a concern for the soundness of arguments and explaining

the meaning of concepts. It provides ways to think about educational matters and involves examinations and analyses. It demands rigour, precision and adherence to professional canons of scholarship (Soltis 1998:199). Seeing that this research was about considering pluralist perspectives on literacy, in other words moving beyond narrow conceptualisations of literacy towards recognition of its transformative potential, I integrated personal and public dimensions of inquiry with “professional space”.

Apart from the three dimensions for analytical inquiry or questioning, it can also be done from different perspectives. According to Burbules and Warnick (2003:5) questioning may be done from an ethical, political, epistemological or metaphysical perspective. Furthermore, questioning can sometimes take place on normative grounds to determine whether practices support or violate the principles of justice, fairness and equity. At other times questioning can take place on epistemological or metaphysical grounds to determine whether practices are based on reliable or shaky assumptions about knowledge. I questioned the LITNUM Strategy on normative grounds in order to establish whether it encourages the democratic principles of justice, fairness and equity.

2.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Drawing once again on the work of Harvey (1990), research methodology may be viewed as the interface between methodic practice, substantive theory and epistemological underpinnings. Epistemology in this sense refers to the presuppositions about the nature of knowledge that inform practical inquiry. Methodology is thus the point at which method, theory and epistemology come together in the process of directly investigating specific instances within the social world. In the process of grounding empirical enquiry, methodology thus reveals the presuppositions that inform the knowledge that is generated by the enquiry (Harvey 1990:1-2).

As alluded to earlier in this thesis, the research methodology or the particular framework of thinking or paradigm for this study is critical theory. The research

methodology enabled me to look beyond the obvious, to possible better ways and ideas about literacy.

Critical theorists are guided by the work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who is best known for his theory of communicative action. Habermas's theory is devoted to revealing the possibility of reason, and it advances the goal of human emancipation (Waghid 2005:326). The first component of Habermas's theory of communicative action is critical theory, of which a discussion will follow later. I am however of the opinion that, in order to fully comprehend what critical theory entails, one should start with examining the theory of communicative action.

The theory of communicative action refers to the “interaction between at least two individuals who can speak and act and who establish an interpersonal relation” (Habermas 1987:87-90). In other words, when people talk, they should be both listeners and communicators. Communicative action employs language as a means of understanding among actors, linking three worlds. Habermas is convinced that there is a universal nucleus in language which can be linked to the three worlds, which, in turn, can be linked to pretensions of validity demanded by the actors. These pretensions of validity present a universal characteristic, make understanding possible and are directly associated with rationality. The three worlds are:

- The objective world: the notion that articulation is true can be linked to the objective world. The affirmation about facts and happenings refers to the notion of truth;
- The social world: the notion that the act of speaking is correct in relation to the present normative context refers to the social world. It is concerned with the justice pretension; and
- The subjective world (the one that only the speaker has privileged access to): the notion of authenticity or trueness is related to the subjective world. The intention expressed by the speaker can be linked to exactly what he (or she) thinks.

The communicative practice presents the possibility that participants may enter into an argumentative process, present good reasons and critically examine the truth.

Participants may also critically examine the integrity of actions and rules, as well as the authenticity of expressions, with the goal of reaching consensus. If there is any contestation by participants, the whole argumentative process is restarted until consensus is reached. As everything that is presented can be criticised, this process allows for the identification of errors and therefore also for learning to take place. Consensus can only be reached if notions of validity can be criticised (Habermas 1987:70-72).

Habermas realised, however, that language is not always used with the objective of understanding. He therefore makes use of theory of speech in order to explain communicative competence. This theory allows a distinction between the statements and the “illocutionary” force. This force results from the agent who is involved in the action of saying something. The success of this force depends on the level of interpersonal relationships produced in the lifeworld (“Lebenswelt”) to which, in the communicative process, participants belong, and which constitutes the basis of their understanding (Habermas 1987:137). Rationalisation of the lifeworld has become a difficult process because it can be linked to the increasing complexity of systems. It attacks communicative action, creating a loss of meaning, a loss of legitimacy, a break-down of collective identities and a break in tradition (Habermas 1987:107).

Having developed a sense of Habermas’s theory of communicative action, the next section will be devoted to its first component, critical theory.

2.3.1 Characteristics and development of critical theory

In this section I shall be exploring the characteristics and development of critical theory, as well as the educational relevance thereof.

Critical theory may be thought of as a critical revision of Marxism, in which many of the Marxist ideas were abandoned. An example of such abandonment is Habermas’s objection to Marx’s construct of five economically determined stages of human history (hunter/gatherer; Asiatic; feudal; capitalist; communist) (Habermas 1978). One of the main ideas from Marxism that has remained prominent in critical theory is that of liberation from “false consciousness”. As a result, an overlap has been found

between the concerns of critical theorists and educationists who are serious about the emancipatory role of education (Blake & Masschelein 2003:38).

According to Blake and Masschelein (2003:38-39), critical theory is informed by several motives, the first being its critical stance toward society in its actual and developing forms, informed by a strong ethical concern for the individual and a rejection of all possible excuses for domination and injustice, and a longing for a better world. Furthermore, critical theory claims that theorists' involvement in the reality under investigation is not an obstacle to their "objectivity". Objectivity is not achieved by theoretical distance from phenomena, but by personal closeness to them. Nor does critical theory find objectivity in disinterestedness. It is not itself "value-free", but interested. It usually conceives itself as a practice directed towards creating a better world. However, this longing for a better world manifested itself in a negative way, from which Habermas tried to distance himself. Peukert (in Blake & Masschelein 2003:39) argues that this negativity is the most irritating characteristic of critical theory, but also one of the most important challenges offered to Western thought – the challenge of making real our humanity and of striving continuously for a better world.

In continuing their argument about the development of critical theory, Blake and Masschelein (2003:39) claim that the main theoretical interest of critical theory has always been to investigate the relationship between the individual, and social and cultural developments. Critical theorists also investigated empirically how social and economic structures were produced and reproduced, through and in the concrete action and thought of individuals and collectives and in relation to culture.

There are three phases in the development of critical theory (Blake & Masschelein 2003:40). In the first phase, a Marxist analysis of social relations was integrated with Freudian psychoanalysis into a social-psychological theory. Through this integration the relationship between psychological and social structures could be clarified. The research programme of this phase finds expression in empirical studies, informed by a notion of reason that stood in the Enlightenment tradition and its promise of social justice. Yet some writers denounced the historical development of reason into a scientific and social positivism, which rejects the capacity of reason to transcend

reality. The research programme of this phase had no contemporary reception at all in educational studies, but through the work of Habermas, philosophers eventually managed to differentiate critical theory from both positivism and hermeneutics.

The second phase is the period of critique of instrumental reason. Here we find the most radical analyses of reason itself, in which reason is viewed as intrinsically instrumental. This decline in the scope of individual autonomy is disguised by progress in science and technology. Critical theorists came to believe that the existing order had almost become immunised against critique by the mass media, which rendered people insensitive to injustice. In this situation revolution was inconceivable and all that remained was to rescue the individual from a totalitarian world. There remained nothing but vulnerability and abandonment of the individual to call us to solidarity and resistance. Against this background critical theory could only have a negative task.

The third phase is characterised by Habermas's attempt to reinstate the emancipatory programme of critical theory, by reformulating the concept "praxis". At first he took up the Marxist idea that science is part of the transformative economic praxis of material production, enabling people to transform the material context in which they survive and flourish. But because science is a discourse, Habermas differentiated this praxis into labour on the one hand and linguistic interaction on the other. Based on this, he distinguished three "species-general interests" (Blake & Masschelein 2003:41). To the "technical" interest in economic production in Marxism, he added a "practical" interest. And on this basis, he further posited a species-general "emancipatory" interest – a necessary interest in emancipation in both social and psychological forms, and thus an interest in a critical understanding of society.

After taking a "linguistic turn", Habermas redeveloped the idea of an emancipatory interest within a theory of communicative competence. As described in Section 2.3, he argued for the necessity of open and undistorted linguistic interaction in human affairs, which he called communicative interaction. Undistorted communicative action could be contrasted with strategic interaction, described by a suppression of true motives and an enactment of manipulative social relations. Through this linguistic turn Habermas could demonstrate the importance of communicative, as opposed to

strategic, interaction for social integration and cultural reproduction. He could also theorise the problems of society under late capitalism in terms of a “colonisation of the lifeworld” by the “strategic” discourse of dominant social forces (Blake & Masschelein 2003:41). These analyses gave him the foundation to develop a “discourse of ethics” as the normative core of critical theory and thus make the break with the negativity of the second phase.

The third phase played a major role in offering a way to formulate emancipation and self-determination as the general aims of education. Analyses of communicative interaction were taken up by educationists, but the question remained, as suggested by Blake and Masschelein (2003:42), whether educational theory could describe educational practice in terms of personal transformation without reproducing the basic instrumental logic of traditional concepts of “education”.

2.3.2 The educational relevance of critical theory

Given critical theory’s non-educational roots, it is easy to view critical theory of education as importing external socio-political considerations into educational theory. But Blake and Masschelein (2003:42) warn that, to think this, is to misunderstand both critical theory and the history of educational theory. The legacy of Enlightenment thinking with its undertones of social justice informs the modern tradition in education comprehensively.

Modern theories of education rest on some theory of the individual, usually informed by some theory of society. In fact, the emergence of autonomous theories and philosophies of education, as well as education sciences and educational research, cannot be divorced from the emergence of modern societies. The development of education as a field has to be linked to its problems and concerns. Given the ideals of critical theory (enlightenment and emancipation) and its analyses of their social preconditions, it is not surprising, according to Blake and Masschelein (2003:43), that critical theory has found favour with many educational theorists, who regard it as fundamental to education.

Furthermore, the “interested” theoretical position of early critical theory referred to in Section 2.3.1, as well as the universalism of the later thought of Habermas, both indicate modern concerns for justice in the educational arena. Moreover, critical theory has never lacked a commitment to exacting intellectual standards, a concern to defend high culture and an understanding of the importance of cultural tradition to guard “against the normalising vulgarities of capitalist modernisation” (Blake & Masschelein 2003:43).

To further illustrate the importance of critical theory to education, I concur with Bailin and Siegel (2003:188), who discuss the important role of critical thinking and education. I regard their reference to critical thinking as synonymous with critical theory. Siegel (in Bailin & Siegel 2003:189) posits four reasons for the importance of critical thinking in education. Firstly, if we want to treat learners with respect, we should encourage them to think for themselves instead of denying them the ability to determine their own destinies. Acknowledging them as worthy persons requires that we treat learners as independent thinkers, able to make their own decisions and judgements. Treating learners with respect therefore requires fostering in them the ability to think critically. The second reason involves the task of preparing learners for adulthood. Such preparation should involve self-sufficiency and self-direction. Critical thinking should be inherent to this task. The third reason why critical thinking is important in education relates to its role in the rational traditions such as mathematics and science, which have always been central to teaching. These rational traditions rely on critical thinking. Mastering the rational traditions therefore requires well-developed critical thinking skills. Fourthly, democratic life builds on careful analysis, good thinking and reasoned deliberation. If we value democracy, we should be committed to fostering these abilities. A democratic country can only be successful if its citizens are able to engage in sound reasoning on a variety of matters such as politics and public policy. Democratic citizenship requires critical thinking. Siegel (in Bailin & Siegel 2003:189) argues that these four reasons are powerful in justifying the important role of critical thinking in education.

I would like to conclude this section with the following argument: Literacy, in essence, is about understanding and learning, which are key building blocks of being

critical and in achieving the ideals of justice and equity through education. I therefore regard critical theory as best suited to analyse the multiple perspectives on literacy.

2.4 SUMMARY

This chapter distinguishes between research methods and methodology and explains why the chosen research methods and research methodology are suitable for this study in the context of pluralist perspectives on literacy and its role in attaining developmental aspirations. This distinction between research methods and research methodology is made as follows: research methods involve specific techniques for gathering information, while research methodology refers to a particular framework of thinking or paradigm.

The research methods used in this study are conceptual analysis (linked to constitutive meanings), deconstructive critique and questioning. Whereas conceptual analysis attempts to establish constitutive meanings for the use of a concept, constitutive meanings underlie social practices and make these practices what they are. Deconstructive critique aims to identify internal contradictions or ambiguities in the use of a concept, while questioning, which is likened to analytical inquiry, has to do with examining a concept in order to seek a better understanding thereof. Each of these concepts is discussed in detail in this chapter.

The research methodology chosen for this study is critical theory, which is discussed by way of looking at its characteristics and development. Essentially, critical theory is devoted to revealing the possibility of reason and advancing the goal of human emancipation. It thus enabled me to look beyond the obvious, to possible better ways and ideas about literacy in the context of developmental aspirations.

This chapter spells out the importance and relevance of critical theory in education. Critical theory is important for treating learners with respect, for preparing them for adulthood, for mastering the rational traditions within education and for developing democratic citizenship.

The most important outcome of Chapter Two, in my opinion, is the potential of deconstruction as research method to show that literacy does not have a definable meaning. There is always more to the meaning of literacy, and as such it cannot be compacted into a particular perspective. The concept needs to be stretched to incorporate pluralist perspectives in order to achieve “justice”.

A literature study focusing on the concept of literacy follows in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE STUDY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

“Literacy” is a key concept in this study and as such I see a need to explore it; in an effort to establish a clearer understanding of what it means. Justification for exploring the concept “literacy” also flowed from my own desire to develop an understanding of the concept. This should be helpful in determining, in Chapter Four, how the LITNUM Strategy accommodates the concept of “literacy”. This chapter, therefore, provides an analysis of the concept within the context of the LITNUM Strategy. As has been argued in Chapter One, analysing the concept “literacy” may help to recognise its transformative potential.

The concept “literacy” will be analysed in this chapter by representing the changes in literacy research and exploring the different perspectives, understandings and models of literacy in an endeavour to construct key meanings of literacy. In doing so, the hope is to offer possibilities for the development of literacy within the South African context. In an attempt to show that defining literacy is not a straightforward exercise, but influenced by our ideological perspectives, I shall point out the importance of social and cultural construction of literacy, since I believe that reading and writing, like speaking, are inherently social and cultural acts. Lastly, I shall be highlighting the concept of “functional literacy” as I link literacy to development.

3.2 THE CONCEPT OF LITERACY

From studying the literature on literacy it is evident that there are many different aspects of literacy to account for, and therefore many different meanings of literacy. There are books devoted to the concept of “literacy”, such as *Toward Defining Literacy* by Venezky *et al.* (1990). It is indeed easy to become swamped by the wide range of definitions and perspectives of literacy, and I soon realised that looking at definitions of literacy *per se* does not make much sense unless one takes into account the particular context within which a specific definition is embedded.

As I trace the development of understandings of the concept “literacy”, I shall use the method of deconstruction, since this process will reveal internal contradictions in the use of the concept over the years. In other words, it will make historicising the multiple meanings of literacy possible as I try to link literacy to developmental aspirations. I shall be using that which is revealed by deconstruction to formulate constitutive meanings of the concept “literacy”. I shall conceptually link these to constitutive meanings of literacy.

I found the Fourth Annual *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, produced by an independent team housed at UNESCO (2006), particularly useful in navigating my way through the process of understanding the developments associated with the concept “literacy”. The report states that because of influences such as academic research, international policy agendas and national priorities, definitions and understandings of literacy have broadened considerably over the past 50 years. In all understandings, literacy embodies reading and writing skills.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of “functional literacy” gained ground and emphasised links among literacy, productivity and overall socio-economic development. Recent perspectives look at the ways in which literacy is used and practised in different social and cultural contexts. Literacy is therefore viewed as an active process of learning, involving social awareness and critical reflection, which can empower individuals and groups to promote social change. Many international organisations (UNESCO in particular) have drawn on these conceptual understandings to develop policies on literacy. During the 1960s and 1970s, the international policy community stressed the role of literacy in economic growth and national development, especially in newly independent countries. Reflecting this emerging understanding, UNESCO’s General Conference in 1978 adopted the following definition of functional literacy still in use today:

A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his (or her) group and community and also for enabling him (or her) to continue to use

reading, writing and calculation for his (or her) own and the community's development (UNESCO 2006:22).

During the 1980s and 1990s, definitions of literacy broadened to accommodate the challenges of globalisation, including the impact of new technology and information media and the emergence of knowledge economies. Greater attention was also paid to the language or languages in which literacy was learned and practised. Reflecting these concerns, the World Declaration on Education for All, made in Jomtien in 1990, placed the challenge of literacy within the broader context of meeting the basic learning needs of every child, youth and adult (UNESCO 2006:30). There is an emerging awareness of the broader social context in which literacy is encouraged, acquired, developed and sustained: literacy is no longer exclusively understood as an individual phenomenon, but is also seen as a contextual and societal one.

Even though the account above provides a good outline of the most important trends in the development of literacy, I feel that it is important to investigate how different perspectives of literacy are constructed. I believe that this will help to make sense of the many different perspectives and assumptions on which understandings of literacy are based.

3.2.1 Perspectives on literacy

A wide range of disciplinary perspectives are involved in studying literacy. This has become more prominent with the increasing importance of social and cultural practices in defining literacy. This shift reflects the application of alternative disciplinary perspectives, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology and history, in literacy research (Beach, Green, Kamil & Shanahan 1992:2-3). It indicates that, conceptually, literacy is multi-faceted and requires different levels of analysis within a broad framework (Rassool 1999:42). The following cross-perspectives in the study of literacy are identified and described by Barton and Ivanič (in Baynham 1995:16, 21): educational, anthropological, psychological, historical, sociological, and language/linguistic. A short discussion of these perspectives follows next.

3.2.1.1 Educational perspective

The educational perspective examines the role of instruction in the acquisition of reading and writing skills and the influence of immersion approaches to reading and writing practices, in which learners acquire their literacy skills progressively, either as mother tongue or as second-language learners (Forrester 2002:36).

3.2.1.2 Anthropological perspective

The anthropological perspective takes into account the influence of socio-cultural issues like multilingualism on the development of literacy. These include issues like the choice of a majority language with the largest communicative potential, the secondary role of minority languages and literacies, and communicative bi-literacy to encourage intra-group communication (Forrester 2002:36). This perspective therefore looks at relational issues between literacy, power and emancipation.

3.2.1.3 Psychological perspective

We need a psychological view of literacy because literacy is a symbolic system used for representing the world to ourselves. Literacy is part of our thinking. It is part of our technology of thought (Barton 1994:35). Bearing this in mind, the psychological perspective looks at the importance of the following factors on literacy and language development: literacy support in the home environment, parental input and motivation to learn to read and write (Verhoeven & Durgunoğlu 1998:xii).

3.2.1.4 Historical perspective

Since literacy has a history, the historical perspective centres on trying to understand the origins of reading and writing, as well as on raising questions and providing insights as to what is meant by literacy. Barton (1994:107-108) argues that the origin of writing is important because it involves being clear about what is meant by writing. It also makes clear how writing draws upon a range of other forms of symbolic representation. The development of printing is just as important because it represents

an example of the development of technology. Finally, the development of a literate culture illustrates that every aspect of literacy has developed and has a history.

3.2.1.5 Sociological perspective

The sociological perspective studies the use of literacy as embedded in social structure. It illustrates that people have different literacies associated with different domains of life, that people's literacy practices are situated in broader social relations, and that literacies are unequally valued – they vary in what purposes and whose purposes they serve. Social change and new social practices demand new ways of communicating, and either increase or reduce literacy demands (Barton 1994:34-39, 52).

3.2.1.6 Language/Linguistic perspective

According to Gee (1990:112), the language perspective looks primarily at the function of human language as a means not only to talk about the world, but also to formulate various perspectives and viewpoints on the world. This happens on three levels simultaneously, namely the *language as social practice* level, the *language as social process* level and the *language as text* level (Baynham 1995:21-22).

The different perspectives on literacy discussed in this section are important, I believe, to get an overview of the impact of other disciplines on literacy. Not only does it offer one the opportunity to examine various aspects of literacy from different viewpoints, but it also enables one to connect with various understandings of literacy.

3.2.2 Understandings of literacy

This section traces the development of different understandings of literacy. UNESCO (2006:148) identifies four discrete understandings of literacy, which I regard as a good starting point in trying to develop an understanding of the concept:

1. Literacy as an autonomous set of skills;
2. Literacy as applied, practised and situated;

3. Literacy as a learning process; and
4. Literacy as text.

A brief discussion of each of these four understandings of literacy follows.

3.2.2.1 Literacy as skills

In the context of this approach, the most common understanding of literacy is that it is a set of tangible skills, particularly the cognitive skills of reading and writing. These are not in any way linked to the context in which they are acquired or the background of the person who acquires them. Researchers have disagreed, and continue to disagree, on the best way to acquire literacy skills. Some advocate the “phonetic” approach and others the “reading for meaning” approach. These differing perspectives have led to what has been called the “reading wars” (UNESCO 2006:149). A coming together of different disciplinary strands flowed from this, which resulted in agreement that a scientific focus on phonics was the key to improvement in literacy (Street 2006:5). Preference for the scientific principles of phonetics has given rise to claims that writing is the transcription of speech and hence more important, because writing provides a perspective on utterances that allows for reflection and distance that in turn enables objectivity and hence scientific thought. Similarly, some claim the alphabetic system, because it is phonetic, is technologically superior to other script forms. Street (2006) notes that many such views are founded on deeper assumptions about the cognitive consequences of learning to read and write. This needs to be taken into account when defining literacy.

3.2.2.2 Literacy as applied, practised and situated

The skills-based approach to literacy discussed above is not free of limitations. Some researchers have therefore tried to focus on the application of these skills, hence the “Literacy as applied, practised and situated” approach. One of the first attempts at an application of skills was through the development of functional literacy. Views of functional literacy often assumed that literacy could be taught as a universal set of skills which everyone should learn in the same way. Literacy was seen as neutral and independent of social context. This understanding changed, because researchers

argued that the ways in which literacy is practised are different in different social and cultural contexts. This line of reasoning was often referred to as “New Literacy Studies” (Street 2006). Its central argument was that literacy is not a technical skill independent of context, but a social practice, embedded in social settings. Key concepts in this view of literacy are:

- Literacy events-- any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes; and
- Literacy practices – the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing (UNESCO 2006:151).

The “Literacy as applied, practised and situated” approach questions the validity of labelling individuals as “literate” or “illiterate”, as many who are deemed illiterate are found to make significant use of literacy practices for specific purposes in their everyday lives.

3.2.2.3 Literacy as a learning process

This approach emphasises that, as individuals learn, they become literate. Literacy is therefore an active and broad-based learning process, rather than a product of a more focused educational intervention. Newer understandings of literacy have shifted the focus from the individual mind towards social practices. Concepts such as “collaborative learning”, “distributed learning” and “communities of practice” thus came into play (UNESCO 2006:152).

Freire (1995) emphasised the importance of bringing the learner’s socio-cultural realities into the learning process itself, and then using the learning process to challenge these social processes. Central to his argument is the notion of critical literacy, a goal to be attained in part through engaging with books and other written texts, but, more especially, through reading and writing.

3.2.2.4 Literacy as text

The “Literacy as text” approach argues that literacy can also be understood in terms of the subject matter and the nature of the texts that are produced and consumed by literate individuals. Texts vary by subject, complexity of language and ideological content. This approach pays particular attention to the analysis of discrete passages of text (UNESCO 2006:152). Linguists have developed a variety of analytic tools for unpacking the meanings of texts. Educationalists have then applied some of this knowledge to the development of skilled readers and writers. The aim of this approach is to provide learners with the full range of literacy skills necessary to operate in contemporary society. Language should furthermore be seen as just one of several modes through which communication takes place (Street 2006:16-17).

This discussion on the different understandings of literacy suggests a movement from literacy as a set of skills to a notion of multiple literacies. The same pattern is detected when studying Street’s theoretical models of literacy (Street 1993). These insights were valuable for this research, since the argument was to move beyond narrow conceptualisations of literacy towards recognition of its potential to view the world differently. This required an examination of the theoretical assumptions on which literacy is based. The theoretical models of literacy are subsequently described.

3.2.3 Theoretical models of literacy

Having discussed different perspectives and understandings, I will focus in this section on theoretical models of literacy. Street (1993:5) distinguishes two theoretical models of literacy, namely the autonomous model and the ideological model, which may also contribute to an understanding of the concept. These two models are widely referred to in literacy studies and will be at the centre of the following discussion.

3.2.3.1 The autonomous model

The autonomous model describes literacy in technical terms, independent of social context and intrinsic in character. It argues that learning to read is an important part of literacy in that it develops certain cognitive skills such as precision, memory, logical

thought and detachment. This model, which is presented as though it is a neutral phenomenon, disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin literacy (Street 2006:12). Practices and policies that subscribe to this model are referred to as typical of “schooled literacy” or the “transmission model”, which emphasises the idea that teaching consists of providing information to learners in order to “fill their minds” or to master essential skills and facts. This process does not happen neutrally, but is most often described by the beliefs of those in power (Powell 1999:33).

Powell (1999:25) identifies three underlying assumptions about “schooled literacy” or literacy as described within the school context. Not only do these assumptions show the underlying beliefs on which our pedagogical practices are based, but they also help to develop a greater appreciation of how our unspoken notions of literacy impact on the way we interpret literacy issues. These are:

- *There are certain discourses that are more literate than other discourses, and therefore are inherently superior.* Learners come to school with their primary discourse based on the discourse which is in place at home. For many learners this is not a problem, provided they are from “middle-class” homes, since schools often value the “middle-class” discourse as the dominant discourse (Powell 1999:26). However, for many marginalised learners, whose primary discourse differs from the one at school, it creates problems. According to Powell, a number of investigations have shown that educators are inclined to have lower expectations for learners whose attitudes, behaviours and linguistic styles do not conform to the school discourse or the norms of schooled literacy (Powell 1999:27).
- *Borrowing conventions from science and technology will result in superior instructional programmes and practices.* Powell (1999:29) contends that there is a popular belief in the supremacy of science and technology for improving schools. The input-output model has become prevalent in educational thought without much room for social or cultural context: input being represented by the ability to acquire skills and content, and output by measuring competency levels. Literacy and language are regarded as tools for acquiring information and processing it efficiently, with thinking and generating own ideas playing a subordinate role.

Powell indicates how this has shaped prevailing views of educational failure. The belief in the supremacy of science and technology for improving schools, as mentioned earlier, has led to a medical approach for dealing with literacy problems. Learners who “lag behind” are diagnosed and treated, using concepts such as “attention deficit disorder”, “learning disability”, “mentally impaired” and “remedial” (Powell 1999:32). What is needed, in my opinion, is a back-to-basics approach, with the emphasis on reading, writing and arithmetic / mathematics.

- *Literacy instruction and research can – and ought to be – neutral.* Powell (1999:32-33) explains that there is an assumption that reading and writing are processes that can be removed from their actual functions, meaning that reading and writing are skills used to acquire and transmit information, as opposed to being means for personal expression of ideas, thoughts and feelings. Such an assumption, however, ignores certain facts. Not only is literacy both social and cultural, but it is also influenced by the political agenda of education. Schooling in general and literacy instruction in particular, are forms of acculturation designed to teach dominant perspectives and beliefs by those in power.

To conclude: within the autonomous model of literacy theory, literacy taught in schools or “schooled literacy” is viewed as a learnt skill or a set of technical skills. I concur with Powell (1999:37) who argues that, viewed in this way, “schooled literacy” is a secondary discourse that is acquired through engagement in the language of the school. Those learners who are able to deal with schooled literacy tasks are typically the ones who succeed, while those whose primary discourse does not prepare them for the experience of school, fare poorly and most often fail.

3.2.3.2 The ideological model

In contrast, the ideological model offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another. It emphasises literacy as a social practice (Street 2006:12), which is seldom straightforwardly described just in terms of reading and writing. Gee (1990:60-61) proposes a similar description of the ideological model. His argument is that the ideological model attempts to understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to theorise it in terms of the

ideologies in which different literacies are embedded. Literacy only has consequences as it acts together with other social factors, including political and economic conditions, social structure and local ideologies.

Many researchers favour this model because it does not view literacy as an end in itself. Rather, it views literacy in terms of its transformative potential. In this way, it is truly functional because it allows individuals to “question and engage in critical dialogue so that they might be educated for participation in a democracy” (Powell 1999:20).

Before concluding this section on the theoretical models of literacy, I would like to compare the autonomous model and the ideological model in terms of the nine different approaches for defining literacy as identified by Baynham (1995:13-15):

1. Deficit Approach: The learner is an empty vessel that needs to be filled with knowledge. This approach matches the autonomous model.
2. Medical Approach: The lack of literacy is treated as a medical condition. This approach matches the autonomous model.
3. Back to Basics Approach: The drop in literacy standards can be attributed to progressive teaching methods. A return to teaching the three R's will improve the situation. This approach matches the autonomous model.
4. Skills Development Approach: This approach, which treats the acquisition of literacy as the acquisition of a series of discrete skills, matches the autonomous model.
5. Therapeutic Approach: This approach, which sees literacy development within a psychological framework, matches the ideological model.
6. Personal Empowerment Approach: The development of literacy is regarded as a process of developing confidence and personal power. This approach has elements of both the autonomous and ideological models of literacy.
7. Social Empowerment Approach: This approach, which links the development of literacy with social change, matches the ideological model.
8. Functional Approach: This approach emphasises social purpose and context. It matches the ideological model.

9. Critical Approach: This approach, which does not take social purpose and context as a given, but subjects them to critical analysis, matches the ideological model.

This comparison shows a clear division between the autonomous model and the ideological model. Add to this comparison the multi-cultural approach, and the division is even more evident. According to the multi-cultural approach, literacy is viewed along a contextualised continuum that is inclusive of all cultural sensitivities, multiple literacies and complex relationships that affect literacy learning (Macrine 1999:12). Recent definitions of literacy highlight this division even further through an emphasis on broader rather than narrow conceptualisations based on reading and writing. However, it does not mean that one excludes the other. Rather, the autonomous model is “subsumed” by the ideological model (Street 1993:9). This means that the ideological model does not ignore the value of the technical skills of reading and writing, but views them as part of social and cultural wholes. Scrutinising literacy in a manner such as this highlights the tensions within the field of literacy research. These tensions have serious implications for literacy development. I am of the opinion that we should guard against a radical shift from the autonomous model to the ideological model, because when understandings of literacy are seen exclusively from one perspective or viewpoint, the “wholeness of literacy as a phenomenon is lost” (Forrester 2002:42).

Having studied the literature on literacy, it has become clear that there is a growing awareness of the social contexts in which literacy is developed. This is emphasised by the ideological model of literacy. Literacy is no longer an individual transformation, but one in which context plays a vital role. It is my contention that policy makers should pay careful attention to the social and cultural construction of literacy if they want to make any difference in linking literacy to development.

3.2.4 Social and cultural construction of literacy

Studying the literature on literacy has increased my awareness of the importance of broader social and cultural contexts in which literacy is practised. I believe the motivations for becoming literate are related to access to a literate environment, be it

school, home or the community. Since such access differs from one environment to the next, literacy is acquired and practised differently in different social and cultural settings. In this section I shall attempt to point out the importance of the social and cultural constructions of literacy, since I believe that reading and writing, like speaking, are inherently social and cultural acts.

To illustrate the social and cultural embeddedness of literacy, Hamilton (2006:138) proposes a social practice view of literacy. Within this view, we are encouraged to look at what people do with literacy. This view is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

The contexts in which language is learned and used are not only social; they are also cultural. The concept “culture” as it is being used here refers to a system of knowledge that allows individuals to interpret events in their lives. It is an ideological system consisting of shared meanings and symbols that have become embedded in daily social encounters. Individuals use it to interpret events and govern their behaviour (Powell 1999:10-11). Because language is a way of making meaning within a particular social context, language can be regarded as a subsystem of culture or a symbolic system within the larger cultural system, with its own rules for using and interpreting language. Oral and written texts, therefore, are not only linguistically symbolic; they are also culturally symbolic. Particular ways of making meaning are culturally described, and hence one’s language is an integral part of one’s identity (Powell 1999:11).

The concept of identity is also explored by Gee (1990:142), who suggests that one’s use of language or discourse is in essence an “identity kit”. Each of us has a primary discourse which we learn through engaging with our family or cultural group. However, as we engage with institutions outside of the family, we acquire other ways of thinking, acting and using language. This is referred to as secondary discourse. Gee furthermore argues that language is about controlling these discourses, and since there are many secondary discourses, there are many applications of the concept “literacy”. A further point of interest is that because discourses involve cultural norms, they are inherently ideological.

The discussion above suggests that literacy occurs in a particular social context. It is important to consider the influence of social context on literacy practice. If we neglect to do so, we shall be disregarding an important building block in the process of understanding literacy. Similarly, we cannot be blind to the equally important role of culture in literacy development, especially since individuals use their cultural background to interpret events and to formulate a response to it.

3.2.5 Literacy and development

This research tries to link pluralist perspectives on literacy in the context of developmental aspirations. It would therefore be naïve not to pay attention to the link between literacy and development.

The idea of development is closely linked to the idea of progress. The emergence of the modern Western world was crucial for the rise of the idea of development. Westerners thought of their civilisation as something that was moving forward in history toward something better. The belief in progress had much to do with the rise of powerful nation states and the increasing wealth and prosperity that resulted from the growth of industrial capitalism and scientific knowledge. Alongside this grew a belief that some societies were “advanced” while others were “backward” (Aitchison 2003:4). This idea of development through stages leading to a more advanced form is called the evolutionary idea of development.

In the 1950s and 1970s the belief was that if everybody learned how to read and write, it would enhance development. It would solve economic problems. Today, literacy is still presented as a prerequisite for solving development problems. What is different is that literacy includes different forms, like computer literacy (Rassool 1999:vii). Rassool (1999:80-91) presents three theories to illustrate the evolutionary idea of development and links them to literacy. These are: (1) modernisation; (2) the new international economic order (NIEO) or under-development; and (3) the neo-classical model (these theories are also discussed by Aitchison (2003:5-7).

The theory of modernisation posits that the Western history of development is the best model for poorer countries to follow and that the aim of development is to achieve a

Western-style society and economy. This theory became dominant in the 1940s and continues to be significant in development programmes. In this theory, underdeveloped regions are at the early or “traditional” stage of development. They develop through a process of transfer of knowledge, technology and capital from “advanced” societies, until they are self-sufficient (Aitchison 2003:5). In the theory of modernisation, the significance of literacy in terms of access to knowledge and skills is great. Increased levels of literacy are linked to participation in societal development. Literacy is regarded as the “technology of the intellect”, contributing to growth and development through strengthening the “power of thought” (Goody & Watt, in Rassool 1999:81).

In the mid-1960s the modernisation theory came under attack. The argument was that the newly independent states could not develop along the same model as the West had, because Third World countries were poor and powerless as a result of the West’s own development processes. This was an important insight because it recognised that being underdeveloped was not a passive situation that was just an accident of history, but rather the result of development processes happening elsewhere in the world. The Third World was the way it was as a result of its being dependent on the major powers of the world economy. Development in the Third World was therefore only possible on condition that this relationship of dependency was either changed dramatically or broken off entirely (Aitchison 2003:6). Rassool (1999:86) refers to this as a need for an NIEO in which inequalities would be addressed. Literacy was now regarded as more than reading and writing. It was a contribution to the liberation of man, and to his full development. Literacy was not an end in itself, but a fundamental human right (UNESCO 2006:136).

Although some people are of the opinion that the international economic system is unfair and that developing countries should not be involved in it, neo-liberalists argue that participation in the international economic system is the best way to achieve development. In this view, every country has something which they can trade more profitably than anyone else in the world. This is called the theory of comparative advantage. This approach argues that everyone who participates in the global free market benefits – including developing countries (Aitchison 2003:7). The focus in terms of literacy is on technical skills. There is a movement away from the “bi-polar

perspective” of literacy (literate or illiterate) to a need for learners to want to learn. Literacy is seen as formative in terms of facilitating workplace learning and as such plays an important role in human resource development (Rassool 1999:89).

UNESCO (2006) makes it very clear that literacy gives people the tools, knowledge and confidence to improve their livelihoods, to participate more actively in their societies and to make informed choices. Literate societies are therefore of vital importance for development. In fact, such societies are better geared to meet pressing development challenges characteristic of the twenty-first century. Not only is creating literate environments and societies essential for achieving and ensuring sustainable development, but it is also crucial for economic, social and political participation and development, especially in today’s knowledge societies. Literacy is the key to enhancing human capabilities, with wide-ranging benefits including critical thinking, improved health and family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, children’s education, poverty reduction and active citizenship. In today’s knowledge economies, literacy skills are more vital than ever.

Central to discussions about literacy and development is the concept of functional literacy, which regards literacy as a necessary condition for economic growth and development. This indicates the interrelationship between literacy and development. Even though the initial focus was on enhanced efficiency and productivity, the concept of functional literacy was expanded to include a broader array of human concerns and aspirations. It is in relation to a whole range of people’s functions, whether as citizens, householders or individuals, that literacy training is perceived and manifests itself. From this viewpoint functional literacy is seen to be identical with lifelong learning, insofar as the latter concept also encompasses everything that enters into life (UNESCO 2006:154). Bhola (1994:39) suggests that an effective literacy programme should be linked to lifelong learning. Lifelong learning, according to Bhola (1994), means that education or learning has no end. In other words, learning does not end when someone’s school career ends or when a certificate or diploma is earned. Rather, it continues throughout life.

In 2002 the place of literacy at the heart of lifelong learning was recognised (UNESCO 2006:155). Literacy was seen as crucial to the acquisition of essential life

skills to address the challenges of life. It was also regarded as an essential step in basic education, which is critical for effective participation in the economies of the twenty-first century. The conception of literacy has therefore evolved from a simple notion of a set of technical skills of reading and writing, to a notion encompassing manifold meanings and dimensions.

To strengthen the notion that the description of literacy surpassed reading and writing, Bhola (1994:37) suggests that functional literacy has three elements, namely (1) literacy (reading and writing), (2) functionality (economic skills) and (3) awareness (social, cultural and political). He refers to this as the “functional literacy triangle”, and argues that it aims to make people knowledge-rich. This is an important comment, especially in the light of Powell’s reference to knowledge as power. She argues that it enables us to control our personal destinies and to own our respective futures (Powell 1999:97).

A discussion about literacy and development would not be complete without reference to critical literacy. Bhola (1994:33) refers to critical literacy as radical literacy. He argues that the purpose of critical literacy is to empower people; to make them critical of what they see and hear. This notion is also emphasised by Freire (1995), who argues that literacy had to contribute to the “liberation of man” and to his or her full development. As such, literacy had to create critical consciousness of the contradictions of society. It also had to stimulate initiative and participation in projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of human development (Bataille, in UNESCO 2006:154). These arguments suggest that critical literacy has the potential of completely subsuming functional literacy, but I am of the opinion that there will always be a place for functional literacy, especially in the context of economic development.

In conclusion, I would like to link the crucial importance of literacy to the knowledge economy of the twenty-first century. It is my contention that literacy is the key to learning and therefore acquiring knowledge. Without it we cannot think or communicate. If the knowledge economy is about using knowledge to ensure economic prosperity, then the value of literacy in acquiring knowledge to contribute to economic growth and development is considerable. In the context of changing

societies it is therefore imperative that we thoroughly understand the concept “literacy” and its many different facets, and realise that it cannot be compacted – there is always more to be said.

3.3 CONSTITUTIVE MEANINGS OF LITERACY

From the literature review I discovered recurring concepts, in other words, concepts which were used and referred to again and again. I focused on these to construct the following key features of literacy:

- Literacy is a set of tangible skills, particularly the cognitive skills of reading and writing;
- Literacy is practised in different social and cultural contexts, which means that literacy is not a technical skill independent of context, but a social practice, embedded in social settings;
- Literacy is an active and broad-based learning process, rather than a product of educational intervention;
- Literacy can be understood in terms of the subject matter and the nature of the texts that are produced and consumed by literate individuals;
- Literacy develops confidence and personal power; and
- Literacy is an instrument of development.

The features above represent meanings which can be associated with literacy. They illuminate what literacy means and in this way provide constitutive meanings of the concept “literacy”. In other words, literacy can and should be understood by these meanings.

Harvey (1990:29) observes that in cases where there is a long list of constitutive meanings, it is not necessary to critically analyse each of them, since they are interrelated. The constitutive meanings of literacy, for me, therefore are cognitive skills; social context; and development.

It is coincidental that I should identify the first two as constitutive meanings of literacy, because they relate to the theoretical models of literacy (Street 1993). The autonomous model argues that learning to read is an important part of literacy in that it develops cognitive skills. In contrast, the ideological model offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy, emphasising that literacy is a social practice. The third constitutive meaning complements the standard view that literacy can and does lead to development. I am therefore satisfied that the three constitutive meanings incorporate all the meanings listed. It also creates some kind of “balance” in reference to the theoretical models of literacy, which I alluded to when I warned against a radical shift from the autonomous model to the ideological model.

I will further analyse these constitutive meanings when I analyse the LITNUM Strategy in the next chapter.

3.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has demonstrated that literacy is a complex phenomenon. In fact, there are many different aspects, and therefore many different meanings of literacy. Using the research method of deconstruction I showed how the concept of literacy has evolved from a focus on reading and writing to an emphasis on literacy as social practice, involving multiple literacies. Not only is this evident in studying the different disciplinary perspectives on literacy, but also in the different understandings of literacy. The discussion on deconstruction has helped to show that literacy does not have a definable meaning. There is always more to the meaning of literacy, and as such it cannot be compacted into a particular perspective. The concept needs to be stretched to incorporate pluralist perspectives in order to achieve “justice”.

Chapter Three has furthermore introduced the autonomous and ideological models of literacy. Insight into these two theoretical models is useful because it provides a basis for considering the transformative potential of literacy. Even though there are signs of favouring the ideological model among researchers, I think we should guard against a radical shift from the autonomous to the ideological model, because when understandings of literacy are seen exclusively from one perspective or viewpoint, conceptualising literacy in totality becomes problematic.

Another central feature of Chapter Three is an emphasis on the social and cultural contexts in which literacy is practised. It is important to consider the influence of social context on literacy practice. If we neglect to do so, we shall be disregarding an important building block in the process of understanding literacy. I also linked literacy to development, arguing that if the knowledge economy of the twenty-first century is about using knowledge to ensure economic prosperity, then the value of literacy in acquiring knowledge to contribute to economic growth and development cannot be under-estimated.

From the literature review I identified several meanings of literacy. An important outcome of the reviewed literature is my construction of three constitutive meanings of literacy. These are: cognitive skills, social context and development.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN ANALYSIS OF THE LITNUM STRATEGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The LITNUM Strategy can be described as an education policy. The question is: what is an education policy? In order to understand the concept “education policy”, we need to examine the underlying principles that constitute it. According to McLaughlin (2000:442), education policy can be considered as a set of political decisions which have been taken by those who exercise power (policy makers, teacher unions and community organisations) through a prescription of actions aimed at changing educational institutions or practices. This explanation of education policy emphasises at least three main aspects: (1) policy is formulated by those who exercise power; (2) policy is a set of justifiable prescribed actions; and (3) policy is a coherent framework for implementation in education systems aimed at bringing about change. From this explanation of education policy it is also clear that education policy is formulated by people, which makes it an activity grounded in human experiences, purposes and needs. In other words, education policy develops from the self-understandings of people intent on transforming educational institutions or practices. As indicated in Chapter Two, this transformation can, however, not be reduced to a technical activity that demands the instrumental implementation of policy without taking into account the values and assumptions on which the particular policy is based. Any attempt to understand these values and assumptions requires analytical inquiry or questioning.

In this chapter I examine the LITNUM Strategy with reference to the constitutive meanings of literacy (cognitive skills, social context and development) as discussed in Chapter Three. My aim is to identify policy gaps (which can be weaknesses, shortcomings, or omissions), which may impact negatively on the transformative potential of literacy. As indicated in Chapter Two, my research methods are conceptual analysis, deconstruction and questioning and I raises fundamental questions such as to what LITNUM is all about and whose interests it serves. In short, I shall be dealing with exploring the values and assumptions which underlie LITNUM

within the framework of critical theory. I commence by giving a short background of the LITNUM Strategy.

4.2 BACKGROUND

The LITNUM Strategy is an educational reform strategy that was launched by the WCED in 2006. It aims to raise levels of literacy and numeracy in the Western Cape over a period of 10 years (2006-2016) (WCED 2006a). Educational reform strategies such as LITNUM are found in many countries where an attempt is made to address the world-wide concerns of low levels of literacy. In South Africa such concerns have been exacerbated by the publication of the following:

- On a national level, reports such as the international comparative research report on the quality of schooling, specifically reading, by the South African Institute of Race Relations, which states that, “South African schools are among the worst in Africa ... only one in five SA Grade 6 pupils had attained the desired level of reading mastery” (South African Press Association 2007); and
- On a provincial level, statistics such as the results of literacy and numeracy tests conducted with Grades 3 and 6 learners in the Western Cape in 2002 and 2003 respectively. These results show that only 37% of Grade 3 learners and 15% of Grade 6 learners achieved the required outcomes (WCED 2006b:13).

Alarming statements and results such as these have led to a greater awareness of literacy and several responses from experts, education officials and parents. In the Western Cape the provincial education authorities introduced the LITNUM Strategy with the aim of trying to improve low levels of literacy and numeracy amongst primary school learners. The question is: how exactly was LITNUM formulated? In October 2003 the WCED embarked on consultations to determine its long-term vision for education in the province. The outcome was Education Vision 2020. This vision had to be in line with the intellectual and human capital needs of the province. Consequently, the Human Capital Development Strategy (HCDS) for the Western Cape was formulated. This strategy was primarily influenced by the provincial vision

of a “Home for All” and the Western Cape Economic Development Strategy, “iKapa Elihlumayo” (WCED 2006b:i).

The HCDS provides a detailed explanation of the limitations and challenges the Western Cape faces to ensure that people have the requisite knowledge, skills and values to compete in a rapidly globalising world (WCED 2006a:1). The LITNUM Strategy flowed from the HCDS as follows:

- Systemic research in 2002 showed that the literacy and numeracy skills of learners in the Western Cape were far below what is required for effective learning and development;
- In response, the WCED implemented discrete literacy and numeracy strategies in 2002/3, but results remained far from satisfactory; and
- The decision was then taken to appoint a task team to work on strengthening these strategies within the framework of the HCDS, and so LITNUM was formulated.

Looking at the current debates about the pros and cons of the LITNUM Strategy, the question is: do we really need such a strategy to develop literacy and numeracy skills? Should we not rather focus on fine-tuning existing teaching practices? In answering this, I would like to join the standard view on this issue, saying that it is my belief that the development of literacy and numeracy skills is of the utmost importance in developing South Africa into an economy able to compete globally. I believe that sustainable growth of the economy can be ensured if the human capital is developed to such an extent that a large proportion of our country’s citizens is literate and numerate, and able to fulfil their place in the global economy.

I shall now be questioning the extent to which the LITNUM Strategy accommodates discussion of the concept of “literacy”. This will be followed by an examination of the LITNUM Strategy with reference to the constitutive meanings of literacy: cognitive skills, social context and development.

4.3 HOW DOES LITNUM ACCOMMODATE THE CONCEPT OF LITERACY?

Seeing that this study considers pluralist perspectives on literacy, in other words moving beyond narrow conceptualisations of literacy towards recognition of its transformative potential, my contention is that the concept of literacy is not clearly described, explained or discussed in the LITNUM policy document. This is an area of concern, especially if one takes into consideration that literacy has become every teacher's business, regardless of whether he or she is qualified to teach Mathematics, Science, Business Economics or any other learning area. Gambell (1989:274) refers to this matter as a "cross-curricular concern". It should not be taken for granted that all educators are familiar with the meaning of the concept "literacy" and that all educators are proficient in teaching literacy or reading. There are two reasons for my statement: Firstly, educators beyond the foundation phase have little, if any, training in reading practice and even less knowledge of the concept of literacy and its many dimensions as a means to self-empowerment. Secondly, educators play a vital role as literacy models, but often rely mostly on textbooks and are not sufficiently language proficient (Forrester 2002:3). A research report by Taylor and Vinjevold (2003) supports this notion: they found that educators have low levels of conceptual knowledge.

Waghid (2002:3) suggests that one way of dealing with this problem is to see how differently the concept of literacy is used elsewhere. Seeing how this concept is explained beyond a public education policy document would enable educators to have a better idea of what is meant by it. In other words, clarification beyond the public dimension can be helpful in informing education policy. I concur with Waghid (2002:3) that concepts cannot just be the domain of a specific policy document or what government proposes it to be. It has to be subjected to more analysing, reflecting and evaluating in seeking a clearer understanding of what, in this case, "literacy" means. It has to be integrated with "professional space", as Soltis (1998:199) suggests. According to Soltis, when engaged in professional analysing, educators are concerned about the logical soundness of arguments, explaining the meaning of concepts, constructing reasonable arguments and providing ways to think about educational matters before deciding on ways to implement them. In this way

educators can play an important role, but they are often not aware that they can. As Grant (in Waghid 2002:3) argues, educators in schools rarely feel they have much of a role to play in terms of informing education policy, but they have much more influence on the success or failure of policies than they might be aware of. I therefore posit that educators can make thoughtful and informed choices based on experience in their “professional space” instead of merely being implementers of public education policy.

4.4 LINK TO CONSTITUTIVE MEANINGS

In this section I examine the LITNUM Strategy with reference to the constitutive meanings of literacy (cognitive skills, social context and development) as discussed in Chapter Three. I do this by identifying key features from literature of each of the afore-mentioned constitutive meanings of literacy. These key features are then used to scrutinise the LITNUM Strategy in order to establish to what extent the strategy accommodates each of the constitutive meanings of literacy.

4.4.1 Cognitive skills

The concept of cognitive skills is strongly represented in the autonomous model of literacy. The argument, as described in Chapter Three (3.2.3.1), is that learning to read is an important part of literacy in that it develops certain cognitive skills such as precision, memory, logical thought and detachment (Street 2006:12). In order to fully understand the concept “cognitive skills”, we need to examine the underlying principles which constitute it.

“Cognitive skills” is a central concept in the learning theory of cognitivism. A good way of understanding cognitivism is to compare it to two other well-known learning theories, namely behaviourism and constructivism. Mergel (1998:21) makes the following useful summary:

- *Behaviourism* is based on observable changes in behaviour. Behaviourism focuses on a new behavioural pattern being repeated until it becomes automatic. The advantage of behaviourism is that the learner is focused on a clear goal. The

disadvantage is that it ignores the possibility of thought processes occurring in the mind. This description of behaviourism brings to mind the deficit approach inherent in the autonomous model of literacy. According to this approach, the learner is an empty vessel that needs to be filled with knowledge.

- *Cognitivism* is based on the thought process behind the behaviour. Changes in behaviour are observed and used as indicators as to what is happening inside the learner's mind. The concern is therefore with the internal mental processes of the mind and how they could be used to promote effective learning. The advantage of cognitivism is that the learner focuses on a particular way of accomplishing a task. The disadvantage is that this may not be the best way of doing it. A cognitivist learning theory bears elements of the psychological perspective of literacy, where the emphasis falls on the thought processes involved in acquiring literacy.
- *Constructivism* is based on the premise that we all construct our own perspective of the world, through individual experiences. Constructivism represents a shift away from the idea that knowledge is given to the passive learner, to the idea that active learners invent knowledge as they encounter and engage with it. The advantage of constructivism is that it better enables learners to deal with real-life situations because they are able to interpret multiple realities. If learners' problem-solving skills are well developed, they could well apply these in reality. The disadvantage of constructivism is that if learners find themselves in a situation where conformity is essential, divergent thinking may cause problems.

From this comparison I am able to construct the following key features of "cognitive skills":

- Cognitivism is based on thought processes;
- Repetition plays an important role in the learning process;
- Learning leans strongly on reinforcement; and
- Learners are trained to do a task in the same way to ensure consistency.

These features represent meanings which can be associated with “cognitive skills”. It gives us an idea of what “cognitive skills” means and in this way provides constitutive meanings of the concept. In other words, “cognitive skills” can and should be understood by these meanings.

The two constitutive meanings of “cognitive skills”, for me, are: (1) thought processes, and (2) repetition. These constitute the meanings whereby “cognitive skills” can be understood.

Scrutiny of the LITNUM Strategy in order to establish whether it accommodates the concept of “cognitive skills” reveals that the strategy is theoretically underpinned by the learning theory of constructivism. LITNUM recognises the work of Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist and social constructivist (WCED 2006a:12). Vygotsky’s theory rests on the fundamental premise that learning occurs on a social level. The question is: Is constructivism the best theory for developing a strategy to improve literacy and numeracy skills? In answering, I posit that even though I agree with the view of some educationists that there is a place for each of behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism within teaching practice, depending on the situation and environment (Mergel 1998:25), I favour the constructivist theory, though not exclusively. What makes the constructivist theory appealing is the fact that it contains elements of the ideological model of literacy. This to me is important, because we do not live in a world free of social and cultural influences. Favouring the constructivist learning theory does, however, not mean ignorance of other learning theories. Cognitivism is essential for developing functional or technical skills. Used in combination with other learning theories we could ensure that cognitive skills are applied in a “just” manner in the different social contexts that underlie literacy practices. This is especially true in the South African context with its history of oppression.

4.4.2 Social context

“Social context” is the defining concept of the ideological model of literacy. This model emphasises literacy as a social practice (Street 2006:12). The argument, as described in Chapter Three (3.2.3.2), is that literacy only has consequences as it acts

together with other social factors, including political and economic conditions, social structure and local ideologies. In order to fully understand the concept “social context”, we need to examine the underlying principles that constitute it.

To illustrate the social embeddedness of literacy, Hamilton (2006:138) proposes a social practice view of literacy. Within this view, we are encouraged to look at what people do with literacy. In other words, we should focus on the cultural contexts within which literacy is practised and consider how these practices are socially generated. According to Hamilton (2006:139), considering the following main elements of a social practice view of literacy will help to make sense of this view:

- Participants: who are involved, for example learners;
- Activities: what participants do, for example presenting a task;
- Settings: where participants practise literacy, for example in the classroom;
- Domains: the institutional spaces that organise social life and the literacy associated with it, for example at school; and
- Resources: the skills or objects needed to practise literacy, for example cognitive skills, posters).

From this social practice view, as well as the discussion in Chapter Three (3.2.4), I am able to construct the following five key features of “social context”:

1. People’s literacy practices are socially generated;
2. Motivations for becoming literate are related to access to a literate environment, be it school, home or the community;
3. Literacy is acquired and practised differently in different social settings;
4. Social context involves participants, activities, settings, domains and resources; and
5. Social context recognises difference and diversity.

These features represent meanings associated with the concept “social context” and give an idea of what it is all about. In this way, they provide constitutive meanings of

the concept “social context”. In other words, “social context” can be understood by these meanings.

The question arises: What are the constitutive meanings for “social context”? The two constitutive meanings of “social context”, for me, are: (1) access to a literate environment, and (2) difference and diversity.

The LITNUM Strategy discusses several social contextual factors related to literacy, such as family and community literacy, availability of learning and teaching resources, and classroom practice. It also pertinently states:

... the child coming from an impoverished, linguistically-limited and print-empty home is at a huge disadvantage when compared to the child from a print-rich, vocabulary-rich home in which the child is well-nourished, exposed to a generally stimulating environment and whose natural learning is well supported by informed parents (WCED 2006a:1).

In this sense LITNUM pays attention to the constitutive meaning of “access to a literate environment”. I am of the opinion that print-rich environments and exposure to books have a discernible impact on learners’ literacy accomplishments. If households cannot afford books, radios or televisions, or if community libraries are not as accessible as they should be, learners will be at a disadvantage. While schools cannot change the socio-economic status of their learners, they can create opportunities for literacy learning, like storybook reading and print-rich classrooms. For this reason, I am glad to note that the support programmes of LITNUM were formulated taking this aspect into consideration.

The LITNUM Strategy refers to difference and diversity in terms of one of its proposed intervention strategies, namely “Changes to Classroom Practice” (WCED 2006a:29). I am, however, of the opinion that efforts to honour difference and diversity should be extended beyond classroom practice. Educators should connect with the lives of learners outside of the classroom, recognising difference and diversity. This suggestion is strongly contained in another proposed LITNUM intervention strategy, namely “Advocacy, Family and Community Literacy” (WCED

2006a:32). The backbone of this intervention strategy is creating networks between home and school so that learners will feel their world is a consistent whole, rather than that it is split into halves. In my opinion, this is an important LITNUM intervention strategy, because children with parents who, as “mediators of literacy” are involved in their children’s schooling, have a much better chance of succeeding in school than those who do not. The concept “mediators of literacy” is used by Baynham (1995:59) and refers to persons who make their literacy skills available to others. I believe that if more parents realise that they have an increasingly bigger role to play as mediators of literacy, our schools, our children and our communities will eventually benefit.

LITNUM refers to a “handbook” for parents (WCED 2006a:30) that would show parents how they can support the development of literacy and numeracy of learners, in other words, how to act as mediators of literacy. Some researchers emphasise the importance of such a type of guide book, especially for modern-day parents, who have lost the conviction that they have anything to offer in the education of their children (Meier, 2003:232). However, the problem is that many parents in the Western Cape are either illiterate or semi-literate, which means that such a handbook will be of little or no benefit.

It is my contention that we seriously need to embed a culture of numeracy and literacy in every community. Children have lost the love of reading and stories. They are consumed by television, computers and electronic games. For this reason, the WCED plans to train teacher assistants, volunteer teachers, community development workers, and other such education agents in an effort to create learning networks with families (WCED 2006a:32). Through the active engagement of the whole community, as well as through creative ideas such as homework clubs it is hoped that the impact of these mediators of literacy will be greatly beneficial and that the literacy levels in learners’ homes will improve.

Many researchers favour the social context view of the ideological model of literacy because it does not see literacy as an end in itself. Rather, it sees literacy in terms of its transformative potential. In this way, the social context view is truly functional because it allows individuals to “question and engage in critical dialogue so that they

might be educated for participation in a democracy” (Powell 1999:20). Policy makers should therefore pay careful attention to the social construction of literacy if they want to make any difference in linking literacy to development.

4.4.3 Development

Aitchison (2003:11) reminds us that there is a widely held assumption that education (literacy) improves the chances for development, and that this is often a basic reason for prioritising education in a society. Bock (1982:84) refers to education as an instrument of development. I find his discussion useful, especially if I replace the concept of “education” with “literacy”. Bock (1982:78) commences his discussion by referring to the Western developmentalist perspective. According to this perspective, education (literacy) is called upon to alleviate poverty, to direct social and economic change, and to lead to self-improvement. The pressure is therefore on education (literacy) to solve the problems of development. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, education is the most important institutional means for improving the quality of human capital. Not only is education regarded as the chief social agent for preparing youngsters for adulthood, but also for helping them to develop the competencies required for youngsters to take up their role in changing societies. More than any other social agent, educational institutions can furthermore be manipulated by government, which is especially appealing to the ruling elites of some Third World countries. Education (literacy) therefore becomes the “central means of remedying” those problems associated with hindering upward mobility and overall national development (Bock 1982:85). In order to fully understand the concept “development” linked to literacy, we need to examine the underlying principles that constitute it.

From Bock’s discussion, as well as the discussion in Chapter Three (3.2.5), I am able to construct the following four key features of development linked to literacy:

1. Literacy as instrument of development alleviates poverty;
2. It gives people the confidence to improve their livelihoods;
3. It is crucial for economic, social and political participation and making informed choices; and

4. Literacy as instrument of development implies both functional and critical literacy.

These features represent meanings which can be associated with literacy as an instrument of development. In this way, it provides constitutive meanings of the concept “development” linked to literacy. In other words, literacy as an instrument of development can be understood by these meanings. The two constitutive meanings of “development” linked to literacy, for me, are: (1) improve livelihoods, and (2) functional and critical literacy.

As far as linking literacy to development with the aim of improving the livelihoods of people, I think it is important to trace the origins of LITNUM. As mentioned before, the WCED embarked on consultations to determine its long-term vision for education in the province in 2003. The eventual outcome was the HCDS for the Western Cape, which provides a detailed explanation of the limitations and challenges the Western Cape faces to ensure that people have the requisite knowledge, skills and values to compete in a rapidly globalising world (WCED 2006a:1). The LITNUM Strategy flowed from the HCDS, in other words, LITNUM flowed from a strategy aimed at developing the knowledge, skills and values of people, or put differently, the livelihoods of people.

One way of ensuring this is to develop both functional and critical literacy, since both types have an important role to play in development. A functionally literate person can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his or her group or community. Such a person is also able to use reading and writing for his or her own development, or for the development of the community (Bhola 1994:29). Critical literacy, on the other hand, aims to empower people and to make them masters of their destiny. It is sometimes called emancipatory, transformational or radical literacy (Bhola 1994:33). Both functional and critical literacy are referred to briefly within the context of constructivism, the learning theory on which LITNUM is based. In terms of functional literacy, both reading and writing are considered critical co-components of development (WCED 2006a:3). In terms of critical literacy, LITNUM states that critical dialogue, discussion and literacy are the crucial formative activities of a school learning context. Learners should be

encouraged to ask questions, to argue and to speak their minds on all issues under study (WCED 2006a:14). Even though brief reference is made to functional and critical literacy, I am of the opinion that LITNUM does not cover these aspects sufficiently. The notion of critical literacy is important because it can liberate people from social constraints that hinder them from living full and satisfying lives, especially in the South African context. Functional literacy is just as important as a prerequisite for critical literacy. Critical literacy can only be attained through reading and writing (functional literacy) (Freire 1995). My line of reasoning complements the discussion in Section 4.3 where I voice my concern over the lack of discussion of the concept “literacy” in LITNUM.

4.5 SUMMARY

It is well-known and well-documented that countries world-wide currently face considerable challenges as far as developing literacy in the context of development is concerned. Education departments are being challenged to become more responsive to literacy needs. This challenge, in the case of the Western Cape, is fairly well articulated in the HCDS and the consequent LITNUM Strategy. The question is: Does LITNUM conform to the constitutive meanings of literacy? My answer is “not completely”. These are my reasons:

- In terms of the constitutive meaning of “cognitive skills”, I found that LITNUM focuses extensively on constructivism as a learning theory. Focusing on the constructivist learning theory does, however, not mean that the role of cognitivism in the learning process should be ignored. When understandings of learning theories of literacy are seen exclusively from one perspective or viewpoint, it becomes compacted, and we miss out on important considerations of literacy in the context of its transformative potential.
- In terms of the constitutive meaning of “social context”, I found that the LITNUM Strategy discusses several social contextual factors related to literacy. This is encouraging, because in this sense it adheres to the ideological model of literacy

that does not regard literacy as an end in itself, but rather, in terms of its transformative potential.

- As far as the constitutive meaning of literacy as “development” is concerned, I found that the LITNUM Strategy flowed from the HCDS as a strategy aimed at developing the knowledge, skills and values of people, or put differently, the livelihoods of people. Although this is a sign of LITNUM’s concern with development, the notions of both functional and critical literacy as important elements of development, are not sufficiently addressed.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Only two years after the launch of the LITNUM Strategy in 2006, the South African Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, announced the Foundations for Learning Campaign: 2008-2011 to improve the reading, writing and numeracy skills of all South African school children. The campaign is a response to national, regional and international studies that have shown that South African learners are not able to read, write and count at expected levels. It seeks to provide energy, direction, and inspiration across all levels of the education system, as well as in homes and the public domain to ensure that, by 2011, all learners are able to demonstrate age appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy. The campaign provides educators with clear directives in terms of what is expected of schools to achieve expected levels of performance (Republic of South Africa 2008:4). I regard the Foundations for Learning Campaign as an indication that South Africa, and therefore also the Western Cape, continues to battle with the challenges of low levels of literacy and numeracy in schools, despite the implementation of the LITNUM Strategy. It also indicates that the LITNUM Strategy has not completely succeeded in its mission to raise the levels of literacy and numeracy amongst learners in the Western Cape. The question is: What then, can be done to make the LITNUM Strategy more effective?

In this chapter I make recommendations based on how the LITNUM Strategy accommodates the constitutive meanings for literacy, as determined in Chapter Four. In other words, my recommendations will be centred on cognitive skills (a “literacy of thoughtfulness”), social context, and development (promoting critical literacy). The recommendations will precede a short discussion on the transformative potential of literacy. Pathways for future research are also outlined and the chapter is closed with a summary of the main arguments in the chapter.

5.2 A “LITERACY OF THOUGHTFULNESS”

Cognitivism and constructivism are the two learning theories we read about in LITNUM, but absent are: (1) an explanation of what a learning theory is, and (2) an explanation of why we need learning theories. A learning theory, according to Bigge (1982), is a systematic integrated outlook concerning the nature of the process whereby people relate to their environments in order to function more effectively. Bigge claims that “everyone who teaches or professes to teach has a theory of learning” (1982:3). A learning theory therefore implies a set of classroom practices; the way in which educators interpret curricula, select teaching materials and choose instructional techniques depends on their view of learning. Hence, a theory of learning may function as an analytical tool to determine the nature of classroom practice. I think it is important that educators know about the significance of learning theories, because, as Pittenger and Gooding (1971:3) argue, it will enable them to reflect on the compatibility of their assumptions about the purpose of education, with information about how learning takes place.

LITNUM devotes much attention to the learning theory of constructivism. Apart from briefly referring to the importance of cognitive skills in acquiring numeracy skills, cognitivism is not discussed. Literacy, however, has a cognitive psychology, and as such, the cognitive dimensions of literacy deserve a rightful place in LITNUM. The cognitive determinants of literacy, according to Bertelson and De Gelder (1994:151-157) can be explained in the following way:

- The process of acquiring literacy is fundamentally different from that of acquiring speech communication;
- Difficulties related to learning to read generally do not originate in visual perception, but rather in the linguistic interpretation of text;
- The main difficulties appear to lie at the level of word identification, rather than at that of lower level (visual shapes; letters) or higher level (sentences; text) units;

- Learning to identify written words generally demands explicit representations of those words at the level at which they operate;
- Evidence from adult illiteracies show that some forms of phonological awareness rarely arise spontaneously, as a result of maturation or of the experience of speech communication; and
- The most probable reason for the importance of speech analysis capacities in reading acquisition is that they make it possible for the aspiring reader to assemble phonological representations so far unknown under their written form.

Another reason why the learning theory of cognitivism cannot be ignored is that it is essential for developing functional or technical skills. By using it in combination with other learning theories we could ensure that cognitive skills are applied in a “just” manner in the different social contexts that underlie literacy practices. Bigge (1982:13) refers to this idea of taking the best of each learning theory and combining them to form best practice, as an “emergent synthesis”. It is linked to the evolution of ideas, which comes with experience in the field of work.

On the negative side, Powell (1999:39) warns that (cognitive) skills advocates often fail to acknowledge that “process” (dynamics of learning) is related to “product” (outcome of learning). That is, process shapes thought. The implication is that the way we present knowledge is based on certain patterns of thinking, certain ways of knowing, and certain means of seeing and reacting to the world. This is where the concept of “schooled literacy” comes into play. Schooled literacy is the literacy that counts in schools (Powell 1999:53). It is characterised by standardised oral and written discourse patterns, as well as by a curriculum that can be readily transmitted and assessed. My critique of schooled literacy is that it has a controlling element – in other words, it discourages alternative visions. Those learners who are able to deal with schooled literacy tasks are typically the ones who succeed, while those whose primary discourse differs from schooled literacy most often fail.

A better alternative to schooled literacy is what Brown (in Powell 1999:40) refers to as a “literacy of thoughtfulness”, which is based on both thoughtfulness and

compassion. It is characterised by the value of knowing; making meaning; negotiating with others through reading, writing and discussion; and an affirmation of the “goodness of knowing”. A literacy of thoughtfulness is one that empowers. It invites dialogue, encourages critique and challenges learners to make meaning of their world.

I am of the opinion that literacy practitioners should be thoroughly aware of the distinction between schooled literacy and a literacy of thoughtfulness, since the former could negatively impact on the democratic ideals of justice and emancipation. In this sense, Wood (1988:169) distinguishes between a participatory democracy and a protectionist democracy. In a participatory democracy citizens are actively involved in critical dialogue and debate. A protectionist democracy, on the other hand, is characterised by apathy, creating the illusion that citizens are satisfied with the status quo. Schooled literacy prepares learners for a protectionist democracy. There is an absence of any real reflection on the potential of literacy for changing the life chances of learners, or establishing a more just society. In contrast, a literacy of thoughtfulness demands that learners learn how to “read the world” at the same time they “read the word” (Freire & Macedo, in Powell 1999:54).

The South African education system has undergone so many changes in the past decade that educators have turned to instructional guides and manuals as a coping mechanism. Since a classroom discourse governed by instructional guides and manuals is associated with schooled literacy (Powell 1999:40), my concern is that literacy teaching by way of LITNUM (with its guidelines and required actions for teaching literacy) has turned into teaching schooled literacy. This is not beneficial in the quest of recognising the transformative potential of literacy.

The discussion above links a literacy of thoughtfulness to a participatory democracy. Powell (1999:65) proposes five criteria for trying to teach literacy for a participatory democracy. Firstly, literacy instruction ought to promote freedom of thought through encouraging diverse perspectives and welcoming productive critique. In addition, literacy instruction ought to enhance learners’ communicative competence by considering the social, cultural, and hegemonic dimensions of language use. Literacy instruction ought to, in the third place, be consciously political. Fourthly, literacy ought to be taught in ways that make learners aware of the power of literacy for

transformation. Finally, literacy ought to be taught in ways that nurture a culture of compassion and care. I am especially interested in the second criterion, which deals with literacy instruction and learners' communicative competence, as a means of addressing the constitutive meaning of literacy: "social context".

5.3 SOCIAL CONTEXT

Chapter Four has revealed that the LITNUM Strategy recognises literacy as a social practice. The policy discusses several social contextual factors related to literacy. Whilst these are well worth considering, LITNUM does not really elaborate on the kind of society we would like to have – one that is characterised by the democratic principles of equity, justice and fairness. Instead, the focus is on a quest for higher literacy test scores. In other words, the pursuit of justice is being overshadowed by a need to become competitive within a global economy. Attempts to address social contextual factors are reduced to "simplistic solutions" (Powell 1999:58). I recall the idea of a handbook for parents as recommended by LITNUM. Recommendations such as this imply reformation instead of transformation. For schools to contribute to transformation, literacy must be seen as a means of empowerment. One way of ensuring this is to enhance learners' communicative competence (Powell 1999:80). In the South African context this is important because of the pluralistic nature of society (11 official languages). Learners need different communicative resources to enable them to communicate with those who are different from themselves. I link this firstly to Habermas's theory of communicative action, which is devoted to the goal of human emancipation (Waghid 2005:326), and secondly to the constitutive meaning of social context of "difference and diversity", as addressed in Chapter Four (4.4.2).

An important consideration in the effort of enhancing communicative competence is that language (or literacy) does not occur in a vacuum. People have different literacies of which they make use, associated with different domains of life. The literacy choices we make are shaped by the context in which they are being used. It follows that each of us has a primary discourse which is the discourse in place at home and which we acquire through interaction within the family. In addition, we have several secondary discourses which we acquire through interaction with school, work, church and other institutions outside of the family. In this sense Gee (1990:146) distinguishes

between “acquisition” and “learning”. The former involves a subconscious process of acquiring a language, while the latter involves a conscious process that requires explicit instruction. According to Gee, effective literacy instruction involves both learning and acquisition: “liberating literacy ... almost always involves learning, and not just acquisition” (1990:154).

Educators should be aware of these requirements for effective literacy instruction since they impact on classroom practice. Apart from engaging in formal instruction so that learners can learn a particular discourse, educators can also play a role in the acquisition of a particular discourse through demonstrating their own mastery and providing opportunities where learners can practise and participate. In this way, educators can contribute towards creating societies in which the democratic ideals of justice and equity prevail.

5.4 PROMOTING CRITICAL LITERACY

I argued in Chapter Four that LITNUM does not pay enough attention to the notion of critical literacy as constitutive meaning for literacy. Yet it is important because it could liberate people from social constraints that hinder them from living full and satisfying lives, especially in the South African context. Bhola (1994:33) describes critical literacy as close to political education, because it seeks to organise people for political action for transforming the world around them.

Elaborating on the idea of political education, Powell (1999:87) posits that literacy instruction that is consciously political involves: (1) inviting deliberation on critical social, economic and political issues, and (2) exposing learners to the latent values embedded in oral and written texts. For Powell, a form of instruction that meets these requirements is a “problem-posing pedagogy”, first proposed by Paulo Freire. A problem-posing pedagogy challenges learners to explore the forces of oppression in their own lives and in society. This type of pedagogy wants to assist learners in understanding their realities so that they might transform these realities. It is characterised by using learner experiences as a source for discussions and questioning, thereby seeking multiple perspectives. The question arises: Can a problem-posing pedagogy be fully applied in the primary school? Should it not be

limited to high school, university or adult education? Even though Peterson (in Powell 1999:90), through reporting on his experiences with his fifth grade class, suggests that a problem-posing pedagogy is possible through the creative use of music, poetry, film, drama, news articles, photos, and other print and media sources, I believe that a problem-posing pedagogy can only be engaged in once functional literacy is mastered.

Critique of the notion of political education has led to the use of the concept “pied-piper syndrome” (Peterson, in Powell 1999:93). It refers to the fear that educators may indoctrinate their learners if they promote social activism. Since it is not acceptable for educators to impose their values and beliefs on learners, it is important that educators know the difference between imposing ideas and providing a forum for debate. This indicates that political education is a contentious area, and that it should be handled with care.

I agree with the widely acknowledged view that the notion of critical literacy is important because it could liberate people from social constraints that hinder them from living full and satisfying lives, especially in the South African context. However, critical literacy as an empowering literacy has, in my opinion, not fully won over functional literacy. Functional literacy is a prerequisite for critical literacy. It is therefore my contention that the relationship between functional and critical literacy should be a complementary one.

5.5 TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF LITERACY

LITNUM, in my opinion, is a predominantly technical policy because its main objective is to raise the literacy and numeracy test scores of learners in the Western Cape. This objective overshadows the pursuit of justice. The technical or functional character of LITNUM needs to be balanced with the realisation that literacy is a social act and that it has a transformative potential.

For literacy to be transformative it has to be critical, not just progressive. Progressive literacy instruction is concerned with the best way of teaching literacy, while critical literacy instruction has as its aim using oral and written texts for liberatory purposes

(Powell 1999:99). For transformative literacy to be realised, learners must believe that they have a definite contribution to make – they must believe that their words will be heard and that the hearing of their words have the potential to inspire. In essence, a transformative literacy is one that makes learners recognise the authority of language in their own lives, and to trust in the power of their words to bring about change (Powell 1999:100).

One way of making sure that literacy is transformative is to ensure that both oral and written language have personal relevance for learners. They must be able to identify with oral and written texts. For these texts to be meaningful, they must speak to the experiences, dreams and desires of learners. Powell (1999:100-101) suggests using different types of books in attempting to achieve this objective: Culturally authentic books can be used as a means of helping learners realise the importance of literacy in their lives. Not only do such books provide opportunities for learners to read about their own realities as they are mirrored in the texts, but they can also help learners who struggle with identity issues to find their place in the world. Beyond this, books or texts that reflect human diversity can be beneficial in the sense that they can help learners to know themselves through examining their relations with others. Multicultural literature can reveal the transformative power of literacy in the sense that it can make learners realise that they, like the authors of these books, can make their voices heard through the written and the spoken word.

Powell warns that a literacy that encourages the voice of the learner without demonstrating how that voice can become a source for constructive change is one that is essentially immobilising. Bill Bigelow (in Powell 1999:107) remarks that we need to do more than encourage learners to “show-and-tell”; we should rather help learners to find meaning in individual experiences and relate it to society.

5.6 PATHWAYS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this chapter I argue that the launch of the Foundations for Learning Campaign: 2008-2011 is an indication that LITNUM is not as effective as was expected. As part of a range of recommendations of how LITNUM can be made more effective, I recommend clarifying the concept “learning theory”, since it impacts on classroom

practice. This recommendation addresses the claim by LITNUM that if one wishes to train or teach others, one must possess sound understandings of epistemological issues and know how they impact on thinking and practices in general (WCED 2006a:1). Such clarification should guide educators towards a better understanding of associated conceptual developments of literacy.

In addition, I recommend:

- A literacy of thoughtfulness as an empowering literacy, instead of schooled literacy, which discourages alternative viewpoints;
- An awareness of the distinction between acquisition and learning related to communicative competence in the context of the South African pluralistic society;
- A complementary relationship between functional literacy and critical literacy, since functional literacy is a prerequisite for critical literacy; and
- Promoting critical literacy in the quest of realising the transformative potential of literacy.

I would like to elaborate briefly on the first recommendation above, namely a literacy of thoughtfulness, which is based on compassion. I link the notion of compassion to Powell's suggestion that the transformative potential of literacy will only be realised if it is grounded in an ethic of compassion, care and a love for all humankind that is greater than our personal aspirations and desires (1999:121). This unconditional, selfless love of one person for another is referred to as agape. Even though it may not be acceptable to talk about agape in academic circles, I believe the concept needs to be discussed because it can be a driving force behind helping us to define the transformative potential of literacy and to work for the common good. According to Powell (1999:108) only agape can: help address the problem whereby the liberation of one can lead to the oppression of another; reveal the limitations of our egocentric visions and our own potential to oppress; motivate us to sacrifice our individual interests and to work for the greater good.

Developing an ethic of care might seem like a huge challenge, especially in the context of schooled literacy which tends to divide rather than unite. Noddings (1992:64) suggests that in addressing this challenge the guiding purpose of schools should be to establish and maintain a climate of continuity and care. She argues that caring in education differs from other brief encounters of caring in that it requires strong relationships of trust. Such relationships take time to build, and they require continuity. The challenge to care in schools therefore requires planning for continuity in the following aspects (Noddings 1992:72-73):

1. *Continuity in purpose.* It should be clear to learners that their schools are places of care;
2. *Continuity of school residence.* Learners should stay in one school building for longer than two or three years so that they can develop a sense of belonging;
3. *Continuity of educators and learners.* Educators should stay with learners for three or more years; and
4. *Continuity in curriculum.* Essential themes of caring should be embedded in the curriculum.

Noddings (1992:22-25) further argues that the challenge of developing an ethic of care in schools can, in addition to planning for continuity, also be addressed by a moral education characterised by modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. In modelling, we as educators should show our learners how to care by forming relations with them, while through dialogue we create connections and get to know each other, thus maintaining caring relations. Practice would help us develop the capacity to care, and confirmation would assist us in realising our vision of a better self. It is an act of affirmation based on solid relations which is only possible if we know others well.

The notion that the transformative potential of literacy will only be realised if it is grounded in an ethic of compassion, care and a love for all humankind that is greater than our own personal advancement. Against this background I wish to offer exploring the concept of a literacy of thoughtfulness as an empowering literacy, based on compassion, as a possible pathway for future research.

It is hoped that the recommendations provided above will help educators realise that the pursuit for justice should not be overshadowed by a need to develop learners who are, above all else, able to compete in the global economy. Rather, it should be driven by the challenge to move beyond self-servitude towards sacrificial action based on love.

In conclusion, I would like to list a few characteristics for an ideal literacy programme in the context of a developing country. These characteristics, proposed by Walker and Rattanavich (1992:96), might be useful to policy developers in the field of literacy. These are:

- The programme should be inexpensive (that is, accessible and viable even to the poorest schools and learners);
- The teaching methodology should suit the widest possible range of children (that is, it should respond to diverse needs, both linguistically and cognitively);
- The teaching methodology should be uncomplicated (that is, possible even where educators have not received much pedagogy);
- The reading programme should relate strongly to everyday life (that is, use learners' realities to ensure maximum ownership; and
- It should bring rapid results (that is, motivate educators and learners alike through the achievement of success and enhanced learning performance).

5.7 SUMMARY

The key research question for this thesis, posed in Chapter One, was: "Are pluralist perspectives on literacy in the context of the LITNUM Strategy useful or not?" My answer is a resounding "yes". Learners' under-performance in literacy tasks indicates, to me, an outcry for justice, equity and human understanding. Viewed in this way, literacy can transform societies. To achieve this, we must move beyond narrow, limiting conceptions of literacy toward recognising its transformative potential.

I arrived at my answer through engaging in a theoretical paradigm of critical theory, linked to education. Essentially, critical theory is devoted to revealing the possibility

of reason and advances the goal of human emancipation. It enabled me to look beyond the obvious, to possible better ways and ideas about literacy in the context of developmental aspirations. I also realised the importance and relevance of critical theory in education. Critical theory is important for treating learners with respect, for preparing them for adulthood, for mastering the rational traditions within education and for developing democratic citizenship.

Within the theoretical paradigm of critical theory, I used the research methods of conceptual analysis (linked to constitutive meanings), deconstructive critique and questioning. I concurred that literacy, in essence, is about understanding and learning, which are key building blocks of being critical and achieving the ideals of justice and equity. Using the research method of deconstruction, I showed that literacy is a complex phenomenon, which has evolved from a focus on reading and writing to an emphasis on literacy as a social practice, involving multiple literacies. I also showed that there are several different perspectives to the concept “literacy” and that it does not have a definable meaning. There is always more to the meaning of literacy, and as such it cannot be compacted into a particular perspective. The concept needs to be stretched to incorporate pluralist perspectives in order to achieve “justice”.

From the literature review I was able to identify several meanings of literacy. An important outcome of the reviewed literature is my construction of three constitutive meanings of literacy. These are: cognitive skills, social context and development.

Questioning the LITNUM Strategy in terms of whether it conforms to the constitutive meanings of literacy, I found that it does not completely do so. My findings are that LITNUM is concerned with technical skills and improved test scores. It needs to be balanced with the notion that literacy is a social act and that it has the potential to transform societies.

In this chapter I have made a few recommendations, based on the findings of my research, on how LITNUM can be made more effective. I recommended clarifying the concept “learning theory”, since it impacts on classroom practice. I also recommended, amongst others, a literacy of thoughtfulness as an empowering literacy, instead of schooled literacy, as well as promoting critical literacy. A literacy

of thoughtfulness should be based on compassion, since the transformative potential of literacy will only be realised if it is grounded in an ethic of compassion, love and care. This recommendation forms the basis for possible future research.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION ON MY JOURNEY THROUGH THE STUDY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter I reflect on my journey through this study and how it impacted on my personal development. In my reflection I touch on factors that profoundly affected my thinking. These include choosing a research topic, methodological difficulties, academic writing, finding my own voice, and the academic interaction. I also link my journey to the constitutive meanings of literacy. In summarising this chapter, I compare the process of undertaking this research to that of undertaking a journey. This chapter may conclude this thesis, but it also opens up possibilities to pursue further studies.

6.2 CHOOSING A RESEARCH TOPIC

Choosing a suitable research topic was a major challenge, though not an insurmountable one, because I knew what my field of interest was. I faced this challenge by compiling a list of possible topics. After a while I realised that I should not be concentrating on identifying a topic, since I would not be writing a thesis on a topic. Instead, I had to concentrate on identifying a problem, because the thesis would be based on a research problem. I then repeatedly revisited my list of topics in an attempt to identify a problem worth researching. This involved a lot of preliminary library research.

I found the guidelines for the selection of a research topic by Mouton (2001:39-40) very useful. Firstly he suggests selecting an intellectually stimulating topic. Secondly he suggests selecting a topic that is researchable in the sense that it would be able to not merely complete it with the available resources, but also complete it at a level of scholarship that is scientifically acceptable. Lastly he suggests selecting an interesting and worthwhile topic.

Following these basic guidelines, I eventually managed to identify a research problem, which meant that I could formulate a research topic.

6.3 METHODOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES

Another great challenge in preparing a proposal for this research was to position myself in terms of an appropriate research methodology. Part of addressing this challenge was the task of distinguishing between research method and research methodology. From a study of the literature I found that social science researchers use the concepts “research methodology” and “research method” differently. Some use “research methodology” to refer to a theoretical framework of thinking, while others use it to refer to techniques used for gathering data. Initially I was confused, but soon realised that in Philosophy of Education, the concept “research methodology” refers to a particular framework of thinking (paradigm). It differs from “research method”, which involves a specific technique for gathering evidence. Once I mastered this distinction, I had to reflect on an appropriate research methodology.

I was interested in analysing the LITNUM Strategy right from the start, because I noticed that there was a need for an in-depth understanding of the strategy and its implications for teaching and learning amongst educators. I was therefore attracted by interpretivism – trying to find reasons to explain or to interpret certain phenomena, in this case, the LITNUM Strategy. I was of the opinion that it was important to understand what the strategy was all about before one could decide how to deal with it. While it may be important to think in this way, I realised that I would fail miserably at my task if I did not consider the element of “emancipation”, which is what LITNUM wants to achieve through its aim of trying to raise levels of literacy and numeracy. In other words, it was important that I engage in critical theory with its ideals of enlightenment and emancipation. Besides, like Edmundson and D’Urso (2007:1), I also had a dream of an “educated hope” that would change prevailing conditions so that learners could be educated and cared for differently in an unjust world. For this research, I therefore positioned myself within a critical framework of thinking or paradigm so that I could look beyond the obvious, to possible better ways and ideas about literacy.

Not only can my reflection on methodological issues be linked to the constitutive meaning of literacy of “cognitive skills” (thought processes), but also to Fay’s idea of “reflexive self-reference” (1996:39). This means that we continuously create and recreate ourselves, our thoughts and our ideas through our experiences and our interaction with others. Positioning myself in terms of a research methodology did not happen automatically, but as a result of self-reflection.

6.4 ACADEMIC WRITING

When I started out writing this thesis I was inclined to using metaphors, which I discovered, is not academically acceptable. At times I found it very difficult to express myself in an academically acceptable manner. My supervisor cautioned me on several occasions against the use of “inflated, rhetorical introductory remarks (commonly known as ‘fluff’)”, a concept referred to by Portmore (2001:4). I realised that there is truth in a remark made by Mouton (2001:7), namely that academic writing does not come naturally – it is an acquired skill. I therefore needed to improve my academic writing skills.

I consequently subscribed to the *Dissertation Bulletin*, an informal bi-weekly resource for thinking about researching, writing and editing a thesis. In Volume 3 of the *Dissertation Bulletin*, Hofstee (2008) refers to the Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov, who once said that “style and structure are the essence of a book (piece of writing)”. This quotation captures a great truth about all writing: it’s about style and structure. These contribute to clarity, which is what good academic writing is all about. This made me realise that, even if I have the ideas, my writing will have little impact if I do not present my ideas clearly.

One of the many discussions I had with my supervisor was on the topic of academic writing skills, and how most experienced scholars have taken decades to become proficient at an academic style of writing. My supervisor, while writing his dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, resorted to literature in an effort to find ways of improving his writing skills, and compiled a reader of all the articles that helped him to develop his skills. I consulted this reader, and found the extract from a book called *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White (1959) particularly

useful. They discuss several elementary rules for language usage, of which three rules deserve to be mentioned. First, they suggest using positive constructions – these are clearer and shorter and therefore convey the meaning of the writer in a better way. Instead of writing, “I do not agree ...”, rather write “I agree that ...”. Secondly, they suggest using the active rather than the passive voice, arguing that it is more direct and vigorous (Strunk & White 1959:13). Instead of writing, “It was found that ...”, it is better to say, “I found that ...”. Thirdly, they suggest the omission of needless words, stating that vigorous writing is concise and to the point.

I made a conscious effort to apply these and other rules, and in this way managed to improve my writing skills.

6.5 FINDING MY OWN VOICE

During the writing of this thesis, I was also confronted with the challenge of finding my own voice. Lawrence (2008) refers to one’s own voice as the voice that allows one to express one’s own values, philosophies and social theories. She furthermore states that writing in your own voice lends integrity to your argument.

I found it difficult to find my own voice. My supervisor repeatedly focused my attention on the importance of my own voice in presenting my arguments. In an attempt to overcome this hurdle, I started reading up on the topic. I found the book *Doing Academic Writing: Connecting the Personal and the Professional*, by Richards and Miller (2005), useful in this regard. In Chapter Seven of their book they have a detailed discussion on writing in one’s own voice”, emphasising the importance of situating oneself in one’s writing (Richards & Miller 2005:180). They argue that if we do not put ourselves into our own writing, our arguments not only lack voice and passion, but we might be unable to communicate or relay our arguments effectively.

During my reading, trying to find an answer to the question whether there is a way to work on finding one’s own voice, I came across the following interesting quotation by Meeks (2008):

One of the great voices of the century is Ernest Hemingway ... What made his work last so long ... his ability to hone and hone and hone his work until every word was what he wanted – and the words carried power.

What this meant for me was to read over my writing repeatedly, which I made a concerted effort of doing when I had time to spare. I would read over my written text again and again. I was amazed at how this helped to identify errors of style and structure. Correcting these errors not only led to improved clarity, but my ability to situate myself in my writing also improved.

Both challenges of academic writing and finding my own voice can be linked to the constitutive meaning of literacy of “development” (functional and critical literacy). Even though I was functionally literate in terms of being able to write, I had to develop the skill of academic writing, as well as the skill of situating myself in my writing. This empowered (or emancipated) me to write well-structured, clear texts in which my own voice was evident.

6.6 ACADEMIC INTERACTION

Mouton (2001:7) posits that most postgraduate students experience the writing of a thesis, based on independent research, as an extremely lonely undertaking. Fortunately, I had the privilege of interacting with peers, academics in the Department of Education Policy Studies, and visiting academics, especially during the first year of my course. I also had several opportunities to participate in group discussions and lectures. These opportunities, coupled with regular meetings with my supervisor, enabled me to broaden my knowledge and develop my academic skills.

One of the highlights of the course was meeting academics from abroad. Professor Sue Books, who teaches at the State University of New York at New Paltz in the United States of America (USA), visited the department in September 2007. I had the privilege of listening to her lecture on “Funding for Public Schools in the United States”. Soon afterwards, in October 2007, Professor Paul Smeyers visited. He is a Research Professor in Philosophy of Education at the University of Ghent (Belgium).

He shared his ideas around his research focus on Wittgenstein scholarship, postmodern philosophy and education, and education research. The great wealth of experience which these visiting professors brought with them made me realise that it is important to value and engage in lifelong learning. To me, one of the prerequisites for lifelong learning is the ability to listen to others. Listening and learning from respected scholars can teach one a great deal.

As I did in Chapter Five (5.3), I link this notion of “listening” to Habermas’s theory of communicative action, which is devoted to revealing the possibility of reason, and advancing the goal of human emancipation (Waghid 2005:326). The theory of communicative action refers to the “interaction between at least two individuals who can speak and act and who establish an interpersonal relation” (Habermas 1987:87-90). In other words, when people talk, they should be both listeners and communicators.

Interaction with academics has also helped me to grow professionally. It has given me the confidence to think critically, which in turn helped me to become more assertive in my role as education manager. It therefore contributed to a change in how I operate in my professional space or work environment. For this reason, academic interaction can be linked to the constitutive meaning of literacy of “social context”.

6.7 SUMMARY

In this reflection I touched on my concern with regard to methodological difficulties. The value of pluralist perspectives on literacy was the focal point of this research, especially in the light of its transformative potential. As such I was directed towards a critical paradigm or framework of thinking. Academic writing and finding one’s own voice is very important for writing a “critical” thesis such as this one, and I made a conscious effort to develop both skills. Academic interaction is vital for intellectual development, and I was fortunate to be able to interact with visiting and other academics. Meeting only two international academics from a pool of millions of academics world-wide may seem as if I have touched only the tip of the iceberg, but I am confident that I will be presented with many more opportunities for such academic interaction, especially since it is my intention to pursue further studies.

To conclude, I shall use Mouton's (1996:24) analogy on scientific research and undertaking a journey to describe this research journey. When undertaking a journey, there is usually a traveller, a mode of travel, a route and a destination. As researcher (traveller), I used the research methodology of critical theory (mode of travel) on my journey. I followed a specific route or plan to reach my destination: the research methods of conceptual analysis (linked to constitutive meanings), deconstructive critique and questioning. My destination was the research question, namely, "Are pluralist perspectives on literacy in the context of the LITNUM Strategy useful or not?" Reflecting on my destination at the end of the journey, my answer is that pluralist perspectives on literacy in the context of the LITNUM Strategy are very useful. The failure of learners to perform well in literacy tasks indicates, to me, an outcry for justice, equity and human understanding. Viewed in this way, literacy needs to transform societies. To achieve this, we must move beyond narrow, limiting conceptions of literacy towards recognising its transformative potential.

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