

**A JOURNEY IN FAMILY LITERACY:
INVESTIGATION INTO INFLUENCES ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF AN APPROACH TO FAMILY
LITERACY**

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DECLARATION

I, Alethea (Snoeks) Desmond, declare that this dissertation is representative of my own work in both conception and execution.

All insights gained from others have been fully referenced.

ABSTRACT

In this critical reflective self study I have examined the Family Literacy Project (FLP) to determine the influences that contributed to the development of an approach to family literacy. This study responds to the question

What influences contributed to the development of an approach to family literacy relevant to the needs of families in rural KwaZulu Natal?

By identifying and exploring and critically reflecting on these influences I provide insights that can inform policy and practice in the adult education and early childhood development sectors in South Africa.

The study includes my critical reflections on finding a voice within a self study and how this has contributed towards the development of a methodology. In the process, I have developed a deeper understanding and appreciation of what has been achieved in the FLP during the first eight years under my directorship, and why. In the study, I report on these insights.

The FLP project in this study is situated in deeply rural KwaZulu Natal, where the existing extensive knowledge base is almost exclusively oral, and informed by well established insights, understandings and values. In this context, I have examined the roles of families, adult literacy and early childhood development to establish their impact on the development of literacy in families. Through critical reflection, I then identified the principles – active learning, holistic development, community and children’s rights – underpinning the FLP and was able to establish how these impacted on the development and success of the project. I then examined the roles, practices and characteristics of the FLP facilitators, and the experiences of facilitators and those who engaged in the project. I also looked at the roles played by the community, the external evaluators, and the effect of exposure of the project in the public domain through attendance at

conferences, publication of journal articles, and awards made to the project because of its successes.

I conclude the study by suggesting how the insights from the study might provide support for others engaged in such initiatives and indicating how the topic may be further investigated.

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GLOSSARY

There are terms that will be used frequently in this study and these are defined early on in the study to make clear their meaning within the Family Literacy Project.

FLP group members: community members who regularly attended the twice-weekly FLP group sessions

FLP facilitators: Women chosen by community members to lead (facilitate) the FLP group sessions

Unit: the plan used to guide the development of the FLP group sessions

Sessions: twice-weekly, two-hour meetings of the FLP group members, led by one of the FLP facilitators.

PREFACE

The Family Literacy Project® was established, and the name registered, in March 2000. It started as a small experiment, in the southern Drakensberg area of KwaZulu Natal, aimed at developing a South African approach to family literacy, but by the end of 2007 the project had become an multi-award winning, internationally recognized project.

This study identifies, and reflects critically on, what influenced and contributed to the development of the core components of the project, and its success in supporting young children and their families to develop a love of books and reading.

The main focus of the Family Literacy Project (FLP) is on the role of the adult in the development of early literacy skills in young children and how the interaction benefits both children and adults. The slogan of the project, *Masifunde Ngengomndeni* (families reading together) and the stated aim of the project to make literacy a shared pleasure and a valuable skill attest to this.

The intended main beneficiaries of the work are young children, but, as most of the work in the project is done directly with adults, they are the people who benefit more directly initially, and as they reflect on their own knowledge, they add to that and so become more confident parents, and their children then benefit. As explained in Chapter 5, family literacy programmes¹ are not widely implemented in South Africa but have gained recognition especially in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Family literacy practices² are to be found to a greater or lesser degree in most families.

¹ Family literacy programmes: programmes run by a range of providers. They target children and parents, at times on their own and at times together.

² Family literacy practices: literacy related activities taking place naturally in homes

Aim of this study

The aim of this study is to identify and critically and reflectively explore the different influences that shaped the development of the core components of the FLP, and contributed to its success. To this end, I have chosen the following question to guide this study:

What influences contributed to the development of an approach to family literacy relevant to the needs of families in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal?

By identifying and exploring and critically reflecting on these influences, I hope to provide insights that can inform policy and practice in the adult education and early childhood development sectors in South Africa. The link between the two - adult education and early childhood development – and their role in community development and nation building are articulated by Rule and Lyster (2005:3):

Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) have long been regarded as the step-sisters of the South African education system. Both are marginal enterprises compared with mainstream schooling in terms of financial resources, policy development, publicity and prestige. However, both ECD and ABET are arguably crucial to development in the related spheres of personal, community and national life. Family literacy provides a framework for exploring the links between ECD and ABET.

This study builds on the research I conducted at the start of the FLP in 2000 – 2001. The initial research is documented in “The Impact of the Family Literacy Project on Adults in Rural KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study” which I completed in fulfillment of a University of Natal M.Ed. (Adult Education) degree. This current study for the doctoral degree takes the investigation further into the approach and method developed within the project, and is a critical reflection on these factors. This current study aims to provide evidence useful to policy makers and implementers concerned about the literacy levels in the country, regardless of whether they work with adults or young children.

Contribution of this study

Initiatives to support family literacy in South Africa have not been well documented. This study is a contribution towards meeting the need for a critical and reflective study of a South African based family literacy project in order to begin to fill a gap in both local and international knowledge. This study will be relevant and useful to early childhood and adult basic education sectors in this country and internationally. The effects of low literacy are disempowering all over the world and affect women most severely and contribute to the kinds of gender imbalances which impact on their children and their development. This study is a contribution towards the discussion on the value of involving families in the development of early literacy skills in their children. I have made this contribution by examining, and critically reflecting on, what influenced and contributed to the approach to family literacy developed and practised by the FLP in KwaZulu-Natal.

Scope and limitations of this study

This study includes the factors that influenced and contributed to an approach to family literacy developed in a deeply rural area of KwaZulu-Natal in the foothills of the southern Drakensberg over the period from March 2000 to March 2008.

This study has been conducted and written from my own perspective of the founder and first director of the FLP. The influences, reviewed in this study, are drawn from my experience over many years in the field of early childhood development both in South African and in the United Kingdom as well as my experiences during the development and implementation of the FLP. I acknowledge the influence of a number of people who worked with me in developing this approach to family literacy and their names, their roles and contributions, will appear throughout this study.

There are people who worked with me who receive little mention and this is deliberate on my part as I had to choose where to focus my investigation. One person who is not mentioned in the study is Lynn Stefano who was appointed as Project Development Manager in 2006. She took over as director when I left the FLP at the end of 2007. The reason for not including a mention of her and her role in the project is that during the period covered in this study she was responsible for setting up and managing new FLP groups. These new FLP groups implement the approach to family literacy developed and explored in this study and could provide material for a follow-up study rather than including them in this study.

I have also excluded from this study any discussion of the groups established by the FLP for primary school children and for teenagers. I have also not included discussion of the expansion programme as this would constitute a study in its own right.

I have limited this study to an identification and critical reflection of what I consider to be the key influences. Where other factors have been identified, I note this and provide an explanation of why further discussion of them is not appropriate or possible to include in this study.

Review of literature in this study

I have included references to relevant literature throughout this study rather than writing a literature review chapter. This is in line with Bruce (1994:144) who states:

It is usual for students to have to write a literature review as part of their thesis. This is normally a chapter appearing early in the thesis, but in some styles of thesis, may appear throughout the work.

I have included references from early on in my work in early childhood development as an acknowledgement of their importance in my life at that time. The references from more recent texts demonstrate a continuation of my exploration into, and inspiration from writers I have read more recently.

Presentation of this study

Preface

Part One

- Chapter 1: My voice
- Chapter 2: The emergence of a methodology
- Chapter 3: The family in family literacy
- Chapter 4: Literacy in family literacy
- Chapter 5: Family literacy
- Chapter 6: The first visits

Part Two

- Introduction
- Chapter 7: Active learning: developing early literacy
- Chapter 8: Active learning: Reflect
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Part Three

- Introduction
- Chapter 14: Discussion of findings
- Chapter 15: Conclusion and Recommendations

Language, style and tone

I have chosen to record this study in the first person in plain English so that my role as project founder, director and researcher is clearly heard. I have included the comments of the FLP project group members in English even though they were originally spoken and written in Zulu. These comments have been professionally translated into English to

retain as much of the original tone as possible; photographs and drawings to add depth to points in the text; findings from external evaluations as well as extracts from journal articles I wrote, and presentations I made locally and internationally throughout the period under investigation.

Repetition within this study

This study has as its focus the FLP, an organisation that has grown organically and in response to perceived needs within an identified area of KwaZulu-Natal. I have tried to limit repeating descriptions of events but at times to do so would detract from a holistic description of a particular aspect of the project. For this reason, some events have been described more than once in the study, and only where I know they add to my and the readers' understanding. It has been difficult to record in a written, linear account, the story of a living, growing organisation and some repetition has been unavoidable.

Overview

Components of the FLP are identified and discussed throughout the study. So that the chapters in this study can be read in the light of the whole project, I provide an overview in the following article I wrote for publication in the journal, *Language Matters*. (Desmond 2004) This was not the first article I had published in a peer-reviewed journal but was the first in an accredited academic journal³.

LITERACY FOR NOW, AND FOR THE FUTURE – WORKING WITH PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Introduction

Many adults in South Africa cannot read and write, or struggle to do so. South Africa has the legislative framework for adult basic education and training in that adults have a constitutional right to basic adult education but this right does not appear to be translated into adequate enough action to cater for the 7.5 million adults who need it. (Rule 2003) There are many anecdotal reports of poor attendance at, and high drop out from adult education classes. It is important when working in adult education that the teaching approach is appropriate but also that the content of the lessons is interesting and useful to the adults.

³ I discuss the use of articles written during this study in Chapter 2

Also of concern in South Africa is how to help children develop early literacy skills. One reason for this concern is the finding in the research conducted by the national Department of Education over a three year period (1997 – 2000) that showed that overall literacy scores of preschool children did not improve even when preschool teachers received training in early childhood development. (Khulisa Management Services 2000)

These two concerns – one for helping adults improve their own literacy, and the other for helping young children develop literacy - led to the establishment of The Family Literacy Project (FLP) in Kwa-Zulu Natal in March 2000. The project set out to explore how family literacy, initially piloted in the United States of America (US), could be used effectively to address these two concerns. This article describes the nature of the intervention and presents some of the findings of project evaluations in an attempt to gauge how they affected parent-child interactions around literacy activities. The main question raised is whether or not the FLP is achieving its aim of making literacy a valuable skill and shared pleasure.

Family literacy outside South Africa

Most research into family literacy has been conducted in the US and the United Kingdom. The term family literacy was coined in the US and there is a well-funded and extensive range of projects offering variations of family literacy interventions. Different models of family literacy include the following:

Parents in schools: Problems that children experience in school are identified. Interventions are designed that target parents so that they can help their children overcome these problems. Those parents are given appropriate guidance in participating in activities such as helping in libraries, producing newsletters and notices, and taking part in classroom activities such as reading. (Auerbach 1995; Paratore 1995)

Children and parents in groups: Parents and children are shown ways to play, talk, or read together. This can be in structured activity sessions outside the home. In some programmes parents and children are asked to engage in activities such as storybook reading, using the library, and writing up literacy and other activities. These are then discussed during group sessions and guidance provided. If parents and children read at home they are monitored and receive advice on different techniques. (Baker, Serpell and Sonnenschein 1995; Harrison 1995; Neuman 1995)

Children and parents at home: Materials and activities in the home are the resources parents and children are encouraged to use to develop literacy skills. Programmes provide strategies for helping parents to help their children enjoy reading and other literacy-related activities. (Graves and Wendorf 1995; Harrison 1995; McKee and Rhett 1995)

In all the models, adult and early literacy are combined in some way, and the establishment of the programmes is prompted by a concern over the levels of

adult literacy. The importance of parental involvement is highlighted, based on the assumption that the child's first and longest-standing teacher is her parent.

Morrow (1995) states that it is difficult to define family literacy clearly and simply as it is a concept of many parts. She uses a definition provided by The Family Literacy Commission in the US that focuses on the family rather than on the school as being where early literacy skills are developed. Part of this definition states that 'Family literacy encompasses the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community. Sometimes, family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children "get things done".' (Morrow 1995:7)

In the US the initial approach to family literacy was to encourage partnerships between parents and schools to help children learn to read. By 1991 this approach had broadened to include what Morrow (1995:5 citing Braun) described as providing 'environments which enable adult learners to enhance their own literacies, and at the same time provide environments which promote the literacies of their children'.

In an Australian study Spreadbury (1996:215) found 'that it was not merely reading to a child that facilitates that child's own independent reading, but rather the amount and quality of the interaction between parent and child that correlated with the child's reading ability at both age six and eight'. The importance of parental attitudes is another variable referred to in several studies that demonstrate that factors such as these are more important than the material environment of the child. (Nistler and Maiers 1999) Amstutz (2000:38) refers to a study conducted in 1997 by Ebener, Lara-Alecio and Irby that found that 'parents instilled the importance of education in their children by setting high expectations for academic achievement, connecting education with success, and acting as a role model in acquiring an education'. A similar finding is referred to by Gadsen (1994:4) when she describes findings by Wigfield and Asher that 'demonstrated that parents' attitudes and expectations for their children's performance are good predictors of children's attitudes toward learning, effort in school, and classroom performance'.

Based on the research described above, an important step in the current project was to see how to apply the findings to make family literacy work in South Africa for adults and children, and to address the needs of both groups.

The Family Literacy Project in KwaZulu Natal

The FLP was established in 2000 and began working in three rural areas in the Southern Drakensberg, namely Stepmore, Lotheni and Mpumlwane. These districts have little infrastructure and most houses are made of mud and thatch with no electricity or running water. The roads from the small towns of Underberg, Himeville and Creighton to these areas are poor, and the taxi and bus services erratic.

Phase One

In the first year, six workshops were run for each group. Apart from two men who attended one of the groups once, the members were mothers and grandmothers. The initial focus was very much on how adults could support the development of their children's early literacy skills rather than improve their own. However, it was hoped that as a side effect, the adults would also acquire useful skills for themselves. In other words, the adult literacy component in the FLP was initially not formalized.

During 2000 the adults discussed ways in which they could support the development of early literacy skills in their children and every session included a chance to try out a play activity related to developing early literacy skills. Although the parents were not asked about their own levels of literacy it was clear that many were struggling with reading and writing. With this in mind, activities were designed to help adults as well as children develop skills such as letter recognition, matching, sequencing and interpreting pictures. For example parents made books with pictures from magazines. Working in pairs, they practised how best to use them with their children, asking questions about the book as well as modelling how to handle it.

These activities were new to the adults and they found it interesting to hear more about the development of early literacy skills. Some existing home practices were highlighted, for example, how when a child sweeps she is developing eye-hand co-ordination, or when walking to fetch water, the mother can introduce new words to the child, and the event can be recalled in the evening to promote sequencing and the use of description.

Two of the groups were established alongside under-resourced but imaginatively run preschool classes and during the workshops the adult group observed the teachers working with the children. The first activity observed was story book reading, and the adults were so interested in this that at the next session one group arrived an hour early so that they could watch the teacher and children busy with a different activity. The teachers showed the parents the portfolios they kept of each child's work and the parents then began to look for the work done by their child and displayed on the classroom walls. In the session following the one on making books, the parents were delighted to see how the teacher had completed the same activity with the children. The teachers tried out activities from the workshops and parents in one group insisted that their work go up on the walls alongside that done by their children.

The third group, at Mpumlwane, was an adult literacy group established by a development organisation from the area. The organisation and the group agreed to work with the FLP. The crèche, situated in close proximity to the church where the group met, was run by two women with no early childhood development training and was a safe but unstimulating environment. Sixty children crammed into a small *rondavel* left little space for any activities. The adults, however, were excited by the workshops on early literacy. This group followed the same programme as in the other two groups but without any input from the preschool workers.

A problem in the first two groups described above was that attendance was erratic. There was always a group of women present, but many were there 'representing' others, or came because on that day there was no casual work available in the forest or fields. Attendance at the third group was consistently high and apologies were always given if someone was absent. One reason may have been due to the fact that the last-mentioned group had been meeting for adult literacy lessons since 1997 and so had established a strong sense of the importance of regular attendance. In an attempt to address the problem of erratic attendance and the literacy needs of the adults, it was decided to explore the possibility of introducing an adult literacy component into the other two groups. However, it was important that the work around early literacy be retained as this had successfully engaged parental attention.

To take this idea of combining adult and early literacy needs further, the FLP requested and was allocated funds to pay a consultant to conduct a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) to determine the level of need for adult literacy in the two groups not already providing adult literacy teaching. Each of the three groups was asked to select a local woman who could work with the FLP in 2001. Two other communities in the area requested that we establish groups for them and two other women were chosen to lead these new groups. These five women were then trained as fieldworkers and helped conduct the appraisal. This was done to enable the FLP, to assess their capabilities and for the women to learn how to assess the needs of their communities.

The enthusiasm and excitement generated by the participatory rural appraisal formed the basis for the changes in the FLP programme. By March 2001 the five women chosen by their communities had attended four weeks of adult literacy teacher training at Operation Upgrade, a Durban based non-governmental agency specializing in adult literacy. Their brief was to establish adult literacy groups at the two sites where the initial workshops had been run and to strengthen the existing adult literacy class. They were also to work with new groups established close to the existing groups. The expansion of the FLP into these new sites was partly the result of one of the findings of the participatory rural appraisal where preschool teachers and other community members requested that family literacy groups be established near to their preschools.

In addition to the training as adult literacy facilitators, the five women were also trained in the use of early literacy and Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques (Reflect) - a participatory method of group work influenced by the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire. The FLP team consisting of the coordinator and the five family literacy facilitators worked with other experts on an approach that resulted in units of six or seven workshop sessions developed around topics that reflected the interests of the women, for example poverty, water, HIV/Aids, early childhood development and child protection. The approach used is participatory but at the same time people are lead along a very clear developmental path towards becoming literate or more literate. Each unit includes a session on early literacy and how adults can prepare children for reading and writing.

During the Reflect-based PRA the women were asked to think about why they needed to be literate. Taking into consideration the women's own levels of

literacy, the Reflect tool used was the 'tree'. Depending on their ability, the women placed drawings, words or short phrases on cards and these became the leaves of the tree, showing what happens when one cannot read well. They were then asked to use the same method to show the 'roots' of their problems. This graphic representation was discussed and some of the points that emerged, as noted in the PRA report by Labuschagne (2000), are presented below:

- The adults have problems following the signs in clinics and hospitals. In addition the information on clinic cards is not clearly understood. The result is that time is wasted sitting in the wrong queues or missing appointments. More serious is that the correct medicinal dosage is not always taken.
- Reading and completing forms is a major problem and the result is delays in receiving grants and pensions or enrolling children at school
- Women have a fear of being cheated at shop tills and taxis
- Parents are embarrassed in front of their children as they are not able to help with homework tasks or read letters from the school
- There is a danger when visiting towns and cities as road signs and even traffic lights are not understood
- The women also talked about wanting to read hymns and the Bible when in church.

One of the main reasons the women gave for their not attending or completing primary school was poverty. Other reasons given were that parents did not see the need for education, cultural beliefs (stated but not explained) or that school is not important for girls.

Not all the above information was highlighted equally in all the groups but ran as a thread throughout the discussions. The need for literacy was almost all functional – form filling, reading signs and so on. No mention was made of the notion of reading for enjoyment or relaxation.

Phase Two

The findings of the participatory rural appraisal influenced the topics subsequently chosen for the units. The literacy needs mentioned were very practical and the FLP wanted to make sure the sessions were interesting. The sessions dealt with additional issues which the project team felt would be relevant and also retained the link with early literacy. Figure 1 is a diagram of the unit. This diagram is followed for each issue that is discussed. The units are prepared by project staff and followed by each facilitator.

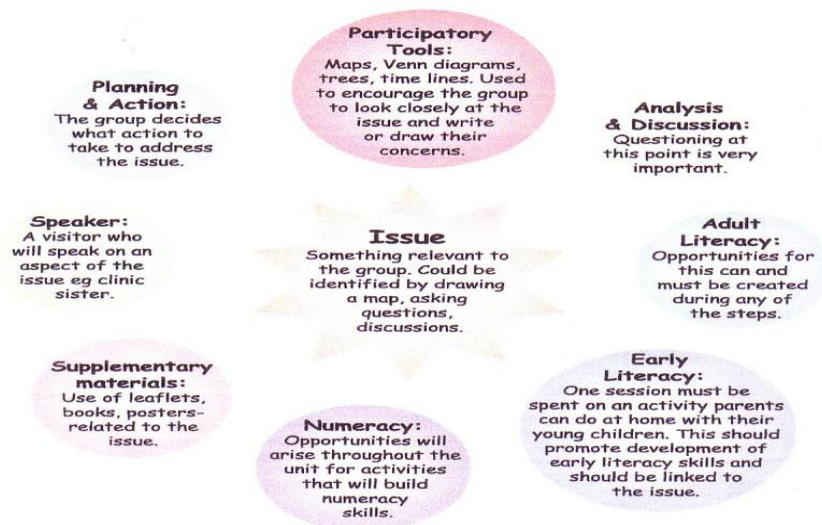


Figure 1: Unit diagram (Sonja Labuschagne and Jess Nicholson)

Lack of appropriate material

One of the problems experienced in the groups was lack of appropriate material. The project team searched for appropriate material for rural women to read or look at in the session labelled 'Supplementary Material'. A decision was taken to develop simple texts or adapt existing material to reflect rural life. Drafts of all the material were translated into Zulu and then read by some of the women in the groups who underlined words they found difficult to understand. The text was illustrated, showing rural scenes, and the books printed and copies given to each group member. The titles of the booklets indicate the link to early literacy, for example 'Prepare your child to read' and 'Parents and young children'. The intention was that the women would have texts to read and discuss as part of the units and be reminded and informed of ways they could play a vital role in their children's development. The importance of these books in a print-poor environment is evident in the behaviour of the women who carry the books carefully in a bag to all sessions.

Journal writing

Early on, the practice of keeping journals with children was introduced and this continues to be an important activity. The journals are known as *Umzali Nengane* (Parent and child). The parent or child chooses a magazine picture or takes one provided by the project. This is pasted into an exercise book and discussed by the adult and child. The adult writes down as much as she can of the discussion, this being dependant on her level of literacy. To extend this activity the FLP provided encouragement and guidance on how to talk and listen to young children, highlighting the fact that a child enjoys it when an adult takes time to talk and listen to her. We encouraged people to talk about everyday things such as washing and eating and fetching water as well as about special events, such as going to town or going to a wedding. We suggested that people try to ask questions to make children think. We stressed the importance of listening to children when they talk. We gave some ideas for starting a

conversation with a child such as by saying 'Look at this....' to get their attention or asking questions to stretch the imagination, such as 'What if.....' and 'Can you imagine if

These guidelines were translated into Zulu and formed part of the literacy activities as well as reinforcing adult support for early literacy development.

Borrowing books

Each preschool alongside the FLP groups had already, through the project, received donations of books for their children to read in the preschool and also to borrow to take home. When project staff noted that not many of the books were being borrowed from the preschool, a decision was taken to put book boxes into each of our family literacy groups. The book boxes included simply written Zulu books for adults and children's books in both English and Zulu. As the women were borrowing children's books to read to, or look at with, their own children, this was not embarrassing in any way, even though many of the women could only look at the pictures or read the simple text rather than reading books for adults. As the women become more confident about writing, they helped the facilitator record the book loans. A few months after the book boxes had been introduced, one facilitator complained that her group would not settle easily into the sessions as they were too busy discussing the book they had read. This was the start of the book clubs that now operate once a week in all seven groups. In the book club sessions, group members take turns to discuss a book and encourage others to borrow it.

Other literacy activities

To help the group find ways of using literacy skills, a number of other activities were introduced.

1. Each group has a community notice board with small posters providing information for those not attending the group, for example a poster on using a condom, or the importance of boiling water from the river.
2. Every adult writes to someone in another group and these letters to pen friends provided an opportunity to practice writing addresses as well as exchanging interesting information.
3. One of the FLP facilitators is responsible for producing a monthly newsletter and 'letters to the editor' are sent to her each month from the groups.
4. A series of story telling workshops were held and the stories collected were translated into English and a small book was produced. One of the women commented that she had to think carefully every time she wrote something because 'I never know when I will be published'. This book was a huge encouragement to the women who were delighted that their stories and drawings were reaching a wider audience. The intention of this particular activity had been to collect stories of childhood that could be shared with children. However so many of the stories were of difficulties and painful experiences that it was decided that the book should be for adults.

Evaluations of the Family Literacy Project

2001

At the request of the project coordinator and with the support from a funder, an external evaluation of the project was conducted in October 2001. The evaluator used many of the same REFLECT tools used during the PRA. The women in the group mentioned that they were still experiencing difficulty with some of the literacy activities listed during the PRA, for example filling in forms. The reason given was that these are often in English, as are clinic cards. Reading the Bible was still a problem for many and so were road signs. However, those who joined the FLP with some literacy skills had moved on to Stages 3 and 4 within Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Level 1. These women said they could now work better with money, could read some hymns and understood the signs at the clinic. Those at ABET Level 1 said they could read prescriptions.

2002

By October 2002 there was a bigger improvement and the list of where people used their improved literacy skills covered most of what was seen as a need in 2000. (Labuschagne 2002:10)

Mpumlwane & Ndodeni	Malunga & Siyamukela	Reichenau	Stepmore & Mangozi
We can count money at the burial society	We can make telephone calls	We can count how many liters milk each cow gives	We can distinguish between the signs for male and female public toilets
We can fill in forms at the bank	We can write notes and send messages with children	We can sign cheques and withdraw money	I can sign at Department of Home Affairs for my child's birth certificate
We know where to go at the clinic (can find my way)	We can read the different wards at the hospital	We can count the number of calves	We can read posters with different information at the doctor and clinic
We can keep record of small scale farming	We can count our cattle and see when some are lost	We can keep record when selling seeds, to whom and how many	Can now read and write in Zulu
Keep minutes at church	We can write our names in society meetings	We can write minutes during our perma culture meetings	We can take minutes at crèche meetings
When going to unfamiliar place, people can read the street names	When travelling, we can read where different taxis go at the taxi rank	When catering for workshops, we can calculate how much food is needed	At the taxi rank we can read where the different taxis are going

		according to the people present and the number of days	
We can read the road signs	We can direct people	I can write down messages and telephone numbers	We can see where we are going when we are going to town.
We can do homework with our children		We can help the children that are still in the crèche with counting	We can read letters that other people send to us
We can check dates in the children's school books to see if they have attended school			
We can read the calendar			
We can write letters for the newsletter			
We can write letters to friends			

Figure 2: Uses of literacy

It was noted in both evaluations that excitement was obvious when group members were asked to talk about themselves and their young children. The evaluator wrote that 'the link with early literacy seems to be a success formula for literacy classes. Not only have the women carried out various activities with their children, but also their own literacy skills and use for the skill has been stimulated through the activities they have done with their children'. (Labuschagne: 2001)

At one site the women were asked to work in two separate groups where one group listed the activities they did with their children and the other group listed the changes they noticed in their children because of the activities they learnt from the FLP.

The activities listed by the one group did not include anything related directly to early literacy apart from copying drawings, reciting poems and singing songs. The other activities related more to respect for others and care for themselves. However the group that listed the changes they had observed in their children related more to early literacy, for example that they now enjoy reading, choosing a book and asking their parent to read it to them. The group noted that children could hold books correctly and turn the pages with care, could 'read pictures' and some were beginning to try and write. (Labuschagne 2001)

This response from two of the other groups were similar in that although early literacy activities were not mentioned, the changes mentioned in the children related to early literacy. The third group gave their response in a different order

and the activities listed included drawing, learning about pictures, how to page through a book and talking to children about what happened at school. The changes listed did not mention anything relating to books or stories apart from children cutting pictures from magazines.

I can offer no reason why the responses differed between the groups but find it important that all groups listed either activities or changes relating to early literacy that they said resulted from what they had learnt in the FLP. One group said that the FLP had taught them to play with their children and that prior to this that they had been cheating their children of time together.

The following is a summary of benefits to early literacy given by the groups in 2002 and noted by the evaluator. (Labuschagne 2002:16)

Categories of benefits	Mpumlwane and Ndodeni	Lotheni	Reichenau	Stepmore
Early literacy, family and child related issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning as a family • Caring for children • How to teach and help a preschool child • Child abuse • Making books with newspapers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching the children what is wrong and right and dangerous • How to talk with children • Caring for children • Respecting our families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with my child • Communicating with parents • Working together as a family • How to talk nicely with a child, not to be rude • Teaching my child • I can communicate with my parents (as an adult) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting children from abuse • Children's rights • Teaching my children • Teaching a child before crèche

Figure 3: Summary of benefits

Changes in reading habits

By October 2001 women were talking about the books they had read. These were books from the FLP library boxes and many women mentioned titles and related stories they had read. Most of the women were borrowing books for themselves and their children. By the end of 2002 they were even more confident and could name books and publications they had read, for example the *SA Reader* and *Read for Joy* as well as the *Drum* and *Bona* magazines. Favourite library books included Zulu titles such as *Amazinyo kabani lowa*, *Inkositini*, *Afi Nesiguthu somlingo* and *I Bhubes'*. The evaluator noted that the '[t]he FLP definitely started a culture of reading amongst the participants.' Most of

the participants read on a regular basis (up to three times a week or more), sometimes in the evenings or late afternoon, but mostly over the weekends when they have a bit more time available to themselves. One woman mentioned that she had bought a book for herself, this is quite significant as her income was mainly from welfare grants. Women said they often read alone but sometimes also read for their children and to older family members. Some women said that when they read to their children they were joined by children from the neighbourhood.

Reasons for reading that were given to the evaluator included:

- to get information
- to learn from books
- wanting to know what is happening in the world
- to prevent loneliness
- for relaxation
- to improve their English
- to be better parents

Conclusion

Illiteracy or low levels of literacy may not be the cause of poverty but many people who are poor have problems with literacy. Although one of the aims of the FLP is to address adult functional literacy needs, our main aim has been to help make reading something people want to do because it is enjoyable and because when reading, adults provide a positive role model for young children. This is by no means frivolous, although it does not lead to immediate benefits such as access to a welfare grant or paid employment. The benefits are that the women's own horizons are broadened and this, in turn, has led them to think about how important they are to their children's development. It is interesting that all the groups indicated that their perceptions about children had changed. They find the information presented in the sessions useful in their daily lives. Most importantly, their own standing in the community has changed and they see that their approach to bringing up children is often different from their neighbours. This led to the development of a home visiting scheme launched in 2003 where group members visit other families, taking out books and reading to the children as well as discussing child development with the parents.

In addition, two community libraries have been established by the FLP with group members acting as library assistants. The libraries have attracted both children and adults from the community.

The attendance has at time been erratic, especially when short term employment opportunities occur through, for example, the 'Working for Water' initiative. However, the groups have remained stable over the years and many women now hold ABET Level 3 certificates and are learning English. In an unpublished paper Bhola (2004) states that

...[a]dult education prepares adults to participate in life and work, and politics and praxis now. Recent evaluations in Uganda and elsewhere

have shown that adults who had been to school when young are coming back to adult literacy classes to refresh their literacy and numeracy skills – and to learn development knowledge which they never got at school and which they are not getting from anywhere else.

This last, the new knowledge, is the key to keeping the interest of the women. Furthermore, linking this to their children's development appears to be another one of the keys to the project's continued existence.

It appears that improvement in levels of literacy in adults gives them skills that can help support early literacy development in their children. The continued focus of the FLP is on the acquisition of these literacy skills that, when matched with a focussed input on early literacy, seems to result in improved early literacy development in the children. As the continuing attendance at group sessions indicates, it is important to sustain the adult literacy with supporting activities such as learner-writing events and book clubs.

Women who join the groups feel that their levels of literacy are not adequate for what they want to achieve, for what they want to do in their lives and what they want for their children. The FLP attempts to help women to meet these goals. When we work with the women in our groups we are working with the present – these women – and the future – their children.

Reflections

In this Preface I have introduced the elements of this study including aim, scope, and register. I provided an overview of the FLP to ensure that the remainder of the study is read in the light of a summary of the whole. I provided a justification for this study, which is my belief that the findings can add to existing knowledge and be of benefit to those involved in initiatives, in government and in non-government organisations, to support adults and children in South Africa to improve their levels of literacy.

When I started to write the Preface, I realized the importance of introducing a summary of the project as all the elements described in the article are re-introduced throughout the study and by including this article on the FLP, each of the parts can now be seen in the context of the whole project. I also realized the importance of setting limits. There is so much more that could be said about the FLP and it was to prevent myself from straying from the main focus of the study that I made the boundaries explicit.

Part One describes the context and methodological approach to this study into the influences on the development of the approach to family literacy as it is implemented in the FLP.

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1: MY VOICE

Part One of this study presents the context and methodological approach I have used in this study into the influences on the development of the approach to family literacy as it is implemented in the FLP.

In Chapter 1 I describe and examine events that I feel have shaped me and led me to start the Family Literacy Project. It is through this study that I have become more aware of what has influenced me and how this, in turn, has influenced the development of the project. It has not been easy to find myself in this story as I usually respond to events in an intuitive, 'gut-level' way without taking time to think about the reason for acting in the way I do. As Garfat (2009) says "Active self awareness is not a state, it is a process, a life-long process" and one which I am beginning rather late in life.

This is my story of the FLP. I have explored what influenced the project development and implementation. I have provided details of some of the activities introduced into the project and draw on findings from the external evaluations and research. I have added to my voice the words of the people, mainly women, who took this journey into developing a family literacy approach that suits families living in South Africa and especially those in deeply rural areas. Through their words I hope I have provided a glimpse into the lives of extraordinary women living in difficult circumstances battling to make their lives and the lives of their children better.

I am inspired by the words of a woman I assume to be a member of the Navajo Nation in the United States of America, Jennie DeGroat who said:

Although as a teacher I have had much experience with Navajo education, my attempts to share stories in the academic community are greeted with responses such as, Where is your research? Or How do you document what you're saying? It is unfortunate that my life and the stories I have lived are not treated as valid data. I am documentation. This morning I come to you with my experiences. That is all I have. (DeGroat 1997:112)

In this study I present my experiences as 'documentation' and will back up my discussion, conclusions and statements with references where appropriate. I am inspired because I think that we ignore so much of what is around us. What people bring when they talk about their lives is ignored because they are not seen as learned people and so do not have ideas to share from which we can all learn. In this study I want to bring my experiences and those of the women I work with and reflect on what we have learnt together. I have done this in the hope that other projects and approaches and families will be supported in what they are doing to help children have the best possible start in life. In addition I want to honour all these experiences of how we, in the FLP, have been able to use our talents to support ourselves and others.

I started the FLP in 2000, developed much of the approach and continued to direct the activities of this non governmental organisation until the end of December 2007. After stepping down as director, I remained a board member and a member of the management committee. I am situated right in this project, which makes the study highly personal. To add to these personal reflections, I have drawn on external evaluations of, and research conducted into the project.

Another fact is that although in the FLP, I was, and continue to be, involved in the work, my background and position in society also affects my perspective of events. Although everyone involved in the project is South African, as I am categorised as 'white', I am in some ways different to the people I work with as they are all categorised as 'black'⁴. In addition, I do not live in the same area, and I did not grow up with exactly the same traditions and cultural beliefs. While I have been accepted into the lives of the women in the FLP, I am also very aware that we often speak to one another across a divide which we do try to bridge but which continues to exist and against which we must strive continually. We must

⁴ I believe that, unfortunately, it will be some time before we drop these classifications and ways of talking about each other in South Africa

do this so that we undo the harm done by the apartheid policies which divided the people of South Africa.

As another 'white' South African woman, Jenny Sprong notes:

All too often our "cultural differences" become our excuse for not engaging at deeper levels with one another. It is true that many of our perspectives will have been formed from different stances, but we can learn from one another. (Sprong 2002:66)

Sometimes in the life of the FLP, we did notice that we did not understand one another and were able to discuss this. At other times we continued to be unaware that anything was amiss until something attracted our attention to the fact that we were not 'on the same page'. Two examples come to mind. The first is from a time when I suggested that group members, as part of a session on family dynamics, draw their own family tree. I expected a diagram showing aunts and uncles, grandparents and all the earlier generations of one family. Goodness Khanyile, of the FLP group based in the small area known as Stepmore, drew a beautiful, shady tree and underneath wrote that this was the tree under which her family sat to talk about important things – in other words, her Family Tree. This was not at all what I expected, but this was a family tree that was as real and valid as the ones I was used to seeing in genealogies.

The second is a much sadder experience and explanations came only months after the event. One of our facilitators⁵ died and this was a huge shock to staff and members of the FLP as by then we had all been together for over three years. At the funeral, I was seated away from the other staff members and had no idea what I should or should not do, so sat very quietly. Several months later one of the FLP facilitators asked why I had done this, and why I had not gone to view the body, or done more than say a few words when invited to. Explanations about different customs around death and funerals followed, and I realised once again how successful South Africa's apartheid policies were in keeping groups of

⁵ Nelisiwe (Nelly) Shezi died in 2005

South Africans apart and how much time we need to spend talking and listening to one another. Over thirty years ago, when apartheid policies were still in force, a friend made a statement that refers to the situation as it was then and suggests a way forward that can still be considered worth pursuing:

Apartheid does not allow for or encourage encounter; it attempts to obviate it entirely. Liberals on the other hand recognize the common humanity of men without being willing to confront their differences. The only way to use differences constructively is to become aware of one's self and then through encounter with the other (different) person to transform oneself and move towards an acceptable future for all. (Nettleton 1972:18)

So, yes, I have been at times right at the centre of the project, but also had a life outside of the project and of course this has an effect on what I did and said within the project and what I do and say about these experiences. If one of the FLP facilitators were to write this, it would be a different document on some levels but I hope not on all and that I have managed to capture the most important aspects of the FLP.

My entry into the early childhood development sector

My interest in early childhood development started when my own children were small, and this interest became formalised, ironically, because I couldn't sew, so it was not exactly a thoughtfully chosen direction. The start of this particular journey in my life began because of events⁶ in 1978 when my children were very young and we, as a family, had to move from South Africa to live in the East End of London in the United Kingdom. This was a huge move for all of us, leaving behind friends and family and a country we loved. The East End was dull, dismal and grey and once when returning to our flat in a council block there, my oldest son, Timothy, then three years old asked "Which bit of grey is our bit of grey?" We all found it difficult to settle.

⁶ My husband, Cos Desmond, received death threats because of his stand against apartheid. These were not the first threats he received but we decided not to place our young children at risk and left the country until changes within the country in 1991 meant we could return.

For adult company in what was to me a strange and very different environment, I joined a sewing class at the Tower Hamlets Adult Education Institute because there was a crèche attached where I could leave Timothy and Christopher there while I learnt to sew. In the sewing class, I found company, but I also found out that I was not the world's best seamstress! I made a total mess of the garment I was trying to sew, and so left that class and looked for another group operating in the same building so that my sons could remain in the crèche. In retrospect, I see that I was focused on learning something interesting and having time to pursue that, while knowing that my children were safely occupied. The class I found was one run by the Pre-School Playgroup Association (PPA) and was for those wanting to work in playgroups.

My actions in relation to the way I made choices raise an issue that is important when working with adults. In my own life, as my story illustrates, I joined an adult education class because I wanted company, and in a place where my children would be safe and cared for, not because I was interested in a particular subject, topic or issue. When I 'failed' in the subject 'sewing', I simply changed to something else. The next subject was of some interest to me but initially I never intended becoming a pre-school worker. Initially, I joined the class for a number of reasons. First, I wanted to use the information I was gaining in the classes to improve my own parenting skills, and, second, I wanted time for myself with the children safely cared for, and third, I wanted adult company for some part of each week. This is an example of how an adult joins a class for reasons not always those that the planners and course developers have in mind.

I enjoyed the pre-school playgroup course very much, so much so that during the first year I was asked by the organizers to become a tutor on the same course to be run the following year. The course organizers never explained why they chose me to become a tutor, but I assume it was because I showed an interest in the course content. I was so delighted to have interesting work to do that, in addition was paid and because it was part-time enabled me to continue to take care of my

own children. So, that is how I came to work with adults, because of the factors I have mentioned, rather than a conscious choice. Over the years I have enjoyed working with adults and have never regretted being brought into this sector in this way.

My most direct experience of being with children was the parenting of my own three sons. Apart from that, although I have had no other direct engagement with children, I have worked extensively with caregivers and parents always with the children's welfare as our shared interest.

The Pre-School Playgroups Association course encouraged the participants to experiment with the activities for children and encouraged discussion. One of the guiding principles of the PPA at that time was to "promote the status of parents" and to "recognise that parents are the main educators of their children". (PPA Guidelines 1989:5) I liked this way of honouring the adults because they had all the experience of their lives to bring to their work - what Whitehead refers to as their "lived experience" and which must be acknowledged as a valid source of data. (Whitehead 2008: 104) Another reason was that it made me, as a parent; feel that what I was doing was important.

The main aim of the work of the Pre-School Playgroups Association was to help pre-school workers provide enjoyable activities in a safe environment for young children. Underpinning all the activities was the understanding that children learn when they are relaxed and having fun. They also enjoy it when an adult takes time to listen to them and to join in the activities without dominating in any way. The adult's role was to plan and provide activities that would meet the children where they were in their development and take them forward by letting them explore and experiment. At that time in that course, we spent little time talking about the theories of child development but the approach had been carefully thought out and was based on research findings as well as common sense.

When I became a tutor, I continued with my training in early childhood development by attending more advanced courses and learnt more about the theories of child development. It was the this first early experience that has guided my thinking on early childhood development and sustained me in all the work done since both in England and here in South Africa.

When the political situation changed in 1991, my family and I returned to South Africa and I plunged happily into working as the director of an organisation training community based pre-school teachers, TREE – Training and Resources in Early Education from 1991 To 1995. When I moved on from there, it was to start working as a consultant engaged in a range of projects. One contract was with Khulisa Management Services, where I was part of the research team looking at the effects of the national Department of Education Early Childhood Development (ECD) Pilot Project from 1997 to 1999, with the final report published in 2000.

In my dissertation for the M Ed, I wrote as follows, and include my comments from the dissertation because this thinking was critical in what has followed since. (Desmond 2001a:2-3)

In March 2000 the final research report by Khulisa Management Services on the three-year national Early Childhood Development Pilot Project was completed (Khulisa Management Services 2000). Among the aims of the pilot project was to establish whether or not children in community-based and formal pre-schools were receiving quality Reception Year education and investigate the most effective means of educational delivery to 5 and 6 year old children. Among the questions the research attempted to answer were the following:

“Are community-based reception year programmes providing high quality, equitable and cost-effective education? And How do community-based reception year programmes compare to the quality, equity and cost-effectiveness of reception classes offered at state schools?” (Khulisa Management Services 2000: iii).

Findings of particular concern to me were that there was a “decline in the early literacy and early numeracy assessment results over the three-year period for the Grade 1 and Grade R classes”, and that only a “quarter of community-based sites are offering “high” quality education” (Khulisa Management Services 2000: iii).

One of the recommendations made by the research team was that “Grade R quality needs to be improved.” In particular the team felt that the “low early literacy and somewhat higher early numeracy assessment results show that educators are not spending enough time on literacy and numeracy tasks and, even more importantly, have not mastered the methodologies for passing these skills to the learners.” (Khulisa Management Services 2000: iii).

The team made a number of recommendations on how to improve the quality of Grade R service, one of which was that more books and educational equipment should be provided in the classrooms. The report stated that “the presence of accessible books is highly correlated with improved early literacy assessment results” (Khulisa Management Services 2000: viii).

As a senior member of the research team, I pre-tested the assessment instrument, was in charge of drafting the interview instruments, trained the fieldworkers, conducted fieldwork and assisted in the report writing. I was concerned that by the end of the three-year pilot project, there had not been a more significant improvement in the early literacy assessment scores.

This concern was coupled with the knowledge that in South Africa 7.5 million adults need adult basic education. This means that these adults have had no education or very little, for example less than 7 years of formal schooling (Harley et al: 1996).”

The insights I gained from this study at masters level, spurred me on to finding ways to help children. If it was difficult to do this through the pre-schools, - I conjectured - then working with families might be another route to take. I read *Family Literacy: Connections in Schools and Communities* by Lesley Morrow (Morrow: 1995) and was excited by the examples described and evaluated. However, all of the projects described were running in the United States of America and Great Britain. I was determined to try and develop a model of family literacy suited to South Africa. This I made clear in the introduction to the first funding proposal I wrote for the project.

This project will develop an understanding of what family literacy is in South Africa. In the meantime, the following definition by The Family Literacy Commission in the United States of America will be used:

‘Family literacy encompasses the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community. Sometimes, family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children ‘get things done’. These events might include using drawings or writings to share ideas;

composing notes or letters to communicate messages; making lists; reading and following directions; or sharing stories and ideas through conversation, reading and writing. Family literacy may be initiated purposefully by a parent or may occur spontaneously as parents and children go about the business of their daily lives. Family literacy activities may also reflect the ethnic, racial or cultural heritage of the families involved.' (Family Literacy Project: 2000)

The wealth of research and reporting available on models of family literacy in other countries was very useful in providing ideas of how to develop our own approach locally. I was always conscious of the need to develop something relevant to our own situation. As quoted in Nafukho, Amutabi and Otunga (2005: 107) Bohla, when writing about adult education, makes a statement that is relevant to any programme in our country, South Africa:

The challenge of adult education today is to create a vibrant sector of adult education without devaluing and weakening the character and content of the indigenous culture of adult education.

Bohla goes on to say something I have tried to keep in mind regarding our family literacy project:

But on the other hand it is also argued that the modern sector of adult education may have dismissed the traditional culture of adult education out of hand and without thought and borrowed indiscriminately from the West irrelevant ideologies, missions, and methods of adult education simply to keep up appearances of modernity or only because the donors donated and demanded.

I have tried to honour the knowledge, values and attitudes brought into the project by the FLP members.

Love of reading and books

I have, in the spirit of this study, to ask myself why I wanted to help children improve their early literacy skills. Although concerned about the low levels of literacy discussed in the Khulisa Management Services report cited earlier, my motivation was not only because of the debates around literacy, but was driven greatly by my own love of stories, books and reading. My earliest memories

include listening to stories told to me by my grandmothers and both my parents, and when I learnt to read, the hours spent happily engrossed in a book. In the days before shelf-paper could be bought and was more likely to be clean sheets of newspaper, my mother knew that when she sent me to fetch something from a cupboard that I would only come back when I'd read the page of newspaper lining the shelf. I have always wanted children to know how much fun it is to pick up a book and read.

In addition I was sure that their lives at school would be easier if they came with a love of books, excited about whatever they may find in them. This didn't mean that I thought that learning could only take place through books, but that being able to read and write certainly helps everyone to learn more about the world and ourselves. I love the following quotation about children and learning

A child needs to be given the opportunity to learn, she said to the school district, and if he is, he might change the circumstances in which he lives. (Madigan 1997:27)

Although I only read this some time after starting the FLP, it encapsulates my hope that as literacy and learning are linked, a strong foundation in the development of literacy skills will help children as they grow and develop.

Reflection

In this chapter I have described how in this study I 'found my voice'. By reflecting on why I started the project, I started to see the influences of my own experiences on the development of an approach to family literacy. These include my exposure, by accident, to courses on early childhood development. There is my own pleasure in reading and love of books. Another important influence and one that made me change from working exclusively with pre-school teachers to

focusing on the family, was the research finding⁷ regarding literacy levels of young children.

Writing about the differences between people led me to reflect on the damage done to all of us by the apartheid regime. We have to reflect constructively on the past and remind ourselves of how 'apart' we were forced to live from one another, and how hard we must now strive to heal ourselves.

In the next chapter, I focus on the research design and methodology and how discoveries during the early years of this study affected the final shape of this study.

⁷ Khulisa Management Services

CHAPTER 2: THE EMERGENCE OF A METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I chart the emergence of a methodology suited to my study and to the way I wanted to document my findings.

One reason I embarked on this study and the writing of this thesis was to explore deeply the work of the Family Literacy Project. I want to share my research into the experiences and learning gained, with an audience interested in the development and future of family literacy in education, not only locally, but internationally. This is an echo of Pithouse (2007:14) who states in her doctoral thesis

I am writing this thesis for myself and for others with whom I share a commitment to educational practice, research, and scholarship.

I believe that it is important to look closely at the development and delivery of the FLP, to explore the principles, ideas, context and individuals and how these influenced and affected the implementation of the project in the first eight years of its existence, from March 2000 to March 2008.

When I started the project, I had no idea I would write it up in this way but the notes I kept, the written reports and the external evaluations as well as work done by FLP group members provide material for a rich and textured account. In this thesis I have recorded and critically reflected on what we did, how we did it, and why, and with what effect - in the hopes that by extrapolating our efforts in this way we might further improve our practice, effectiveness and success. I also hope that others engaged in similar work will be enriched and encouraged by this study.

I cannot pretend, nor would anyone believe me if I tried, that the development and delivery of the FLP has been without problems. There have been times when the programme went smoothly and all hopes were met; there were the

times when there were problems and plans had to be re-worked. It has been an 'organic' programme, by which I mean that it is growing, developing and responding to the needs of the people it was set up to serve. The documenting and critical reflection and analysis of the influences on the development of the project is vital for both myself as the researcher and those reading this as this could provide the basis for discussion and guidelines for others involved in investigating or evaluating other family literacy initiatives.

I hope to develop what Whitehead (2008: 104) refers to as a 'living theory'.

A living theory is an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work.

The importance of the FLP group members cannot be overstated, nor their response to the approach taken by the project. For this reason I have drawn on many of the stories told by group members themselves in the hope that their voices will be heard as authentic comments on their way of life and the impact of the FLP on them and their families.

The approach of the FLP towards family literacy as a way of developing literacy in communities historically excluded from access to literacy through formal education is unique in South Africa. As such, the notion and practice of family literacy is a contribution to the body of knowledge to be drawn on by those in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector and the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) sector. Because of personal circumstances which I explained in Chapter 1, I have for many years been part of the ECD sector and played a role in many of the initiatives in the field from curriculum development, policy development and the generation of training standards as well as exciting developments such as the first ever radio programming of the internationally acclaimed *Sesame Street*. It was my involvement in *Takalani Sesame*, the South African *Sesame Street*, which strengthened my belief in the importance of

research and evaluation. As Gladwell states (2000:91) "*Sesame Street* has been subject to more academic scrutiny than any television show in history". I have been involved in research and evaluation of ECD programmes and projects, such as *Takalani Sesame*, and have seen the importance of sharing findings and good practice with others. My hope is that this current piece of work could help in the development of good practice in both the ECD and ABET sectors.

While I have been engaged in the development of ECD and early literacy initiatives in many ways, this more formal recording of this project started as something that might lead to me being awarded a Doctorate of Technology at the Durban Institute of Technology (DIT)⁸.

I decided it would be helpful to write it as a thesis with clear boundaries and focus rather than as a less formal story of how the project was developed. I thought that the need for rigorous and critical reflection might result in a document useful to others interested in family literacy.

Problems started when I began writing the proposal. What I wrote was turgid and boring as I tried desperately to write in what I considered to be appropriately 'academic' style. I lost interest in what I was doing. I had to find a way through this block. I decided to write as though I was talking to someone about the FLP, someone who was interested in how and why I started it and what I thought was important. I adopted this approach when I went to the Higher Degrees Committee and talked about what I wanted to get across to others – what we do in the FLP and how much we want to share with others so that they too can help adults and children enjoy reading. It worked and my proposal was accepted.

With the acceptance of my proposal, I felt the doors had been opened, and I could now start writing up the experience, the findings, and explaining how each part was underpinned by principles and supported by research by others, by

⁸ During the period of my research, the DIT became the Durban University of Technology.

myself and experience and observations in the field of early childhood development, and how we were forced to reflect critically on all that we did along the way. Instead the chapters refused to flow; the words would not come as I struggled once again to make the work fit into some scheme I thought was acceptably rigorous and 'academic'.

Disheartened, I was looking through my files for inspiration and came across an article by Taylor and Settelmaier (2003) and was captivated by their reasoned and carefully argued approach. One quote in this article was from a post graduate student and was one that made immediate sense to me and which spurred me to start my dissertation afresh:

Just write. Even if it makes no sense, just write. Even if it makes you feel stupid, just write. Even if it makes you feel vulnerable, just write. Even if you feel the world is turning against you, just write. When you feel sleepy, just go to sleep and dream about that wonderful world you want to create. When you get up pick up your pen and continue writing. Because the truth is, when the mud settles down and the cloud clears away, everything becomes as clear as day. In other words, you have written your world into existence because writing is both data and method. (Taylor and Settlemaier 2003:235)

I began to write. As the FLP has been operating since March 2000, the body of experience documented in interviews, stories, field notes, reports, journal articles, conference presentations and external evaluations was vast. As I wrote I began to draw this together and in this study I have critically examined and reflected upon it. This study builds on the work I did at Masters level⁹ and extends it in order that the discussions and findings will provide something of value to help fill the gap in the knowledge of how family literacy can support the literacy development of both young children and their adult carers. The need for this information lies in the poor literacy rates found in both children and adults and discussed in particular in Chapter 4.

⁹ Desmond. A. 2001 The Impact of the Family Literacy Project on Adults in Rural KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study

As I began to write up the study I was guided by my question

What influences contributed to the development of an approach to family literacy relevant to the needs of families in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal?

I focused on this question to examine and critically reflect on the way my experiences and the experiences of others as well as the context in which we operate and the successes enjoyed have influenced the development of the project. In each chapter I present my findings and note the influences of these on the development of the family literacy approach under scrutiny in this study. In Part Three I draw conclusions by exploring and critically reflecting on these influences and the contribution made to the approach now adopted by the FLP.

I draw on my own written observations, evaluations and research conducted on aspects of the project, and journal articles and presentations made by myself to national and international gatherings. I wrote these articles during the course of my studies and so have included extracts as they form part of my own journey towards an understanding of the influences on the development of the FLP approach to family literacy.

I have included stories written by FLP group members to trace the influence their needs and aspirations and growth have had on the development of this project. I use stories as a source of information in this study because the telling and writing of these by FLP group members was, as stated earlier, an important part of the project. When the stories were gathered, the FLP group members were asked to give permission to the FLP to use these in publications and in reports. Only one woman refused to give permission and I understood that as her story was very personal and referred to people she felt had mistreated her when she was a child. She said she did not want to raise these issues once again. Every FLP member was delighted when we presented the stories printed out and bound, or

when we talked about relating them to others through reports and in conference presentations. All such data in this document was drawn from these reports and publications.

The ease with which the FLP group members shared their experiences through stories is not surprising as Chilisa and Preece (2005:51) point out, stories are

...central to the lives of African societies. They have been used to collect, deposit, store and disseminate information.

Stories in the FLP have been used in a number of ways and have provided an opportunity for women to tell, act out and write about their experiences. These stories provide a very rich source not only of local knowledge but also as a basis for discussion of issues facing the FLP group members.

I chose to use a qualitative method of research because, to quote Merriam and Simpson (1995:97) the

...overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, to delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) or meaning-making, and to describe how people interpret what they experience.

Qualitative data is detailed and describes context, process and effects. This study records the thoughts and ideas of those involved in the FLP as well as documenting my involvement and critical reflections. A qualitative case study approach meant that there are boundaries and limitations to the study but within those the findings and discussion can be rich and deep. As I record accurately and in detail the experiences of those involved in the project, others will be able to make connections between this and the context in which they live and work. As Chilisa and Preece (2005:142) explain:

Qualitative research assumes a holistic perspective. A holistic perspective refers to the fact that the research problem is investigated and reported taking into account the complex and multiple contexts in which it occurs. For instance, people's perspectives,

experiences and insights are studied in the setting, contexts and value systems within which they occur. Qualitative research is thus value laden and context dependent.

When I planned each external evaluation that was conducted for the FLP in the period under discussion in this study, I wanted to track how much progress was made in linking family literacy activities to early childhood development and adult literacy teaching. I was drawn then to the kind of research methods described by Baynham (1995:42) where he talked about “ethnographic field work involving participant observation, gathering autobiographical accounts of literacy practices as well as analysis of texts”. He went on to describe the importance of seeing where literacy is used and the value placed on it rather than describing only how reading and writing are taught. This kind of evaluation and my own research does need a level of trust between myself and the reader that my intention in this recording and reflection has been both honest and thorough.

My approach, once all the material relating to the FLP had been collected, has been to:

- Critically review these materials in order to identify what influenced the approach advocated through these materials
- Analyse the key practices and interrogate these to determine how they influenced group members and how their response in turn influenced further development of this approach to family literacy
- Evaluate the findings
- Reflect on their possible contribution to the early childhood development and adult education sectors in South Africa

Throughout the time I was engaged in this study, I wrote journal articles and presented papers at national and international conferences and workshops on the work of the FLP. I have included extracts from some of these in this study, at times quoting from them and at others inserting them as a whole.

There is the question of where I fit into this study. I have made my role explicit and have included experiences from my life before the project was established as well as those during the period under consideration in this study. Chilisa and Preece (2005:142) refer to the researcher as

...the main data-gathering instrument and the person whose experiences, prejudices and value system inform(s) the research process. It is for this reason that researchers are expected to inform the reader about their position with regard to the topic of research and the people researched.

This is an echo of Bullough and Pinnegar (2001:13) who wrote that “Many researchers now accept that they are not disinterested but are deeply invested in their studies, personally and profoundly”. Pithouse (2007:27) spells this out even more clearly:

...[s]ince the researcher who conducts a self-focused educational inquiry is also a subject of that study, the educational understanding that is gained through the research is bounded by that person’s particular viewpoints, observations, and interpretations.

In keeping with this, I have paid special attention to my role in this study as well as exploring relevant experiences in my life to discover how these have influenced the choices I made in developing and implementing the approach of the FLP. To ensure that my ‘voice’ within this study had validity and relevance, I drew on guidelines developed for use in autobiographical forms of self-study research by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) and extended by Feldman (2003). These provided me with a “checklist” against which I measured myself to avoid the inclusion of the personal becoming confessional or merely egotistical.

The guidelines I selected from Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) and Feldman (2003) helped develop the following:

- The need for the inclusion of the person must “ring true and enable connection”. The reader should be able to see that what is presented is

not a heavily edited version of the writer's experience or feelings. What is presented should throw a light on the reader's own experience and enable her to use the information in her own situation. The writer must "take an honest stand".

- That "insight and interpretation" can be promoted as the reader makes the connection between the writer's explicit role and her own ideas and that this connection leads to further insights. As Bullough and Pinnegar go on to say "a 'pattern in experience' ... allows a reinterpretation of the lives and experience of both the writer and the reader. To be powerful, this pattern must be portrayed in a way that engages readers in a genuine act of seeing the essential wholeness of life, the connection of nodal moments. In seeing, the reader is enabled to see self and others more fully".
- The importance of the ability to present the study in a way that the "authority of the scholarly voice, not just its authenticity" is recognised.
- The validity of the study requires that "We need to make sure that we are not blinded or fooled by the ways that we construct our stories.....We must also provide reasons why others should trust our findings". (Feldman 2003:27)

Identification of influences

Having decided on this as the most appropriate methodology, I then reviewed the material, thought deeply about which influences emerged most clearly. I then used these as chapter headings and began to organise the information collected under these headings. In each chapter I described the influence as I saw it, and reviewed it in the light of the literature, both current and that which informed my earlier thinking. I then described material, activities, evaluation findings, stories and my own feelings and responses in the light of the influence under discussion.

At the end of each chapter, under the sub-heading Reflection, I summarise the content of the chapter and make reference to my own feelings during the writing of the chapter.

It became apparent to me that there were four clear principles that had informed my work in early childhood development and that these same principles were the influences on my work in the FLP: active learning, holistic development, place in the community, and a rights-based approach. Once I decided to group the findings under the four principles that I realised had influenced my work over many years, I experienced a sense of relief that the document had a shape that made sense to me and I hope to others as I use these principles as chapter headings in Part Two of this study.

As I continued to examine the material I had gathered, I realised that I had to include a discussion on the influence of the perceived success of the project by those not directly involved in its implementation. This success can be judged by the awards for the excellence of the project, and invitations received for the project members and me to take part in African and international events. This aspect of the project became the focus of another chapter.

The final influence to be discussed is the influence of the FLP facilitators on the way the project has evolved. This I have done in a chapter describing their contributions as well as including references to them throughout other chapters.

What I have done is to tell our stories in as rich a way as possible so that others could benefit from the process we went through as the project was developed and grew in ways I originally had not imagined it would.

Only when I was almost at the end of this study did I read an article by Jack Whitehead and the quote from this that I include here could have been one I made myself, so closely does it mirror what I have done throughout the life of the

FLP. Whitehead (2008) sees an important question as being “How do I improve what I am doing?” My first question when beginning the FLP was to ask myself how I was going to do what I thought must be done. Later, his question of “How do I improve what I am doing?” became my question.

My imagination worked to offer possibilities about improving what I was doing. I chose a possibility to act on, acted and evaluated the effectiveness of what I was doing in terms of my communication with my pupils. This disciplined process of problem-forming and solving is what I call an action reflection method. (Whitehead 2008: 107)

Reflection

In this chapter I have described and explained how I began to write about my journey of exploration into family literacy, the initial difficulties I experienced as I struggled to find the writing style that suited me and what I wanted to achieve. I write about how, by making this a study of my own journey within the FLP, the study began to take shape.

I describe the sense of relief I experienced once I identified the question I really wanted to answer, and how by naming the principles that guided my work in early childhood development, I saw how these continued to influence what I did in the FLP. I explored other influences and name these.

The following chapter is an exploration of the term ‘family’ within family literacy.

CHAPTER 3: THE FAMILY IN FAMILY LITERACY

In this chapter I explore the term 'family' within family literacy and introduce issues relating to early childhood development in South Africa.

Importance of families

The role of families as the first and most important educators of their children is highlighted in many discussions about how to ensure that young children receive the best possible start in life. My own reading on the topic has been influenced by, inter alia, Bowlby 1953; Bruce 1987; Smidt 1998; and most recently my work on the South African Department of Social Development Parental/Primary Caregiver Capacity Development Training Package developed in 2008. These discussions take place in families, communities, non profit organisations, government departments and academic institutions and the reason for this is of course that most children live in a family, however this family is constituted. Most families play a very important role in the education of their children from birth to adulthood. Families do this by providing care and shelter for their children, by supporting the development of their knowledge of, for example, books and reading; their skills, for example, how to dress and feed oneself; and their attitudes, for example, how to determine their responsibilities towards themselves and others. It is at home that most children learn about beliefs, values, customs and manners and so become socialized into their community. As Pence and Nsamenang (2008: 22) state:

It is from the caring and generative role of the family that children begin to learn about moral life, participative skills, social values, and the ways of the world.

In the communities where the FLP operates, family life is seen as important and this is discussed in more depth in Part Two of this study. From the time I started the FLP I was called 'ma' and assumed this was a term of respect for an older

woman. However as time went by, I realized that in many ways we had become a family and my concern for the FLP facilitators and FLP group members was understood not only on a professional level but also on a personal level. When I decided to leave the project in 2008, one of the FLP facilitators asked the question “How can you leave your child?” My answer was that the child had grown and I would be watching with interest from a distance. I have done this by remaining on the Board of the FLP as well as developing training material and session plans for use by FLP facilitators. My relationship has changed and I noted with interest that instead of referring to me as “ma” as in the past, the FLP facilitators now refer to me by name. They keep in touch and I hear about important events in their lives, personal rather than professional. I think this is a healthy development and demonstrates a move by all of us into a new way of relating to one another.

There are many different configurations of families and they do not conform to one model, and certainly not all to the so-called ‘nuclear’ model of two parents and two children.

As Rule and Lyster (2005:9) suggest, the term ‘family’ needs to be redefined:

The concept of the family (typically seen as the nuclear family in developed countries) requires substantial revision in the light of serious social problems arising from violence, AIDS and migrancy. Such conditions have led to a breakdown and reordering of many family structures so that the care-givers in the family are often not the biological parents of the children, but could be relatives, community members or older siblings. A wider conceptualization of families needs to include single parent families, extended families (often headed by grandmothers), orphaned families etc.

Research by Amoateng et al (2007:48) has shown that in South Africa family models differ between the population groups:

On the whole, population groups show differences in living arrangements as demonstrated by the fact that Africans, followed by coloureds, are the most likely to live in extended family households, while whites and Asians are most likely to live in nuclear family households

Most of the families in the area of the FLP can be described as “extended” and as such the following extract from Mkhize (2006) is relevant as it deepens our understanding of the importance of the wider community to families, especially those in the rural areas. It also serves to explain why, once I was referred to as ‘ma’, I became responsible for the wellbeing of not only the project but of all the people involved in it:

Traditional African thinking is informed by communal life. Psychological development is not an individual journey; a person realises his or her place and responsibilities within a community of other people. (Mkhize, 2004). Sayings such as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Nguni) and *Motho ke motho ka batho babang* (Sotho/Tswana) capture this relational dimension of being. The term ‘community’ refers to an organic relationship between individuals. People are morally obliged to be responsive to others’ needs. This collective mode of existence explains why many people are treated as members of one’s family – being addressed as father, mother and brother irrespective of the genetic relationship. The extension of such terms to a number of people pledges these people to parental responsibilities. The family is of utmost significance: a child is born into a family community, which includes members of the extended family, the living and the deceased. (Mkhize 2006:187)

As we saw in the extract from Rule and Lyster (2005) quoted above, another factor to take into account when considering the “family” in family literacy is the HIV and AIDS pandemic that is currently sweeping South Africa. Parental illness, absence and death affect the composition of families. From the following from Desmond and Desmond (2007) we know that many families are headed by women and that these women are grandmothers or aunts:

...the majority of children whose mothers die are in the care of their grandparents or another female relative...Of the households caring for children who had lost their mother, and whose father was absent, 62 per cent were headed by women.

While still showing a female bias, the results do suggest that at least some men are taking a role, as the remaining 38 percent of households are headed by men. What is interesting to note, however, is that in 96 per cent of the households headed by men, a female spouse of the head was also present, compared to only 21 per cent of female-headed households that had a male partner of the head present.

It would appear, therefore, that the burden of care for children, both before a mother's death and following it, falls on women. The burden on female relatives occurs even when the father is alive. (Desmond and Desmond 2007: 231-232)

Apart from the composition of families, there are the differences in customs, values and behaviour between families even in the same community or neighbourhood. These differences can be attributed to a range of reasons and one that makes sense to me is that families combine traditional or customary knowledge gained from their parents with knowledge gained from other families, the media or through study. In this way families develop their own traditions or way of behaving and this is passed on to their children who in turn will make changes as they start their own families. This interest in traditional or indigenous knowledge and practice must be pursued and at the same time evaluated for current relevance, as the following from Landers and Myers (1988:2) shows:

It is important to recognize that many parents, even in so-called disadvantaged environments, are competent and effective caregivers. Their own competence, early socialization, and access to common wisdom provide a basis for childcare and development that is well adapted to the needs of their particular situation. Moreover, the demands of childrearing are often shared with grandparents or other members of an extended family, whose help and valuable insights demonstrate strengths inherent in the traditional culture.

Landers and Myers (1988) go on to explain that organisations entering a community must realize that if local knowledge is not respected, any new information will not be easily accepted. As the FLP was working with families in a deeply rural area of KwaZulu-Natal and some of us, myself in particular, were coming from a different community the following advice was vital:

Taking seriously the idea that a rich store of parental competence, knowledge and experience exists in any community means that parenting education cannot be viewed simply as a process in which outside experts transmit predetermined messages to caregivers who are assumed by the experts to lack knowledge. Rather, parenting education, to be effective, must recognize and support common wisdom and those local practices that foster a child's healthy growth and development. (Landers and Myers 1988:2)

While respecting practices within the community, I do believe that there is no need to hold back information on alternative ways of behaving. This can be offered in a way that allows for discussion and for people to make up their own minds about the relevance of this in their own lives. Landers and Myers (1988) point to the need for reflection and evaluation:

However, accepting the value of common wisdom should not lead to a naive view that all local practices are, by definition, good. Such a romantic position is not viable in a world in which children increasingly live simultaneously in more than one culture, cultures in which traditional socialization processes and practices are often being distorted by migration, urbanization, and other social and economic pressures. Some age-old child-care wisdom is being lost in the process of change. More important however, is the recognition that practices that may have worked well in a traditional environment do not necessarily work as well under new circumstances. Also, new knowledge about health, nutrition, and development has become available, and this knowledge may not have found its way into the store of common knowledge. Therefore, there is a responsibility for parent educators to provide new knowledge as well as to support and revive traditional childrearing knowledge. The effectiveness of parent educators will depend less on the external transmission of facts than on their ability to promote reflection, strengthen resolve, and provide experiences in which new knowledge can be applied. (Landers and Myers (1988: 2)

The caution expressed above against the reliance only on traditional practices needs to be taken seriously and new information should be tested in order to strengthen families and so provide a firm foundation for young children. This will be discussed in more depth in Part Two of this study as we look closely at how traditional knowledge was highlighted and discussed by FLP group members before new information was presented and how this new information was or was not integrated into the lives of the families involved with the FLP.

Some Early Childhood Development issues

The rights of children are protected in the South African Constitution and the national Department of Education has indicated its commitment to young children in different documents in particular the Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development. The Department of Education policies are based on the

understanding that as there is rapid physical, mental, emotional, and social growth and development in children from birth to seven, the early years are critical. Young children acquire concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. Important among these are the acquisition of language and the perceptual-motor skills required for learning to read and write.

If there is early and appropriate provision and care, this can often reverse the effects of deprivation and in fact support the development of innate potential thus reducing the need for remedial services to address stunting, developmental lag and social problems later in life. (Department of Education 2001:6)

The South African government acknowledges that it has to work together with the primary educators of children - the parents, or those taking on the parenting role such as grandparents. A holistic approach to a child's education and development will place them in the potentially caring, protective and enabling environment of the family, from which they will move out to crèches, pre-schools and on to formal education. Government support is necessary so that families have access to the means to provide the basic rights of children i.e. primary health care, adequate nutrition, safe water, basic sanitation, birth registration, protection from abuse and violence, psychosocial support and early childhood care.

As I stated in the case study commissioned by Pamoja¹⁰ (Desmond 2004), in South Africa there has been a slow improvement in access to early childhood development provision from between 9 – 11 per cent of birth - six year olds in 1996 to 16 per cent in 2001. (Wilderman and Nomdo 2004:2) In the province of KwaZulu Natal 70 per cent of the early childhood development provision (i.e. crèches and pre-schools) falls below the poverty line and per capita spending on public schooling in 2003/4 was 39 times higher than on early childhood development provision. (Wilderman and Nomdo 2004:5)

¹⁰ Pan African network of Reflect practitioners

The National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development in South Africa 2005 – 2010 is an attempt by the South African Government to ensure that all relevant departments work together for the good of all young children but initially for 2.3 to 3 million poor and vulnerable children:

The National Integrated Plan for ECD provides an integrated approach for converging basic services for improved childcare, early stimulation and learning, health and nutrition, water and sanitation – targeting young children (birth to four), expectant and nursing mothers and community groups. (UNICEF 2005:11)

The task is enormous and there is recognition by the South African government that it cannot achieve this on its own and must involve civil society from large non-governmental organisations to small local initiatives where a community member sets up a crèche or a local woman takes care of a few children in her home.

Reflection

In this chapter, I have provided a description of the term 'family' and have also briefly described the main challenges facing young children and their families in South Africa. My understanding of what the term 'family' means has influenced the way I approached the development of the FLP. I understood that the so-called nuclear family model was not the most predominant in the communities where the project is situated. I understood that the term 'family' in these communities usually extends to grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and at times even the children of neighbours.

I brought early childhood development issues into the discussion in order to describe the context in which young children find themselves in South Africa. I think it is necessary to do this in order to identify the importance of both government and non-government initiatives as I hope that the findings in this

study will inform the ECD sector and encourage similar undertakings both on a government and community level.

In the following chapter I will discuss the term 'literacy' in family literacy.

CHAPTER 4: LITERACY IN FAMILY LITERACY

In this chapter I provide information on the international and South African state of adult and child literacy. In addition I include findings on the importance attributed to the literacy levels of adults in their ability to support and promote child development.

It is important that the work of the Family Literacy Project is taken seriously by both the adult literacy sector and the early childhood sector in South Africa as the approach has implications for both sectors. There are many debates and campaigns around adult literacy in South Africa and worldwide and although these are interesting they are not the subject of this study. However, it is important to situate this study within the adult literacy sector through the provision of information on the world- and country-wide perception of the need for the improvement of levels of literacy in adults and children.

International initiatives

In New York in February 2003 the United Nations launched the United Nations Literacy Decade with UNESCO taking on the responsibility for promoting and coordinating this initiative. The importance attached to literacy is explained in the motivation for the launch of this Literacy Decade in the answer provided by UNESCO to the question “Why literacy?”

Literacy is an indispensable means for effective social and economic participation, contributing to human development and poverty reduction. Literacy empowers and nurtures inclusive societies and contributes to the fair implementation of human rights. In the case of mothers, literacy leads to an enhanced quality of life for their families and improved education outcomes for their children. Nevertheless literacy remains a low priority for national governments and the donor community. Worldwide, 774 million adults are illiterate and approximately 80 million children are out of school. A large number of those who enroll drop out before attaining literacy skills and some of those who complete primary education remain illiterate. (UNESCO 2007:11)

Mrs Laura Bush, at that time the First Lady of the United States of America was appointed as the Honorary Ambassador for the Literacy Decade and it was in her name that the First White House Conference on Global Literacy was organized in 2006 and to which the FLP was invited as one of the only nine organisations to present their programmes at this event¹¹. The inclusion of the FLP in the programme is probably the result of Laura Bush's belief that

Research tells us that a child's ability to thrive is closely linked with his mother's education level. That's why mother and child literacy should be at the heart of our efforts to increase literacy around the world. Our mothers are often our first teachers. From them, we learn lessons that will influence us throughout our lives." (UNESCO 2007:3)

Chapter 3 explained how in South African this view has to be broadened to include family members other than mothers but who take on the role of mothering or parenting.

The Literacy Decade follows on many international conferences and initiatives over the years. Openjuru (2004:407) lists these as:

These were Elsinore in Demark (1949); Montreal (1960); Tokyo (1972); Paris (1985); Jomtien, Thailand, (1990); Hamburg (1997); Dakar (1996) and (2000) (UNESCO 1997). At all these conferences, illiteracy was recognised as one of the major world problems.

The international Education for All (EFA) goals were developed in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand and in the 2006 EFA Monitoring Report the link between literacy and all other goals is made clear. There is an understanding that the higher the literacy skills of parents the more support they provide to children to enroll and attend school thus ensuring that they proceed to higher school standards. (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006:1). This report goes on to state that the although the literacy rate has increased in Sub-Saharan Africa by 10 per

¹¹ Details of the FLP participation in this event are provided in Chapter 12

cent, many countries will find it difficult to meet their EFA goal of reducing their levels of illiteracy by 50 per cent by 2015.

The FLP as an organisation, and I as an individual, took part in an international survey led by David Archer of the non government organisation ActionAid International that resulted in 2005 in a report *Writing the Wrongs: International Benchmarks on Adult Literacy*. (Archer 2005) This study incorporates information from 67 programmes in 35 countries of which the FLP was one of the 43 respondents from Africa. This document gives five reasons that, apart from it being a basic human right to education, adult literacy is important.

The first of the reasons presented in *Writing the Wrongs: International Benchmarks on Adult Literacy* (Archer 2005) is that literacy is a tool to reduce gender inequality and that being literate increases self confidence in women. The second is that mothers who are literate are more likely to raise children who are literate and who are healthier. Another reason is that being literate is economically significant; countries with higher literacy levels are those with higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita growth and that poverty alleviation programmes work better when the target population has at least basic literacy skills. Literacy helps in the fight against Aids and adult education will have to be provided for those children who are losing time at school because of the pandemic. (Archer 2005: 1-2)

South African initiatives

Moving from the international to the South African situation it is on the policy level that the country can be applauded. The South African Constitution is often hailed as among the best in the world it is not surprising that it enshrines the right to basic adult education. Despite the fact that this provides the legislative framework for adult basic education and training, without sufficient programmes or help to meet the needs of the adults who need it, the excellent South African

constitution becomes almost meaningless.

In South Africa a national campaign that was going to “break the back of illiteracy” was launched in 1999 by the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, who saw firsthand, in his parents, the difficulties experienced by people who cannot read or write. This campaign became known as SANLI, the South African National Literacy Initiative. In 2006 the then Minister of Education Naledi Pandor established a Ministerial Committee on Literacy to plan for another campaign. The reason for this campaign is included in the summary of the mass literacy campaign plan:

The plan is necessary because South Africa’s system of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) is not reducing the number of illiterates and functional illiterates in spite of the constitutional right of all South Africans to basic education in their own language. Currently there are about 4.7 million total illiterates (who have never been to school) and another 4.9 million adults who are to varying degrees functionally illiterate (they dropped out of school before grade 7) – a total of 9.6 million. (Department of Education 2007:5)

The latest campaign, *Ka Ri Gude* was launched in 2008 and in 2009 the budgetary allocation was “R16 million less than it was in 2008” and with a “target of 4.7 million illiterates needing to be reached before 2015, the campaign has applied rigorous cost-cutting mechanisms to lower its per capita costs to reach as many learners as possible”. (McKay.2009) This decrease in government support and the relocation of the directorate for adult basic education to the Ministry of Higher Education will have an effect on the success of the campaign but what this will be it is too early to tell.

One concern I have with mass campaigns is the pressure I believe is placed on the training providers to reach as many people as possible in as short a time as possible. This concern is shared by Barton and Papen (2005:21)

There is frequently a conflict between the desire and need to serve as many learners as possible and the concerns for how much is possible in how little time. With limited funding, there are always pressures to produce short-term and

tangible outcomes. However, experiences in many countries have shown that money is better spent on longer programmes than on short-term efforts that result in impressive short-term outcomes, but with little long term change.

Literacy programme curricula

The curricula of programmes in mass campaigns or those offered by other literacy providers vary. Some follow a curriculum that takes adult learners through the technical aspects of learning to read and write but in the FLP, content has always been added to this. The FLP content is relevant and the presentation engages adults in active learning - we do not include content that is far removed from the needs of the adult learners. We do not want

Learners (to) shun (night) school, or drop out and become disillusioned, when the programmes homogenise their diverse needs and desires into competencies which only make sense within the framework of essay-text literacy itself. (Kell 1996:254)

However it appears that some FLP group members are used to the school approach where they are taught so that they can pass the tests and the FLP approach caused them some concern. They wonder, as this letter to the editor of the FLP newsletter shows, why we are not teaching what they will then find in the examination paper:

Editor, can I make my first request? I wish to know that why our exam are different? Why they teach us every day. Because at the end of last year the paper was written a new thing on me and I ask you can you develop our skills because I wish to learn after that to see my future. Thank you, Mondli Shoba (Masifunde Njengomndeni 2006)

In the FLP we did use the information acquired during the participatory rural appraisal and so were able to design learning content that addressed real concerns and problems. People needed to learn to read and write and we could not ignore that this is a process that requires a certain amount of tedious

practising and technical expertise. However as the basic skills were being mastered, this had to take place within meaningful content material.

As well as the information used from the PRA, I felt that there was also the need to introduce new information. My own thoughts on this, in what is less than academic language, is to ask how 'you know you like chocolate if you have never tasted it?' Or in the words of one of the participants in the 2000 PRA, "Snoeks must come and visit the crèches and come with more knowledge even about things they have not mentioned." Labuschagne (2000:49).

Literacy, education and reading for pleasure

From 2000 onwards the FLP provided books, newspapers and magazines, and I became very aware that the women enjoy being able to read, alone and with their children. As is detailed in Chapter 10 they have gained in confidence and are very proud of their ability to read and write - some of them now in English as well as in Zulu.

In discussions in 2000, I was told that parents in the area are divided as some say that there is no need for their children to learn to read and write as they will only herd cattle or get married. Some were also wary of further education as it was reported that one young man left to go to Durban to study and never returned. However this view has changed and is no longer dominant as FLP group members have stated that they want their children to benefit from school and tertiary education. One of the FLP facilitators, Florence Molefe, saved money for several years in order to send her daughter to Durban to study and is now the proud mother of a daughter with a degree. The following words from FLP members echo the sentiment that education, both basic and further, is important:

I managed to get an opportunity to go to adult school¹². I am now free because I can read so many things. Running your family is difficult because you have a heavy load to carry with all sorts of strains and difficulties, but I believe in prayer in everything I do. I really wish to see my children learning and finishing their schooling, so that they will not be like me. I would like them to gain many things. Zandile Duma (Family Literacy Project 2003)

I wish that I can take my children to university when they finish Standard 10 so that they can get a better job. Sibongile Zuma

More especially education make the home warm because you get a good job that gives you a good salary then you can buy whatever you like. Goodness Khanyile (Desmond 2004:13)

The FLP tries to take into account the needs expressed by adult learners for recognition of their learning. Anecdotal evidence provided by FLP facilitators suggests that certificates are very important to the FLP group members. I have had to remind myself not to ignore the need that many people have to measure themselves against some external standard, or that they really do enjoy having a certificate to frame and proudly hang on the wall.

Print environment

The area in which the FLP operates can only be described as print-poor. As will be mentioned several times in this study, there is little in the way of environmental print in the areas in which FLP works. For example on the 20 km of dirt road from Creighton, past St Apollinaris Hospital at Centocow and on to the rural settlement of Mpumlwane there are only about ten signposts and nothing more. There are no shops or advertisement boards and the two schools on the way do not have boards giving their names. The church at Mpumlwane is unmarked and the only written words in the building are a poster in English on Aids and words in Zulu on the altar cloth. The FLP library there has a large sign indicating that it is a community facility. Along with many other literacy initiatives

¹² Many FLP group members refer to the project as an adult school

in South Africa, we have had to not only look at what people know already and what they need, but how to support them in a print-deprived environment.

Adult literacy in the FLP

Initially we did have to think about why we were adding adult literacy to the groups set up to look at how adults could support the development of early literacy skills in their children. One reason was that the existing adult literacy group at Mpumlwane seemed more stable than our new FLP groups. In this group the same women attended regularly rather than sending family members to 'represent' them as they some times did in the newly formed groups. The existing group was not running without some problems and I was asked during my first visits if I was going "help the teacher" and I was also asked about certificates. The group members also asked me what should happen because "we do not all know the same things" which I took to mean that they were at different levels and yet being taught at the same level.

I realized that the group members of the newly formed FLP groups wanted something for themselves as well as for their children, and that adult literacy may be the answer. I decided to explore how adult literacy could be introduced because of its obvious link with family literacy work and because I wanted a way of bringing stability to the groups. I also thought that the children who saw adults working hard to read and write would realize the importance of developing literacy skills. I also had the idea, confirmed and extended by later reading and already stated in this chapter, that by developing the literacy levels of parents that the literacy levels of the children would improve.

Each extra year of education for mothers is also associated with a significant decline in infant mortality and improved child-health. Children with parents (especially mothers) who can read and write stay in school longer and achieve more. (Archer 2005:7)

Literacy and paid employment

It is quite sad that as is stated in Chapter 8 that a number of women who, when talking about these adult literacy classes, said eagerly that once literate they would be able to get jobs. This indicated that they thought that 'literacy' would give them a range of skills and that jobs would materialise where presently there are none. This is a view similar to that held by many others in South Africa that the only way forward is to have a workforce that is better educated. As Baynham (1995: 45) says;

...job-related literacy tasks (have) outcomes like increased productivity, increased awareness of health and safety, increased ability to participate in new types of work practices and access to further training.

This is in part true, but it is not the only factor. This takes us back to pre-1994 discussions where in disputes between labour and management, strikers were told they did not deserve better pay and conditions as they were not capable of taking on more highly skilled work. This is a consideration that must be dealt with by those looking at the adult basic education and training provision in this country. Educating people will not automatically provide work for them and this is particularly true in the deep rural areas.

Literacy levels of children

Literacy is not only a problem in the adult education sector. Literacy levels in children are also of concern. In South Africa there are many well-documented stories and statistics that worry us about the status of reading and writing skills in both adults and children, for example:

- From statistics released by the national Department of Education it was "found that the average South African Grade 3 child was able to score only 39 per cent on the Reading Comprehension and Writing assessment." (Valentine 2007:2)

- So many children do not have easy access to books. A recent survey (2007) by the SA Book Development Council found that 54 per cent of South African homes do not own a leisure book.
- The General Household Survey (2005) found that 1 million children live in households where there is no literate adult.
- The results of the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) also make me concerned for the future of literacy in South Africa. The IEA International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has for 50 years conducted large-scale comparative studies of educational achievement and to mark the start of the 21st century inaugurated a new study. PIRLS was set up to monitor international trends of reading achievement in primary school children every 5 years. In 2001 the first PIRLS study was conducted in 35 countries and in 2006 was extended to 40 countries. In South Africa the sample included children from Grades 4 and 5 (16,067 Grade 4 and 14,657 Grade 5 children) more than half of whom attended schools in rural areas and came from disadvantaged homes. The results from South Africa are alarming. The average score internationally was 500 with South African Grade 4 children scoring the lowest of the 45 countries with an average score of 250.

Another finding from PIRLS was that over half of the South African parents of the children in this study were not regularly involved in their children's educational activities. According to reports from the parents most homes had few books with over 50 per cent having less than 10 books and only 4.2 per cent owning more than 100 books.

Two of the findings from the South African PIRLS research team were that high frequency of home literacy activities was linked to higher learner performance and that having a large variety of children's books in the home has a positive influence on performance. (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study in Primary Schools in 40 countries (PIRLS) Report. 2006)

It is findings such as these I have referred to above, and the vast amount of research internationally and nationally quoted throughout my study that confirms my belief that family literacy has a vital role to play in helping those struggling to raise their levels of literacy.

Reflection

In this chapter I have described the situation in which the FLP operates, in terms of adult and child literacy concerns in South Africa. This establishes the need for interventions such as the FLP and why this initiative and others must take into account the needs of the communities in which they work. The needs identified in research findings and statistics influenced me to find a way to support literacy development in both adults and children.

Although the initial influence on the establishment of the FLP was the need to improve early literacy development in young children, it became evident in the first year of operation that the FLP had to take account of the need to support adults to improve their levels of literacy. The benefits of improved adult literacy levels, especially in mothers, have been noted in this chapter and were an influence on, and justification for, including adult literacy in the FLP sessions.

The way in which FLP group members linked becoming literate with acquiring paid employment opportunities made me realise the difference between their perspective and mine. Many FLP group members believed that if they were literate they would be able to find work and of course, if work became available,

they would be more likely to be considered if they were literate. However, my aim in providing literacy training was to open the door to the pleasures of reading and to equip them to offer more support to their children than they would be able to as people with few or no literacy skills.

The following chapter describes and discusses family literacy.

CHAPTER 5: FAMILY LITERACY

In this chapter the term 'family literacy' is presented and explained especially as it relates to the South African context.

The term 'family literacy' was first used by name, researched, written about and implemented through programmes in the United States of America and the United Kingdom which

target preschool and primary school children and their parents and are based in schools or community centres. (Desmond and Elfert 2008:vii)

It is important to distinguish between 'family literacy programmes' and 'family literacy practices'. 'Family literacy programmes' refer to programmes run by a range of providers and which target children and parents, at times on their own and at times together. 'Family literacy practices' refer to what actually happens in homes all over the world - to a greater or lesser degree depending on the level of parent-child interaction within those homes.

When I started the Family Literacy Project in 2000 the descriptions of models that I was able to find were not from South Africa or Africa. As the following extract from an article¹³ I wrote for Language Matters (Desmond 2004a:349 – 350) shows, I had to look for inspiration and examples from further afield. This extract also appears in the Preface and it was a difficult decision as to whether it should appear here, or there. In the end I decided it was necessary to include it in both places as it provides important background information in both this chapter and in the Preface.

Most research into family literacy has been conducted in the US and the United Kingdom. The term family literacy was coined in the US and there is a well-funded and extensive range of projects offering variations of family literacy interventions. Different models of family literacy include the following:

¹³ I have included this article in full in the Preface

Parents in schools: Problems that children experience in school are identified. Interventions are designed that target parents so that they can help their children overcome these problems. Those parents are given appropriate guidance in participating in activities such as helping in libraries, producing newsletters and notices, and taking part in classroom activities such as reading. (Auerbach 1995; Paratore 1995)

Children and parents in groups: Parents and children are shown ways to play, talk, or read together. This can be in structured activity sessions outside the home. In some programmes parents and children are asked to engage in activities such as storybook reading, using the library, and writing up literacy and other activities. These are then discussed during group sessions and guidance provided. If parents and children read at home they are monitored and receive advice on different techniques. (Baker, Serpell and Sonnenschein 1995; Harrison 1995; Neuman 1995)

Children and parents at home: Materials and activities in the home are the resources parents and children are encouraged to use to develop literacy skills. Programmes provide strategies for helping parents to help their children enjoy reading and other literacy-related activities. (Graves and Wendorf 1995; Harrison 1995; McKee and Rhett 1995)

In all the models, adult and early literacy are combined in some way, and the establishment of the programmes is prompted by a concern over the levels of adult literacy. The importance of parental involvement is highlighted, based on the assumption that the child's first and longest-standing teacher is her parent.

Morrow (1995) states that it is difficult to define family literacy clearly and simply as it is a concept of many parts. She uses a definition provided by The Family Literacy Commission in the US that focuses on the family rather than on the school as being where early literacy skills are developed. Part of this definition states that 'Family literacy encompasses the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community. Sometimes, family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children "get things done".' (Morrow 1995:7)

In the US the initial approach to family literacy was to encourage partnerships between parents and schools to help children learn to read. By 1991 this approach had broadened to include what Morrow (1995:5 citing Braun) described as providing 'environments which enable adult learners to enhance their own literacies, and at the same time provide environments which promote the literacies of their children'.

In an Australian study Spreadbury (1996:215) found 'that it was not merely reading to a child that facilitates that child's own independent reading, but rather the amount and quality of the interaction between parent and child that correlated with the child's reading ability at both age six and eight'. The importance of parental attitudes is another variable referred to in several studies that demonstrate that factors such as these are more important than the material environment of the child. (Nistler and Maiers 1999) Amstutz (2000:38) refers to a

study conducted in 1997 by Ebener, Lara-Alecio and Irby that found that 'parents instilled the importance of education in their children by setting high expectations for academic achievement, connecting education with success, and acting as a role model in acquiring an education'. A similar finding is referred to by Gadsen (1994:4) when she describes findings by Wigfield and Asher that 'demonstrated that parents' attitudes and expectations for their children's performance are good predictors of children's attitudes toward learning, effort in school, and classroom performance'.(Desmond 2004a 349 – 350)

As already stated, when I set up the FLP in 2000 there were few projects or programmes in Africa but in recent years more attention has been paid to family literacy projects in Africa. This has led to more projects being documented and results, questions and impact shared both within country, between African countries and beyond. These include

- The 2007 UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning organized and funded “North-South Exchange on Family Literacy” held in Germany. One of the reasons for setting up this exchange was to facilitate discussion between countries across the globe. Together with delegates from Namibia, Niger and Uganda, I was able to contribute experiences from Africa to the debates between representatives from North and Latin America, the Arab States, Asia and Pacific and Europe. The following statement was made by participants:
 - Family literacy is an approach to learning that focuses on intergenerational interactions within families and communities which promote the development of literacy and life skills.
 - Family literacy celebrates and builds on existing skills and knowledge, and encourages participants to identify issues they face within their families and communities and to act upon them.
 - Family literacy has proved to be an effective means of promoting literacy and encouraging adults and children to become lifelong learners. It bridges formal and non-formal/informal learning.
 - There is growing evidence of its benefits from a range of countries and settings around the world, and of its ability to empower families from diverse cultural and language backgrounds.
 - Depending on local circumstances and aims, these benefits can include improvements in parents' and children's language, literacy and other skills, and in parents' ability to help their children. Other benefits may include: progression to further study, employment, and more positive

- child-rearing practices (for parents); and enhanced self-confidence, relationships in the family, status of women and girls, and life chances (for parents and children).
- Culturally appropriate research and evaluation are central to the development of effective family literacy policy and programmes.
 - Family literacy is essential to building a culture of lifelong learning. It should be an integral part of education policy and requires comprehensive and long-term public investment. (Elfert, M. 2008:3)
- Africa featured in a meta-study on family literacy, language and numeracy conducted by researchers in England (Brooks et al 2006). The researchers acknowledged that most of the projects studied were from England but that they were able to gather evidence from three “non-English-speaking countries” of which South Africa was one as the project was the Family Literacy Project situated as it is in a mainly Zulu-speaking area of the country. Mention was also made of a project based in Uganda.
 - Accounts of nine African-based projects were included in a book edited by Maren Elfert of UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning and myself: *Family Literacy: Experiences from Africa and around the world*. (Desmond and Elfert 2008) The book was produced because as editors we felt that it was time to highlight the contribution to information on family literacy that could be made from Africa. Contributions to this book demonstrated to us that family literacy in Africa has a much wider focus than family literacy programmes in other parts of the world. African family literacy programmes take into account the needs of the family as a whole and the development of the community at large. Programme implementers understand the problems facing families, such as poverty, HIV/Aids and gender imbalances and this understanding is reflected in the way the programmes are delivered.

With increased notice of African based family literacy projects, there has been interest in the similarities and differences between these and those in the United States of America, Europe and the United Kingdom. Many of these have interesting activities but not all are what is needed in the African context where

the issues relate to daily life in often difficult circumstances. As Kate Pahl states in the meta-study mentioned above:

Others, notably the programmes in Uganda, South Africa and Nepal and the MAPPS project, engaged more directly with the out-of-school experiences of the women who participated, and the programmes were shaped by their experiences. In most cases, this was from necessity, as to engage with participants meant learning to listen to their concerns, which may focus on health and access to water and electricity, not literacy. Again this reflects the more holistic approaches many programmes have taken. (Brooks et al 2006: pp 58-59)

I believe that there is the need to further develop and highlight examples of Africa-based family literacy projects or programmes that are relevant to the range of contexts on the continent. This was one of the issues I set out to address when I set up the FLP – to develop a South African model of family literacy, using examples from other continents but shaping it to meet our own needs. These needs include acknowledging and including the tradition of passing on knowledge orally that predominates in most rural areas and to provide support for the status of the spoken language in the home while not ignoring the need to introduce books and writing to children and adults. Uncomplicated interventions that do not require huge resources or much infrastructure are needed if they are to be effective in under-resourced rural areas. Societal and health needs will always be of interest to families, in particular infant care, tuberculosis and HIV and AIDS.

Reflection

In this chapter I have provided an overview of family literacy with particular emphasis on approaches from Africa. The influence of family literacy programmes from the USA and the UK can be seen as the major influence on my piloting an approach to improving levels of literacy in young children. If I had not read about existing family literacy programmes I may not have had the framework in which to start a pilot project to find ways to support early literacy development in young children by involving their families.

A later influence stems from my involvement in international meetings on family literacy. As an invited delegate to the North-South Exchange on Family Literacy described in this chapter, I was provided with a platform and the confidence to promote an African model of family literacy. I was encouraged by the interest of others in the approach developed by FLP and FLP facilitators and FLP group members were excited by the reports of the project reaching a wider and more international audience. The influence of this and other opportunities to present 'our' approach is discussed again in Chapter 12.

Part One of this study ends with the following chapter in which I describe the very first visits made in the life of the FLP.

CHAPTER 6: THE FIRST VISITS

The start of the Family Literacy Project has been referred to earlier in this study. This chapter presents details of those early days and the influence of these experiences on the project development. I found it difficult to decide where to place this chapter. At first I thought it should come earlier in the document, but I finally chose to place it here. In this way it forms a bridge between the broader context described in the previous three chapters, and the more intensive investigation into the work of the project in Part Two.

Selecting sites

When I was preparing to start the FLP, I decided to work in five sites spread across KwaZulu Natal. In my work since 1991 I had visited a range of pre-schools so felt confident that I could select sites in rural, peri-urban and urban areas and be able to work from there to reach parents. That was not to be, and in this section, I describe how I tried to select sites and at times how they seemed to select me.

In February 2000, a person I met when I visited New York to work with the Children's Television Network to learn more about, *Takalani Sesame*, the project I worked on for a year, visited South Africa. She asked me to take her to a rural site and I chose to visit Mbalenhle Pre-School in Stepmore, near the village of Himeville. This was a site I had visited three times as part of a research project with Khulisa Management Services and I knew I would be able to bring a visitor there. This visitor, Donna Chandler, was also the person who had given me the book I learnt so much from: *Family Literacy: connections in schools and communities* (Morrow 1995). We went to Stepmore and while there I asked the pre-school teacher, to bring together a group of parents who might be interested to discuss ways to help their children develop early literacy skills. We set the date

for this meeting and I left, confident that this was to be the first of the sites where I would start developing an approach to family literacy.

As can be seen from my field notes I was impressed by the way the pre-school teacher, S'bongile Madiba¹⁴, tried to be effective despite enormous odds.

The pre-school was in a small, abandoned home with fire-blackened walls. Goats walked in and out of the rooms while the children played. The teacher, S'bongile Madiba, was enthusiastic and well prepared on every visit¹⁵, although she was never warned in advance. I decided to start the family literacy project here and she was happy to accommodate us. We arranged that parents would come together on March 8th 2000 to discuss the project. This meeting would take place in the new pre-school building – a small mud building erected by the parents. (Field notes March 2000)

I set off eagerly for Stepmore for that first meeting in March 2000, only to find that when I turned onto the small track to the pre-school that the stones over the stream had been washed away and I had to abandon the car and walk. Once over the stream I climbed the short distance to the small general store where I was met by the owner who had been watching me since I parked my car. Being from the city I immediately asked him if my car would be safe and asked him where I could find a person to guard it while I was in the meeting. He laughed and only when I insisted did he say that not only could he see the car and would keep an eye on it, but that he would also ask a local man to sit next to it to make sure no-one would steal it. When I returned to my car I found that the 'car guard' was a very old man with only one arm and certainly in no state to fight off anyone intending to damage or steal my car. This was the last time I asked for a car guard or was worried about the safety of my car or, indeed, my own safety as I relaxed into the welcome I received at each of the sites I later came to work in.

Once at the pre-school I discovered that S'bongile Madiba had, in the days between my visit with Donna Chandler in February, and the 8th March, moved to another school and was working there as the Grade R (Reception Year) teacher.

¹⁴ S'bongile Madiba died in April 2009

¹⁵ Research visits made during my contract with Khulisa Management Services 1997 - 1999

The new teacher, Nomusa Ndlovu, was expecting me and I was able to hold the meeting.

This was the meeting where I hoped to begin exploring family literacy and developing a South African approach to it. The visit was not without its problems but dealing with small hitches such as these soon became part of the programme and are common in development work especially in deeply rural areas.

I arrived for the parents meeting at Mbalenhle Pre-school. When I got there I found that Maureen had not asked her boss, the shop owner, if she could come to the meeting to translate. He was out but when he came back he was quite happy to let her come with us and he undertook to watch the car as I'd had to leave it on the side of the turn off to the shop.

This meant a late start – 11 instead of 10 o'clock. About 5 parents were there at 10 but by the time we started we had 10 people. (Field notes 8th March 2000)

After that meeting Nomusa Ndlovu and I set off to talk to S'bongile Madiba at her new school. To reach Malunga Primary School we had to drive for thirty minutes on a deeply rutted road before coming to the small settlement of Lotheni. At every turn in the road I asked in a hopeful way if we had reached the school. I became anxious and the road became more filled with holes and rocks. Nomusa sat beside me very calm and obviously very used to travelling on similar roads. Both the principal of Malunga Primary School and S'bongile Madiba were so enthusiastic and welcoming that this became the second site to situate this experiment in family literacy. This is a site I felt I had little to do with selecting, I felt that I had been selected by the site! I arranged to return the following day and run a workshop with parents of the children in Grade R.

The other sites where the FLP was established came about as people heard about this experiment to help children. A friend had moved to the area and was working at a non government organisation set up to support women and girls. She asked me to visit a pre-school near the village of Creighton. To get there, I drove from Creighton to the mission station at Centocow and the site of St

Appollinaris Hospital. There I met Thoko Dlamini and together with Gugu Made, also from the Centocow Leadership and Training Group we took a taxi to the pre-school at Mpumlwane. We took a taxi because these two women thought the road too rough for me to drive on. For reasons revealed later in this story, this was to be the last time I relied on public transport in that area. We arrived at the small village of Mpumlwane and found a group of women attending a literacy group in the church building. I introduced my ideas of family literacy and we agreed that I would return and work with them once a month. The women had prepared lunch for me and then we waited for the vehicle that was to take me back to the mission station. When this did not arrive, one of the women went to see what had happened to the arrangement made with a teacher at the nearby school. It turned out that her car had broken down so we had no choice but to the two hour walk back to the mission station where I had parked my own car. I was ill-prepared for this, wearing sandals and not used to taking long walks. After we had been walking for some time a huge water truck appeared on the horizon. I stood in the middle of the road and flagged down the driver who promised to pick us up on his return trip. He did this and four of us fitted ourselves in, probably breaking quite a few rules of the road. All the while Thoko Dlamini was repeating "You'll never come back. I know, you'll never come back." But the draw of working in such a remote and under resourced area was too much to resist and this became another site to experiment with adapting family literacy methods from abroad to the South African situation.

And, according to my field notes, the following meetings in these sites had their own challenges:

Flexible, that's the F in FLP. I was really looking forward to this meeting¹⁶; they had been such a lovely, lively group. First of all Maureen Msomi, the translator, had gone to nurse her mother who was ill. Then only two of the original group turned up but with 7 new mothers. This meant we couldn't do a good feedback on the reading with children exercise and following up on the bread making suggestion was also difficult. Anyway Lisebo and Melvina talked about how their

¹⁶ At Mbalenhle Pre-School, Stepmore

children had enjoyed reading although Melvina's younger child (4) had not wanted to read but had played with a ball instead. (Field notes 13th April 2000)

I started my work in the FLP believing, and I continue to believe, that it is important to begin with what people know and move on from there to introduce new ideas and knowledge. It became my practice in the FLP to establish what people already knew. The adults who came to those first sessions and sat happily on the floor in the small pre-school, or in the classroom, or church, came with rich experiences of lives lived well despite encountering many difficulties. They came to the group with a lifetime of knowledge and experience that needed to be acknowledged, shared and discussed. I wanted them to be involved in adding to their own knowledge, using information I provided where I thought it would be helpful and relevant.

It was important for me, in 2000, to think about how I was perceived as at that stage I was still very new to the area. I worried that people might think that I was bringing not only information but also material goods into these very under resourced communities. I did bring many things and perhaps these were not always what was expected – magazines, paint, play dough, glue, paper, and, in the first year always, water, juice and biscuits. The water was essential because none of the sites had easy access to piped water.

As can be seen from the plan I had for the third session, that, although I was willing to see how the group wanted the sessions to develop, I did have some idea of what I wanted to achieve on each visit. I felt it was important to balance people's own knowledge and the new information I brought and so wrote out workshop plans to draw these together.

PARENTS MEETING 3: SITE: Mbalenhle

DATE: Thursday 11.5.00

1	PRAYER	
2	WELCOME Introduction of new members Apologies	Name tags Labels Pen
3	REPORT BACK - who 'read' the magazines with their children? - What did you learn from this - Did you and the children enjoy/not enjoy this? - Did this lead to any other discussions or activities? - Did you try any activities of your own? - Feelings? - What now?	Koki Newsprint
4	ACTIVITY Do "We are the same" etc activity to introduce parents to what is going to be happening in the pre-school and why. Discuss with practitioner that when she has done this activity she should ask the learners to tell their parents so that they can talk about it with their children and perhaps do something similar at home.	Trays with objects similar but not the same
5	PROBLEMATIZE Problematize one of the ideas from previous meeting and try and draw out a solution	
6	ACTIVITY Demonstrate a book made from magazine pictures. Give out paper, magazines. Ask adults to do this with their pre-schoolers and let older children write down words	'book' paper, magazines
7	SETTING UP A GROUP Discuss whether or not the group wants to become more formal e.g. Aims, membership, responsibilities, committee	Newsprint, koki
8	NEXT MEETING Date, time, place	
9	REFRESHMENTS	Juice, biscuits
10	PRAYER	

PROBLEMATISING FOR MBALENHLE FAMILY LITERACY GROUP

Do exercise with bread, peanut butter and rama

- how would you buy the first lot of ingredients?
- what are the alternatives?
- how can slices be the same?
- who will do this rota? Tasks?
- When?
- Cost?
- first amount of money?
- Profit?

FORMING A GROUP

Why do you think it might be important?

NAME: e.g. Mbalenhle Family Literacy Group

AIM: e.g. To work together to promote early literacy

MEMBERSHIP: e.g. anyone who is related to a child in this preschool

RESPONSIBILITIES: e.g.

- to attend workshops regularly
- to complete assignments

COMMITTEE / AGM

Figure 4: Workshop plan 2000

Of course it was important that I had a plan, but as often happens in developing a project; plans cannot always be followed as one hoped they would be. For example, the 'problematizing' arose from a suggestion group members had made in the second session. They suggested that to raise money they could make and sell sandwiches at the nearby Somangwe Primary School. What I found out, fortunately before this session started, was that there was already a school feeding scheme and that the children would probably not be interested in buying more than the chips and sweets already on sale at the school gates. I was never able to discover why people thought that making and selling sandwiches at the school would be a viable money-making proposition.

Another idea that was soon put on hold was the formalising of the new groups. As described later, numbers fluctuated and people didn't always attend

themselves but sent others to represent them. I never asked why this happened but merely accepted this practice.

What did work were the play activities I introduced, and the discussions around development of early literacy skills. I tried to make the sessions relaxed and fun to attend. By doing this I wanted to change the ideas that many people have that school and learning are boring or dull. Some of those women did have bad memories of school and some of these are discussed in Chapter 9, but they were certainly not of the opinion that learning was dull. They came eager to learn and soon wanted to share what they knew. So, as far as that was concerned, the methods I used were working.

However, as stated above, the attendance was not what I expected, and our ways of keeping time were very different. On several occasions someone who had attended one session would send her daughter-in-law or aunt to 'represent' them. I assumed this was because they were all one family and what one person learnt could be shared with the others. My ideas of the importance of continuity of group membership were sorely tested. What about the day when everyone seemed to forget there was a session? That was the time when children were sent running from the pre-school, bounding over the hills to fetch their mothers who came along laughing and apologising for forgetting. But of course, I had a diary and a watch, something none of the women I worked with in that first year had. I tried hard to be relaxed about time. I tried hard not to mind when people did not attend every session. I had to believe that information was going back into families to use in whatever way they wanted to use it. I was learning a lot about life in a rural area, and having to learn it very quickly and sometimes without quite understanding what the lesson was.

Geographic area

All sites are in the same geographic area but take between 20 minutes and up to two hours to reach from the small village of Himeville where I stayed for at least a week at a time when visiting the area each month in the first two years of project development and implementation.



Figure 5: View of Mpumlwane (Source: FLP team member)

The location of the project in the southern Drakensberg area of KwaZulu Natal is an important consideration with the effect it had on implementation. The location lent charm and brought challenges to the development of an approach to family literacy.

The following description is from another study conducted in the same area by my son and his colleague. I include it to add to my description of the location. Desmond and Kvalsvig (2005) describe the area in this way:

The pilot study took place in two rural towns and the surrounding countryside in a mountainous area of KwaZulu-Natal during the winter of 2004. The area has rainfall in summer and the winters are dry and cold, with snow at times. The area is close to a World Heritage Site and attracts tourists and holidaymakers who stay in hotels or bed-and-breakfast accommodation in the villages or on the nearby farms, or camp in the conservation area.

There are two small towns each of which have holiday homes, tourist accommodation and retirement homes, as well as low-cost housing provided by the municipalities to alleviate poverty. The area is served by a Department of Health Clinic and Community Health Workers, and officers of the Department of Social Welfare, who handle grant applications for vulnerable children.

Outside the town the housing is scattered and the roads are bad. Food is scarce during winter. The families in the more remote parts of the study area have to travel 40-50 kilometres in local taxis to the town in order to attend the clinic or to obtain grants or pensions. Children walk long distances to school over rugged terrain, and many of the schools in the area are poorly equipped.

The rural houses were usually constructed of wattle and daub. They were scattered across the countryside rather than grouped in villages. (Desmond and Kvalsvig 2005: 18-20)

The charm lies in the natural beauty of the surroundings and the challenge lies in the poverty, the illnesses, the lack of infrastructure or the poor maintenance of what infrastructure there is. The FLP is situated in Sisonke District Municipality where, according to the 2005 KwaZulu-Natal Municipal Portfolio, 17 per cent of the population in the area had no schooling and 41 per cent are unemployed. Over the years, I saw that some roads were graded and improved but never to a standard that made it easy to drive without a sturdy 4x4 vehicle. These are the same roads over which group members travel in less than sturdy local taxis. Toilets were built in some areas. New houses went up as local people presumably were employed and brought money into the area. For most of the group members of the project, life did change but not, as far as I could see, substantially.

Final site selection

As can be seen from the above, I never did carry out my original plan of having five sites in different parts of KwaZulu-Natal. The Sisonke Municipality caught me and kept me there. I am not sorry about this because it has allowed me to build a team of people in the same geographic area who understand each other's problems and are able to work together more easily.

Reflection

In this chapter I have presented information on how the FLP sites were chosen, highlighting the introduction and development of the participatory approach as well as some of the difficulties experienced.

The warm welcome I received when I entered the communities where the project began in a way influenced the choice of sites. Despite difficulties in transport, staff changes and poor infrastructure I was influenced by the warm welcome I received when I entered what were to become project sites. This welcoming attitude and the awareness of the level of need ensured that I did not look for more easily accessible sites in which to begin the project.

The chapters in Part Two are an exploration of the influences I believe have played an important part in the development of the FLP approach to family literacy.

PART TWO

INTRODUCTION

In this introduction I provide a brief overview of the four principles that have influenced my work in the Family Literacy Project. I have used these four principles as chapter headings and have grouped presentations of findings and discussion of the different activities of the FLP. The remaining two chapters in Part Two of this study focus on the influence of FLP facilitators and evaluators on the development of the FLP approach to family literacy, and the influence of recognition of and interest in this approach on both a national and international level.

It became apparent to me as I read through and studied the documents I had collected, that the work of the FLP fell into four broad categories and that these were clearly those of the four principles that have guided my work in early childhood development. What I will describe in this study is primarily how I work with adults and it is clear that while these are principles of early childhood development, they are also relevant in work with adults. In my experience the way adults learn best seems to be very close to the way that children learn best, i.e. when they are involved in activities that takes into account their lives and experiences (holistic development) in the community in which they live, and that their rights are respected, upheld and promoted.

The following are the four principles I believe have influenced my work in the FLP:

Active learning

Children learn best when they are actively involved in finding out about their world and how things work. They experience pleasure when they discover something for themselves, and this lays the foundation for future effective

learning. Children learn best when they are playing freely, choosing what they want to do. There should be no fear of failure and they should be allowed to experiment with and practice different skills. It is very important that children should be relaxed and encouraged to have fun, there should be no pressure on them to learn but rather adults should provide opportunities for them to try new ways of behaving, making things work or exploring. Adults should encourage children's creativity by allowing them to use their imaginations and to plan their own activities where possible. Children need to talk to those around them. They learn by observing others, talking about how they feel and playing together with adults or children.

Holistic development

Children develop in a holistic way and social, emotional, intellectual, moral and physical aspects must be equally valued and catered for. It is so difficult to pull these apart and look at one and not the other. As we look at one activity we see that, yes, it supports emotional development – but, it also develops the child intellectually, and so on. I do not think we should be too concerned to analyse each and every activity and try and place it into one or other of the aspects that make up a whole child. On the other hand it is important to know the different aspects so that we don't overlook one or the other of them. We have to stop and check that we are caring for and supporting the whole child.

Children are part of a community

Children don't live by themselves. Even with the high incidence of HIV and AIDS in South Africa, there are few cases of a young child living entirely on her own. Children nowadays may be more likely than before to live in child-headed households but many affected by AIDS will be living with extended families, as described in Chapter 3. A relationship with others is important in the development of resilient children. Children need to feel that they belong to someone who loves them and will protect them. This can be one person, or a

group of people who care for each other and act as a family. And families rarely live in isolation; they are part of a wider community. We should see children as the centre of the family and the family surrounded by the community. We must breathe new life into the saying¹⁷ that “it takes a village to raise a child”. This may be more possible in a rural area than in a peri-urban or urban area and this has been discussed in Chapter 3.

Children have rights

The rights of children must be protected by everyone who works with children or comes into contact with them – this means almost everyone. The rights of young children are clearly stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child; and the South African Constitution. However, along with rights come responsibilities and it is important that children learn from an early age that they have the responsibility to care for those around them.

Reflection

In this Introduction to Part 2 I have briefly outlined the four principles that influenced my approach to both early childhood development and family literacy. In the following chapters these principles will be reiterated and it will be shown how they have influenced the development and success of the Family Literacy Project. The two other major influences – the role played by the FLP facilitators and external evaluators, and the recognition of the FLP on a national and international level will be contained in the last two chapters in Part Two of this study.

¹⁷ This Igbo and Yoruba (Nigeria) proverb refers to the communal effort involved in bringing up a child. See: <http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-proverb-of-the-month/23-1998proverbs/137-november-1998-proverb.html>

CHAPTER 7: ACTIVE LEARNING: DEVELOPING EARLY LITERACY

In this chapter I will expand on the first of the key principles that underpin my work – which is that active learning works best for both adults and children. The principle is explained as it relates to young children and as the chapter continues, this principle will be linked to activities presented to adults in the Family Literacy Project to help them work more effectively with their young children.

When I was writing up this study, I extracted parts and included these in an article I submitted¹⁸ to the editors of the journal, *Mousaion*, a journal accredited with the national Department of Education and published by the University of South Africa. I have not indicated here which parts I extracted as the article has not yet been published, and the words are my own.

Children and active learning

- Children learn best when they are actively involved in finding out about their world and how things work.

Children learn through their five senses – touch, hearing, taste, smell, and sight. You only need to watch a small child for a short while to realise that their whole body is involved in what is being learnt.

They touch with their hands, their mouths, their feet and that is why safety at this stage is so important, to prevent children from being exposed to poisonous substances or very rough and sharp objects.

Children will smell things and taste things if given the chance to do so. Once again safety is an issue here. We must avoid undue emphasis on safety so as not to protect the child so much that she is never able to explore anything.

¹⁸ At this time the article has been peer-reviewed but no date has been given for publication

Children listen to sounds around them and will imitate. This is the beginning of speech and adults and older children who talk to babies are helping them understand how to have a conversation, how to speak and how to listen.

Children look, examine and watch what is around them. They learn about colours, shapes, size and position. They learn how others behave and how to show feelings such as distress, happiness in ways other than by crying or laughing. Babies and young children are watching and listening to those around to see and hear how to behave, how to act in the world.

- Children experience pleasure when they discover something for themselves and this lays the foundation for future effective learning. Children learn best when they are playing freely, choosing what they want to do.

Children should be given the opportunity to explore in safety. This means some preparation or guidance by the adult who makes sure that the child is not going to come to harm. By saying that children learn best by choosing what they want to do does not mean that adults have no part to play expect to keep children safe. We should be watching our children so that we can provide appropriate opportunities for play and exploration.

- Children should be allowed to experiment with and practice different skills with no fear of failure.

If children are reprimanded or punished because they do not do things “correctly” the first time they are less likely to keep trying to learn. Praise and encouragement are both important for children. Praise should not be empty “that’s nice” type of comments but should show a real appreciation of what the

child has done or attempted to do. Encouragement is vital to keep children motivated and also to take them one step forward as they learn new skills.

- It is very important that children should be relaxed and encouraged to have fun, there should be no pressure on them to learn but rather adults should provide opportunities for them to try new ways of behaving, making things work or exploring.

This to me is the key to the whole principle of active learning. Play may be what some people refer to as the work of children but this does not mean it should be dull or pressurised. I really do believe that if children are having fun they will learn far more easily than if they are unhappy or feeling that they are being forced to do something.

- Adults should encourage children's creativity by allowing them to use their imaginations and to plan their own activities where possible.

Children love to hear stories, to imagine how it will be when they are older or in a different place, to play out things that give them pleasure as well as the things that worry them. Adults prompt children to use their imaginations with "what if?" and "what happened next?" questions.

- Children need to talk to those around them. They learn by observing others, talking about how they feel and playing together with adults or children.

Talking to and listening to children is vital. This is not only for them to learn a language, but also to learn how to be with others. Most children engage in solitary play when they are young, moving on to parallel play and then co-operative play. They can also move between all three once they get older. But

whatever the kind of play, children usually enjoy knowing that an adult or loved one, brother or sister, is nearby.

This is a thumbnail sketch of the principle of active learning but I do not think that this is the place to expand further as that would mean a thesis on early childhood development rather than on the development of an approach to family literacy. However it does provide those who are not familiar with early childhood development with an understanding of a principle I consider to be very important.

Adults' role in active learning

As mentioned in Chapter 6, from March to September 2000 I held workshops for parents and other adults caring for those children attending Mbalenhle Crèche/Pre-School, Stepmore; Fundulwazi Pre-School, Mpumlwane; and Grade R, Malunga Primary School, Lotheni. Most of the groups were made up of women although one or two men did attend, but never on a regular basis. These workshops were the start of the FLP and will be described in more detail here than they were in the earlier chapter.

The aim of the workshops was to emphasise existing good practice in families and introduce new activities to support the development of early literacy skills in young children. When I chose the new activities, I had to bear in mind the limited physical resources available in homes in these areas. All activities made use of what was readily available, or was provided by the FLP. No activity required complicated or expensive equipment.

I believe that teaching parents new activities is important as long as the parents are not undermined or made to feel inadequate because they were not already engaging in these activities. The understanding that adults should participate actively in their children's development is shared by others in the early childhood sector as the following quotation shows:

Our conviction that teaching adults strategies to use with their children is productive in terms of the child's development is based on theories of adult mediation of children's learning following Vygotsky (1978) as well as various ethnographic studies of adult-child book reading (e.g. Cochran-Smith, 1984; Snow, 1983). Research showing reading gains for tutors as well as recipients of tutoring suggested that benefits in adult reading development would result from the parent-child interactions (Cohen, Kulik and Kulik, et al., 1982) (Handel and Goldsmith 1994:152)

Adults in a child's life are not standing by watching or even only providing opportunities and materials for learning. Adults should find ways to work together with the child so that the child is supported but still able to experiment with and investigate things and situations for herself. As Smidt (1998:30) points out adults should be more than mere supervisors as the

...role that adults play is complex, involving them in planning activities, talking to children, listening to children, observing children, thinking about what the children are doing, interacting.

Adults and active learning

Something I stressed in all the workshops I ran was that children learn best through play, when they are actively involved in finding things out and when they are relaxed and having fun. To highlight this approach, all the workshop sessions were conducted in as relaxed and friendly atmosphere as possible. The adults were given the opportunity to do the activities that they would later do with their own children. There was laughter and real engagement in the cutting, sticking, kneading of play dough and other activities presented to help children develop early literacy skills. In the Mbalenhle group the women demanded that their own collages and drawings go up alongside those of the children from the pre-school.



Figure 6: Making a collage, Stepmore (FLP team member)

The workshops were designed to cover a number of points about early literacy development and, at the end of each session, material was given to the adults to use at home; for example magazines to look at with children, newspapers to use for letter searches, squares of coloured paper for collage. The same material was left with the pre-schools so that the children could do the activity at home and again with the pre-school teacher. This also meant that those children, whose parents did not come to the sessions, did not miss out on the activities.

The parents from Malunga Primary School in Lotheni started coming early to the sessions so that they could watch their children in the Grade R class. They said they enjoyed seeing what the teacher did and were delighted when she showed them the children's portfolios. I realised that few of the parents ever came into the pre-schools or Grade R class. When they did, as this was where we held our sessions, they cast longing looks at all the equipment and toys. Once in each of

the sites we spent some time talking to the pre-school teacher about the different areas in the classroom.

At the one site, I suggested that they hold an open day so that parents could come and look at the classrooms and try out some activities themselves. When I saw the photographs of the open day that was held I realised once again that I had assumed that everyone knew what I meant by an open day held with the purpose of introducing the parents to school activities. The day had been largely about parents being fed (which must have been an expensive exercise for the school), and children modelling. As I noted in Chapter 1, many times over the years, I made mistakes like this, assuming either that I understood what people meant, or that everyone knew what I was talking about.

As stated already, I designed the discussions and activities in 2000 to stimulate an interest in the role of the adult in the development of early literacy in young children. The workshops provided an opportunity for adults to try things out for themselves, to engage in their own active learning. As mentioned earlier, the adults really did appear to enjoy the range of activities covered in the session. They also threw themselves wholeheartedly into role playing reading to children with one adult being the child and the other taking the part of the adult.

Workshops in more detail

The first workshop I ran in each of the groups began with the following questions:

- What do you think of when you hear the words early literacy?
- What do our children already know that will help them on their lifelong literacy journey?
- What can we do to make sure there are no unnecessary difficulties ahead?
- What can we provide that will help them move on and develop?

I understand some Zulu words and phrases but so few that I needed someone by my side to translate everything I said, and then have the responses translated back to me. This meant that I was not always sure of how unfamiliar words and terms were translated.

The questions I used were posed to involve the parents from the start and to build on what they knew their children were able to do. I thought that the term early literacy would be unfamiliar so provided discussion cards to stimulate discussion. These cards were A4 illustrations showing children and adults engaged in early literacy activities such as adults talking to a baby, adults and children reading together, adult and child discussing an advertising flyer and an adult and child talking about environmental print. This last illustration was originally drawn as a man and boy standing on a street corner with all the shop signs, taxi notices, street names and advertisements around them. This had to be redrawn to depict the dearth of environmental print around the FLP sites. It was an important lesson to me because it raised my awareness of the lack of printed material in and around the sites served by the project. I had given the brief to the artist and only when driving to the sites did I become conscious of not seeing one sign or billboard or anything printed in the hour long drive of 45km from the village of Himeville to Lotheni.

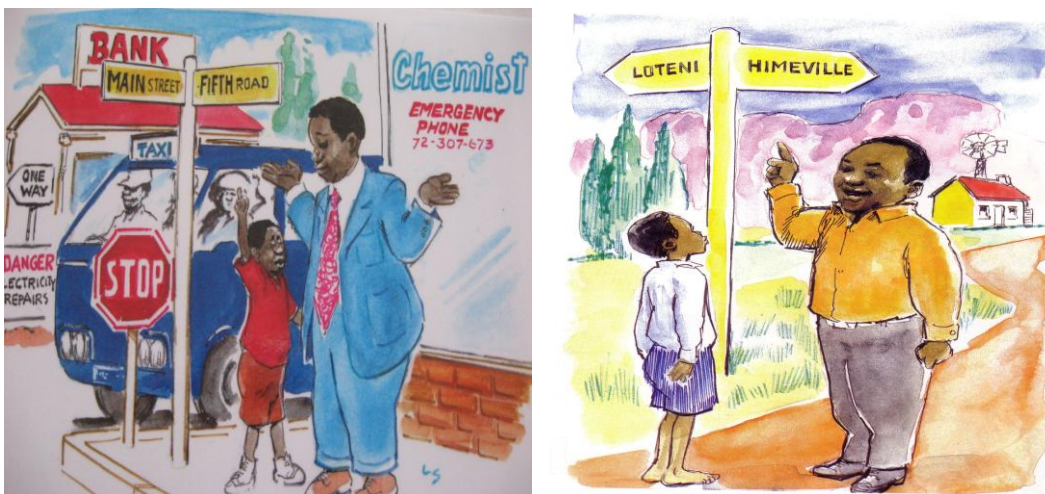


Figure 7: Print in the environment (Source: Len Sak)

During the first meeting at Mbalenhle Pre-School, those present drew a map of their community and listed what they liked about Stepmore and what they were proud of in their own lives. This activity was designed to promote a sense of strength, to value what they had and could already do. The women in the group listed singing, looking after children and grandchildren, and keeping their homes clean; the two young men (uncles of two of the pre-school children) said they were proud of doing karate and playing soccer.

One of the main aims in establishing the FLP was, as has been stated several times, to help children develop early literacy skills, skills that would make it easier for them to learn to read and write once they reached school. An important influence informing the design of those early sessions was the belief that parents (or those taking on the role of parents) are the first and most important teachers in the lives of their children. To find out what parents themselves thought about what children should be taught and their role in this, I asked them to list the skills, knowledge and attitudes they hoped that a six-year-old would have. Six years was chosen as this was the age at which children would leave pre-school or crèche to start primary school. The group at Stepmore said they thought that children of this age should know how to show respect, should speak Zulu well and should be able to write. Only after prompting and questions from me did they add reading and knowing how to play to the list. On reflection, a discussion with the group of these expectations would have been interesting, rather than assuming as I did, that they meant that children should be able to read and write their own names and perhaps write some letters of the alphabet.

In the sessions, we talked about how someone who could not read or write could help her child prepare to learn to read and write. The members of all the groups said it was not possible that a parent with few literacy skills could help her child to develop in this way. Using this information, it seemed to important to build the confidence of these parents and one way of doing this was to show them how

they were already nurturing early literacy skills in existing, everyday activities. We talked about how playing games, picking up sticks, stones or sorting beans could develop the fine motor skills necessary for holding a pencil or crayon when drawing, scribbling and, later, writing. We discussed the eye-hand coordination necessary for sweeping the floor or drawing in the sand and how important this would be in writing and in handling books. When the discussion focused on parent-child conversations about the daily tasks of fetching wood or water, the group realised that these activities could include the early literacy skills of repetition, vocabulary, sequencing, and recall and that they, as parents, had a vital role to play in the development of these skills.

Extending literacy activities in homes

As I have always believed that reading is an important way, but only one way to support young children's literacy development, it was not surprising that I included in the programme a range of activities designed to help children and parents have fun together while at the same time building skills such as talking, listening, fine muscle development, shape recognition and eye-hand coordination, - all vital for the later development of reading and writing.

Another reason for making sure that the programme included activities other than book reading was to accommodate the parent's lack of literacy skills and yet build their confidence that they could help their children, even if they were unable to read well. Including these activities was to balance the emphasis usually given to reading books. As Goodman (1997:56) states:

There is an undue emphasis on the idea that the major or only road to literacy learning occurs when children are read to by their parents. This suggests to the society at large – and the suggestion becomes embedded in the culture – that being read to is the only aspect of literacy that counts as an influence on children's literacy development.

This view is expanded by Richter (2006) when she states:

Exposure to written material is critical to preschool children for their literacy development but while there are 1 million children living in households with no literate adult, we have to look at other ways of providing developmental support. We should be encouraging everyday opportunities in the home to be used to link words to activities, events, people and objects and clarifying the link between them in the present as well as in the future and the past.

As we moved through the first year of the project, I introduced new activities and materials into the sessions, taking care that none were difficult or expensive to acquire. Bubble fun, play dough, beadwork, storytelling and using newspapers to, for example, find letters of the alphabet, were all brought to the group. In the first year of the project, the parents began to talk about how their children enjoyed looking at a book with them. It was only later in the life of the project that parents reported that children were asking for books. This is important to note because it appears to be an indication that bringing books to families means that they will be enjoyed, but that it may still be necessary to find ways to make these so much part of daily life that they are missed if not there.

As group members realised that what they were already doing with their children provided support for the development of early literacy skills, they gained the confidence to try other activities suggested in the sessions.

Using parental confidence

When the women put aside concerns over their own low levels of literacy, they were more open to making books for their children. They became quite animated as they discussed the theme of their book, but it became evident that the women were themselves not familiar with books. It was necessary, therefore, to provide guidance on the placement and direction of the pictures they cut from the magazines brought in for this activity. At first, the pictures were pasted at different angles that would have resulted in the children having to turn the book around several times in order to look at the pictures. This lack of experience in

handling books was not surprising, given that most homes had few books, but was an important point for me to remember when introducing books to families.

Another session focused on how to look at pictures. To do this, the women chose magazine pictures and thought about how to extend conversations, for example, a watch – who has one?; a taxi – where do we go in the taxi?; and colour - find objects of the same colour in the room. The adults took magazines home to look at with children and, in subsequent sessions, reported on how the children responded.

Another way I tried to make sure that women unused to books would feel at ease was to provide what we called “discussion cards”. These were an extension of the discussion cards used in the earlier sessions and described at the start of this chapter. The new discussion cards were pictures cut from *National Geographic* magazines and laminated. This was something I found very difficult to do as I have a high regard for books and magazines and don't like tearing them. The reason I chose to use *National Geographic* magazines was that they showed people from all around the world and I felt that this opened up the women's own worlds to take them on journeys far from their small rural settlements. Each time I introduced different cards, the discussions were lively and full of laughter and questions.

Reading with children

From the start of the FLP I made sure that reading to and with children was given high priority as I believe as Wells states that “the frequency with which children are read to has been found to be a powerful predictor of later success at school” (Wells 1988:121). And reading with children is fun and a wonderful opportunity for adults and children to spend time together.

When I talked about reading to children I suggested that the adult take the child to sit on her lap. This was met with much amusement as my field notes show:

We talked about how to read with a child. Sitting them on your lap got everyone laughing. I didn't pick up on this. I emphasised that this was to be fun, not a drilling. (Field notes 8.3.00)

In the session on how to read with a child, we had to talk about looking at a book rather than reading it, as most of the women could not read. We talked about how this should be an enjoyable experience for both the parent and her child and that children were not to be drilled or tested. Instead, children should be encouraged to use questions and comments as clues to what the story might be about.

I began to provide children's books for the adults, with a few simple books in Zulu aimed at new readers. These were well received in all the groups and the women were happy to take them home to read or look at with their children. In sessions we modelled reading to children and even women who could not read themselves felt comfortable looking at pictures and describing them with their children. We talked about how to help children learn how to hold a book, to talk about the cover and how to turn the pages. We suggested that adults and children make up stories about the pictures. In other words we made sure that adults felt confident handling books and using them even if they could not read well.

It took time before the adults said that the children were asking for books but as the women themselves began to see that when looking at books they could relax and forget their worries, this became part of daily life for many.

Once, at Mpumlwane I noticed a lot of the pre-school children hovering around the door of the church where we were holding our family literacy group. I was told

that this was the day for changing books and they were there to choose books with their mothers.

Over the years, I did see how the women were involved in reading to children and how much books came to mean to them. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 10 where I look at the book clubs and libraries set up in the FLP.

Highlighting conversations

In every session there was discussion on the importance of conversations, and parents were encouraged to talk to their children more than they were already doing. An illustrator working for the FLP drew pictures of different family and household scenes that showed adults and children talking together or looking at printed material, ranging from books to advertisement flyers. These illustrations sparked discussion in the group and again showed how ordinary household events could be used to support early literacy development.

These activities were underpinned by early childhood development theories about the importance of families stimulating conversation, as Wells (1988:112) states:

...they provide a framework within which they can discover some of the fundamental principles upon which language in use is based – the reciprocal exchange of signals, the sequential patterning of turns, and the assumption of intentionality.

As Wells (1988:121) continues, the “richest opportunities for talking and learning” are when adults and children do things together around the home, so I continued to ask parents to reflect on how much they were doing to help their children, whatever their own levels of literacy and however lacking in books their homes.

Believing that parent-child conversations have a “significant impact on a child’s developing oral language skills” (Dockrell et al 2004), the advice I gave to the women was to talk, talk and talk as well as listen to their children and as I put it,

“bathe” them in language. The illustration I commissioned to illustrate this point caused a lot of discussion and laughter as it did not make sense to most of the people in the groups.



Figure 8: Baby ‘bathed’ in words (Source: Len Sak)

The women said they did not think it could be a baby in a bath because “Snoeks would never show us something so dangerous!” Another example of how careful I had to be to make sure that I didn’t take too much for granted and expect that we always understood each other.

To encourage talking to children I designed a handout for the adults to refer to. This was translated into Zulu and formed the basis for many discussions.

TALKING TO OUR CHILDREN

A child enjoys it when an adult takes time to talk and listen to her. We can talk about things that happen everyday, like washing and eating and fetching water. We can talk about special things, like going to town, going to a wedding. We can talk about places we go to, like pre-school or the shop or hospital. We can talk about feelings and hopes.

Try to ask questions that will make children think. Most important of all - listen to your child when she talks to you!

Here are some ideas for starting a conversation with your child:

Get their attention

- You could say "Look at this" or "Let us go and" "
- When you have their attention, you will want to keep them interested in the conversation.

Describe and discuss

- Gives names to things. Your child may not know what objects around her are called. Help her to learn these names.
- Describe the things you see or the actions you are doing. Talk about the colour, size or shape. Talk about what things are used for. Ask your child for her ideas about what she sees or what she is doing.

Make links

- Help your child to see the connection between what you are talking about and other things in her life.
- You could ask questions that start with these words:
 - What if.....?
 - Can you imagine if?
 - Do you remember when

Reflect

- Let the child take the lead in the conversation. Listen to what she says. Give her the chance to ask you questions.
- Think about what you have done or what you have seen.

Figure 9: Handout on talking to our children

Changing attitudes

The discussions in the first and subsequent sessions often revolved around attitudes towards children. The adults said they were not used to engaging in conversations with their children about their activities. I encouraged adults to sometimes let children take the lead in a conversation, to listen and to ask questions. The following quote recorded in 2001 shows that some people did take this suggestion seriously.

Thuli wrote

'I sometimes ask Thandi what they have learnt at pre-school. It is also good to listen to your child when she is talking to you. "Mom now I know how to cut pictures. I saw toys at pre-school." (Desmond 2003:16)

And at the end of 2005, the following two stories written by group members shows that this important activity continues to be part of the lives of some FLP group members.

Bagcinile Mkhize said: "Here's what I did with my child; when she woke up in the morning she started the fire and boiled water then bathed and put on her uniform, and then I helped her pack her books and pens. When she came back from school I asked her to show me what she did in school, and I helped her where she had difficulties. By talking to my children I find out where they have difficulties, then I borrow books so that they can learn more about the areas that they have problems with."

Lindiwe Molefe told her story: "When I wake up in the morning I start the fire and boil water and start cooking porridge. I then go to check if my child is up, and if she is still asleep I let her sleep a bit more until she wakes up properly by herself.

Once she is awake I bath her and before she puts on her school uniform I dish her breakfast, of porridge with milk and sugar, so that she does not dirty her uniform. When she has finished her breakfast I dress her in her school uniform and then walk her to pre-school so that there is nothing that will frighten her, she is only five years-old. When she comes back from pre-school she tells me about her day and what she did at pre-school. I then help her with school work, and play the games that they played at pre-school. Yesterday she wanted us to hop like frogs, but I could not hop that way and it made her laugh that I couldn't, and so she said we must rather stand.

I found yesterday to be a nice day, and I think my child had enjoyed it, I saw that she was very happy, she woke up singing this morning." (Frow 2005:22)

The evaluation conducted by Kvalsvig et al in 2003 also provided evidence that FLP group members had read the handout on having conversations with children and internalised the practice sessions and role plays around these. Kvalsvig et al grouped the interactions between mother and child into categories of mediated learning i.e. where the mother emphasised and/or elaborated on an aspect of the picture shown to the child; and/or made a link between the child's own experience and an object in the picture. (Kvalsvig 2003:15) The research team also assessed how the mothers communicated with their children through a range of approaches for example questions, prompting, repetition, and information. In both assessments the women from the FLP demonstrated use of mediated learning and communication skills that were more evident than the control groups.

The difference between the Group 3 (FLP) caregivers and the less experienced groups thus lies more in the content, fluency and frequency of their interactions than in utilising any special strategies to capture attention. (Kvalsvig 2003:24)

When FLP facilitators suggest how to extend conversations with children they suggest that adults talk about every day things as well as special events. They suggest that adults talk about places they visit regularly or on special occasions and that they should discuss these as well as feelings and hopes relating to the visits.

Bongiwe wrote: Do you remember the time when you were visiting by your mother's home that you were travelling on a tractor? Yes Mom I remember there we ate a duck's meat. (Desmond 2001a:34)

As with the practical activities we introduced to the groups, the adults were given the chance to discuss their own feelings and express their hopes. What we recommended for children, we also encouraged for adults at their own level. By staying true to the principle of active learning, adults were able to learn by doing and then choose what they wanted to do with their own children at home.

In recording what questions she asked her child, Busisiwe wrote:
'Look here at the health clinic, what do you see?
Look here in the city/town, what do you see?

What can you say if your teacher doesn't teach you, can you tell me?
Can you think that if you've finished schooling, you can work or doing what?
Can you think about the first time you went to a crèche?
Let's go to see grandfather at the hospital. Where do they sleep at the hospital,
Ma? He asks.' (Desmond 2001a:37)

Through all the activities on early literacy development presented in the FLP sessions, we stress that looking at and reading books, drawing and writing are activities that can be enjoyed by adults and children together or on their own. In the FLP groups the adults are often asked to read, write and draw for themselves as well as practice in how to provide their children with opportunities to do the same.

The findings by Sonja Labuschagne (2000) relating to how adults involved in the early FLP workshops saw early literacy are summarised below. The adults said that they had learnt the following:

- The home environment is important and information should be provided for young children
- It is possible for young children to be literate
- The family literacy groups provide information to adults that will help their children have a good future
- Education will help children be different to their parents
- Children learn respect.
- The family literacy group helps parents realise they can teach their children at home and so prepare them for school.

Borrowing books

From the start of the project I had brought in books for the crèche children. After about seven months, I suggested that the children could borrow the books to take home to look at with their parents and siblings. This was met with a little resistance from the teachers, who were worried that books from their newly acquired stock would not be returned or would come back damaged. At first,

they allowed only the children whose parents attended the FLP sessions to borrow the books but, after a while, were persuaded to allow all children to take books home.

Then the parents in the group began to borrow books on a regular basis. As has already been stated, there was no problem with sounding patronising by implying that, with their low levels of literacy, these books were the only ones they could read, as they were encouraged to borrow the books so that they could look at them with their children.

Adults and children writing together

Another example in the FLP of helping both adults and children to be actively involved in something together is that of keeping a journal. We call these journals *umzali nengane* – parents and children. Parents cut out pictures from magazines provided by the project or draw pictures themselves. They discuss these with their children and then if they can write, the adult writes down what the child says. I see this as a time that an adult and child can spend time together concentrating on an activity that provides a chance for the adult to talk, listen and write and for the child to see that what she says is important enough to be written down. Most women in the project continue to keep these journals even with their own, now older, children or with other young children in the extended family.

As these journals are written in Zulu, I could not understand them so in my research in 2001, I had some extracts translated and was delighted to find out how rich the conversations were:

Fikile recorded how she responded when her child misinterpreted a picture:

He sees a mom kneeling wearing a pinafore, a child standing in a bath dish, mother holding a towel bathing her child, a chair, a bucket, a teapot. I told him that, this is not a teapot, but a kettle for boiling water, then I show him a container near a bath dish, he says that it seems as if it is a car with wheels then I told him

that it is a soap container. I show him clothes which are going to be worn by the child who is bathing. (Desmond 2001a:40)

And

Commenting on the free writing activities, Busiswe said her child likes the pictures in her journal. Writing in her journal has helped her to learn how to talk to children and how to work with her child. She recorded what her child said and some of the questions she asked.

The recording showed that the child made quite detailed observations. For example:

“He says that he sees a house in a forest, flowers, a mountain, a rope from inside to the outside of a house, a sky near the house, a man who is going inside the house, a grass near the house, a small house without a wall, stones gathered nicely. Inside these stones there is a way. He also sees a big tree in front of a house. (Desmond 2001a:37)

In the preceding pages I have described how early literacy was introduced to the groups in an active and participatory way. In the following pages I will describe how the focus on early literacy was maintained and the impact this had on the women attending family literacy groups. As in the initial phase, active learning continued to form the basis and women were encouraged always to try out each new activity.

Adults, active learning and early literacy

By 2001, the second year of the FLP, we had made the decision to combine adult literacy, Reflect and early literacy. We came to this decision because early literacy for their children appeared to be one of the ways to keep the women’s interest. It was also, of course, the reason behind the establishment of the FLP and I was not about to abandon that aspect. They genuinely enjoyed finding out about how to play with their children and reported eagerly on the progress their children were making at school. One woman said she realised she had “been cheating her child”. This was not the response I hoped for, as I never wanted to make anyone feel that they were inadequate in any way. Perhaps it was only a way of saying she wanted to do more for her child, but did not know how to.

Following the initial Reflect training for the participatory rural appraisal, we all worked with Sonja Labuschagne to devise a way that would suit our wish to combine adult and early literacy. Sonja Labuschagne shared the unit design with us and to accommodate the FLP commitment to early literacy, an additional component was added and the unit we use looks like this:



Figure 10: Unit diagram (Sonja Labuschagne and Jess Nicholson)

In each unit, one session is spent on activities, discussions and guidance on how parents can help young children develop early literacy and other skills. In some Units, for example on Child Protection, and Children’s Rights, the focus is almost entirely on young children and their needs.

We tried to build into the units what was described by Kolb (1993:148) as

Learners, if they are to be effective, need four different kinds of abilities – *concrete experience* abilities (CE), *reflective observation* abilities (RO), *abstract conceptualisation* abilities (AC), and *active experimentation* (AE) abilities.

This is in line with the principle of active learning, where adults and children both benefit from experimenting with real objects and experiences.

In 2000 there were few books on early childhood development written in plain language in either English or Zulu. So we did not have a steady supply of supplementary materials needed for that part of the unit. Over the years and together with others interested in the project, I developed booklets¹⁹ in easy to read Zulu and English and some of these focused on early childhood development and early literacy in particular, for example *Prepare your child to read, Parents and young children*, and *You and your child*.

Evaluations and research

In this chapter I have already referred to findings from research and evaluations conducted in the FLP. I include further findings to illustrate the impact of our activity based interventions on adult-child interactions around early literacy development.

Research by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) 2003

Dr Jane Kvalsvig and her team of researchers (Kvalsvig et al 2003) chose three groups of women carers of children aged between 3 and 5 to interview and observe as they were looking at books with their children. One group had been with the FLP for more than two years, the second group for less time and the third group had had no contact with the FLP at all. All interviews were video-

¹⁹ A full list of publications is included in Chapter 9

recorded and I asked that particular attention be paid to the adults' behaviour towards the children while they were looking at a book or talking about a picture.

I found the research findings encouraging as they indicated that the women involved in the FLP had found what I believe to be true. That is that you can engage a child's attention and talk about any picture if you use questions and look for links between the picture and your own experience. I have been known to go to the extreme and say that you can even talk about a blank piece of paper but fortunately no-one has ever challenged me to prove that.

The findings were that children in the group of adults who had been with the FLP for more than two years (Group 3) spoke more than the other children and the adults used "more content categories overall, than those in Groups 1 and 2, and more content categories in each of the components of mediated learning." (Kvalsvig et al 2003:15) "The Group 3 dyads managed to find many other aspects of the pictures to talk about as well." (Kvalsvig et al 2003:17) The findings also showed that Group 3 mothers were better able to engage their children's attention and that the children themselves seemed more used to discussing pictures. Here was the documented proof that adults and children were engaging actively in talking and looking at books, something I had observed but was pleased to have substantiated by an outsider.

I was a little disappointed that there was not more evidence of "praise and encouragement" as this had been something I stressed from the very beginning. However the researchers did say that although verbal praise or approval was not very evident, the Group 3 mothers did make approving sounds more often than the mothers in the other groups.

When the children were handed the books (upside down and the wrong way round) the Group 3 mothers were less likely to interfere with the child's attempts to position the book correctly. They also spent more time looking at the picture

books than the others. From the illustration from the report shown below you can see how the FLP mothers allowed their children to be far more independent and provided guidance only to prevent the child from becoming very frustrated.

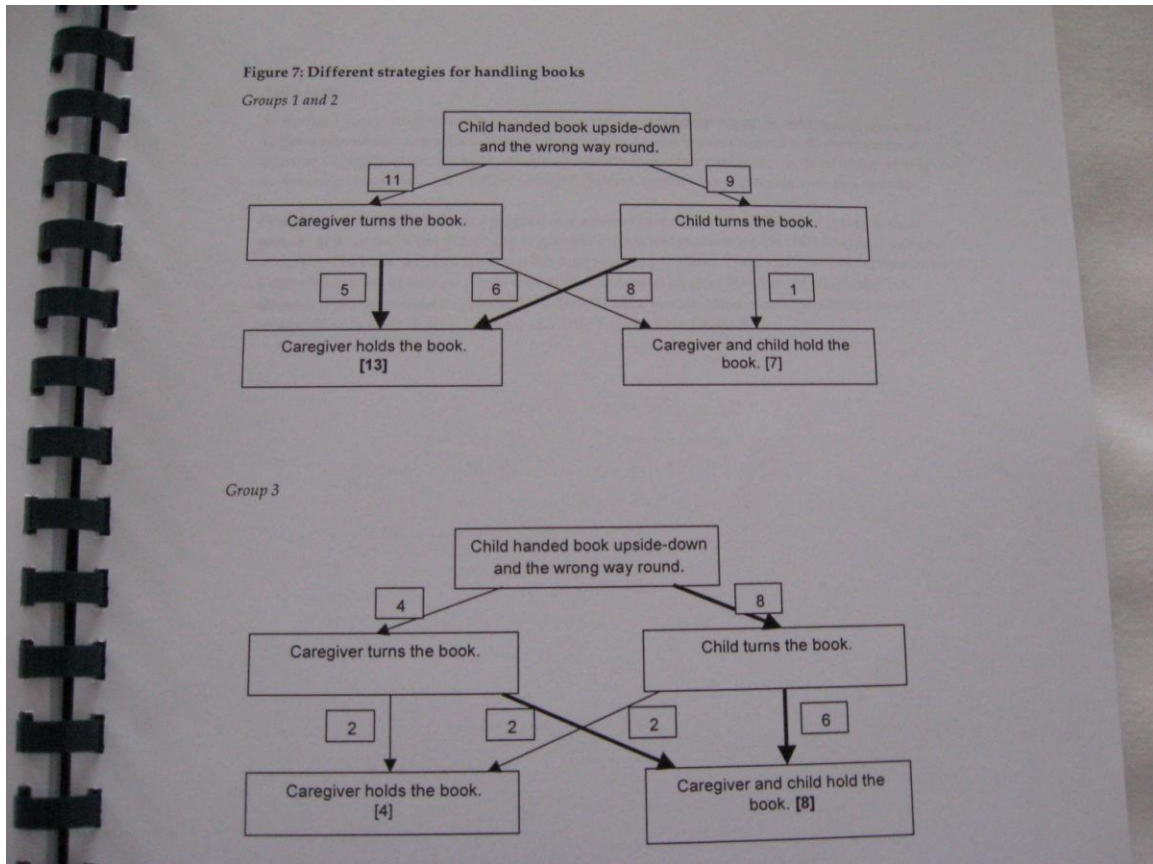


Figure 11: Strategies used in handling books (Kvalsvig et al 2003:27)

This is an example of what Bruner in Smidt (1998:11) refers to as “scaffolding”. As Smidt says

Bruner believed that adults can allow children to take small, supported steps in their learning. When the learning is complete, the support of the adult is no longer needed.

PRA and subsequent evaluations by Sonja Labuschagne and Jill Frow

In the 2000 Participatory Rural Appraisal (Labuschagne 2000) followed by project evaluations conducted by Sonja Labuschagne in 2001 and 2002 (Labuschagne

2001; Labuschagne 2002), part of her brief was to look at the impact of the sessions on early literacy on parenting knowledge, skills and behaviour.

In 2000 the response to questions by Sonja Labuschagne about early literacy was that education is important and that parents can help children at home. Some parents felt that children can become literate and knowledgeable at an early age. Much more on how parents and children were interacting was evident from the evaluations in 2001 and from then until the 2004 and 2005 evaluations conducted by Jill Frow (Frow 2004; Frow 2005a), the parents reported on how they were helping their children at home and on the progress the children were making. The parents talked about reading to children, to children asking to be read to, about making books with children and singing songs and playing games. These adults also commented on the way they talked to their children and how they had learnt to explain things to a child. Parents said that some of these things they already knew how to do before joining the FLP but other things were learnt at the family literacy sessions.

Over the years the evaluators concluded that the FLP was having an impact on the behaviour of parents as they were now able to introduce different activities into the lives of their children. Reading to children has become part of daily life and children are asking adults to read to them.

Most interesting is that all the groups indicated a change of perception about their children. It seems the unit and discussion on children's rights along with the early literacy activities in the group have contributed to this change. Changes have occurred for example in the way they talk with their children and the realization of the concept of learning as a family. (Labuschagne. 2002:23)

Researchers from the University of South Africa

Early on in the life of the FLP, I invited two researchers from University of South Africa (UNISA) to visit our project. Dr Myrna Machet and Dr Lilli Pretorius conducted research to answer the question "Did the adult-to-child programme

have an effect on the emergent literacy development of the FLP children?” (Pretorius 2003) They did this by visiting the project and assessing children in April 2001 and again in November 2001. To help with the fieldwork they trained two of the FLP facilitators to conduct the assessments in Zulu.

The children who were assessed were children whose parents attended FLP sessions during 2001. In addition a control group of children, whose parents did not attend FLP sessions, were assessed.

The findings were that the so-called “FLP children” showed “fairly steady improvement in their literacy skills (which) is not really surprising, given that developmental changes are expected over time” so these results were compared with those of children of the same age who were not linked with the project. The results did not show consistent out-performance by the FLP children over the other children. However, when two of the FLP children were tracked in Grade 1 there were

...quite striking differences between the FLP children and the non-FLP children in the two sites, with the FLP children outperforming their peers on 8 and 7 of the 11 measures respectively. The home-based literacy practices to which these FLP children had been exposed from the beginning of 2001 seems to have stood them in good stead during their entry into Grade 1 a year later. (Pretorius 2003:8)

My own research

For my MEd fieldwork (Desmond 2001a), I conducted in depth interviews with four women participants from the Mpumlwane FLP group. Part of the conclusion states:

By the end of the study all four women talked more freely and with more understanding about their children’s literacy activities. Their behaviour appears to have changed from a great emphasis on catering for physical needs to that of modelling and encouraging literacy activities such as reading, questioning, listening, observing and describing. Their interactions were appropriate to the age of their children and they demonstrated, through their answers and writing, care and gentle encouragement. The project did not discuss how to teach

children to read and write but the women did make reference to their encouraging their children to start to write. (Desmond 2001a:52)

Also included in the dissertation is a translation of a letter I received from one of the women I interviewed. The letter was written in August 2001.

I have a child who is attending pre-school and she is four years old. We sit together and discuss family members. She can mention them, father, mother, brother and sister. I find it easy now to communicate with her. She enjoys cutting pictures and she uses all my exercise books. I normally ask her whether she is not going to school, we bath together and dress together and after that she asks for her handkerchief.

She also asked for her lunch box, what I have noticed is that she likes to copy things that are being done by adults. When I go to the garden to water plants, fetch water, sweeping to the other room, building houses with mud, when others go to fetch the donkeys and cows she is always there. (Desmond 2001a:35)

These evaluations were valuable in that they underlined the changes that were being made by the women attending the FLP sessions in regard to their attitude to and confidence in taking their role in the development of early literacy skills seriously. They did this by engaging in activities in the sessions and then repeating the activities at home with their children.

Reflection

In this chapter I have presented the first of the four underpinning principles, that of the importance of engaging actively in learning and how this influenced adult interaction with children, especially interactions around the development of reading, writing and listening skills. I have highlighted the influence of this principle on the design and introduction of the unit that guides the delivery of sessions in the FLP; the influence on guidance provided to adults in their interactions with children; and on the results of evaluations and research findings.

I found this quite a difficult chapter to stop writing. There was so much I could say, and as promoting the love of books and reading is of particular interest to

me, I had to limit myself to what I hope is enough to show how reading, writing and talking with children have been strengthened in the families in the FLP.

In the following chapter I will present the same principle, this time in relation to the influence on work on improving levels of adult literacy.

CHAPTER 8: ACTIVE LEARNING: REFLECT

This chapter presents an account that is both personal, and descriptive of the Reflect approach, an approach that has had a great influence on the Family Literacy Project, and I believe has contributed to its success in ways that I shall describe in this chapter.

When I first found out about the Reflect approach I did not immediately link this to my own history. It was only in thinking about Reflect and writing about it for this study, that I became aware how the seeds of the Reflect approach had been sown in my life more than thirty years earlier. Reflect (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) is based on the teachings and experience of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. When I read through a lecture by a friend, John Aitchison, where he described the influence of Freire on activities in South Africa I realised how close I had been for many years to these ideas. In his lecture, John Aitchison (Aitchison 2001) writes, and I intersperse my personal comments in italics:

In 1970 an important interchurch initiative, the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPRO-CAS), began to publish a number of influential reports, including one on education.

I worked for SPRO-CAS from its inception.

Shortly thereafter the radical University Christian Movement began circulating mimeographed summaries from the United States of America of the works of Freire (who, in exile, worked for the World Council of Churches in Geneva).

I was secretary of the first branch of the University Christian Movement which was later banned by the South African government.

Freire's famous book, *The pedagogy of the oppressed*, had already been banned by the South African government. Some students were trained by SACHED staff in Freire's methodology and used it in their community education and literacy classes, work which can be seen as the origins of the progressive literacy movement.

I was one of those trained and later also worked for SACHED.

Freire's conscientisation method was often grafted onto the "small group" methods introduced in the mid-60s from the United States of America by some of the mainline churches.

I attended many of these training sessions held at the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, a geographically isolated ecumenical gathering place for those opposed to apartheid.

These T-group/group dynamics/sensitivity training/ basic human relations training methods had been introduced largely as a means of enabling white and black church people to meet each other at a greater level of intimacy and it certainly had a powerful and emotional impact. In the longer term it developed a cadre of church and student leaders who were adept at small group work and who would later apply some of these methods in the student, trades union and political contexts within the broader anti-apartheid struggle. Needless to say, it was to have a powerful influence on adult education in a variety of settings. (Aitchison 2001:13)

Perhaps it was because of this early exposure to the ideas of Freire that, when I found out about the Reflect approach in the first year of the FLP, I made sure that the use of the tools formed the basis for most of our workshops and sessions. I was attracted to the Reflect approach because people are expected to become involved from the start of each session. Their ideas and knowledge are respected and acknowledged. They are actively involved, not passive recipients waiting to be led to understanding or knowledge.

The first time I heard about Reflect was when Paula Nimpuno, then with the Netherlands-based early childhood development funding agency the Bernard van Leer Foundation visited the FLP in July 2000. She said we needed to use a Reflect approach in our evaluation. I had no idea what she was talking about but through an internet search was able to find a person who did. Sonja Labuschagne was at that time working for the non government organisation ActionAid in Southern Africa. Part of her work was to train people in the use of Reflect, an approach which had been developed within that organisation.

In the FLP we have used those aspects of the Reflect approach that suit us. Because we use some aspects and not all, we have been criticized and told by some that we may not claim that we are Reflect practitioners. Fortunately,

Reflect is a flexible approach and many projects worldwide that call themselves Reflect groups do not use Reflect precisely as prescribed. In the FLP we certainly do play a significant role in development initiatives using aspects of Reflect.

Reflect has changed over the years but the initial approach was described by the developers of this method, Archer and Cottingham (1996:6) as

...a new approach to adult literacy which fuses the theory of Paulo Freire and the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal.

The Reflect approach was the result of an action research project by the British based international non government organisation ActionAid to find out how the PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) techniques could be used to benefit adult literacy projects. In October 1993, the Reflect approach was piloted in Uganda, El Salvador and Bangladesh. Evaluations of the three pilot projects showed that Reflect groups both retained group membership and that those people achieved literacy levels more easily than those in control groups. It appeared that Reflect

...proved to be both more effective at teaching people to read and write and much more effective at linking literacy to wider development.” (Archer and Cottingham 1996:6)

By early 2000 the original definition had become much wider and encompassed development and power more explicitly as this quotation from Phnuyal, Archer and Cottingham 1998, cited by Riddell (2001) shows:

...the ‘renewed’ definition of Reflect: a structured participatory learning process which facilitates people’s critical analysis of their environment, placing empowerment at the heart of sustainable and equitable development. Based on ongoing processes of reflection and action, people empower themselves to work for a more just and equitable society. (Riddell 2001: 5-6)

Reflect continues to be linked to literacy as well as development as can be seen by the award CIRAC (the International Reflect Circle) won in 2003. This was the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize which was awarded to CIRAC for having revolutionised literacy training to include social development. This despite the

2001 global survey of Reflect finding that “less than a quarter of organisations using Reflect see it as just (or principally) an approach to literacy” (Global Survey of Reflect 2001: 5)

I like the way that Reflect depends on people being actively involved in discussions. When everyone is given a chance to say, write or draw what they know about an issue, they very rarely refuse to do so. The appeal, to me, of Reflect as one part of our methodology was the underlying belief that we are working with people who know and understand their own situation very well and can often suggest ways to improve it. The Reflect tools give them a voice, whether or not they can read and write. The tools allow people to describe their community, identify problems and strengths and draw their own conclusions about what to do. When using a Reflect tool, the facilitator always probes deeper into the situation by using questions that enable people to look beyond the immediate description of a problem to the root cause. The discussions and answers to the questions may even lead to the discovery of a solution. If this does happen, Reflect practitioners refer to it as an ‘action point’ where the group is expected to act to make the solution a reality.

Reflect meets very well the principle of active learning which underpins the work of the FLP. The use of tools to stimulate discussion engages group members and they are actively involved in reviewing and constructing knowledge.

Paulo Freire

I first heard the name of Paulo Freire in 1969 or 1970 when someone asked me to help with a literacy class for domestic workers in Johannesburg. She said that we would be using an approach developed by Freire. I didn’t know what she was talking about but in those days anyone who advocated listening to poor people, in this case black South Africans, was considered by the apartheid government to be a danger to state security. In the interests of our own safety, those of us

who taught the literacy groups knew nothing more about the person other than that he was involved in what was called popular education in his home country of Brazil.

Aitchison (2001) in his inaugural lecture writes how Freire, from a middle class family, went as a teacher to a poor rural area in Brazil. In response to the defeatism he appeared to perceive in these people, and the way he saw that they accepted their poverty, he designed an educational approach that would give them a voice. He wanted a

...consciousness raising educational method (that) would have to begin by building self-confidence. Only then could people discover that they were capable of gaining some control over the environment in which they were living. (Aitchison 2001: 11)

Aitchison goes on to explain that to equate this method of Freire with only literacy teaching is wrong, as Freire was concerned that people should not only learn to read and write words, but that they should also be able to read and write reality, to really understand the world they lived in and how they could make changes to this.

According to a report in the ActionAid journal, *EducationAction*, Freire was aware of and supported Reflect which of course incorporates his name – Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques:

...the Brazilian educator, who was the foremost ‘philosopher’ of the popular education movement over thirty years, actively followed and supported the development of Reflect, from his first contact with the Uganda pilot experience in London in 1993 through to his death in Brazil in 1997. (EducationAction 2000: 33)

A scholar of the works of Freire, Gadotti (2002:40) describes him as “a happy person. He took real pleasure in learning and teaching and transmitted this pleasure to those around him, in the classroom or elsewhere.” Gadotti says that Freire believed that learning takes place when people want to learn something

that is relevant to them. Openjuru (2002:30) quoting Rogers (1989:40) says something similar:

...all learning is best done through active involvements of the learners in a series of tasks that lead to mastering the skills they are expected to learn. Active methods of learning are based on the importance to learners of understanding what they are doing so as to learn better.

This reflects my statements in Chapter 7 where I wrote about the discussion of those in the early childhood development field who maintain that children learn best when they are actively involved in finding out about the world around them i.e. learning something relevant and important to them.

Gadotti also maintains that Freire believed that it is important to dream, to visualise a more just world and then to work towards achieving that. And those best placed to do this are those who are most affected by the injustices of the world, although they can be assisted by those willing to work alongside them.

We cannot understand the pedagogical thinking of Paulo Freire apart from a social and political project. Thus you cannot “be Freirean” by merely cultivating his ideas. What it demands, above all, is the commitment to construct “another possible world”. (Gadotti 2002:39)

The FLP might not be living up to these high ideals but there is within the project a real attempt to help people achieve a better life for themselves and their children, a desire they often express.

The FLP does not have explicitly stated goals of freeing people from exploitation as Openjuru (2002:23) quoting Sing (1976:20) states

He, (Freire) believed that no literacy programme was worth mention if it did not “enable the illiterate masses to become aware of their exploitation by the oppressor classes so that they may engage in a revolutionary struggle to free themselves.

The FLP does not use language like this but perhaps there is an underlying wish for FLP group members to find ways to break out of their financial poverty and achieve a better standard of living and quality of life.

Reflect networks

There are projects in South Africa who use some Reflect tools, others who adopt the whole approach and use Reflect to teach literacy and support social change, and there are those who use it as a community development tool without the literacy component. These projects belong to the South African Reflect Network (SARN). I find it interesting that the range of projects meets one of the recommendations of the 1999/2000 review of evaluations of Reflect internationally.

Reflect should be applied in a cross-disciplinary way, across different types of development programmes, not necessarily even with an education bias, be they government or NGO-provided. (EducationAction 2001:12)

I attended an early meeting of SARN in 2001 and when it was formalised as a Section 21 not for profit organisation, I became a board member. The aim of the network is to publicise the advantages of Reflect and train more people in the use of Reflect in their organisations. In addition the network is a support to those of us who already use Reflect in their work.

SARN is a member of Pamoja which is the Pan African network of Reflect practitioners, which in turn is a member of CIRAC which is the world wide network. In this way the FLP can be seen as a small, active organisation within a much larger international grouping.

Facilitating Reflect

Facilitators are important in the successful implementation of Reflect and articles and evaluations of Reflect worldwide highlight this. The following quotation is taken from the review of thirteen evaluations of Reflect conducted in eleven countries, including South Africa, which took place in 1999 and 2000.

Facilitators are the crux of Reflect programmes. Thus, it is no surprise that there were many issues raised in the different evaluations concerning them, with

regard to the criteria for their selection, their actual identification, and the training, supervision and follow-up which they are afforded. There are no magic bullets in dealing with the different issues concerning facilitators. Rather, it is important to consider holistically the approach to their recruitment, training, support and conditions of service. (EducationAction 2001:11)

When we asked Sonja Labuschagne to do a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), using the Reflect approach, she said she needed the help of women in the community. I had decided that if this project was going to continue, I could not run all the groups on my own. This was because the distance between the groups was too great, the facilitator needed to speak Zulu, and it was important to honour the skills found within the community. For these reasons, I asked each group to choose a woman in the community who would be able to work with the then recently formed FLP. All I asked was that each woman be able to speak English, have a matriculation certificate and be unemployed. Five women were chosen and Sonja and I arranged for them to meet us at Reichenau Mission 15 km outside Underberg, to spend two weeks on the PRA training and piloting. In the first week they would be trained in the use of Reflect tools and in the second go to each site with Sonja to conduct the PRA.

In October 2000, as stated in the Preface when Sonja Labuschagne and I met five very nervous young women, we looked at each other and wondered how we were going to survive two weeks together – all of us strangers to each other. Through the use of her extensive range of facilitation skills and the participatory nature of the Reflect approach, Sonja Labuschagne drew the women into developing their own skills. They became interested and by the end of the first week were excited to be returning to their own communities to use the Reflect tools to find out what people really wanted to know more about and do. This was in fulfilment of some of the expectations they expressed on the first day where they said they wanted new knowledge and skills so that they could go back and help their community improve. These women have fulfilled their early promise of “natural warmth and some basic facilitation skills; assets that can be built upon” (Labuschagne 2000:50) and are the backbone of the project.

The choice of these particular women by their communities has resulted in the kind of facilitators that have been chosen to work in Reflect around the world. In the Global Survey of Reflect report (2001:32-33) facilitators are described as mostly coming from the community in which they work and being of a similar age and gender of their groups. The most often stated motivation for being a Reflect facilitator was “around ‘societal change’ – a desire to contribute to the transformation of their local community and wider society.” Other motivating factors listed in the Global Survey that are the same as those mentioned by the FLP facilitators were that they wanted to become teachers and also that they wanted to transform themselves. It is interesting to me that communities across the world chose similar people to work with them, and recognised the same driving forces in people who want to be facilitators of Reflect, or possibly any development approach.

In that first week of training for the participatory rural appraisal, important ideas about development were discussed. I think that these laid the foundation for the way the FLP facilitators work with their groups. Sonja Labuschagne stressed the importance of knowing more about the community before suggesting any action. This applies to people working for development from within a community (as the facilitators would be) and to those who come from outside to provide some support and help in response to a perceived need (as I was doing). The facilitators took part in a Reflect tool known as the ‘River Code’ where they took different roles – of members of the community, and the development worker. At the end of this activity it was clear that the development worker whose style was to always carry people rather than supporting them in their own development, made little progress. I think that this approach to development work has stood the FLP facilitators in good stead as over the years they have watched FLP group members take a more active role in their own families and in community affairs.

In the second week of the initial Reflect and PRA training, the plan was to meet with each of the groups I had been working with for the past seven months. Not all these visits went smoothly, but as events in the previous months had already demonstrated to me, nothing in development work goes exactly the way one hopes or plans. Sometimes this is a good thing and new directions and insights are gained by diverting from the plan. At other times nothing seems to happen at all, or people do not turn up for the meetings arranged. This is teaching us, the project directors, something and that is that we may have asked the wrong question, not provided enough information for people to decide that the meeting was worthwhile, that other things were more important, or that people forgot the time or date.

The findings from that PRA in 2000 were that there were groups of people who wanted to improve their own literacy, from those who had never attended school to those who had almost finished but who felt that they still could not read and write well. These adults were beginning to realise the important role they played in the development of early literacy skills in their children.

Reflect tools in the Family Literacy Project

As I have stated already in this chapter, in the FLP we embrace certain aspects of the Reflect approach. We use the tools developed by Reflect to stimulate discussion, to make visible the knowledge the groups possess and to work towards solving problems. In other words we use the Reflect tools to encourage and support active learning.

In the early stages of Reflect practice, many of these tools were used outside in the open with stones, sticks and sand. By 2000, squares or circles of card were used and people wrote or drew on these. (EducationAction 2000:26) This made it easier for everyone and I was pleased to be introduced to Reflect when this was already a more common practice. I found the idea of working on the ground

outside somewhat appealing and even romantic until I thought of dust, wind and rain washing away the carefully constructed maps and diagrams before they could be transcribed onto pieces of paper by group members.

To illustrate the importance of this aspect of the Reflect approach in the FLP I will describe some of the tools that we use.

Community map

The FLP group is asked to draw a map of their community. This is usually done on the floor on large sheets of paper although some FLP groups have tried to do this outside using branches, stones and leaves to indicate different features. Once the map is complete, and this can take a long time as there is always debate over the number of houses, the course of the river, or the exact site of a school, the FLP facilitator will lead a discussion on different aspects. She may ask about the use of common ground or about what happens at the river or in the forest. In this way a full picture is built up not only of physical layout but also of different activities in the community and the knowledge and values underpinning the maintenance of community life.

This tool can be used when setting up a project and if used again a year or two later can show developments that have taken place in the area.

This tool was introduced to the facilitators in the October 2000 workshop and used by them in their groups in 2001. This map was drawn by Florence Molefe of Lotheni in 2000.

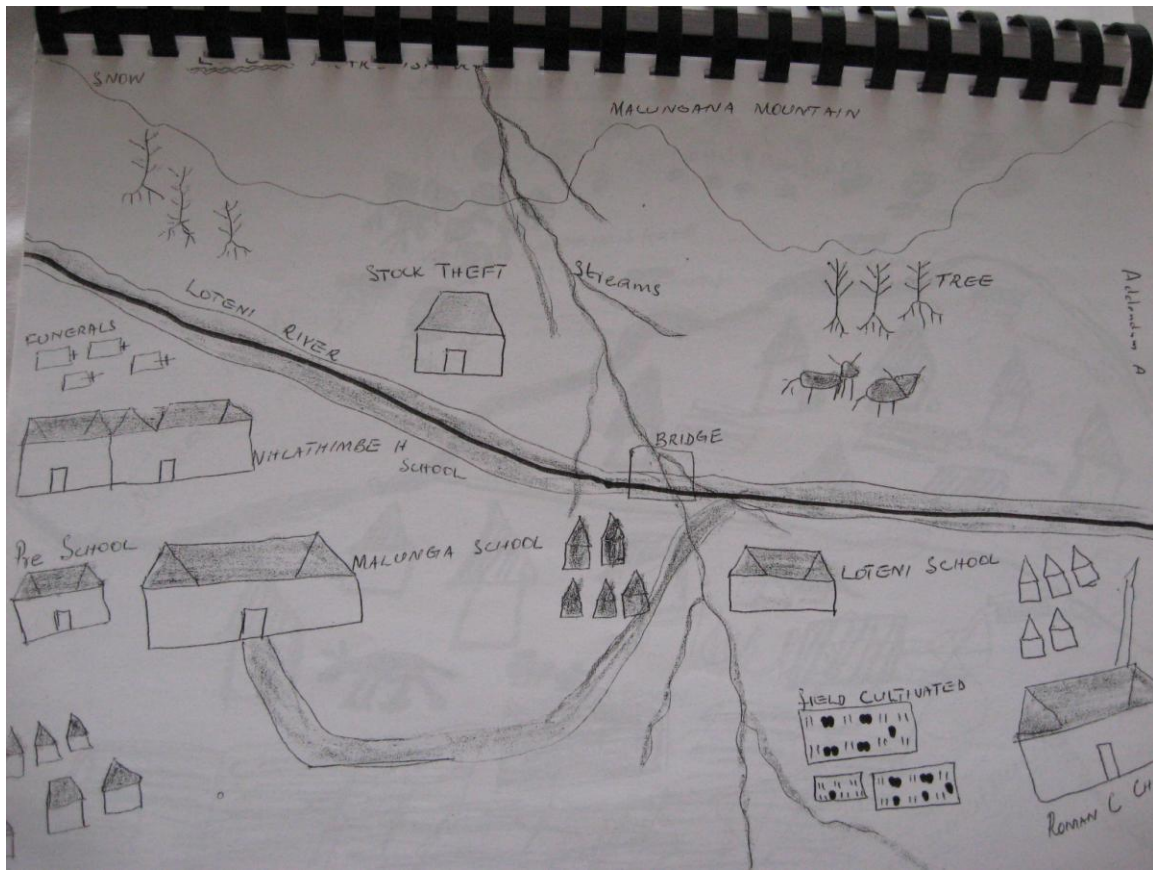


Figure 12: Community map of Lotheni

The following questions were posed once Florence Molefe had explained her map to the rest of the group:

- How do children cross the river since there is no bridge?
 - Where did the community get funds to build the pre-school?
 - How does the community protect their cattle from thieves?
 - How can the community contact an ambulance in cases of emergency?
- (Labuschagne 2000:15)

Once the map has been drawn, the group then works on formulating problems. This must start with a statement about the real problem for example rather than saying “there is no clinic” the problem should be phrased as “people have to travel long distances to get allopathic health care”. The group can then look for creative solutions to the problem rather than focusing only on the lack of a facility.

Mobility Map

To explain the tool known as the Mobility Map I will describe how it can be used to actively explore the use of literacy skills. The FLP group is asked to draw or write down in what places they need to use literacy and numeracy skills. They use one piece of card for each place that they identify. Once mobility maps have been completed by each group member, the group can discard the duplicates and make one large mobility map for the whole group.

The FLP facilitator will then ask questions of clarification to establish exactly why literacy skills are necessary at these places. An example would be the clinic where people say they need to read signs, times, posters, leaflets, appointment times, and medicine dosage. They also need to know the days of week and times when the clinic is open and for what purpose – children, adults, elderly, or pregnant women etc. So within one site, literacy and numeracy skills are needed to find out a number of different things.

When this tool was used in the groups in October 2000, women said that they could ask others for this information but they really wanted to be able to find things out for themselves. A lot of the discussion around literacy skills centred on the way women felt inferior and lacking in self confidence when faced with a situation where they needed to ask for help. They also felt that they may be being cheated, for example on taxi trips or in shops.

Venn Diagram

Leading on from the Mobility Map that can be used to explore literacy skills, is the Venn Diagram where each woman will draw a circle in the centre of the page to indicate herself. She then writes down or draws on pieces of card which literacy and numeracy skills she has and which she wants to develop. She places close to the circle indicating herself, the cards with the skills she wants to develop first and those further away which are not that important to her. Alternatively she can

be asked to place cards close to her that show what she can already do, and those she needs help with, further away.



Figure 13: Venn diagram, Mpumlwane (Source: Roy Reed)

The Tree

This is a very popular tool that has been used often in the FLP to explore many different topics such as budgets, early childhood development, or water-borne diseases. A large tree shape is drawn on a piece of paper and the leaves made from pieces of paper each bearing an effect or result. The group writes or draws roots that describe the cause or input in the particular topic under discussion.

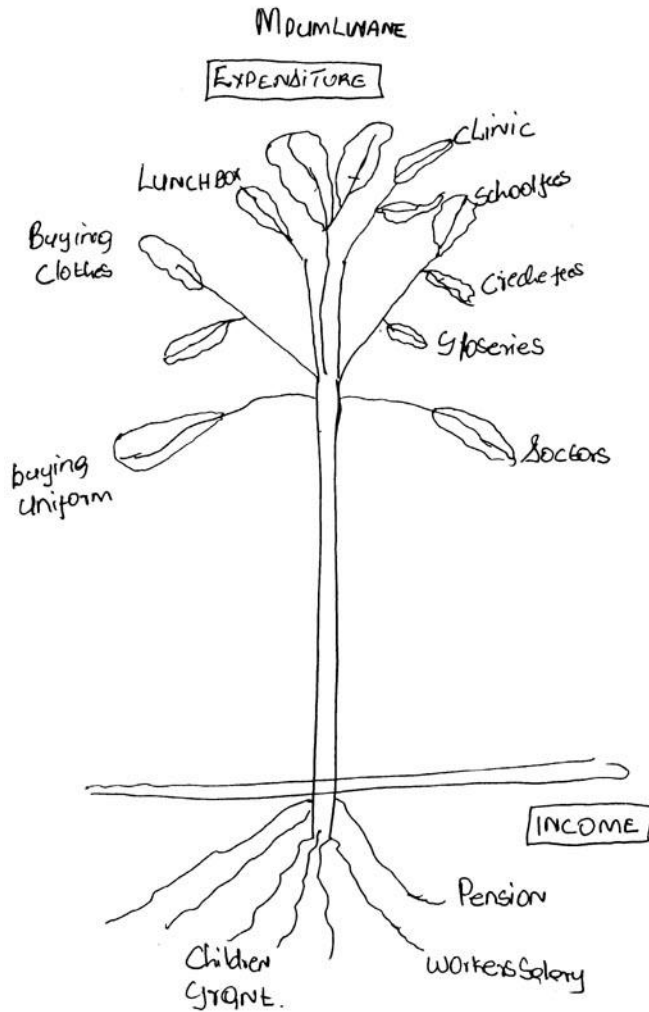


Figure 14: The Tree (Source: FLP team member)

The matrix

The Reflect tool known as the matrix proved useful in finding out what health problems were most common and what people did about curing or dealing with these. The FLP group members first called out or wrote on pieces of card, the most common illnesses in the community. These were written down the side of a sheet of newsprint. Then the FLP group members were asked where they and

others in their community could go to for help with health issues and called these out. These were written up along the top of the newsprint. The FLP group then placed marks to show where most people sought help for the different ailments.

	Clinic	Private doctor	Hospital	Traditional healer	Neighbour
T.B.					
Diabetes					
Diarrhoea					
Scabies					
Blood pressure					

Figure 15: Health matrix

The matrix was also used to discover the different types of child abuse, and in the example below, who was responsible in many cases. Another matrix would be used to identify where to go to for help.

	Emotional abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Neglect
Mother				
Father				
Uncle				
Teacher				
Priest				

Figure 16: Child abuse matrix

Usefulness of Reflect tools

We found these tools and other Reflect tools useful in the project as they provided us with information about each site, what the problems were and where the strengths lay. The graphic representations formed part of the ongoing evaluation of the project. Information was put into a tabular form and the following year progress was measured against this. Each woman had copied the

maps and diagram into her own book and so had a record of what she wanted to achieve and could check her own progress through the year.

All the tools described above can be used to draw out different kinds of information. The tools also provide an opportunity for a lot of discussion about the area, about the needs and especially the problems. However, I encouraged the FLP facilitators to highlight the strengths of the area in order to build the confidence of the women in their ability to find solutions. I believe that confidence is a key factor in success in endeavours such as this. When people feel confident they are more inclined to take risks, and learning anything new is a risky enterprise.

Reflect and adult literacy

Reflect is an approach to adult literacy and community development. It is an approach that is also used with children's groups and in our project we have tried that as well. As stated already, when I first experienced Reflect and saw the value of the tools and the way the group was encouraged to find their own solutions to problems, I was determined to make it part of our approach. I knew very little about ways of adult literacy teaching and learning and despite being uninformed on this issue, I decided that the Reflect approach was not structured enough. This may or may not be true, and we have never tried it out as a literacy method. So, instead of adopting the whole of the Reflect approach, I went to Operation Upgrade, a locally based NGO and asked them to train our facilitators to teach literacy in their mother tongue, Zulu. When the facilitators had been trained over a four week period, I brought them together with Sonja Labuschagne (Reflect) and Beatrice Mbele (Operation Upgrade) and together we worked on the unit design described earlier in the Preface, incorporating early literacy. In the evaluation a year later, the facilitators were praised for having so successfully

combined all the different components. The following lengthy quote describes what had been achieved:

They (facilitators) have managed to combine elements of three methodologies in a highly successful way. Although a 'model' of integrating participatory techniques with literacy and numeracy according to the Reflect approach was presented to them only during the workshop in April this year, they have already managed to make this work in practice.

They are able to use participatory techniques to identify community problems and issues, use participatory tools to explore these problems with their groups and link the literacy numeracy to these issues so that learners learn literacy and numeracy in the context of their own world. Yet they have taken the Reflect approach further by using the skills they have learnt from Operation Upgrade in an intensive way during the literacy and numeracy parts of their lessons. Referring back to their resource materials they have developed literacy lessons according to the various stages of their learners while still basing it in local problems and issues. Linked to this they have guided their groups through the Reflect process of analysis and discussion to come up with action points and activities that improve their standard of living..... Last but not least the facilitators have balanced this whole process in the context of family literacy. When adult learners have discussed issues like water problems in the community, related activities they could do with their children around early literacy were demonstrated and supplementary reading materials on these issues were available.

The end result is an exciting new approach with the following outcomes:

- Literacy and numeracy skills for adult learners
- Early literacy activities for children
- Development activities that improve learners' lives
- Education around various topics e.g. HIV/Aids, cholera, etc

Considering that most tutors and facilitators struggle to get to grips with one approach they have been trained in during the first few months, what these women have achieved is remarkable. (Labuschagne 2001:15)

All these tools take time and generate a lot of discussion. The women become very involved in working on the graphic representation and it seems to be seen as a safe space to talk about sensitive issues. As the results of the activity are a group effort, talking about these issues can be a little removed from the very personal to the group.

In the FLP group sessions over the years, a number of action points have emerged at the end of the different units. For example the action point relating to

child protection was that mothers resolved to walk with their children to pre-school and to caution them about playing alone in heavily wooded areas. Another action point was that the FLP group members undertook to boil all water that came from the river; this following the unit on water-borne diseases. When the group decides on an action point, the FLP facilitator is there to provide support but is not the person who carries out any action so the FLP groups have to plan and implement their own ways of solving problems.

Some of the problems stated over the years have not been solved as the issues are too big for one group to address. FLP group members have been encouraged to join committees such as the development committee, community policing forum or school governing body. In each of the sites this has happened and women who were previously too afraid to take part in meetings because they had difficulty reading and writing, now feel confident enough to try and influence their neighbours and work to uplift the community in areas of sanitation, road improvement, schools and safety.

I have described other ways in which FLP group members became involved in community issues and organisations in Chapter 10.

Reflect, adult literacy and income generation

The use of Reflect tools contributes to changes in the programme and in the people involved in the project, and the response to there being changes has been varied. I think that the adults who join the FLP want change. They come because they want to improve their reading and writing skills and, for many, to learn English. They do seem to think that once they have learnt to read and write and can speak English that their lives will improve. The improvement they want

to see is being able to find paid employment and so provide more for their families. However as Paulo Freire (1972:25) said

Merely teaching men (sic) to read and write does not work miracles; if there are not enough jobs for men able to work, teaching more men to read and write will not create them.

The women accept the commonly held belief that illiteracy causes poverty when in fact if they looked at their own lives, it has been poverty that has resulted in their own low levels of illiteracy as their families could not pay school fees.

Children go to school because there is money unlike the old days. Landeleni Dlamini. (Desmond 2004: 11)

When I was in Standard 3 I stopped going to school because I did not have any one to buy me my school needs. I was not able to go back to school, as the little bit of money my brother was getting was hardly enough for us to get food. Phikisile Khuboni (Family Literacy Project 2003b:17)

When my father died, things started getting very difficult. My mother had to find temporary jobs just for us to survive and therefore I was no longer able to continue with my studies because we did not have any money for me to continue. Florah Dlamini (Family Literacy Project 2003b:14)

I was born into a poor family. My parents did not have money to educate me, and as a result I stopped going to school at an early stage. They consoled me by saying that at least I could write and read my own letters, but I was not happy because I would have loved to get educated. Goodness Khanyile (Family Literacy Project 2003a:9)

It has been difficult within the FLP to find an appropriate response to the requests from members to provide skills training – an approach of ‘well, now we can read and write, teach us something that will earn us money’. We have provided some skills training but I struggle with the wish to focus on how reading and writing alone can change lives. This is not a popular attitude amongst others involved in development work but one I have wanted to explore. I also want to work with the idea presented by Freire (1970:27) that people can make changes in their own situations.

True generosity lies in striving so that these hands (of the oppressed or marginalised) – whether of individuals or entire peoples – need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world.

I believe that if the women in our FLP groups learn to read and write and find out more about the world around them, their lives will change. I believe that this can become their 'work' and that they do not always have to acquire other skills in addition to reading and writing. This is not to say that the FLP group members did not know a lot before they joined the FLP, or before they learnt to read and write well. However we cannot deny that being able to read and write gives access to a wealth of information from many sources and which can be used in our lives. I believe that by using the Reflect approach we start with issues that the FLP group members want to learn more about. We use a Reflect tool to provide an opportunity for the FLP group members to talk about what they already know about the issue. They talk, they listen to others in the group and they think about the issue. The FLP facilitator is prepared with reading materials or information that can extend the discussion. By combining existing knowledge with new information, the FLP group members can, by using the Reflect approach of questioning; see how they can move forward. The issues or problems are there to be solved. Perhaps not entirely because some solutions are beyond the reach of even the whole community and lie in changes in, for example, the government's economic strategy, or approach to health or housing provision.

The opportunities provided for discussion are vital and I often say that people enjoy belonging to the FLP because we talk so much. On a more serious note, discussions are accepted by many in education as an effective learning tool:

When designed properly and used thoughtfully, discussion tasks can be an effective learning tool that promote creativity, as well as generate meaningful interaction and understanding for the learner. Well-designed discussion tasks lead to progressive knowledge-seeking inquiry (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994) or expansive learning (Engestrom, 1999) where learners are actively synthesizing new information with prior knowledge and experiences in the process of creating not only new knowledge but also new understanding of the learning process.

Ngeow & Kong (2003:1)

One way in the FLP that being literate, knowing about early childhood development and health, and earning some money, have been combined has been in the home visiting programme which is described and discussed in Chapter 10.

Reflection

By bringing the Reflect approach into the FLP I have to acknowledge that I am expecting adults to change. Of course all education involves change and that is something I have welcomed in my own life and want others to see as a positive rather than negative experience. Sometimes it is an easy option to stay in one's 'comfort zone' and I also welcome that but on the whole I prefer to take opportunities to make changes. This may go back to my own childhood when as a family we moved from town to town, the longest stay being five years. This was because in those days to progress as a bank official, my father regularly accepted transfers. This may explain why I become restless if things stay the same for too long. Each year in the FLP I have looked for ways to introduce different activities to the programme. When, at the end of 2007, I could not come up with any new ideas, nor see any pointers in the work done in the FLP groups, I knew it was time to leave the project.

I think that this is what Reflect does in the FLP – it leads to all sorts of interesting diversions and it is the facilitators work to keep the discussion focused, and note what other issues are arising so that these can be addressed in other units. Is this too prescriptive and too ordered? For all the freedom I encourage, we do have some plans and completing units is seen as important even if the units sometimes take much longer than imagined during the design phase.

In the following chapter I explore the second principle that has had an influence on the FLP, that of holistic development.

CHAPTER 9: HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

As I stated in the Introduction to this part of the study, one of the principles which has influenced my work is the holistic development of the young child. This chapter expands on the earlier brief description and describes the influence of this on the Family Literacy Project.

In the Introduction to Part 2, I spelt it out in the following way: Children develop in a holistic way and social, emotional, intellectual, moral and physical aspects must be equally valued and catered for. In the South African Government Education White Paper 5: Early Childhood Development there is reference to this holistic development of young children:

Consistent with our White Paper 1 on Education and Training (1995) and our Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (1996), we define early childhood development (ECD) as an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least 9 years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially. (Department of Education 2001:8)

When talking about and working with young children I find it difficult to focus on one aspect of development at a time. It is very hard to separate one aspect from another. It becomes very complicated when we try to take a skill and try and fit it neatly into one aspect of development. Take the early literacy skill of knowing how to look at a book. Knowing how to hold the book in two hands, at the right distance from your face requires a certain level of physical development. Enjoying the book can be labelled as emotional development. Intellectual development takes place when children look at a picture and make links between this and a real object or when they try to tell a story by looking at a series of pictures. If someone tells them the story in the book, depending on the message, this could influence moral, emotional, spiritual and intellectual development.

It is important to know each of the developmental aspects and also to look at the stages of development. Children do not develop at the same rate, so it is easier

to talk about stages that children pass through in their development, rather than linking certain stages to an age. I think it is important to understand all the different aspects or categories of development so that none of these is neglected. We also want to know the different stages so that we can recognise these and provide developmentally appropriate activities for children.

I believe that we as adults should also be viewed in a holistic way. This belief of mine has, in the FLP, influenced the choice of the activities provided for the group members. It may be useful to list some of the activities and link each one to an aspect of the whole adult. This will become a little artificial because we will see that, as with children, one activity could be placed under more than one heading.

Intellectual development

To me the most obvious activities in the project that fit under the heading of intellectual development are those that help the adults improve their reading and writing skills. FLP group members, now that they can read and write in Zulu, have requested and are being provided with sessions where English as an additional language is taught.

I have difficulty with some definitions of adult literacy which suggest that people who do not read and write are in some way not intellectually able. For example in An Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework for Scotland (undated: 13) a quote from the 2001 Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland report of defines adult literacy and numeracy as

The ability to read, write and use numbers, to handle information, express ideas and opinions, make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners.

Of course I agree that adults who are literate can do all the above, but definitions such as these, even if they do not mean to, imply that adults who possess no or

very few literacy skills cannot think, discuss issues, or live meaningful lives. I have often tried to clarify for myself what I think about people who cannot read and write. I do not think they are unintelligent or that they cannot learn. I do think that there is a strong probability, especially in South Africa, that they never had an opportunity to go to school, either because there was no school nearby, because they were needed to help around the home, or because the family had no money. Then of course if they did go to school, with the quality of teaching in some schools under the Nationalist government system of Bantu Education, it would not be surprising if they never learnt to read and write very well.

I want people to learn to read and write because I know how much easier life is when you are literate. When adults can read it means that they can find things out for themselves, they can gather far more information than they could if they only listen to others, or talk about their own experiences. I want literacy to be seen as “a means to self-development, not job development” (Adams 1997:189) although this has been something that we have not overcome in the FLP, and which I have discussed in more detail in Chapter 8. When people have learnt to read and write they ask, what now? They ask us to give them skills to earn a living. This is not surprising in communities where most people live on welfare benefits, but it is something I do try to move away from²⁰.

The group members in the FLP know why they want to learn to read and write, and provided evidence of this when we used the Reflect Mobility Map tool. This entailed drawing a person in the centre of the page and then members of the group decided where people in the community travel to most often. Each suggestion discussed and agreement reached on whether or not they could be considered real destinations, omitting for example the suggestion of the toilet, although far from the house was not deemed, after discussion, to be a real ‘destination’. More discussion ensued as to what happened at the places

²⁰ Discussed in more detail in Chapter 8

mentioned. I took the following information from the report on work done with the group members at the FLP group at Mpumlwane in 2000 (Labuschagne 2000):

Destination	Reason	Literacy/numeracy event
School and/or crèche	To take children	Complete forms
Church	To worship	Read hymns and the Bible To count rosary beads
Shops	To buy food	Read labels Read road signs Count change
Clinic/hospital	To immunise and weigh children	Know different departments Read medicine labels
Gardens	To grow and collect vegetables	Read seed packets Count change
Forest	To collect wood	To speak to the police (not clarified)

Figure 17: Literacy events

In the next part of this exercise, the FLP group members graded the events in order of importance and wrote these on differently sized circles – the smaller the circle the less important the skill to them, and conversely the larger the circle the more importantly they regarded that skill. In this way the women made their own goals explicit. Within the project, we did not ask women to comment on their own progress, but we have measured the progress of the FLP group members as a whole. In retrospect, it is a pity that this information was not gathered, as that information would have been valuable now for this study. However the women did have the opportunity to track their own progress if they wanted to do so. The evaluations in subsequent years and the stories of the women show that progress has been made, even if we are not able to allocate this to particular women.

The following extract from the external evaluation of the project in October 2002 indicates this progress Labuschagne (2002):

The terms of reference for this evaluation did not focus on the achievement of literacy, numeracy and language skills, but rather on the use of such skills. The daily activity charts and focused group discussions held in the four areas

revealed the following ways in which participants use their literacy and numeracy skills..." (Labuschagne 2002:10)

The full table is in the article included in the Preface and the information includes the ability to make telephone calls; deal with money at the bank, the burial society, shops; write messages; read posters and signs at the clinic and keep records of meetings or sales of vegetables.

Sonja Labuschagne goes on to say in reference to the table that

The above examples of using literacy and numeracy skills were given by participants at different stages of literacy ability and beginner participants are obviously not able to carry out all these tasks but stated proudly that they could for example sign their names. What was encouraging from this exercise is that although participants' daily activities provide little opportunity for the use of their literacy and numeracy skills ... they still managed to incorporate and use their new skills in different aspects of their lives. When compared to the aspirations of why people wanted to be literate and the 2001 evaluation of the project, definite progress can be observed. (Labuschagne 2002:10)

Labuschagne (2002) noted further examples of where and how literacy skills were being used. I include this because it is an example of how literacy, which I have included under intellectual development, could also be included in other developmental areas – pointing to the need to consider human development holistically.

The participants managed to give the examples quite easily and often related stories of experiences to prove their point. A definite change could be seen in participants' confidence in their own skills. More advanced participants were attempting more advanced tasks and linking their skills with their daily lives and developmental activities e.g. keeping a record of their small scale farming.

It is also interesting to note how participants in the Reichenau group who are mostly employed or involved in income-generating projects are using their skills in the context of their work lives, e.g. the farm worker at the dairy mentioned how he calculates milk production and the use of milking machines, the catering group could calculate what to buy according to the number of people and the domestic worker mentioned how she can take messages and write down telephone numbers.

In the Siyamukela & Malunga groups (Lotheni) one woman gave an excellent example of how she used her literacy and numeracy skills to solve a problem of a family member who was in a hospital but people did not know where exactly. She made some phone calls and finally located the missing family member. This story

was told with pride and does not only show the use of literacy and numeracy skills but also the confidence participants now have to tackle problems. Participants also use their reading skills to gain knowledge. One woman in the Stepmore group gave the others a hint about boiling onion and garlic to get rid of moles in your garden. She mentioned that she read this in the 'Read for Joy' book where she finds all kinds of useful information. The group felt that they are generally more aware of things now. (Labuschagne 2002:11)

Some of the uses mentioned in the chart referred to helping children with their schooling and this has been a thread running through the project and evidenced in many stories and comments²¹.

In my life my dream is to have a nice house and I wish to get a good job. I wish to have a car. I also wish for my children a quality education and a successful one. I wish that God can save me for a long time till all my wishes are fulfilled. Nokuthula Mnguni (Unpublished)

Hopes and dreams: Beautiful house when I am working. When my children finished schooling and working they will buy a car, we will visit many places with our car. We must not forget about education. Bongwiwe Zuma (Unpublished)

Hopes for tomorrow: I wish that I can take my children to university when they finish Std 10 so that they can get a better job. Sibongile Zuma (Desmond 2004:13)

The important thing that I did: I bought Christmas clothes for my children. I even bought shoes for all of them

Things that I wish to do in my life: I wish that we have a brighter future for my family and I have a beautiful house and that my children finish schooling and have proper job, and that I can be a real teacher with my adult learning. Sibongile Zuma (Unpublished)

I managed to get an opportunity to go to adult school. I am now free because I can read so many things. I really wish to see my children learning and finishing their schooling, so that they will not be like me. I would like them to gain many things. Zandile Duma (Family Literacy Project 2003a:42)

I have been moved by the commitment of group members in the FLP to making sure that their children have a better life than they did. When I started the project this is what I had in mind, that children's lives would be changed by parents who wanted to ensure that they were well prepared for school. Over the years I have come to realise how much I underestimated this parental commitment: I never

²¹ Some of these stories are from filed notes

imagined that it would be so strong. And yet why should it not be? I want the best for my own children, and am not surprised that others have the same wishes, but I was surprised at the depth of commitment that has kept some women as members right from the very first year of the FLP.

This is not unique in evaluations of family literacy programmes as can be seen from this statement by Baker from the United States of America:

During my years as an adult educator and family literacy practitioner, I was intrigued by the fact that adults with similar demographic and educational profiles were more successful (as measured by retention and outcomes) in family literacy programs than in adult education programs with no family component. Why was this so? The most obvious reason was children's power to motivate their parents. When I looked at the effort mothers invested in bringing their kids to school with them and at the effort they put into their own studies, I understood the central role played by their determination to give their children "a better life."
(Baker 1997:83)

Reasons for reading

In 2003 we developed a unit that was to encourage the women to share their boxes of books with neighbours and so start a community library. This initiative is discussed in Chapter 10 but the information gathered during the unit is relevant to this section on intellectual development. The following indicates that people in the areas we work in are very interested in finding out more about their world and using knowledge gained from books to improve their lives.

FLP group members in Stepmore were given questionnaires to complete with their neighbours. One hundred and fourteen forms were completed correctly. The average age of those interviewed was 36, with respondents ranging in age from 10 to 72 years old. The average grade completed by respondents was Grade 6.

The question of interest here is “Why do you want a library”, to which 93% of those interviewed responded.

58% said they would gain knowledge
17% said it would bring them books to read
9% said it would help them read, or improve their reading
7% said it would help their children
6% said it would develop the area
2% said they liked reading
1% said it would bring them success
(Shezi 2004:9)

It appears from these responses that most community members in these areas see that reading books will provide them with knowledge and indeed six months after the library was opened in Stepmore the findings by the facilitator were that this was true. Teachers from the adjacent Somangwe Primary School said that they had gained more knowledge from reading the books in the library and used it to read about their history. This was echoed by the FLP group members who said they gained knowledge and also learnt more about themselves as South Africans. (Shezi 2004:9) My own response to these responses is that I would like the response that “they liked reading” to rise well past the 2per cent.

Developing reading materials

As every Unit deals with a different topic, the FLP provides a range of material on many issues. Discussions resulting from the use of the Reflect tools about what the members already know usually raise questions which the FLP facilitator answers by using her own knowledge or draws from books, posters, or leaflets. With the way the sessions are structured, FLP group members often have to question their own ideas as well as incorporate new ones and then put these into practice into their lives, the importance of which is captured in the following:

Let them learn to read. Don't teach them. Let it emerge as they go about talking and telling of the riches they already possess. Forget word frequency counts. Who could work up any interest in the hundred most frequent words in any language? Keep all the words and world together and them involved in it. Pushing reading into context-less space is the first phase in the destruction of coherence. (O'Neil 1977:76-77)

It is words like these that kept me going when I was confronted by those who wanted to quantify the progress of the FLP, asking questions about numbers of people attending sessions, writing and passing examinations, levels of achievement; instead of listening to the words of the women who enjoy what they are doing and who want to pass what they have learnt on to others.

As a Family Literacy Group member I wish that all illiterate people of South Africa who did not get the opportunity of schooling should know that it is never too late. They can still join ABET classes to develop her indigenous knowledge and revive her informal school instructions. I would be grateful if I would achieve my goal and find myself employed, earning a living and also help my community to earn its living. South African women, I hope by developing yourselves in education our youth will suckle healthy milk from you. Their future will flourish and be able to govern the country. Mirriam Zwane, Stepmore Family Literacy Project group member. (Desmond 2004:1)

When I started the FLP, I had difficulty finding materials appropriate for our groups to use. I wanted books showing rural scenes and providing information on young children and families. To solve the problem we developed several books that met the need for written information on, for example, early childhood development and HIV/AIDS. A book on community libraries was adapted from one produced in Nepal. These books were written with the group members in mind and illustrations and examples reflect the local situation more than many other more urban publications. Women from different FLP groups were asked to help make sure that the material was relevant and easy to read. They were given draft copies of the books and asked to underline words they did not understand as well as comment on the book as a whole. Their contribution to the development of the books was acknowledged and this caused a great deal of excitement and could be included later under the section of emotional development.

Family Literacy Project Publications list

- Prepare your child to read / *Ungayilungiselela ukufunda ingane yakho* is a 20 page book for parents on early literacy. The book is based on the Media in Education Trust and Print Media South Africa book *Ready to Read*. The book was edited for newly literate parents by Operation Upgrade, and translated into Zulu. The English and Zulu versions were read by women from the Mpumlwane Family Literacy group who underlined words and phrases they found difficult.
- Parents and young children/ *Abazali kanye nzingane ezincane*. This is a 12 page book for parents on early childhood development. A reader prepared by Early Learning Resource Unit and Adult Basic Education Services Trust in Cape Town was reworked for parents. The English and Zulu versions were read by women from the Mpumlwane family literacy group and the language adjusted.
- Stay Healthy/ *Ukunakekelwa kwempilo*: This 32 page book on HIV/Aids was developed by us with Professor Geoff Solarsh (University of Natal Medical School) and Carol Browne (Senior Dietician, SA Sugar Association) reading it for accuracy and relevance. The books offer guidance on how to work with HIV/Aids mothers and children.
- Stay Healthy/ *Ukunakekelwa kwempilo* workbooks: the 20 activities were developed to help extend discussion about HIV/Aids so that groups could talk about issues that they may themselves be facing and examine their own attitude to the pandemic.
- You and your child/ *Yenzele okungcono ingane yakho* 22pages of ideas of what children need and parent's role in their development. The topics were drawn from what the family literacy group members said they wanted their own children to know and be able to do.
- Help children be strong/ *Sizani abantwana ukukhula baqine* A 29 page book for adults on how to help children build resilience i.e. I can, I am, I have. This was a simplification, with permission from The Bernard van Leer Foundation of "Strengthening the Human Spirit" by Edith Grotberg.
- Growing up in the Southern Drakensberg is a book of stories written by family literacy group members describing their own youth. These were selected from stories that came out of workshops run by Jill Frow with each group. The stories are in Zulu and English and are illustrated by the women.
- Stories of Strength is a book that like "Growing up in the Southern Drakensberg" was a product of workshops Jill Frow held with family literacy group members. The aim of the workshops was to explore the survival skills of people living in difficult circumstances.

- Our Stories is a guide to facilitating storytelling and writing with adult literacy groups and came out of the work done with our groups.
- Community Library Guidelines/*Imikhombandlela ngokusungulwa kweLayibhrari* was a re-working, with permission from CEPDA, of a book developed for women's groups in Nepal.
- You are your child's first teacher is a Zulu translation of an ELRU publication. It reinforces the message the FLP is giving in all its activities.
- My day. A5 22pages. This storybook for children is in full colour. Dual text: Zulu and English.
- Ezweni A5 10pages. This storybook for children is in full colour. Dual text: Zulu and English.
- Hands A5 6pages. This storybook for children is in full colour. Dual text: Zulu and English
- Siph'o's mother's brother's child A5 12pages. This storybook for children is in full colour. Dual text: Zulu and English
- Audio tape. Three original songs in Zulu plus recordings of above three stories (15, 16 and 17) in Zulu and English

Social development

Those who belong to the FLP are from close-knit rural communities and most live near their extended families. Some of the women had to move when they got married, which is in keeping with the traditional practice of women leaving their parents and becoming part of their husband's family and all that that entails. From discussion with the women in the groups, many of them still honour traditional ways especially those relating to mothers- and daughters- in law. I often ask FLP group members to tell me more about traditional practices as these are not only interesting but also helps me understand better the framework from which they work and how it is different to my own upbringing and understanding. I have also tried to read about practices in non-fiction as well as novels that incorporate this information. This thesis is not the place to go into all that I have learnt over the years, but to say a little about traditional family structure may be helpful here.

According to Krige (1936:120-158) for women marriage involved a “double transition” as a woman left her own family and became part of another family. The two families were tied by this marriage, but the woman would belong to the husband’s family and the loss to her family would be compensated by the gift of cattle (*lobola*). At the time when the young woman leaves her family home she is presented with special clothing (*isidwaba*) by her father. Until a bride has had her first child she is told what to do by her mother-in-law and “has to work very hard, doing all the work of carrying water, cooking, sweeping, gardening, gathering wood and grinding corn, etc.” (Krige 1936:155)

That these traditions still play a part in the lives of the rural women where the FLP works is clear from their stories. Many of the women were pleased to tell their stories and were amazed that we, Jill Frow who was facilitating the story-telling workshops and I, were really very interested in events that were special but not unusual amongst their family and friends. Hlaleleni Khuboni’s story of her courtship and marriage provides us with picture of traditional practices followed in the early 1960’s. Hlaleleni Khuboni still lives at Ndodeni which is one of the most rural of the FLP sites.

When I was still a young lady, I fell in love with a Khuboni gentleman. We were in love for a year. One day this Khuboni gentleman came to me and said, he wants to build a family with me. He arrived at night to fetch me to marry him. We went together and when we arrived at his place, his sisters met me and I slept together with his sisters in the sisters’ bedroom. I woke up early in the morning and went and sat on the rock (this is a traditional way when a bride to be has to wait for some ritual and wait to be fetched at a particular place, usually near the river or at some other convenient place). Whilst sitting there, his sisters kept on bringing me different kinds of food. At about 4 p.m. in the afternoon, I came back together with his sisters. I was dressed in the most beautiful attire with beads and all. I walked slowly towards their house until I was at the Khuboni’s yard. They then dressed me in the family’s traditional attire, and I became their new bride. I started fetching my own firewood, until the time for our wedding ceremony. Now I have my own house and my own children. Unfortunately my husband died. Hlaleleni Khuboni (Family Literacy Project 2002a: 30-33)

Hlaleleni Khuboni is quite an elderly woman now and is one of the most faithful members of the Ndodeni FLP group. She has not made a great deal of progress

in terms of reading and writing, but she enjoys the discussions in each session. She is also one of the group members who visit others in the community to read to their children. I imagine that she spends more time looking at the pictures and discussing those than she does actually reading the words. She is very much part of the social fabric of her community and the group.

The following story by Thembi Ndlovu shows both the positive and negative sides of traditional practice. Her pride in herself for her respect, her virginity and for following tradition is evident in her story. However she also writes about how she was told she could not complete her schooling because women were not expected to be educated.

When I was 17 years old I met a man who wanted to marry me. He paid lobola in 1982. We got married in 1983 on the 12th of June at the church and at my home on the 28th. It was a great joy at home in Lotheni, people were singing, blowing whistles, marching, and dancing.

When I got married he bought me a white wedding dress and furniture. He praised me for behaving myself well. I respected my parents because when I got married I was still a virgin. I took part in all the young maiden traditional rituals. My grandparents looked after me at Mpendle. I was no longer at school.

I got married to Ronald T Ndlovu at Stepmore. On the 29th June 1983, things were still exciting. I was very happy. In 1986 I asked permission from my husband to go back to school. This was not allowed. I was told that a woman is not allowed to get educated. Thembi Ndlovu (Family Literacy Project 2003: 31)

It is interesting that Thembi Ndlovu does not say how she felt about not being allowed to continue at school but the fact that she is a member of the FLP does show that this wish for more education never left her and that she persevered and eventually gained permission from her husband to continue with her education.

Another account of a party was written by Busisiwe Dlamini and in her story we see that old and young came together and this is reported quite wistfully in the

terms she uses such as “with such preparedness” and “things would be so beautiful”.

A party and an initiation

When I was young I used to like watching parties. People used to dance with shields and sticks. They used to play with sticks. Young ladies used to wear beautiful traditional attire with such preparedness. Old and young people used to come out to watch all of these, and things would be so beautiful. The lady undergoing an initiation party would carry her money on her head. Busisiwe Dlamini (Family Literacy Project 2002b: 13)

Bonani Zondi and Landelani Dlamini also talk of the importance of traditional songs and dancing and how each person was supported to learn the right words and steps.

And I also liked that after getting tired of playing we would sit down and sing traditional songs and to teach each other traditional dancing. If one of us was dancing out of tune with the clapping of hands, we would teach that person until they got their step to be in tune with the clapping of hands. When it was Christmas time, we would go to different homes and dance and be happy.” Bonani Zondi (Family Literacy Project 2002b:11)

When I was young I liked to stay with my grandfather because he would sing songs for us, and he would say he loves songs so we should sing with him. We would sing and things would be lovely, but we could not sing properly, and then he would say we must all sing one by one, so that we would learn the songs that he loved. Landelani Dlamini. (Family Literacy Project 2002b:21)

These stories exemplify the social development aspect of some of the women. These stories refer to family and community life and how that was in years gone by. Stories are a way of passing on knowledge that is particularly relevant in communities where there is little or no written material. The project, in giving the women the opportunity to talk and write about these memories, has highlighted the importance of social interaction and tradition in all our lives.

In reading some of the stories, I get a sense of the nostalgia for times past but have to remind myself that life was not all pleasant and full of parties and many

of the stories do reflect the hardship of the times as this story of Funabani Khuboni does.

When I was young, I was not living at home. I used to live with my sisters and I looked after their children. When I started going to school, there used to be no one who could stay at home and look after the baby, because my sister had some temporary job as my brother-in-law was not working. I also used to stay away from school a lot, because someone had to stay at home. I failed at school because I had this problem that I could not attend school regularly. This situation continued until the baby got a bit older and after that, we could leave the baby with neighbours. Funabani Khuboni. (Family Literacy Project 2002b:25)

Group members are encouraged to write to pen friends in neighbouring groups. These letters are given to the facilitators who exchange them at the monthly team meetings.

The reason for starting the pen friend activity was to give group members practice in writing. Rather than writing to imaginary people or composing business letters they would never send, (activities often found in literacy manuals) we decided that the women could write to each other. However it has become far more than a writing activity and the women developed social links with one another. At the end of the year event everyone has the opportunity to find their pen friend and spend time talking to her. It also means that when one or other group is singing or dancing in turn, their pen friends can acknowledge them in their songs and dances as is the traditional way.

The FLP has a newsletter that is edited by one of the facilitators. She writes about things that have taken place within the project or issues affecting it. Group members write letters to her as editor and more and more of the newsletter is taken up with these letters. The letters are a way of keeping in touch with one another across the physical distances between sites. Group members from one of our "sister" organisations the Farm Family Literacy Project write in to the newsletter so the network is widened and our group members realise they are part of a growing social and learning network in the area.

As with the pen friend activity, the newsletter was started to provide group members with something to read and to encourage them to write. And, as with the pen friend activity, this has also fed into the social development of group members as they see themselves as part of a larger whole, read about one another and maintain an interest in keeping others informed about their own activities.

One of the FLP facilitators came to me in the second year of the project and described how the women in her group found it hard to settle as they each wanted to talk about the book they were returning to the library or book box. The women enjoyed talking to one another about the stories and as they became more confident, began to recommend books for one another to read. This was the start of the first book club – an idea that soon spread to the other groups and before long the FLP had seven book clubs. These meet once a week after the sessions so that people have plenty of time to talk to each other about books.

The highlight of the social development aspect of the project is the end of year event. This is a very long day where each FLP group performs plays showing us all something about their lives. There is also a lot of singing and dancing and socialising during lunch. In 2005, the dancing was so enthusiastic that one person broke through a floorboard! FLP group members look forward to this end of year event and travel long distances in uncomfortable taxis to attend.

Moral Development

Each Unit used in the FLP group session is focused on an issue relevant to the women. Many of the issues raise moral questions. As part of the sessions, FLP group members are encouraged to discuss these and the FLP facilitators report that there have been many lively debates. Issues such as teenage pregnancies, premarital sex, jealousy, and attitudes towards people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS have been raised and discussed.

Guidelines for the FLP facilitators are that all views should be expressed freely but that members should be guided towards tolerance and acceptance of people who have views different to their own.

An example of how the issue of teenage pregnancies was addressed is given below:

UNIT: FAMILY LIFE
SESSION 5
Material from Networker No 29

Activity	Materials
There are always some problems in families. One of the problems your groups have mentioned has been teenage pregnancies.	
Ask the group to brainstorm ideas about why teenagers become pregnant.	Board and koki
<p>Here are some reasons, go through them with the group if they haven't mentioned them already:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information on life skills issues such as body development, contraception (<i>ukumela inzalo</i>), sexual abuse • Cultural beliefs: give some examples • Peer pressure also contributes to teenage pregnancy. For instance many girls and boys think that because their friends are having sexual relationships then they should be having sex too. • Parental pressure – some parents tell their children to give them grandchildren before they (the parent) die. • Sexual abuse – if a teenager is raped • Poverty at home – some young people get involved in sexual relationships in exchange for money • Shortage of recreational facilities – many teenagers do not have access to other things to do in their spare time. 	
<p>Give some examples of what happens to a young girl if she gets pregnant: for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict in the family – one parent may blame the other for lack of discipline • Increased costs for the family • Delays in the teenager's educational progress • Affects the teenage mother's social life • Child birth out of marriage some times affects the teenage mother in the future if she gets married to the man who is not the father of her first child. 	
<p>What are some examples of a young boy or man if he gets a teenager pregnant? How are these different from what was discussed above? Are girls and boys treated differently? Is this fair?</p>	

<p>How can teenage pregnancy be prevented? Discuss this and then add from the following list:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on life skills should be given to teenagers in order for them to make informed decisions. They need to understand the consequences of their actions and to practice standing up for their rights. • Open talk between teenagers and their parents is needed if parents are to help their children make healthy choices. • Parents also need training in life skills and sex education so they feel comfortable to talk openly about these issues. • Parents and teenagers need to know the facts about sex, pregnancy and contraception. • The community needs to establish recreational facilities for young people. 	
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Figure 18: Unit on family life

In 2003 I held workshops on the importance of storytelling in families. The women were asked to tell stories they remembered their grandmothers telling them. It was interesting to hear how much they learnt from these stories and sad to hear that many children are not interested in listening to the stories.

Some of the lessons learnt from their grandmothers and discussed in the workshops were about how to interact with family members, how to show respect and generally how to behave in a moral and responsible way towards others. This extract from Goodness Khanyile shows the importance of parental guidance and how deeply the loss is felt at the death of a parent.

But whilst I was living in this bliss my parents died, one after the other, which was a very bad thing. I would ask myself a lot of questions, how would we survive, and who would advise us and guide us and teach us about the family traditions and responsibilities. Goodness Khanyile (Family Literacy Project 2003a: 11)

This has implications for the country as we face the Aids pandemic and the loss of role models for all the children who have lost their parents through this and other tragedies.

The women of Ndodeni, Lotheni and Stepmore said stories are important for the pleasure they give and the information and guidance given The following is

taken from the workshops where the women wrote on cards what they learnt from stories told to them as children:

- RESPECT
 - Respect for our parents
 - Respect the home you will live in when married
 - Respect older people as they have knowledge, they know more than you do
 - Respect for ourselves
 - Respect between women and men

Parents were seen as people who contribute to the moral development of their children. All adults are seen as important members of the community. The group members report that this respect is often lacking in children today. This is not new in the lives of parents as I am sure I remember my parents making similar statements about the “youth of today”. As Krige (1936: 30) tells us, the “custom of *hlonipha*... literally means to have shame or to shun through bashfulness, and affects women to a far greater extent than men.” *Hlonipha* is translated into English as ‘respect’ and can refer to language as well as actions. However in communities such as the ones in which the FLP works, there does seem to have been a strong culture of respect that is perhaps not quite as strong today as when the FLP group members were growing up.

What I really liked most was to respect my parents, in fact, respect for all adults, when I grew up all adults were respected. They used to tell us that we must respect elderly people so that our days on earth could be increased. I think that is why I reached an age of 37, because I really paid attention to this, and completely believed in it. Thembi Ndlovu (Family Literacy Project 2002b:36)

- TOLERANCE
 - To tolerate my mother in law even though it was difficult

In the Stepmore FLP group when mothers- in-law were mentioned there was much laughter and the women were joking with one another until I asked them to tell me what they were saying. One of the women, Mirriam Zwane, got down on her knees to show me how she would make a cup of tea and offer it to her

mother-in-law. Everyone became very excited and urged her to demonstrate how to grind mealies and how to sweep the floor. There seemed indeed to be a tolerance for mothers-in-law in the Stepmore group.

In Ndodeni there was more of a pride in being a mother-in-law, and amongst the younger group members, a pride in being an *umakoti* or bride. In the discussion that followed I learnt that the older women felt that as they had been *omakoti* when they were young, they should now be allowed to enjoy having a younger woman look after them. The younger women did not appear to be anything other than sincere when they spoke of the respect they had for their mothers-in-law and how they enjoyed looking after her.

This was interesting to me and something to be admired, that traditions can be so strong as to remain intact for some even though, in my eyes, the younger women were not given the freedom I had enjoyed in my relationship with my own mother-in-law. Yet I do remember rushing around tidying up before she visited and making sure I served food she would enjoy. But in my life those visits were a pleasure but they also did not take place that often and I know that I would not be able to have maintained the level of “service” that the *omakoti* of Ndodeni offer.

- **ADVICE**
How to grow up in ways that are good
How to behave in a marriage
Do not be jealous of others

The issue of jealousy has arisen often in the FLP groups and in our team meetings. I became so worried about this that I sought the advice of others in the field and found someone who had developed a Unit on the topic. We presented that and the FLP facilitators said that it did help people to talk about jealousy. However it has cropped up again over the years and I have never had a satisfactory discussion about it with any of the FLP facilitators.

I asked Jill Frow to address this in her sessions with the FLP facilitators during 2005. In one of the meetings in 2005 entitled *Take yet another step* Jill Frow (Frow 2005:6) raised this issue by mentioning that the FLP facilitators often say that there is jealousy in communities. She asked if jealousy was what prevented the FLP facilitators themselves from speaking freely at team meetings (there are often long silences during these meetings and I become very frustrated by what I see as an unacceptably low level of participation). The response to Jill from two of the FLP facilitators was that the facilitators are not worried about jealousy; they are silent if they are not sure of the appropriate response. One FLP facilitator turned to Jill and said clearly that team members were not jealous of each other, they were only shy.

The remaining points were similar to those discussed above and stressed the need for respect for others, oneself and the value of tradition.

- GENEROSITY

To give food to visitors
Food must be shared

- SKILLS

How to grind mielies and to cook
How to avoid dangers like snakes

- KNOWLEDGE

How to tell good from bad behaviour
How to behave well
How to be brave

- HISTORY

That it is important to know our own history
To know how things change
To think carefully about the past

The women were adamant in those workshops that “We must not lose our own practices, we must do it – even now!”

To raise the profile of storytelling we asked one or two of the women to visit the child to child groups run by the FLP in primary schools and tell their stories there. It was heartening to hear that during a visit to Ndodeni, an independent evaluator noticed children running up the hill to the FLP meeting room. She was told that children now run to meet the women to ask them to tell stories.

The following story was told by one of the women in the Stepmore FLP:

My granny told me that in the olden days they lived in beehive-shape huts, one for the elderly boys, one for the elderly girls and the kitchen. The elders of the family would also have their own. By that time respect was a major responsibility among people of all age groups. Water was collected from springs using clay containers (imbiza). You had to put something soft on your head before putting your water container on your head so that it won't slip away.

Male folk worked in Johannesburg and would walk on foot for a whole month, resting along the way to Johannesburg. There were no cars by then. They would carry provision that would not go bad on the way. Mealies were roasted, ground into fine powder, mixed with sugar and a pinch of salt. They would lick this powder and drink water and be full. Mirriam Zwane Stepmore Family Literacy Project group (Unpublished)

Physical development

The FLP has, over the years, organised some skills training such as fabric painting and sewing so that group members can provide for their families. This is not one of the core activities and not one I have promoted but one which does, in some way, encompass physical development.

In some of the story telling sessions, games have been used to encourage people to relax and share information. Over the year these activities are not presented often, usually only when the story telling facilitator, Jill Frow, presents workshops. She is affectionately known as "Jika, Jika' Jill" because of one of the

games she asks people to play. Some of these games are described in the FLP book *Our Stories* (Frow and Desmond 2003)²²

- The name game
The aim of this activity is to make people feel important, learn each other's names and stimulate creativity. Participants stand in a circle of not more than 12 people, all facing inwards. The leader does a dance step and/or a dramatic stance while saying "My name is" The rest of the group imitates the dance step and says "Her name is" Each person in the group has turn to have their name celebrated in this way.
- Patterns
The aims of this activity are to have fun, banish shyness, get to know each other, get to know what others think and feel and stimulate the participants mentally and physically. For this activity you need three balls of different sizes and textures.

The participants stand in a circle with their arms in the air. The facilitator starts by throwing one ball to someone with their arms up. This person throws to someone who has their arms up. Everyone throws to someone with their arms up and when someone has caught the ball, she lowers her arms. Everyone has to remember to whom she has thrown the ball. When everyone has been thrown the ball, the same pattern is repeated several times. Once the ball is flowing smoothly in a rhythmic pattern the facilitator introduces a second ball and even a third, keeping the same pattern going. This causes a great deal of hilarity.

At a certain point the facilitator halts the game and introduces a sharing topic. Participants share before they throw the ball. The sharing and ball flow in the same pattern as before.

Some examples of what was shared:

"I was born in Donnybrook. There were 5 in my family – my mother, my granny and three children."

"I was born in Centocow Hospital. There were 7 in my family."

The next round of sharing may be as follows:

"My favourite fruit is....."

The final rounds of sharing becomes a little more pertinent, for example:

"What I like best about my community is....."

"My favourite day as a child was because I"

- Jika Jika
The aims of this activity are to move around physically and rhythmically, to mingle with others, relax and have fun, learn about people's preferences, get people into small groups or pairs if needed.

²² These extracts are from my own notes

The facilitator calls out the phrase “jika jika, jika jika” while people dance around the room, chanting in unison. She then blows a whistle or bangs two pot lids and asks people to get together in small groups, for example those who

- are wearing the same colour shoes
- use who use the same kind of washing soap
- keep the same kind of animals at home
- have the same favourite childhood song

FLP group member, Jabu Dlamini summed this up when she said “Because nothing happens when you are too busy playing, but it is also important for you to play when you are still a child, so that you can exercise your body and your body becomes strong when you exercise and does not become weak”.

Emotional Development

In the first sessions in 2000 I asked the group to talk about what they were proud of in their area and in themselves. In each group they were a little embarrassed to talk about themselves but soon warmed to the task and the following list gives an idea of some of the contributions:

Looking after children and grandchildren; keeping my house clean; my singing; my gardening; my children; being able to crochet and knit well and building a home with mud bricks. The men were proud of their soccer and karate skills. (Field notes March 2000)

Many times in the early years of the project I sensed or was told outright about the lack of confidence and low self esteem of the women. They talked about how they felt they were being cheated because they could not count well; how they could not take part in meetings because they could not read; one woman told me how she had started her own church but felt very inadequate because she could not write down the names of the congregation. Sadly this woman died a few years later but not before she learnt how to write and told us proudly about the register she kept of the attendance at her services.

From the above a claim could be made that the FLP does try to address a range of needs of the group members in a holistic way as the following statements from group members show:

Wish for the future: There with my own car and my family. I know how to drive perfectly and take my children to Tech. Gladys Nzimande (Unpublished)

This is how I feel in my family: In my family I feel great. Me and my husband and my children because we do things together. When there is a problem we sit down and solve that problem. When we have a money problem we sit down and solve it. When our children are not feeling well we get together with my husband. When I am busy my husband bathes them. Bonani Mncwabe (Unpublished)

I met other learners who introduced me to adult school. It is a good thing to learn. This takes me away from my problems at home in the morning and I come back to them after school.

I've been inspired to learn at adult school, it helped me because my husband has seen that I can be helpful with many things, including reading with my sisters' children and it is fun. We would also like to thank our community that has organized a lot of things. That is nice. I thank my community that organizes for us to learn and to do garden projects, where we grow vegetables like cabbages, carrots etc. Our homes are doing well. Thanks to Snoeks, our Editor Nonzuzo, and Jimi who is teaching us.

I say forward with learning, fellow people, God has given us an opportunity for life on earth, and I now have hope. Learning has made me industrious, I wish that other people can experience what I've seen, because even in our crèches our children are learning good things, and our children are developing. May they keep this good opportunity they have at school. They must thank the Lord, and ask the Lord to put them in the place where they need to be. You must work hard and pray. In all that I do, I am dedicated, so that the Almighty can help me in all the difficulties I experience here on this earth we live on.

One thing I've realised is that my life has improved a lot much better now than before. I am thankful that the Lord is with me. I am now able to find some temporary jobs like other people. Even if I have problems, I do not complain a lot, I comfort myself by telling myself that things were much more difficult for my parents when they brought me up. I am prepared to be a mother who is diligent whilst I'm still alive. Bongiwe Msomi (Family Literacy Project 2003a:17)

Reflection

In this chapter I have given space for the women's voices to be heard and related these to the principle of holistic development. I enjoyed choosing the stories to include in this chapter as it provided me with an opportunity to enter the lives of

the FLP group members. The stories reminded me once again that our lives are apart in many ways, but that we share a commitment to our families. The commitment of the women to the aim of ensuring that their children had the best possible start in life was fierce. As I wrote this chapter I was reminded of that once again and am convinced that this is one of the reasons the FLP group members continue to make time in their busy lives to attend FLP sessions. The respect for others, and for their own history, comes through as the FLP group members tell stories of the past and bring us up to date with their lives as they are now.

In the next chapter the third principle, that of the place of children and their families in their community will be presented.

CHAPTER 10: COMMUNITY

In this chapter, the first question I address when exploring the principle that children are part of, and the responsibility of the community, is what a family is. As discussed in Chapter 3, there are many ways to describe a family, and many different definitions and underlying these are our own experiences of family. Communities are made up of families and by supporting families the project supports community development. So although the Family Literacy Project is not a community development project, activities such as the home visiting programme, provision of post-literacy activities, and involvement in community libraries, contribute to the development of the community as a whole.

My own experience was very much that of what is commonly called a “nuclear” family – a mother, father and children. In my case, our family consisted of a mother and father and only one child. My mother did not work outside of our home, but as a music teacher she did at times teach the piano to children who came for lessons in our house. My father worked for a bank from leaving school until he retired, apart from time serving in the navy during World War 2. This is also changing as many people now move from one employer to another and even change careers several times. My own childhood was very happy and secure. Something I have tried to carry in to my own role as a parent, was the complete acceptance of my right to be an individual. My parents were sorely tested in this regard when as a university student I joined those who challenged the government. I think their concern was based mostly on a fear of what happened to those who opposed apartheid. As far as my own role as a parent goes, I have been more than a little overanxious but in general, I think, supportive, and loving my children has never been a problem because to me they are quite amazing!

In England, in the late 1970's and through the 1980's there was a shift from the nuclear family to encompass many families of children and one parent, usually a

mother. I remember in the Pre-School Playgroup Association course discussions I attended in London, we talked about how to celebrate Mothers/Fathers Days and at the same time being sensitive to those with one or the other rather than both parents. Another change was that some gay people, singly or as couples, applied to adopt children.

In South Africa the AIDS pandemic has changed the face of families and this is something that is mentioned in Chapter 3 but which is beyond the scope of this study to discuss fully. However it is mainly black South African children who are affected, and a brief look at traditional practice may be helpful here. According to Krige (1926:61) the importance of children cannot be underestimated as the birth of the first child indicates that the marriage is fulfilled and complete.

As Crampton (2004:25) writing of family life in the 1700's notes that children in an extended family were expected to address all adult men as father and adult women as mother and it was as though each child saw every adult as their parent. This is borne out by Krige (1936:23) when she explains that every Zulu person (at that time) would be seen to have a number of fathers and mothers and many, many brothers and sisters. However she does say that "the individual family, consisting of a man and his wife and children ... must be considered the most important unit in Zulu society."

Krige (1936:27) goes on to describe the relationship between children and their grandparents as being different according to whether they are paternal or maternal grandparents. The paternal grandfather is to be obeyed by the child even more so than her own father and it is from this grandfather that the child will learn about tradition. A maternal grandfather is more likely to be indulgent, as is the maternal grandmother.

Krige (1936:30) goes into more detail on the terms used to address different family members than we need for this study. However it is interesting to note

that a bride has to observe many ways of showing respect to members of her new family including her husband who she has to refer to as “father of so-and-so”. That this traditional practice is changing to something far less formal is evidenced in the following quote by Goodness Khanyile who says

The following year I got married and a year after that I got a child who was a great blessing because God gave us a boy. This was nice because my husband and I stopped calling each other by our first names. We now call each other mom and dad. (Family Literacy Project: 2003a:10)

It appears, from my own observations that adults in the extended family are seen to have a special relationship to the children and are accorded respect as adults who will take care of and be responsible for the child should something happen to her parents. This may explain why children orphaned by Aids are usually cared for in their extended families or by the community in which they live. There are, of course, families who do not take care of these children because of fear of being stigmatised, or because they are just too poor to care for more children and in these cases the children are being cared for in orphanages. As Desmond (2005: 3) notes

There are many different ways of providing care to children, so a number of alternative models of care are appearing. Some children remain in their original homes and another family member takes on the role of primary caregiver. At the other extreme, some children are removed from their homes and communities and live in formal institutions. In between these two extremes are a host of alternative models, from foster care to children’s villages and so on.

As this study by Chris Desmond was conducted in the area in which the FLP works, it is relevant to take a brief look at some of the findings in this report. In addition, in keeping with the theme of this chapter, I will note here that he is my son. I am pleased that as a health economist he is concerned not only with figures and costings, but also with the well being of young children.

Of the thirty four young orphan children in the study which he undertook, 26 were living in family homes in the community and 8 were in a cluster home, Clouds of Hope, in Underberg. It is interesting to note that in the family homes, all the

children were cared for by women relatives apart from one woman who was caring for children who were not related to her but were children born to her husband and another woman.

Community caregivers with orphans	21
Great grandmother	1
Grandmother	8
Aunt	9
Sister	2
Other	1

(Desmond 2005:24)

Figure 19: Caregivers

As an indication of how families are rallying around to help those ill with HIV/Aids is the fact that seven of the “caregivers were already the main caregiver for the children when the mother died.” (Desmond 2005:24) Five of the women were chosen by the extended family to be the caregivers of the orphaned children and this indicates some degree of consultation and discussion within the family. However what is sad to me is that only 10 of these relatives were receiving help from family members and this in the form of clothes or money. This may be an indication of the poverty in the area but it would also be interesting to find out if children were ever cared for even for short periods to give the caregiver some free time.

Desmond (2005) concludes that attention should be paid to different kinds of support, not only financial:

One of the key strategies for the care of orphans detailed in the UNAIDS and UNICEF ‘Framework’ document (2004) is to strengthen the capacity of families to protect and care for orphans. They note that families are the best hope for vulnerable children, and one of the aims of the present study is to investigate the role of financial aid to the families. But our results point to the fact that direct financial aid is only a part of what is needed. Psychosocial problems may need a variety of intervention measures to address them: bereavement counselling, with group approaches, peer support, and individual counselling. (Desmond 2005: 52)

Supporting resilience in communities

I think it important to look at how we can raise children who are resilient. In 1995 I was sent a book *Strengthening the Human Spirit*. (Grotberg: 1995) This book became very important to me and in 2001, when asked what the FLP was doing to support those orphaned by HIV/AIDS, I requested and received permission to re-work this book. The reason for doing this was that I think all children need to be resilient and I find it difficult that children affected by Aids are separated out. I thought then, and still believe, that if we can help all children grow up emotionally strong, then we are building a society better able to deal with any problems there may be, including the Aids pandemic.

This leads me to talk about 'memory boxes' that are offered as a way to help Aids-affected children deal with the loss of close family members. In my family we have what we call 'nostalgia' boxes for each son. These boxes contain everything from the hospital bracelet (worn at birth) to their home-made birthday cards to the newspaper columns and academic articles they now produce. Every child will enjoy looking through a box like this and every family can keep one and these boxes do not have to be linked to death or Aids. I have a friend who is a medical doctor working mainly with Aids patients. She told me about a time when she was talking to a group of women about making memory boxes and they asked if she thought they were going to die – this is the negative side of linking something meaningful in any circumstance to Aids. All children need to be resilient, all children and families can enjoy memory or nostalgia boxes, and they should be able to without having always to be reminded of the swathe of death that Aids is cutting through this country.

The FLP book, *Help children to be strong* is a simplification of *Strengthening the human spirit* mentioned earlier. The FLP provides support to adults to ensure that children grow up with positive feelings about themselves and their ability to

enjoy, and cope with life. There are three statements we would like children to be able to make:

I can

I have

I am

What children need to become resilient include food and shelter, love, people they can trust, people who trust them, hope and to be independent and confident. (Family Literacy Project 2002:1). These characteristics are not unique to children, we all need to work towards being resilient and these are needs everyone has. We all need to be able to say things like

I CAN communicate, try and solve problems, control my feelings, understand what kind of person I am and what others are like, and find someone to help me.

I HAVE people around me I trust and who love me, no matter what I do, people who make rules for me so I know when to stop before there is danger or trouble, people who are good role models, people who want me to learn to do things on my own and people who help me when I am sick, in danger or need to learn.

I AM lovable, glad to do nice things for others and show I care, respectful of others and myself, will be to be responsible and independent, and sure things will be all right. (Family Literacy Project 2002c:2)

Over the years the FLP facilitators have been on a number of courses including those on home-based care, counselling and play therapy. The course on play therapy has been particularly useful as the FLP facilitators have been able to include the activities learnt here into the work they do directly with young children as well as passing on information to the adults in the FLP groups. So many of the families have children who have been bereaved by illness or accidents that it is important for the adults to know at least a few ways of responding to young children who may or may not easily express their feelings about their loss.

The following extract from Desmond (2005) provides a glimpse of the way some families and children respond to a mothers' death.

Some children were too young when their mother died to react to her death, even when they were told about it or were included in the funeral ceremonies. The caregivers had explained the absence of the parents in different ways: some shielded the children from the knowledge (in two extreme cases by denial and by pretending to be the child's mother) and others adopted a more modern approach of including the children in the funeral ceremonies, and of letting them see the body laid out in the house. The children themselves reacted in different ways: the younger ones seemingly unaffected; others were sad and uncomprehending; and one later refused to believe that her mother was dead, saying that she was working far away. Some of the children who were older when their mothers died were very upset. The caregivers and their families did their best to console the children who cried a lot. In one case members of the church assisted. An older sibling of one of the children was said to have become 'mentally disturbed' by the death of the parent and in this instance the caregiver had asked for assistance from a social worker. (Desmond 2005: 27)

Two programmes the FLP implements are a response to helping place children at the centre of a supportive family and community. These programmes are the home visiting programme and the community libraries programme.

Home Visiting

- **Early literacy**

Late in October 2002 on a visit to the groups I heard FLP group members talking about how children in the neighbourhood often came around asking FLP group members to read to them. In discussions with the women we began to talk about how they could take the message of early literacy to their neighbours and this gave rise to the home visiting scheme.

At the beginning of 2003 some FLP group members chose neighbouring families with small children, took books from the project and visited the families twice a month. They also talked to the mothers in the families about the role they play in

their children's development. They said they felt confident enough to do this because of what they had learnt in the sessions on early literacy included in each unit.

To guide the conversations we approached a Cape Town based early childhood development training and resource organisation, Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU), to ask if we could use one of their books entitled *You are your child's first teacher*. We raised the money for this to be translated into Zulu and those women involved in the home visiting programme began to use this as a guide during their visits.

To support the FLP group members as they delivered these early childhood development messages the project ran workshops once a term in each site. These were run by Felicity Champkins, a locally based early childhood development specialist happy to visit rural sites. She developed a programme that includes activities that can be done at home and which encourage the development of early literacy skills. These workshops are a follow on from those run by Alex Barry in 2002 and 2003 where she focused on story telling, reading books and other games and activities to support the development of early literacy skills.

- **Health of young children**

In 2004 I attended a workshop run by the Kwa-Zulu Natal provincial Department of Health to promote community involvement in the IMCI programme (Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses). This World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF strategy was launched in 1992 to improve the management of the health of young children and so reduce the number of deaths of children under the age of five. IMCI is used in 100 countries. Research conducted by these bodies (WHO and UNICEF) show that most of these deaths are the result of

preventable diseases that could be easily treated if recognised early. The strategy has three components of which the third is the one into which FLP fits:

Improvements in health worker skills;
Improvements in health systems (includes ensuring supplies of essential drugs, vaccines and equipment and regular supervision); and
Improvements in family and community health practices. (CORE 2003:2)

The IMCI strategy was initially focused on the first two components until it was realized that without community involvement the desired result of healthy children would not be easily achieved.

I was very interested in this approach and could see how easily it could be integrated into the FLP home visiting scheme. However, despite making links with clinic staff in our area, and the support of more senior people in the provincial health department, we made little progress towards getting the FLP facilitators trained and ready to support the FLP group members. In the desperation that unfortunately often rises in me when working with provincial or national government departments, I decided to go ahead and arrange training without the support of the health department. In 2004 we contracted Chris Gibson, an independent expert in IMCI, to train FLP facilitators and one FLP group member from each site.

The key messages in the community component of IMCI are:

- Breastfeed exclusively for 6 months
- Start adding complementary foods at 6 months
- Provide adequate amounts of micronutrients
- Promote a child's mental social and physical development through play and stimulation, and growth monitoring
- Safe disposal of faeces
- Hand washing with soap
- Malaria prevention
- Prevention of child abuse/neglect
- Adopt and sustain behaviour e.g. in relation to HIV/Aids
- Continue to feed and give extra fluids during illness

- Give children appropriate home treatment for illness
- Prevent injuries and accidents
- Immunization
- Danger signs of illness
- Follow recommendations in relation to treatment follow up and referral
- Care of pregnant mother
- Participation of men

When the FLP group members were observed during the home visits, most were seen to deliver the early childhood development messages in an interactive way by playing with the children or modelling how to look at books with children. However when it came to sharing the IMCI messages these were delivered in a didactic style quite out of keeping with the approach adopted by the FLP. To overcome this we did two things. The first was to make a video of how to do a home visit. The FLP facilitators acted out entering a home, engaging all family members present and sharing information and passing on skills in a participatory way. The second was to develop a game or fun activity linked to each of the key IMCI messages. These were tested in the groups and have since been produced by UNICEF South Africa for wider distribution.

Newsletter

The newsletter, mentioned also in Chapter 9, started when I asked group members to write to me. These letters were printed, followed by a few pages with news and then photographs. The newsletter is now professionally laid out and is edited by one of the FLP facilitators who takes responsibility for collecting news and letters from the groups. The newsletter *Masifunde Njengomdeni* (Families reading together) is very popular and group members are always eager to see if their letter has been printed or their group featured in the news items.

The newsletter also provides an important post-literacy activity as group members have a reason to write and read in what is otherwise still a print-poor environment.

Community organisations

Early in the project we found that as women became more confident and more able to read and write, they took leading roles in community organisations. One woman who had started her own church was delighted when she could write the names of her group. Another woman was relieved to be able to read the minutes of meetings she attended.

This is not unique to the FLP, as the following quotation shows:

Education programmes for women can support women's wider involvement in the social and political life of their communities, and can provide women with important knowledge about health, income-generation and other aspects relevant to their own and their families' lives. (Barton and Papen 2005: 22)

In response to requests, we developed a Unit on committee skills and this proved to be a great help. Interesting points about democracy were raised in this unit and one group came up with their definition of a good leader: as

...want a person who is free and open, a person who likes all the people and speaks politely with the community. A good leader must be the person who fights for the needs of the community, a person who visits to see the needs of the community. (Facilitator personal report to author)

Groups in some areas used this information to run workshops for other community members

The evaluation in 2004 showed that across the 100 group members, forty seven belonged to community groups and twenty one of these women were committee members. Four women were on their local development committees. This information has not been collected again but anecdotal evidence is that FLP group members are interested in the development of their communities and prepared to work towards improving the situation for themselves and their families.

FLP Community libraries and book boxes

I did not visit the homes of the FLP group members, but I often wondered if they had anything to read at home. Later, my own studies (Desmond 2001a) and those of others (Kvalsvig et al 2003) showed that many homes in the area often only had the Bible and a few school text books. So many times in conversations about the adult literacy and in particular the reading habits of black South Africans, I would hear that “people do not read”. My response to this was to ask how people *can* read when they have nothing *to* read. The FLP group members and others in their community would have to travel by taxi to Creighton or Underberg in order to borrow a book. They do their shopping when they visit these small towns and I imagine that to add books to an already heavy load of mealie meal, sugar or other groceries would be the last thing on their minds. Also, the taxi driver would charge extra if their loads were too large. The cost of a trip to only visit the library would cost money taken from the welfare benefits that most families live on. I was sure that people were not reading because they could not read well, and because there was nothing for them to read. They did want to read but to get their hands on books was just too difficult a task.

In 2004 the FLP group at Stepmore received a donation of a community library from the non government organisation, Biblionef. This 40-foot container is painted bright blue and very visible for miles around amongst the otherwise quite bleak buildings. The container is fitted with shelving and this is packed with reference books, books for adults and brightly illustrated books for children. The books are in Zulu and in English. The library is run by a FLP group member, and she is helped by the FLP facilitator and monthly visits from a retired librarian living in Himeville. Children from the primary schools attend children’s sessions, where they listen to stories, write, draw and borrow books. At the beginning of 2007, FLP encouraged children to record the number of books they had read; a young girl from Stepmore was the first to read 10 books and was presented with

a small prize of a bag and stationery. Children are the main users of the library, but teenagers and adults also visit it and enjoy borrowing books.



Figure 20: Children, Stepmore Library (Source: Roy Reed)

The FLP runs two other community libraries, at Ndodeni and Mpumlwane. The community library at Mpumlwane was built with the prize money received by the project as a runner up in the GuinnessUDV Adult Literacy Awards in 2003.

I include here extracts from a paper (Desmond 2007) I wrote and, with Zimbili Dlamini²³, presented at the World Library and Information Congress “Libraries for the future: Progress, Development and Partnerships” held in South Africa in 2007. The focus here is on the FLP community library at Ndodeni:

The hand written sign outside a community library reads “Strengthen the community of Ndodeni by joining the Community Library. It is our help.” The library is the only brick building in this remote KwaZulu Natal village and is run by local women who are members of the Family Literacy Project a small non government organization.

The beginning of the community library

The family literacy group in Ndodeni first met in a church building that was small and built of mud. There were no chairs or tables and the women used to bring grass mats and arrange themselves around the room so that they could lean against the walls during the group sessions.

The group then cleaned and painted a two-roomed mud dwelling that had been abandoned by a local family. The project provided a table and chairs and a cupboard for the books that had been kept in the box-library.

²³ FLP facilitator at Ndodeni

When a staff member of a large South African book store chain heard about the project she asked if there was any way in which their social responsibility programme could help. The proposal put to Exclusive Books Trust was successful and the building of a two roomed brick library began. The women from the project were involved in finding accommodation for the builder and helped him throughout especially when it came to bringing water from the river to use when the concrete floor was thrown.

The opening of the library was a huge event in the community with great excitement at the procession of 4 wheeled drive vehicles bringing visitors from all over South Africa. The women and children danced and sang and the celebrations went on long after the visitors had left.

The community library and community development

Before the community library was built at Ndodeni, the family literacy project group members borrowed books from the book box supplied by the project. Researchers in the area had found that very few homes had books. (Kvalsvig 2006:6) The book boxes were well used by adults and children, with children often reminding their mothers to exchange books.

To develop the idea of offering the books from the book box to the wider community, the Family Literacy Project adapted a Nepalese booklet entitled “Our Reading Home: Library Guidelines” published by CEDPA/Nepal in 2000. The Family Literacy Project booklet, “Setting up a Community Library” is in Zulu and English. In this booklet it was suggested that group members conduct a survey to find out how relevant a library would be to the community.

Ndodeni group members visited thirty three of their neighbours aged between 10 and 45. Thirty of those interviewed said that they regularly read newspapers and magazines, each naming one including the project monthly newsletter. The reasons given for wanting a library ranged from gaining knowledge, and improving the area to helping family members. “It will help me a lot to get books that I’ll obtain knowledge from” and “It is a good thing to have a library because we will be able to educate our families” and “The whole community will benefit”.

There is no school at Ndodeni and the nearest library is in the small village of Creighton, a taxi ride away, so it is no surprise that since the opening of the community library at Ndodeni it has been used by adults, teenagers and children in the area.

Running the library

Early in the life of the project a local woman was chosen by the community to be the family literacy facilitator. Zimbili Dlamini lives in the neighbouring area and walks for an hour to reach Ndodeni as there is little transport between her home at Mpumlwane and Ndodeni. Zimbili Dlamini runs the library with the help of some of the family literacy group members. These are women who have never used another library and have had to learn how to catalogue books as well as issue them and keep track of returns. The project has produced a second booklet relating to libraries. This booklet “How to run a Community Library” helps those who run the Ndodeni library and the other libraries run by the project.

Evaluation

Each year the Family Literacy Project has engaged an external evaluator to work with the groups to provide information on the programme and recommendations for the year ahead. In 2004, before the building of the community library at Ndodeni, the group in Stepmore already had a community library. The comments in the evaluation report from the Stepmore group were that

- “We have learned how to visit a library and borrow books”
- “The community is now enjoying reading books”
- “We teach people how to use a library “
- We interact a lot with the community through the library.” (Frow 2004:15)

These findings from a different area (Stepmore) in 2004 were reiterated in the evaluation conducted in Ndodeni in 2006. The 2006 evaluation used an adaptation of Photo Voice where Family Literacy facilitators used cameras to record changes in reading patterns in their members, families and the wider community. Once the photographs were developed, the facilitators wrote a sentence or two to explain why they had taken each photograph. The photographs were then displayed in the groups so that group members could comment as well. The following are some comments linked to photographs taken at Ndodeni:

Photograph	Explanatory sentence
An adult reading a book in the library	The learner is taking books in the library while she is waiting for others to come. The learners use waiting time to read now.
An adult signing a form outside the library	A learner signing for First Words in Print. The learners were very glad to get new books. They were using the same books for a long time. They were allowed to keep these and take them home.
A child visiting the facilitator and looking at a magazine	This is Sisiza, a neighbours child – also part of the Child to Child programme. She came into my house, saw a magazine and naturally sat down to read it. She loves my puzzles too.
An adult crouching down amongst a group of young children. All looking at a book.	These are some of the children visited by our learners in the Home Visiting programme. They live next door to the library. They always come and ask for something to play with. They come and call the learner every day.... Asking for her to read to them. They are like my friends too. They call me “Missy Missy” if they meet me.
Two adults and a child looking at a book	She always comes with her grandchild to school. The child asked her and she is reading her a book. It shows what she is used to doing at home.
Facilitator’s son reading a book at home	This is my child doing his homework. He can speak English. I wish you could hear him. He does not have to be told to do his homework. When he heard I was going away, he said “I will do my homework but who will sign?”
A toddler holding a book	My brothers child always asks for a book if he sees someone else reading. “Give me mine.”
Older child choosing a book in the library	“Library Time”. One of the children is choosing a book. If for some reason they are not attending school they do not even wait for Library Time, they come and ask to use the library. I do not mind if it is just one or two. The other children may, for example, have gone to play sport. The library has given the children something else to do.

Overall the evaluation was very positive with the concluding remarks were that people are beginning to read and to enjoy it and that “reading patterns are certainly changing and there is a sense of momentum in the change as small people who love books become big people who love books and big people who love books become parents who love books ...” (Frow 2006:47)

The adults use it for family literacy group sessions as well as community meetings. The library at Ndodeni has become “our help”, it is part of community life and enriches the lives of those who previously had no access to books and reading. (Desmond 2007)

Reflection

In this chapter I described the configurations of families and their place within communities. I presented information gathered from the project documents on the way in which FLP activities attempted to support and strengthen the place of FLP group members within their communities. In describing the provision of book boxes, followed in some sites by the provision of community libraries, I was reminded of how difficult it is for those living in remote areas to find something to read. The provision of books was an important addition to the communities in which the FLP works.

In the next chapter I present and discuss the principle of children’s rights.

CHAPTER 11: ADULT AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

I have the rights of children, and by extension, adults, as one of the principles that underpin the work of the Family Literacy Project.

I believe in the rights of others, and I hope I act in accordance with this belief, but where does my belief stem from? One injunction from my parents that I remember was that I could do whatever I liked as long as I didn't hurt anyone else. So, all I can come up with from that is that what was at first seen, in my life, as the right way to behave became translated in my understanding to accepting that people have rights.

In a conversation with a friend, Peter Frow, about rights, he drew my attention to a passage from the bible, Isaiah 10. 1- 4 (Frow 2006:1)

Woe to those who make unjust laws,
To those who issue oppressive decrees,
To deprive the poor of their rights
And withhold justice from the oppressed of my people,
Making widows their prey
And robbing the fatherless.

Perhaps it is passages like this that I heard in church that laid the foundations for a belief in human rights? The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was finalised in 1948, soon after I was born so perhaps that too was spoken about as I grew up. I can't say exactly when or why I came to believe in human rights as a principle, but that belief has certainly informed my work.

Paraphrasing Flowers (1997:17) Viviers (2005:5) states that

Human rights are as old as the humanity itself. Throughout history people acquired rights and responsibilities through their membership in a group, whether it was a family, indigenous nation, religious grouping, community or state. Most societies have had the rule of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you". All societies have had systems of propriety and justice, whether in oral or written form, as well as ways of attending to the health and welfare of their members. Some of the oldest sources which address issues pertaining to

people's duties, rights and responsibilities include the Hindu Vedas, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, the Bible, the Quran and the Analects of Confucius.

As my work in the FLP developed and I thought more about human rights I have wondered about two issues – how people feel when they hear about the rights their children are meant to have and when they know that they, as parents, cannot provide what are the internationally stated rights of children? The second issue is how do we deal with differences between the rights stated in so many documents and signed by our own government, and some traditional practices?

To address the principle of human rights in the work of the FLP and these issues I will highlight some of the stated rights and provide examples of how our approach in the FLP seeks to support their realisation.

The issue of rights is not new in literature, religious texts or practice but it appears that since World War 2 there has been a flood of conventions and declarations dealing with rights and the first one that was accepted internationally was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. This was followed by, for example, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1965, the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979 and the one FLP has based workshops on, the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

South Africa has, as a democracy, ratified several of the United Nations Conventions including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. From these conventions we have lists of rights that we can say should be upheld. However as Desmond (1997:204) says

People's commitment to human rights cannot be measured by their enthusiasm about United Nations documents on the subject or debates about a Bill of Rights.

Human rights are about people, not about laws. A genuine concern for them can only arise from an experience of their denial.

In South Africa the government departments most responsible for early childhood initiatives are Health, Social Development and Education. There have been calls for co-ordination of services for young children and the institution of the Office on the Rights of the Child in the Presidency goes some way to doing this.

People can expect their rights to be provided and protected by the state, especially if that state has signed the relevant convention or declaration. This raises the question in South Africa of how non government organisations should approach this. We, in NGOs are working with government to bring about positive change in the lives of people. If there isn't the money to provide all the services that would make the lives of poor people easier (water, electricity, housing, health facilities), should NGOs lobby government to change the national budget to prioritise differently, or should we try to find different ways to solve the problems? In the case of the FLP we have not addressed issues on a national or even provincial level. The FLP is too small to have staff to spend time on advocacy and lobbying on a range of issues. However we do believe in the importance of presenting our approach as a way to address the problems experienced in schools of children who do not achieve well in reading and writing.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women that was signed and ratified by the General Assembly of the United Nations as long ago as 1979, and ratified by the South African government in 1995, has several sections that apply to the women involved in the FLP.

State Parties take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women

(e) The same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women)

The FLP is, through the commitment to providing a family literacy programme, working towards helping people and especially women become literate. This commitment did not come from a reading of a Convention or proclamation, or because we are in yet another decade of literacy pronounced by the United Nations. The FLP provides literacy tuition because the women asked for it and this is described in several other places in this study. But it is encouraging to see that we, in the FLP, in a very small way, are contributing towards a greater goal set internationally. We cannot attribute this commitment to knowledge of conventions, but somehow by another route, we came to honour one of the principles I think informs our approach. By coming to it by a route of responding to needs voiced by the women in our groups, I think that perhaps we have focused more on the “human” part of human rights – a commitment to people and by so doing to achieving their rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by the South African government on 16th June 1995 and one of the requirements is that regular reports are made on the progress in achieving these rights, the first one two years after ratification. This is important for those who work more in the realm of advocacy than the FLP does as they know they have support in holding the government accountable. The FLP, as stated earlier, based a unit on children’s rights. This was done for both the adults and again in a different format for children. In both there was a focus on the responsibilities that come with rights. This has been particularly important in the light of questions the women have about their role in upholding the rights of their own children. In conversations with the women in the groups I have been asked how they should respond when a child says they have the right to a particular brand of shoe. It appears that children at school are being taught about their rights but for some this has not been clear as evidenced in the following statement by one of the FLP group members at Stepmore:

My son told me about rights saying ever since they were told about children’s rights at school children were considerably lost. While they are still learning

some children say they are tired of learning and leave the classroom, go and rest outside, claiming they have a right to do that. He feels that they should be given clear instruction about rights so that they can get clear understanding and can therefore exercise their rights accordingly and the point of respect should also be included so that our nation will not be demoralized. Human rights are good but children need clear explanation thereof. Mirriam Zwane, FLP group member (Unpublished)

In the FLP Unit for children and for adults on rights, these were stated and explained so that adults could discuss their role in upholding the rights and so that the children could find out more about their rights. The responsibility aspect was introduced as an activity where rights and responsibilities were listed and group members labelled each statement as a right or a responsibility. An example of this is that children have the right to play with their friends and they have a responsibility to respect their friends and speak nicely to them.

I believe that children have a right to play and this is stated in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (Article 31) which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989 and ratified by the South African Government on 16th June 1995. Article 31 states that:

1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

This is expanded on by Engle (2005:16) when discussing the policy implications of children's rights, who states that

Play is one of the main ways in which young children learn and develop cognitive and motor skills. It also provides children with opportunities to form social relationships and learn how to interact with and treat others. The more a family is able to provide play materials and safe play spaces for a young child, the greater are the opportunities for learning. Families also need to support play between adults and the child.

In the FLP as stated in Chapter 7, we try to describe, discuss and provide examples of ways in which children learn best, that is by being actively involved

or through play. As can be seen from some of the stories written by FLP group members and used in this study, the FLP did not introduce the idea of play to families. However the FLP does support play and playfulness and has tried to highlight the importance of learning through play.

I know that children can usually find something to play with and was encouraged to read this description of children in a cluster home for orphaned children where it appears that play is valued.

Almost all the children had friends of the same gender and much the same age, some preferring to play with groups of children and others with a 'best friend'. Among the activities with friends, boys played ball games (soccer or marbles), rode a bicycle, trapped field mice, played cars with an old scrap car or home-made wire cars. Both boys and girls sang songs (gospel songs and songs from the radio), chanted rhymes and danced traditional dances. Girls played ball games, played with dolls and pretended to be cooking. (Desmond 2005:26-27)

These games and playful activities are very similar to the stories told by the FLP group members of their own childhood years earlier, as this example shows:

We also used to play with mud, making things out of mud. We would also build mud houses. We would look for pots and say we are cooking. We would tear papers and pretend we are making money, and take this money to buy things for our dolls made of mielie cobs. We would also cut rags and make clothes for our dolls. During peach season, we would cut peaches into slices and sell them to each other, and we were so happy playing until it got dark. Things were very nice when we grew up. Jabulile Dlamini (Family Literacy Project 2002a: 34-35)

At times play gets in the way of responsibilities as this story by the same person illustrates:

When I was growing up as a child, we use to look after babies, but sometimes we were not responsible, we would ignore these babies whilst we were doing our own things. Babies would cry and until they could cry no more. We used to take various things, cut them and wear them as traditional attire, and pretend that we are maidens. One day my mother instructed us to fetch water, and we completely forgot about that, as we were busy playing, taking the mealie cobs and dressing them up as dolls and pretending that they were our babies. The sun went down and we had not done any work. My mother came back, and beat the hell out of us, and we started blaming one another. That is the day I will not forget. From then on, I would first do all my work my mother told me to do. That is how I learnt

that it does not help to play if you have not yet done all your tasks.” Jabulile Dlamini (Family Literacy Project 2002a: 34-35)

In an attempt to encourage the FLP group members to reflect on their own childhood memories and let these reflections influence their interaction with their own children, I asked them to return to their stories. They were asked to choose stories that provided examples of when they, as children, enjoyed themselves and they were asked if their own children would have similar pleasant memories. Then of course they also had to look at the stories for examples of how some of them had unpleasant experiences and asked how they could avoid these being repeated in their children’s lives.

The following story touched me with the image of the young child going outside to look for help and finding none and her heart becoming “sore”. As parents we have all probably at one time or another made our children’s hearts sore but if we spend time reflecting and remembering, then perhaps we will not do it too often.

A long time ago, my mother left me with mealies, and said to me, you must grind these mealies and make a steamed bread from mealies. That was very difficult for me as I had never done such a thing before. I did not even know how to peel off the mealies from the cobs. The next big problem for me was to grind these mealies on the grinding stone. My fingers were sore from holding the grinder stone, and I was getting so hungry. I would go and look out of the door far away into the hill and mountains, hoping to find something to help me, but nothing could help me with the grinding of these mealies. I struggled until I finished. My heart was very sore.

Now the next problem was to sift the grinded mealies, this was another struggle for me, but I eventually finished this task as well. I put the mealies into the pot. When it was on the fire, I put a lot of firewood into the fire, and went out to play outside. After a while, I remembered that I was cooking. Alas, hey, the house was smoking! I cried out aloud, Help! The house is on fire! Irene Khanyile (Family Literacy Project 2002a: 10-11)

The rights of women

The Daily Activity Chart is a tool that has been used to help the FLP group members reflect on how members of a family spend their time. The women were

reportedly amazed to see how much they did during the day compared to the men. When asked what the solution would be to this imbalance, the women in one group decided to ask their children to help more around the house, rather than challenging the gender roles. As I said earlier, however difficult I find this I do not interfere but hope that by providing women with information and opportunities for discussion, they will find their own solutions to gender imbalances and difficulties within their homes and communities. Initiatives for change are only sustainable when they are introduced by the people who then live them.

Each FLP group completed the unit on committee skills. In each area said that they would like people on the different committees to know as much as possible about portfolios and procedures. The Ndodeni FLP group said they wanted to run a workshop for their neighbours. Unfortunately because they are an all-woman group they could not call a meeting as only a man can call a community meeting. I had no solution to offer them as I felt that I could not encourage changes in gender relations that may get the group members into trouble within their families. As Archer and Cunningham (1996:18) state

There is oppression withinwithin most households (especially by gender). By undergoing detailed local analysis and organising to address local issues, some of these local structures of oppression can be realistically and effectively challenged.

I only hope that the women continue to grow in self confidence and challenge practices that inhibit growth and development in them and in their communities. Their daily workload, however, leaves little time for meetings and discussions, as shown by one of the FLP group members:

I wake up and make my fire in the kitchen. Put water on the fire. Wash dishes; make some tea in the morning. Wash the pot and cook while the food is getting ready. I clean up nicely and go fetch water in the river. After that I go and fetch wood in the bush and sweep the yard. When I'm finished I go and fix for supper. Gladys Nzimande FLP group member (Unpublished)

As can be seen from the examples above, a challenge I see is in my wish to change perceptions of, and encourage action to improve gender relations. As a result of discussions arising from a Reflect activity, gender relations have been raised.

In the late 1980's I tutored a course for Bangladeshi women in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Many times gender relations were discussed and the women asked me about my home life, how much my husband did to help around the house etc. I knew my journey was different to theirs, the way they had been brought up was different and all I could do was to tell them about myself. Even then I never promoted the idea that their lives should or could be different. I believed then, and believe now, that it is important to present adults with information and they must then use that as they see best in their lives.

I have my own ideas of how men and women can and should behave, and I know that I know too little about the traditions and culture of the Zulu women I work with in the FLP to understand fully why they do what they do. I won't pretend that I stand back and do nothing when I think something is unfair, but for example as far as sharing of the daily workload is concerned I feel that the women bear too heavy a burden. What I feel I can do is to give women the opportunity to see this (as described above in the Reflect daily activity tool) and decide how if and how they will make a change. As Feek (2005:2) describes one approach to development (which one can assume is to change existing practice) is to

First, just shake things up a little and see what happens. Under the shake it up approach, the goal is not specifically to address HIV/Aids, natural resource management or democracy and governance, for example, but to simply change the existing patterns of life, note what results and follow the promising routes.

I would like to end this chapter on rights with a story from one of the few men who have been members of the FLP. Phungula Cletus had very little schooling and joined the group to learn to read and write. The following was in response to the question of what he considered important for children. He may have had

these ideas before joining the FLP but whether he did or not, they are important and I hope they had an influence on his fellow group members as they capture the spirit of human rights. It is not about the conventions and reports on progress, important though these are; it is about people, about their humanity and the love we show one another.

What makes a child happy is to show her that you love her. You can show her that you love her in many different ways. You can take her with you when you go to the shops, and teach her how to buy small things. You can also teach her how to walk safely on the road. When you pray you must pray with her. When I go to milk the cows, I like to go with her, or when I am feeding the chickens, I also give her some chicken food so that she can also throw some mealies to them. Phungula Cletus (Family Literacy Project 2002a: 18)

Reflection

This chapter has focused on the fourth principle underlying the FLP and that is, the rights of children and how these apply to the children served by the FLP and how these were perceived by the FLP group members. I relate and reflect on my own experience of discussing the rights of both children and adults. It is easy to quote from international and national statements on rights but not always easy to translate these rights into every day practice. I think it is very important to have these statements by such bodies as the United Nations, but I also think that the ideals have to be presented in a way that does not make someone feel inadequate or guilty if they are not able to meet, for example, the rights their children deserve. The responsibility must be shared between individuals and the government. In addition, I am reminded always of the need to couple rights with responsibilities.

In the next chapter I discuss the influence of the external evaluations and awards on the FLP.

CHAPTER 12: EXTERNAL EVALUATION AND AWARDS

In this chapter I will present a description of the main evaluation approaches used by the external evaluators who worked with the Family Literacy Project. All evaluations have been participatory as this fits well with the general approach of the project. The findings from these evaluations appear throughout this study, in support of the findings from my exploration of the influences on the development of the approach to family literacy. For this reason, the section in this chapter will focus on the aims and the methodology of the evaluations. In addition I will include a description of the awards received by the FLP in recognition of their contribution to literacy development.

Under the apartheid system of education, no-one was encouraged to think critically or independently and these evaluations provided a chance for the FLP to work on developing observation and reflection in both the FLP facilitators and the FLP group members.

Evaluations

Every year since 2001 an external evaluation has been conducted on the work of the FLP. In this chapter I will focus on three of these evaluations.

The evaluations considered here took place in 2002 and 2006. The description of the two more recent evaluations conducted in 2006 is taken from a presentation I made in Hamburg, Germany at a meeting of the European grouping of family literacy projects, QualiFLY, in February 2007.

Evaluation in 2002

The evaluation in 2002 was conducted by Sonja Labuschagne who drew on her experience as a Reflect trainer and practitioner. (Reflect as an approach is described more fully in Chapter 8) I attended all the sessions during which the

evaluation activities took place. I was observing the evaluation and did not take part in any of the activities in the FLP groups.

In the evaluation of the project in 2002, there were three main aims:

- To determine the outcomes of the family literacy groups in terms of the use of literacy skills by group members, their attitude towards early literacy, the activities they engaged in to support the development of early literacy and their interest in learning English.
- To determine the level of interest and participation in developmental or income generating projects
- To determine the potential for the above outcomes to be sustained and
- To explore indications of where the family literacy groups should be going in the following year

The techniques were participatory but also included semi-structured interviews with groups and individuals, and questionnaires.

The FLP group members responded eagerly to the evaluation as many of them were already familiar with Sonja Labuschagne as she had conducted the participatory rural appraisal in October 2000. I believe that they were also happy to see her again as the findings of the participatory rural appraisal had led to the family literacy groups continuing and growing and they probably hoped for another leap forward following this evaluation.

The evaluation included gathering information on future direction of the FLP as this was in line with my wish for something new to be added to the programme each year in order to keep it relevant and to ensure that more of the needs of the FLP group members and their community were being met.

Two main activities were included in the evaluation and these were a daily activity chart and a brainstorm and clustering exercise. The daily activity chart as a tool is described in Chapter 11 and in this evaluation the purpose was to list the daily activities and link to these the literacy and numeracy skills that people had, or wanted to acquire. Questions were asked about each of the daily activities to find out if, when and where FLP group members read. More information was sought on what was read and if the FLP group members were reading with their children as this was a major thrust of the project in that year.

FLP group members were asked what other activities they engaged in with their children and if and how any of these were of benefit to the children as they developed early literacy skills. The evaluation sessions were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere as the FLP group members were already familiar with the daily activity chart as this had been used by the FLP facilitators in sessions during the year. The information gathered and the questions asked were new but the method was familiar and the FLP group members did not seem to be under any pressure and became very involved.

In the second activity, the FLP group members worked in small groups (something else that was familiar to them) and wrote or drew on cards to show all the benefits they were receiving from being members of the FLP. The FLP group members then pooled their cards, and clustered these under different headings. This exercise also provided an opportunity for testing the veracity of some of the answers in the daily chart activity.

The evaluation session in each of the FLP groups ended with a focused group discussion where Sonja Labuschagne asked probing questions to explore the benefits the women had mentioned and seeking more details of these.

The FLP group members were also asked if and how they shared knowledge and skills gained in project sessions with others in their families or in the wider

community. They were also asked for their ideas on the future direction of the project.

2006 Evaluations

Two evaluations were conducted in 2006, one by Jill Frow and one by Claire Kerry.

Evaluation by Jill Frow 2006

Jill Frow adapted the *Photo Voice* (Wang 2005) technique to focus on reading patterns, in particular on whether there were changes in reading patterns amongst the members, their families and the wider communities; and whether there were signs that reading is becoming a pleasurable activity. This was linked to the FLP aim of “making literacy a shared pleasure and valuable skill”. I did not attend any of the visits to the FLP groups but did attend the sessions where FLP facilitators discussed the photographs and explained their reasons for taking each one.

The steps in this evaluation which took place between May 2006 and November 2006 included:

The FLP facilitators were introduced to Photo Voice and given lessons on how to use cameras. The question that they were to ask themselves before taking each photograph was how it would show that people were beginning to read and that they were enjoying that.

The first photographs were taken and displayed at a FLP team (staff) meeting where the FLP facilitators recorded their comments onto audio-tape.

After Jill Frow met with each FLP facilitator individually to talk more about the photographs, the FLP facilitators took the next spool of photographs.

Jill Frow displayed all the photos and story captions and took the displays to each of the five sites. FLP group members were encouraged to talk about the photographs and choose the ones they thought were the best reflection of reading in their community.

A written evaluation of the process was completed by each FLP facilitator

During the evaluation Jill Frow intended to

- Promote a sense of ownership amongst FLP facilitators and FLP group members of the monitoring and evaluation process – rather than feeling that an evaluation was being 'done on' them;
- Promote observation and reflection in the FLP facilitators – important skills that I felt needed more development in the FLP facilitators. Although they write monthly reports I did not often see reflection recorded on events in their groups;
- Motivate the FLP facilitators to bring about visible changes in reading patterns in their FLP groups and the wider community. I believe that all evaluations bring about some change as people know they are being observed. This approach made it explicit that change was expected and the FLP facilitators were, and continue to be aware that they have a responsibility to make this happen.

These intentions were realised and the FLP facilitators and the FLP group members were very enthusiastic about the whole process. The FLP facilitators took some very good photographs, demonstrating that they had thought about the question and how to answer it in the photographs and the story captions bore this out.

In one FLP group the members refused to let the FLP facilitator take their photographs. This was because of an earlier incident where someone, not connected to FLP in any way, had taken photographs and promised to pay them. As they never received any money they had taken a decision to never let anyone take their photographs again. The FLP facilitator, Phumy Ngubo, responsible for this group decided to take photographs of her own family reading or looking at books. Jill Frow decided that these were significant enough to be grouped together and created a category for FLP facilitator's family photographs.

The FLP facilitators said that they enjoyed learning how to take photographs and some of them began to experiment by taking photos from different angles. One of the FLP facilitators also talked about how useful she found the photos when starting a discussion with her group.

The FLP group members became very involved in this evaluation by looking at the photos their FLP facilitator had taken as well as those taken of other groups. They commented on the photographs and drew their own conclusions about what the people in the photographs were doing or feeling, for example "Even if they are working, they are reading" and "Even if the child is alone, he enjoys reading" and "The children are learning; they are going to make the country go up in literacy."

This evaluation provided a glimpse into the lives of the people who make up the FLP. The photographs show unguarded and informal moments that really do reflect what is happening around books and reading in communities where these have been highlighted. As Jill Frow quoted me in her report, I said

I feel privileged that through the photographs I have the opportunity of a glimpse into the lives of the people we work with. Seeing the delight and engagement on many of the faces makes me feel that what we are doing is very worthwhile and appreciated by adults and children. (Frow 2006:43)

Evaluation by Claire Kerry

The second evaluation conducted during 2007 was when Claire Kerry (Kerry 2007) set out to assess the impact of the home visiting programme that was introduced into the FLP in 2004 and described in more detail in Chapter 10.

Claire Kerry gathered information from different levels of the home visiting programme, for example:

Monthly reports by the FLP facilitators and the child health specialist were reviewed and comments on the home visits extracted.

Evaluative interviews with different members of the FLP.

Meetings where FLP facilitators reported on progress in the home visits.

Discussions with FLP group members at three of the sites.

Review of the home visit books in which the FLP group members recorded details of their visits to neighbouring homes.

The information Claire Kerry gathered was on the frequency and duration of the home visits as well as who was present – only adults or children, or both adults and children. She was able to find out what the home visitors understood the purpose of the visits to be and how the household visited received them.

In the group discussion and the review of the home visit books, the level of understanding the FLP group members have of the health messages they are meant to pass on became clear. The key messages are listed in Chapter 10 and the evaluation showed that not all of these were shared and some were preferred over others. For example the participation of men in the care of young children was hardly ever touched on. In the discussions and from the home visit books, it was evident that messages about the transmission of the HI virus are not always

easy to discuss and this is due to cultural norms in force that mean that some things cannot be referred to directly.

The home visitors were asked to record changes they observed in the homes they visited. The FLP facilitators reported that most home visitors did not find this easy and it was only during group discussions that Claire Kerry was able to help people identify changes. One of the home visitors had gone through her records and noted change, but this was an exception.

Written words are important in both of these 2006 evaluations, the story captions were written and then read with group members, and the FLP group members wrote down information about their visits. This provided opportunities to use the newly developing literacy skills and was an easy way to get FLP group members to practice reading and writing as they appeared to find it enjoyable and interesting as well as having a purpose, especially in the case of recording information on their visits to the homes of their neighbours.

Awards

The FLP has been recognized in literacy sectors provincially, nationally and internationally.

Provincial recognition

On a provincial, KwaZulu Natal, level the FLP won all possible awards from the Adult Learning Network: best group, best learner, best facilitator and best project.

The criteria for each had to be met and to do this the “learner” had to show evidence of progress, commitment and determination in the face of difficulties and who shared her learning with others in the wider community. Renneth Molefe, an FLP group member from Stepmore, won this and to this day is the assistant at the Stepmore FLP community library.

The best 'educator' award was won by the FLP facilitator, Florence Molefe, who also won the national award at this level. The criteria for this award included using innovative approaches relevant to the needs of the group in her community and to demonstrate leadership as well as furthering her own professional and personal development.

The FLP group at Mpumlwane won the award for the best group when they met the criteria of working well as a team and promoting the benefits of lifelong learning to others in their community.

The FLP as a whole won the provincial award as the best project as it met the criteria of promoting a positive learning environment with educators (facilitators) and learners (group members) who worked well together to make use of all available resources in creative and innovative ways.

National recognition

On a national level the FLP won the runner up prize from both the Adult Learning Network and the GuinnessUDV Award for outstanding achievement in Adult Literacy Work, and an FLP facilitator, Florence Molefe, won the national award as the best facilitator.

Regional recognition

In March 2006 the FLP was invited by UNESCO to attend the ADEA Biennale in Gabon. Wilna Botha, the FLP chairperson delivered a presentation on the work of the FLP to the Ministers of Education in Southern Africa.

On the African continent, the FLP was one of nine organisations selected to take part in the All-African Regional Conference in Support of Global Literacy, organized by UNESCO and held in Mali in 2007. The FLP was included in the

category “Family Literacy and Intergenerational Learning with two other projects: Support for the Quality and Equity of Learning based in Mali, and Family Basic Education based in Uganda.

To qualify for selection, a number of criteria had to be met. The information required included a statement of the problem addressed by the programme, a description of the programme goals and how these address the stated problem. In addition information on staff, management and materials used was presented.

I had to provide an example of how the FLP had changed the life of a group member and I chose to highlight the following FLP group member:

Danisile Gladys Duma (b.1948) has been a regular member since the first family literacy meetings held in Lotheni. In 2003 she wrote (in Zulu):

“I was born at kwaNogugu and grew up at Mpendle. I started school and went as far as Std 2. I stopped schooling because my home had nothing. I stayed at home, although I desired to learn, but I had to look after cattle.

I was married when I was 15 years oldon the ninth year (of marriage), I got a baby girlShe is the only child I have. My child grew up and went to school. I had wished that my child should be educated and not have to go through the similar experience as me, as I had a very sad experience because I was not educated.

In 2001, an adult school was established, and I joined it. Now my life is interesting, and I am free. I thank this adult school.”

Gladys helps take care of her young grandchildren aged 4 and 7. She is part of the FLP home visiting team, visiting her neighbours to read to their children and pass on ECD and health messages. Gladys completed ABET L3 examinations and now reads the Bible and hymns at church, something she has longed to do.

The submission also required us to think carefully about the innovative features of the programme and choose a few key words to highlight these. I wrote that:

The approach is **participatory** and **brings together adult** and **early literacy** to strengthen the literacy skills of adults and to **respond** to their desire for a **better life** for their children by supporting the **role of adults** in early literacy development.

Local women have been trained as facilitators.

Sites are **deeply rural**.

Information and methods are **shared** with others nationally and internationally.

Children who are supported by their parents usually do well at school and adults are motivated to continue to offer this support.

The FLP has learnt that facilitators are key to the successful implementation of the programme and need ongoing support and encouragement.

Group members want to remain part of the project as there is a lot of discussion of interesting and relevant topics in the weekly sessions.

All NGO work is dependent largely on donor funding and if donors change their priorities this can be a real challenge to the NGO as it has to source new donors.

Following the conference, a description of the Family Literacy Project was included in the report. (UNESCO 2007)

International recognition

Internationally, as has been stated in Chapter 4, the FLP was one of nine organisations invited to take part in the first ever White House Conference on Global Literacy that was held in the United States of America. This pre-dated the regional conference in Mali described above. I was asked to submit a description of the project, based on criteria similar to those described in the section on regional recognition but was not given a reason except to say that it was a UNESCO initiative and the name of the Family Literacy Project had been submitted by someone – I never found out who this was. Some months after making the submission I received a phone call from a woman who said she was from the “White House” and that the Family Literacy Project had been selected as one of nine organisations from around the world to attend a conference in New York. Suspecting that a friend was playing a trick on me, I cut the conversation short by asking for an email giving me all the details. When the email arrived and was indeed from “the White House” I was delighted. I was asked to make the presentation but decided to send Florence Molefe, the FLP

facilitator who the year before had received the national award for ‘best literacy facilitator’. It was for her a journey from a mud dwelling in Lotheni to a five star hotel in New York and all that went with that.



Figure 21: Florence Molefe, President and Mrs Bush (Source: unknown)

A follow up conference on literacy projects in Africa was held in Mali the following year and once again the FLP received an invitation to attend and present.

The photographs and certificates are important reminders to FLP group members of the recognition they have received, and deserved to receive for their commitment and dedication to improving their own and their children’s literacy.

Reflection

In this chapter I provided an introduction to and description of three of the evaluation methods used in the Family Literacy Project, the findings of which appear throughout this study. The evaluation approaches described in this chapter required the FLP facilitators and FLP group members to reflect on their role in the project. This is something I know to be important, as the more participatory evaluations are, the more likely those affected by them can learn from the findings and recommendations.

As I wrote about the awards I was reminded of the excitement the winning of an award always generated. I was also reminded of how often I was surprised and delighted by these awards, recognition of a small project in a very remote rural part of KwaZulu Natal and yet worthy of attention.

The following chapter is a description of, and critical reflection on the influence and role played by the facilitators of family literacy.

CHAPTER 13: FACILITATORS OF FAMILY LITERACY

The FLP facilitators feature throughout this study and their role has been made explicit. In this chapter I describe them in their role as mothers and facilitators of literacy within their own families. An entire study could be devoted to the role of these women within the FLP and I have created boundaries to contain myself and present some of what I consider to be the most important aspects of their influence on the development of the approach to family literacy.

I would not have been able to run the project without the five original FLP facilitators – Zimbili Dlamini, Fiselani Linda, Florence Molefe, Phumuzile Ngubo, and Nelly Shezi. As I worked closely with them, I came to know them well and became involved in their lives and through them gained an understanding of the families I hoped to support through the FLP.

The importance of facilitators in delivering a quality adult literacy programme has been mentioned already in this study and their role in ensuring the successful delivery of the FLP programme cannot be over-emphasised. From the very beginning of the project I needed someone with me to translate as we faced a language barrier created by my inability to have a conversation in Zulu, and the group members' inability to have a conversation in English. During the first months of the project I ran all workshops myself, with the help of a translator. As described first in the Preface, during the participatory rural appraisal in October 2000 five women received training and co-facilitated the information gathering sessions. Four of these women and one other were then employed by the FLP as facilitators and during the period under scrutiny in this study, ran groups in Stepmore, Lotheni, Reichenau, Mpumlwane and Ndodeni. As stated elsewhere, one facilitator, Nelly Shezi, died and a new facilitator, Joyce Ndlovu, was chosen by the FLP group at Stepmore.

Following on from the training the FLP facilitators received in how to conduct a participatory rural appraisal I made sure that their professional development

became a central part of the FLP programme. Over the years they attended a number of workshops and courses, including:

- Mother Tongue Adult Literacy Facilitation: Operation Upgrade
- English Second Language Facilitation: Operation Upgrade
- Certificate Course in ABET: University of South Africa
- Higher Diploma in ABET: University of South Africa
- Certificate Course in ECD: University of South Africa (all completed the course and Zimbili Dlamini passed the examination)
- Advanced Certificate in Education: University of South Africa (All completed the course and Zimbili Dlamini passed the examination)
- REFLECT course (Action Aid Southern Africa)
- HIV/Aids counseling course arranged by Operation Upgrade
- Integrated Management of Childhood Illness
- Home based care course arranged by Operation Upgrade
- Play Therapy for bereaved children
- Writing for community newspapers
- Who Am I? (Personality and Human Relations course)
- Psycho-Social care of young children

Each month during school terms the FLP facilitators attended a team meeting. I received a written report from each facilitator and responded to each in writing after the meeting. During the meetings we reflected on the past month, discussed the new Units and tried to solve any problems experienced during the month. In every school holiday I brought the FLP facilitators together for a week-long training and professional development session. In each of these staff-development weeks the FLP facilitators presented reports, discussed new material and learnt something new from a visiting speaker.

The FLP facilitators were a bridge between me and the FLP group members. They interpreted for me – not only the language but also at times behaviour or concerns that I did not understand. However they were not only important as facilitators of the FLP groups, they also played a role in their communities and families. To highlight this aspect I present the following story of facilitators of family literacy in two very different communities. I do this through extracts from an article²⁴ based on my presentation to the 3rd Conference on South African

²⁴ Submitted for publication. No decision received.

Children's Literature held at the University of the North West in 2007. The presentation was entitled *From the Berg to the Karoo – Families are reading!* In the article I changed names but in this version I have reverted to the real names of the facilitators.

The stories are of women who on their own admission did not understand the importance of their role in the early literacy development of their own young children and became aware of it once introduced to the family literacy approach. The stories show how, as they were exposed to the idea of family literacy, this took hold not only in their professional lives as facilitators but also in their personal lives as mothers. I believe that this firm rooting of family literacy within their own families and the fact that they have noticed how their children benefit from books and reading has enabled them to speak with conviction as they facilitate groups of other women. They are able to draw on their own experience and as they come from the same communities as the people they work with, this carries more weight than, for example my speaking about how reading and books feature in my family.

The women interviewed are not group members; they are all facilitators of the family literacy approach. The reason for highlighting their stories is that, if they believe in the importance of providing early literacy support to their own children, they will speak from experience and with conviction in the groups they lead.

The facilitators are local to their projects which range from deeply rural sites in KwaZulu-Natal to the more peri-urban Karoo sites. When these women started as facilitators none of them had formal qualifications and some had not completed their own schooling. All had been chosen by their communities to be facilitators in family literacy work.

Prior to the family literacy intervention, most of the families reached had few, if any, books in their homes. They, like the group members, fall into the 54% of South African households where there is no leisure book.

Method

Early in the life of the FLP, in 2001, the director interviewed two facilitators and followed this up with interviews in 2007. The facilitators from the Karoo-based project were interviewed in 2007 when they had completed an introductory course in family literacy. The director of the FLP ran that course and interviewed the women on how they viewed early literacy and how this view had changed, if at all, since they were introduced to developing literacy skills in the home.

The interviews were conducted in English although the facilitators were either mother-tongue Zulu or Afrikaans speakers. All the facilitators speak English so no translation was necessary.

Comments from other facilitators are included to provide more detail.

A brief description of the family literacy work is provided before each set of interviews, as the approach in KwaZulu-Natal is different from that in the Karoo, although the latter draws upon the former.

Some discussion of the responses is included in the presentation of the interviews. A conclusion draws out points from the interviews and discussion.

Stories of four mothers

From the southern Drakensberg

Family Literacy Project facilitators were chosen from and by the community. This happened in October 2000, six months after the first monthly family literacy workshops had been run by the director who was at the time the only staff member. These monthly workshops run by the director were held for local women in deeply rural sites in the southern Drakensberg area around the small villages of Creighton and Himeville. The workshops were set up with the help of local crèche teachers and were aimed at helping the participants to discover more about their role as “first educators” of their children.

The focus of each workshop was on one or other way in which parents could support early literacy development. Sessions ranged from book making, story telling, looking at or reading books, household activities that support early literacy skills, such as sequencing, vocabulary, repetition and recall. The women who attended the groups were, at the start, convinced that they had little to offer their children in the way of support for early literacy development, as they themselves could barely read or write. It was by providing activities and through discussion that they became more aware that in their own daily chores lay opportunities for building vocabulary, sequencing, repetition and recall and other skills, like fine muscle control. A favourite example was that of going to fetch water with a young child – the mother can plan, she can talk to her child about what they see on the way, and when home they can recall the sequence of events and tell a story that has a beginning, middle and end.

In October of that first year, a decision was taken to look at how the project was progressing and what direction it should take. To conduct a Participatory Rural Appraisal seemed to be a good approach but Zulu-speaking facilitators were needed in order to run this with any benefit or understanding. Each group where the director had been running sessions was asked to choose a woman who had matriculated but was not employed. She should speak English as well as Zulu.

Now each FLP group has a facilitator chosen from the community and trained in, among other things, adult literacy, early literacy and participatory approaches to development. Baynham (1995:39) refers to people in this position as “mediators

of literacy” and our FLP facilitators have always been very important in the development of the project. Archer (2005:31) based on the study of successful adult literacy programmes, states that “any adult literacy programme will only be as good as the facilitators it can attract, train and retain.”

Archer goes on to note that, in the adult literacy programmes studied, that most facilitators came from the community in which they worked, as the FLP facilitators do. They live close to their work, which is vital in the rural areas where there is little transport available. It is also important because they know and understand the women in their groups so well and want to help them improve themselves.

The first FLP facilitators came to join the project with no promise of payment for their work. After the initial PRA exercise, there was funding to pay them; but it is important to remember that they came without expecting payment and because they wanted to help their communities.

The following stories are those of two of the original FLP facilitators.

Zimbili Dlamini

Zimbili and her eight-year-old son, Pepe, live with her extended family in a traditional Zulu homestead reached by means of a poorly maintained dirt road that becomes almost impassable on rainy days. Her home has no piped water and no electricity, but since Zimbili started working with the FLP it does have books!

Pepe and Zimbili spend time every evening reading – Pepe reads the books he has borrowed from the community library and Zimbili studies for her honours degree by distance education. It has been a long journey to get to this point. In her 2007 interview, Zimbili said she never thought she would one day travel around and beyond the borders of South Africa to speak about the benefits of family literacy. In 2007 alone, she travelled to Namibia and Mozambique, as well as attending international conferences in Johannesburg and Durban.

There is no doubt that Zimbili’s son Pepe enjoys reading. When Zimbili was away for a week-long FLP training session, Pepe found the key to the community library and with the son of one of Zimbili’s colleagues let himself in to the library so that he could exchange his books. Zimbili says that if she is tired and wants to go straight to bed, Pepe complains and insists that they sit and “study together”.

When interviewed in 2001, Zimbili had started working as an FLP facilitator and had already attended a course on early literacy run by the project. She said then that parents should read to their pre-school child because she felt that children understand parents better than they understand a teacher. When asked for her suggestions on how to extend a conversation between a parent and child, she said “when they start to tell you what they do outside you can start telling stories and help encourage them to talk.”

In answer to a question about how a mother knows when a child wants to listen to a story, she said she thought that when a child wants to talk about things she

has seen this would be an opportunity that the mother could use as a starting point for a story.

Zimbili said that the most important thing she learnt on the initial adult literacy course that she attended was that if parents are literate they could advise their children well, as they will consider education to be important. Her experience in her family literacy group has proved to her that, although this is true, there are also women who are not literate who will make a great effort to help their children to develop a love of reading.

Zimbili has supported women in their seventies who know how to look at a book with children by discussing pictures and turning pages carefully. These older women, who still cannot read and write well, visit their neighbours armed with books from the community library to read to the young children. One of these women has recently been widowed and, according to tradition, cannot leave her home for a year. It is very encouraging to note that a habit of reading has been established and that, even though the older woman cannot support this child for the next year, the child she had been visiting continues to come to the community library to look for her and to borrow books.

Over the years, Zimbili's understanding of the development of young children has grown from the view that "early literacy (is) the education before children come to school or crèche" to encompassing "the whole development of the child. This is good when it is started early rather than when you are old."

As Zimbili's view of early childhood was broadening, so was her view of adults - as the response to the question of what she understood by "adult literacy" shows. Initially she said that "this is the education for the people who are the adults who have not been going to school and those who have been half at school". A year later she said that adult literacy is "the added development of people. The person knows many things without reading and writing."

After working for two years in the project, Zimbili felt that she had been quite successful in bringing adult and early literacy issues together, although there were some problems. One problem she encountered was that some adults were not aware that young children should attend crèche. In line with the family literacy approach, Zimbili encouraged her group members to help children at home and said that she noticed that parents were taking to heart her advice that, when a child needed help, they should not say they were too busy. Zimbili now runs a community library at her site, as well as facilitating family literacy groups for adults, teenagers and primary school children.

Phumy (Phumuzile) Ngubo

Phumy became a family literacy facilitator at the same time as Zimbili. Phumy is married and has two young sons who she said were not at all interested in reading when she first tried to introduce them to books. As her work in FLP made her more aware of the importance of reading with her children, she tried to encourage them and sometimes even insisted forcefully that they read. In the 2001 interview, she said she believed that from five years old a child would listen to a story. She said that to help a young child to concentrate they should be shown pictures and engage in activities related to the story.

Gradually her persistence paid off and, in her interview in 2007, she said that her children now enjoyed reading and looking at books with her. Phumy spends a lot of time in her mother's house and, as her mother has joined the family literacy project, there are more books in her home. The whole family - Phumy, her children, her mother and her nephews - often read together as a family in the evenings.

The first group Phumy started was made up of farm workers who were mainly men. She struggled with the farmer's indifference to and his, at times, interference in the group sessions. Phumy also found that working with men who didn't live with their children was difficult because they did not have the opportunity to read with their children and, in some cases, did not see the need to do this. The farmer refused to provide transport for his workers to the sessions and after a while they found the walk from the farm too exhausting after a day in the fields. In addition, there were fears based on rumours of a group of people in the area murdering for body parts. The group stopped but it is interesting to note that, four years later, the farmer has had a change of heart and has requested that a family literacy group be run on his farm.

Phumy has become the facilitator within the FLP who runs the introduction to family literacy course for those in other organisations. She is able to provide examples from her own family to illustrate points about reading with children and also extending conversations within families. While facilitating a course recently, she was quite open about how her sons resisted her early efforts to get them to listen to stories or look at books with her. This honesty created a bond with women who were not at all sure that their own children would enjoy reading and books. Phumy was able to convince them that with the right attitude, and by making reading a special time for mother and child, books and reading would become a pleasure in their homes.

Comments from other FLP facilitators

As the 2007 interviews were conducted on the same day as a team meeting, other FLP facilitators made comments on their family's experiences around reading and books.

Florence Molefe said that her two sons ask her to bring books from the FLP book box as they enjoy reading. She feels that her encouragement of reading at home has helped her eleven-year-old son, as he brings books from school and asks her to read with him. He is doing so well that his teachers said he might be able to move up a class.

Fiselani Linda says that, when she goes to the library where she runs a teenage group, her children ask her if they can come too and read with her. They then borrow books to take home. Her son was the companion of Pepe (mentioned above) when the two young children found their own way into the community library to exchange their books rather than waiting for their mothers to return home after a week away.

Joyce Ndlovu looks after a number of children who have lost their parents. She said that some of these children have asked her to move them to the school that is adjacent to the FLP community library so that they can get books more easily.

From the Karoo

In 2005 the FLP organised a workshop in the Eastern Cape for anyone interested in family literacy. Those organisations who were already implementing family literacy programmes were joined by those who came to find out more about this approach. Three members of the Bethesda Arts Centre (BAC) in the Karoo were told about the meeting and drove for six hours to attend it. One of those who attended, Maria, was so excited by this approach that she persuaded the director of the BAC to arrange a course on family literacy.

The FLP developed this course to suit the BAC. As this is an arts project, where local women come daily to work on fabric wall hangings, it was decided that the course would be offered during their working day in two-hour slots over twelve weeks. The women had to be committed as they were giving up time during which they could be generating income through their sewing.

Four women from the BAC, including Maria, were chosen to be trained as facilitators. The local Reception Year teacher was also invited to attend the course. After the week-long facilitator training course, the five women were to work together to run the twelve sessions for three different groups from the community. Susan and Maria, whose interviews are presented here, ran the course for the BAC members. Two other women ran a course for young mothers in the community; the Reception Year teacher has not yet run a full course.

This introductory course on family literacy included time for the women to look at their own community and homes and discuss how much printed material was available and how much time their families spent reading and writing together. Story telling, making books, reading stories, making puzzles and puppets were activities that made up the next part of the course. The conclusion was, in part, an evaluation of the course, as participants were asked again when and where families spent time reading and writing together. This list was then compared to that made at the start of the course. Differences and additions were noted and were discussed to see what changes had occurred in their lives as a result of what they learnt on the course.

The interviews were conducted after the newly-trained facilitators had run the twelve sessions. The interviews were done during the second training, which encompassed a follow-up course for the parents who attended the first course.

Susan²⁵

Susan lives with her partner and they have a seven-year-old son and a daughter of one. She said that, before she attended the family literacy course, she didn't know how to work with her children and didn't understand their problems. After

²⁵ As I have not asked permission to use their full names, I use only the first names of these facilitators.

the very first session of the course, she felt that she could go home and try things out with her children.

During the 2007 interview, which was several months after that first course, she said she felt that she had become a better mother as she realized the importance of spending time with her children and making sure that the home they grow up in is a happy one.

Susan said that she now reads with her seven-year-old son and asks him to talk about anything he finds difficult when reading at school. If he does have difficulty, she tries to help him by asking him to write down words that they then discuss.

Along with the other women in the group, Susan says that an important lesson she gained from the course is that she does not need to shout at her children and that punishments can be quite light and still achieve the behaviour change that she hopes for in her child. She says that this has been a useful lesson for her as it has made life at home easier.

Susan decided not to tell her partner what she learnt on the course but she says she finds that he is watching her and now does things more patiently with the children and also provides opportunities for them to learn things. When their one-year-old daughter was repeatedly opening and closing a kitchen cupboard, Susan was about to intervene when her partner said she should not, as their daughter was learning how things around the house worked.

After the course, Susan started facilitating the short course on family literacy. The group members were local women. She says that she really enjoys being a facilitator, as she feels she is helping other mothers find out about different ways to be a mother.

One of her group members told her “I wanted to slap the child and I remember that I must talk to the child and then she was opening up.” This echoes what Susan herself has found out about working with children in a supportive way.

Susan said one of the good things she learnt from the course was that as a mother you should try to “surprise” your child every day with something enjoyable for him to do.

Maria

Maria has a son of five and a young baby not yet a year old. She was the young woman who attended the FLP workshop on family literacy. She was convinced that the women at the Bethesda Arts Centre needed to hear about this approach and persuaded the BAC director to organize training by FLP.

During that first course she tried each activity described and practised in the sessions, at home with her son. On each following morning she came in and discussed how the activity had worked or what problems she experienced.

Her son was very pleased with the book she made for him during the course. He demanded that she make more books for him. Maria was so pleased with his

reaction to the book that she brought him to the course session so that she could demonstrate how the two of them enjoyed the home-made book.

During the 2007 interview, she said she no longer had much time to spend with her son now that she had the baby. However, she said she did try to find time to ask about his day at school. Other activities she fitted into her day included singing songs and reading at least one book a week with him. They also watched television whenever she could spare the time from her household duties.

Maria said she enjoyed being with the other women from the BAC on the course she facilitated because she heard how they were struggling with the same problems. She said she learnt that “you don’t have to be perfect”. She believes that many of the women in her area want to do something for their children and enjoy hearing that they are their child’s first teacher.

Both Susan and Maria presented the comments made by the women on the course they facilitated. These included the following statements:

I learnt how to talk to a child.

That even if you are a mother you can still listen to a child.

How to make learning fun.

How to be a good parent.

How you are the child’s first teacher.

How if “they show how much they love their children that child will grow into a lovely and wonderful person.”

I used to get cross if a child could not do something.

Learning about how to have self-respect.

How to sing and play with children.

How to read a book together with children without stressing or hitting if he can’t say a word correctly.

Other facilitators

Christelene has three children aged 12, 8 and 3. She said that, since attending the course, her behaviour has changed from shouting and sometimes even smacking the children to helping them when they do something wrong. With the two older children away at boarding school, it is disappointing to note that Christelene says she only reads to her 3-year-old when all the children are at home, never when there are only the two of them.

Shirleen has two children aged 4 and 9 months. The changes she noticed in herself since the course were that now she knows that she is his first teacher. She now tries to teach her 4-year-old to read, and shows him different colours so that they can name them together. She says he loves it when she brings a book from the library and reads to him and always asks when she will change it and bring another one.

Cathlene has three children from 9 to 23 and is a pre-school teacher. Much of what she heard on the course was not that new to her, but she feels that she now

listens to children a little more and helps them solve problems or answer questions in a more straightforward way, with more of a smile and a laugh than before.

Conclusion

In this project, the family literacy approach appears to have given parents the confidence to take up their role as the first educators of their children. In the interviews, all the women talk about the changes they have seen in their children since introducing a reading time into their daily lives. They were excited about the changes they noticed, and how the children now asked them for books and to what lengths they were prepared to go in getting new books, as, for example, in the story of the two young children who made their own way to the library and opened it up themselves.

The women, in particular those from the Karoo, commented on the way children should be treated in the home. It was in this group that most emphasis was given to talking quietly and pleasantly to children rather than shouting or even hitting them. This was a change in behaviour that was an unexpected outcome for the course designer. Household tasks and even furniture can be valued as ways to encourage language and learning.

The four women had young children when first interviewed and all have taken seriously the suggestion that babies enjoy conversations. Talking to children from an early age and communicating through smiles and gestures are important, as Wells states:

...they provide a framework within which they can discover some of the fundamental principles upon which language in use is based – the reciprocal exchange of signals, the sequential patterning of turns, and the assumption of intentionality. (Wells 1988:112)

As Wells continues, the “richest opportunities for talking and learning” are when adults and children do things together around the home. (Wells 1988:121)

These interviews demonstrate the changes in behaviour and attitude in the women and underpin the idea that adults should participate actively in their children’s development. The following quotation shows the benefit to both adults and children:

Our conviction that teaching adults strategies to use with their children is productive in terms of the child’s development is based on theories of adult mediation of children’s learning following Vygotsky (1978) as well as various ethnographic studies of adult-child book reading (e.g. Cochran-Smith, 1984; Snow, 1983). Research showing reading gains for tutors as well as recipients of tutoring suggested that benefits in adult reading development would result from the parent-child interactions (Cohen, Kulik and Kulik, et al., 1982) (Handel and Goldsmith 1994:152)

Family literacy is one approach to providing support to parents so that they in turn can provide support to their children. Without this support the question must be asked: "Will those South African children who are currently struggling to read be able to make progress and enjoy the books that many see it important to provide?" In the Family Literacy Project we believe that support for early literacy development must go hand in hand with the provision of books into the homes of all our children.

Reflection

In this chapter I have added to information on the FLP facilitators already contained in all chapters preceding this one. The information in this chapter relates to their professional development as well as their roles as mothers as I believe that the changes they experienced in their own lives influenced their approach to the FLP group members and other community members with whom they interact. I included the stories of other facilitators of family literacy as I wanted to show how family literacy as well as being influenced by facilitators, has also influenced more than only those working for the FLP. As I wrote this chapter I restrained myself from being too effusive in my praise of the FLP facilitators. I could have gone on at length because to me they are so important and without them I would not have been able to continue after the first year of the project. Without them, the FLP would not have become so established and entrenched in the lives of the communities in which they live and work.

The following chapter is in Part 3 of this study and is a discussion of all that has been presented so far in this study.

PART 3

INTRODUCTION

Part 3 concludes this study. The first section includes a description of the influences I consider to be the most important. I made these choices based on a critical reflection of the events, people, context and activities detailed in Parts 1 and 2 of this study. Following a description of each influence, I explain the contribution made to the development of the FLP approach to family literacy. The final chapter in Part 3 summarises the discussions and highlights the contribution of this study to the early childhood development and adult education sectors, particularly in South Africa. I also include a reflection on how I have been affected by writing this study. Suggestions for further studies that would benefit the development of family literacy in South Africa are also included in this final chapter.

CHAPTER 14: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, the influences I consider to be the most important in the development of the Family Literacy Project approach to family literacy are presented and their impact described.

The question driving this study is:

What influences contributed to the development of an approach to family literacy relevant to the needs of families in rural KwaZulu-Natal?

This study of the FLP covers the growth of an idea that sprang from a wish to improve the literacy levels of young children and how the idea developed to meet the needs of the communities in which it is based. The findings presented included extracts from materials developed within the project, the words of the women and men involved in the project, findings of external evaluations, research conducted externally and internally, and articles written to share the findings and understanding gained from the work over an eight year period.

It is my intention to reflect critically on the influence of the findings contained in the chapters in this study. I have in some instances referred to examples detailed earlier in the study but have refrained from doing this too often as I felt that this would complicate this section unnecessarily and make it difficult to read.

Influences that contributed to the development of an approach to family literacy relevant to the needs of families in rural KwaZulu-Natal have been:

1. FLP group members

1.1 Commitment of group members

Possibly the most important influence on my role within the FLP has been the commitment I witnessed in FLP group members as they returned to the sessions week after week to learn more about how they could support their young children. I was overwhelmed, and continue to be inspired, by the sincerity of the FLP group members who want something better for their children than they themselves have ever had. The responsibilities of FLP group members include daily household tasks requiring extra effort of fetching water or firewood, as well as the seasonal tasks of re-thatching dwellings, re-smearing walls with mud and floors with cow dung, and planting. Although some of these, in particular the seasonal tasks meant that attendance at group sessions was interrupted, the members always returned to resume their participation in the groups.

This commitment by FLP group members ensured that I made every effort to build the FLP and raise the funds necessary to continue the programme for as long as the FLP group members remained within the project. This commitment also influenced the choices made of what to include in the FLP group sessions and what publications should be developed.

For example, evidence of this commitment to the well being of young children can be found in the materials developed by the FLP. For example, as described in Chapter 7, the FLP group members listed what they wanted their young children to know and be able to do by the time they left pre-school. Their ideas formed the basis for the booklet *You and Your Child* and were useful in stimulating discussion as the starting point was familiar to the FLP group members and showed respect for their ideas.

1.2 Interest and engagement by the whole extended family

The extended family is common among the families of FLP group members and the role of parent is often not limited to the birth mother and father. From the first meeting in 2000 at the Mbalenhle Pre-School in Stepmore I was made aware of the range of people considered to not only be part of the young child's family but as assuming the role of a primary care-giver. At this meeting there were uncles, grandmothers and mothers. To take seriously the 'family' part of family literacy, it was necessary to recognise that the age, gender and relationship to the child of the primary care-giver and that these care-givers may include members of the extended family.

The influence these considerations had were, and continue to be, on the content of the FLP group sessions and on the awareness of the need to acknowledge, respect and draw on the knowledge and experience of every one of the FLP group members. Evidence of these influences lie in the adoption of aspects of the Reflect approach to working with adults – where each set of sessions (a unit) begins with an activity designed to draw out what group members already know, for example the Tree activity and the questions following the production of a community map as described in Chapter 8. FLP facilitators have been trained to provide opportunities for extended discussions between group members, as well as encouraging the telling of stories based on experience.

1.3 Creating a need to write

Although the FLP group members said they wanted to learn to read and write, and indicated where they would use these skills, I was struck by the lack of opportunities for a regular and repeated need to write. There were more times when FLP group members needed to read – signs, labels, notes, but not so many times when they needed to write.

This influenced the decision to provide post-literacy activities such as the production of the FLP newsletter and the exchange of letters between pen-friends. Mindful of the injunction to use it or lose it, the FLP approach integrated these opportunities for using developing literacy skills into the programme. The delight of FLP group members when they saw their name in print in the newsletter encouraged them to write more and encouraged me to find ways to produce evidence of their ability to write stories as evidenced in the production of *Stories from the Southern Drakensberg*.

1.4 Book orientation

When I introduced the book-making activity it became apparent that the FLP group members were not used to handling books. The pictures were placed randomly on the pages and the first books had no themes or themes that were not entirely relevant to children such as cosmetics.

I had to structure the session to include discussion on theme, where to place the picture on the page, how to place the pictures so that the child could see these without turning the whole book around.

I also included sessions on ways to look at books and read these with children. This included suggestions of how to develop concepts about print, reflection, questioning skills and practice in sequencing and using imagination. The success of these sessions can be found in the research findings of Jane Kvalsvig (Kvalsvig et al 2003) presented in Chapter 7.

I used discussion cards – laminated pictures cut from magazines – to stimulate discussion between adult and child and introduce the idea of the importance of talking about pictures as well as reading words.

1.5 Taking an active role in the community

Many of those who came to the first FLP meetings were shy and most of them said they were not well regarded in their community because they could not read or write. Some, like Lisebo Ndlovu who was chair of the Mbalenhle Pre-School committee, were involved in local affairs but most were not.

It became a part of the FLP approach to encourage FLP group members to take a more prominent role in local affairs by joining the community development committee, the pre-school management committee, school governing bodies or becoming involved in church leadership. This was something they could consider more readily as they developed their literacy skills and could read minutes and take notes. However, as described in Chapter 11, the women FLP group members in the most deeply rural site of Ndodeni could not share their committee skills because as women they were not allowed to call a meeting for others in the community. In the other sites FLP group members and FLP facilitators reported that they were joining in local community structures as their self-confidence grew. One FLP group member at Stepmore, sadly now deceased, had started her own church. When she joined the FLP she said she wanted to learn to read and write so that she could record the names of the members of her church. I was pleased to hear from the FLP facilitator at Stepmore that this was an aim that was achieved.

2. Environment

2.1 Providing reading material

When I started working in those first sites as described in Chapter 6, I soon became aware of the lack of printed material. There were few road signs, no libraries, there were few books in homes and in the main reading material was limited to school text books. Reading for pleasure was difficult to contemplate as the FLP group members had few or no books written in Zulu, at the appropriate literacy level or relevant to their interests.

This influenced me to find funding for books, to be housed in boxes and built libraries. Funds were also raised to produce books designed to meet the needs of FLP group members and in which they could see themselves reflected in the illustrations. To make sure that the illustrations did reflect rural families, the drafts were discussed in the FLP group sessions. The FLP group members made suggestions which were relayed back to the illustrator, for example the longer length of skirts of rural women, head coverings to show marital status, style of homes. A design and layout person was engaged so that every publication was given a professional look that I felt would raise the status of owning or reading such a book. Both the illustrator, Len Sak, and the designer, Jess Nicholson, are sensitive and familiar with rural areas and shared my wish for publications where content as well as the look were important.

2.2 Lobbying local and provincial government

I felt and responded to the influence of the lack of infrastructure and in particular the poor maintenance of roads in different ways.

I spent many hours lobbying local and provincial government departments to upgrade or at least maintain the roads, especially between Stepmore and Lotheni. I was worried not only about the damage caused to my own vehicle but I was concerned about the safety of the FLP group members as they travelled by taxi over the boulder strewn and potholed road. My concern led to the inclusion in funding proposals of an increased travel budget to cover the cost of using a 4x4 vehicle instead of the smaller sedan I used at the beginning of the life of the FLP.

2.3 Health matters

The health of FLP facilitators and FLP group members and their families has been of concern from early on in the project, HIV and AIDS prevalence in KwaZulu Natal is high and the area where FLP is situated has not escaped this scourge. Other health problems such as high blood pressure, cancer and

diabetes have also been mentioned by FLP group members as have childhood illnesses. This is not to say that the FLP group members are sickly but there are enough instances of ill health for these to be noticed.

Units have been developed by the FLP on all the health problems mentioned above. In addition a booklet entitled *Stay Healthy* was developed to support those facing or wishing to avoid infection by the HI Virus.

Children's health problems and ways to prevent illness and avoid accidents are all part of the IMCI programme introduced to the FLP groups. These messages have been taken into the wider community through the FLP home visiting scheme.

2.4 Income generation

Although we, in the FLP have never asked FLP group members to disclose their financial standing it is apparent that there is a lack of money in most households in the area. This can be seen from the simple dwellings and plain clothing of most FLP group members. It is also apparent from the requests from FLP group members once they had learnt to read and write, that they be taught income generating skills.

I did introduce some income generating skills into the programme. The transfer of skills was successful and FLP group members learnt to sew and do fabric painting. However the opportunities to sell these items were limited and the income generating endeavours never took root. I have not included much discussion of these in this study as once the skills transfer had taken place, the FLP distanced itself from the marketing and selling as I knew this was neither our core business nor our area of expertise.

I raised funds to pay the FLP home visitors a small amount of money for each visit they made to their neighbour to pass on early literacy and child health

messages. I did this so that the FLP group members could see that by acquiring knowledge and becoming literate they could earn some money without learning any other skill. This is, after all, how I make my living.

2.5 Providing scarce resources

Activities planned for sessions running in deeply rural areas or other under-resourced areas must take into account that however simple the activity is and however you try to use easily obtainable materials, some things do have to be brought in. Once I even tried bringing water in but when this spilt all over the car I relied on water from the nearby rivers or standpipes. Paper, glue, play dough, magazines – all of these and more may be found without too much effort in an urban setting but are few and far between in the areas I chose to work in.

This lack of material resources in the pre-schools, schools and homes influenced my choice of activities to introduce to the FLP group members to encourage them to play with their children in a way that would develop early literacy skills development. As described in Chapter 7, I brought most of the resources with me but also kept in mind that if the FLP group members were going to do replicate the activities in their own homes, they must be able to find the resources without too much trouble and little expense. I also suggested activities that required no material resources at all, such as conversation, finger rhymes, acting out stories, recalling events and building on household tasks that developed eye-hand co-ordination or fine muscle development.

3. My background

I was influenced by the theories of child development expressed in the principles of active learning and holistic development and brought these into the FLP. It was these principles that influenced the choice of activities that the FLP group members could at first experiment with themselves and then try out with their children at home.

I also believe books and reading do not have to be at the heart of activities that will promote the development of early literacy skills. As Richter (2006) pointed out, we must use everyday activities to promote literacy development and not only books as so many homes are without these. In addition, most of the FLP group members could not read or write when they joined the project and I felt that a focus on reading to children as the only way to promote early literacy development would have embarrassed the adults and may have resulted in them leaving the FLP.

The willingness of the FLP group members to try new activities however strange these may have seemed to them influenced me to continue to introduce these activities. It was the friendliness and openness of the FLP group members that made it possible for me to enter the communities and to be listened to as I brought what at times may have seemed like outlandish ideas and activities into the meetings. The play dough, the collages, the letter recognition games were all new and unfamiliar and yet they trusted me enough to play alongside me and they trusted me enough to accept that these activities would help their children do better at school. Without that openness and trust the FLP would never have survived beyond the first meeting.

4. Government support

I feel that support for the FLP from government, provincial and national, has been minimal. I was invited by a government official to attend a meeting on how the KwaZulu Natal provincial Health Department intended to involve community members and non government organisations in the implementation of the IMCI programme. Although the invitation came from a government official, no progress was ever made in building a relationship between the FLP and the district officials.

After waiting some time for a response from district officials, I went ahead and raised funds to engage an IMCI expert to work with FLP facilitators and FLP groups to introduce the key family practices of the IMCI programme. This led to these messages being incorporated into the FLP home-visiting scheme and the production of games and activities linked to the key family practices.

5. Human rights

The importance of the rights of adults and children has been an influence on the development within the FLP. The right of children to education, health, safety and love; and the right of adults to improve their own education has been the most influential in the FLP.

The rights of the FLP group members and their children are evidenced in the respect demonstrated through the willingness and eagerness to hear from them what they already knew about any issue under discussion. This participatory approach involves every FLP group member and every point of view is listened to and disagreements are made with respect to the feelings of the other person.

6. FLP Facilitators

The early commitment to helping their community was evident in the women who later became FLP facilitators. They came to the training on PRA and helped to conduct the PRA in the sites without the hope of being paid. Throughout the eight years of my involvement with FLP I noticed how eager they were to improve their qualifications and how they battled against having many household chores, no electricity and no quiet place to study.

The FLP facilitators have benefited, and in turn this has benefited the FLP, from a very full professional development programme. The FLP facilitators have made sure their own children receive the best education available to them. Zimbili Dlamini, Phumy Ngubo, Nelly Shezi and Fiselani Linda did not send their children to local schools but chose what they considered to be better schools

even though this incurred expense that they could ill afford. Florence Molefe sent her daughter to university. Zimbili Dlamini built two rooms, using mud bricks, so that she and her son could have a place to sleep and what she calls her 'resource room' complete with bookshelf and desk. By their own example these women have demonstrated the importance of laying a good education foundation and of keeping children in the education system for as long as possible.

7. Development practice

7.1 Reflect

The approach of the FLP Project includes the adoption of aspects of the Reflect method and is referred to throughout this study and in particular in Chapter 8.

The influence of Reflect on the FLP cannot be underestimated, particularly the aspects where the existing knowledge and skills of the FLP group members are articulated and discussed, followed by FLP facilitators encouraging FLP group members to reflect on what they had said, discuss how the most appropriate aspects can be strengthened and built on, and finally decide where and how new knowledge can be incorporated into existing practices. I see this honouring of the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of the FLP group members and facilitators as being one of the most important components of the FLP approach to family literacy.

It was the continuing interest in what was being offered in the sessions that kept the FLP alive and growing in response to the needs that were observed and articulated.

7.2 Active learning

The Reflect approach and my own experience in adult education settings has led me to accept that adults and children learn best when actively involved in what they are discovering. When I heard that the FLP group members who were

involved in the home visiting scheme adopting a didactic approach when sharing the IMCI health messages, I knew something had to be done to counteract this.

To ensure that the IMCI health messages were shared in an interactive and enjoyable way, as the early literacy messages were relayed by the FLP group members, games and activities were developed. Each game or activity is linked to a health message and acts as a stimulus for further discussion of the message.

In addition a video was produced on how best to conduct oneself during a home visit. This video was made by the FLP facilitators with the help of the IMCI consultant, Chris Gibson, and a short-term volunteer from Brazil, Rachael Bothello. Although influenced by the didactic approach taken by the FLP group members, the production of the video had an influence on the confidence of the FLP facilitators. Rachael Bothello included all their names in the credits and this video is still viewed with pride by the FLP facilitators and encouraged their creativity as evidenced by their suggestion that they make more videos to demonstrate other aspects of the project.

8. External evaluations

I believe that evaluation of any programme should take place regularly and that the findings should help determine the way forward. I also believe that evaluations should be participatory; no-one should feel that they are being evaluated by someone who arrives and watches them. Instead, group members should be involved in the process of evaluation and contribute their views wherever and however possible.

This belief influenced me to raise the funding for an external evaluator to visit the project and conduct an evaluation each year. One reason for this is that I believe the presence of an outsider in the FLP groups sends a message to the FLP members that what is being attempted and achieved in the FLP groups is

important not only to them but to outsiders as well. Another reason is that when the FLP facilitator and FLP group members expect a visitor they do all they know what they should be doing to make the session run well. This demonstrates to me that everyone involved knows how they should be run, even if during sessions with no visitors present, plans are not strictly adhered to.

The approach adopted by the evaluators over the years under scrutiny in this study, has been participatory. This is the influence of the participatory approach adopted by the FLP and in turn the participatory approach of the evaluation demonstrates to FLP facilitators and FLP group members that outsiders also value their participation.

The findings of the evaluations have influenced the direction taken by the FLP. The recommendations based on these findings were, each year, examined and if they were seen to be appropriate by myself and the FLP facilitators they were implemented.

9. Winning awards

When I started the FLP as a pilot project in 2000 I never imagined that it would become an award winning and internationally recognised project.

The influence of winning awards and receiving recognition from prestigious bodies such as UNESCO was to encourage everyone connected with the project to strive to do their work even more effectively. The awards were a huge boost to the FLP group members who no longer felt isolated in their rural homes but became, through this recognition, part of a wider community.

Some of the awards resulted in travel for FLP facilitators and FLP group members who had never moved more than 50km from their homes. Renneth Molefe who won the provincial award for the best adult literacy learner travelled to Johannesburg to take part in the national awards event. She did not win the

national award but she did travel further from home than ever before and it appeared to me that she was far more confident after the event than she had been before. When the Mpumlwane FLP group won the provincial award for best adult literacy group, three FLP group members went to Cape Town to attend the Adult Learning Network Conference. They did not participate fully in the conference because of language difficulties but they did go on trips around the city and even the long bus trip to the Western Cape was seen by them as a highlight in their lives. The most dramatic impact on anyone in the FLP that came through recognition of the work of the project was when Florence Molefe left her home in Lotheni and travelled on her own to New York. She named her youngest child *Nolwandle* (Ocean) in honour of the trip she made.

10. Raising awareness

I began, rather tentatively, to present the approach to family literacy that was emerging in the FLP to a wider audience. I did this through poster presentations, journal articles and conference presentations. These resulted in invitations to take part in international meetings on family literacy and a request to write a chapter in a book on family literacy and later to initiate the development and publication of a book with a focus on African examples of family literacy.

I became more confident in presenting the FLP approach as I saw that it was interesting to others and that our experiences could contribute to developing a higher profile for African models of family literacy.

The influence of this recognition of the FLP approach to family literacy strengthened our commitment to experiments such as the home visiting programme described in Chapter 10, the production of the newsletter, and the establishment of community libraries.

Reflection

Writing this chapter was to me both a challenge and an achievement. The challenge lay in keeping the descriptions and impact of the influences detailed enough to be clear, but avoiding repetition of all that had been covered in the study. The achievement came as a result of being almost at the end of what has been for me, a fascinating look at the FLP.

The following chapter concludes this study with a discussion and critical reflection, as well as recommendations for sharing findings and further research.

CHAPTER 15: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this, the final chapter of the study, I reflect on what happened to me as the author of the document. I also reflect on the findings as they relate to the development of an approach to family literacy and how these contribute to the body of knowledge on ways to support families and help them find enjoyment in their own journeys into literacy. I also suggest areas of research for others interested in exploring the implementation of family literacy projects.

Myself

When I first thought about embarking on a doctoral-level study I was already deeply involved in the Family Literacy Project. As stated at the start of this study, I decided that I could look carefully at the FLP within boundaries and in a rigorous and useful way and that this could be done within a doctoral programme. As well as this I wanted to be a role model for my son who was at that time completing his masters degree. My studies have taken so much longer than I thought they would and my son has long since been awarded his doctorate.

Now, as I reach the end of the study, I find that once again the doubts as to my academic ability come to the fore. Is what I have written scholarly enough? Have I met the requirements for a study at this level? Have I wasted my time? I suggest that the answer is that the time has not been wasted because during this study I found a new voice, one that has given me confidence to share what I have learnt from the FLP work. I have also become more confident about the validity of that experience and more able to speak out about the contribution from the 'south' to the family literacy debate still centred mainly in the 'north'. I moved from being an onlooker to a more determined advocate for the family literacy experiences from Africa to be taken seriously. I believe this has come about because I have thought carefully about the development of the FLP and come to

see more clearly the influences and the outcomes of an initiative that began as an experiment in a small mud building in the remote village of Stepmore. If I had not embarked on this study, I do not think I would have been able to present so clearly to others, I would not have had the confidence that I have now in the importance of what has been achieved, and the contribution that this work has and continues to make to the families of FLP group members, and the contribution it will make to those involved in the early childhood development and adult basic education sectors.

There was a time that lasted two years, where I gave up on this study. I was working hard, overwhelmed at times by the responsibilities that come with managing and developing a non governmental organisation. I also lost faith in what I was doing and could not see that it was important. I began to take huge chunks of what I had written and use these in articles and conference papers. I decided not to complete my doctorate. I justified this to myself by arguing that I was sharing information widely and contributing to the local, national and international debate on family literacy. In 2007 I attended the following workshops and conferences, presenting alone or co-presenting twelve papers, some with Zimbili Dlamini.

- RASA (Reading Association of South Africa) conference, Cape Town
- QualiFLY (European Network of Family Literacy Projects), Germany
- IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) Workshop, Namibia
- Wordfest ,Grahamstown
- RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Learning), Belfast
- 14th International Learning Conference, Johannesburg. An article based on this paper was accepted – jointly authored with three other presenters.
- IFLA Conference, Durban
- Self study Conference, Durban
- Best Practices in ECD conference, Cape Town
- Workshop for senior officials from the Western Cape ABET department
- Centre for Social Development Conference, Grahamstown
- SA Children's Literature Conference, Potchefstroom
- UNESCO North-South Exchange on Family Literacy, Germany
- UNICEF Knowledge Sharing Seminar, Pretoria

At the beginning of 2009 after a conversation with Joan Conolly, my supervisor, I made the decision to look again at what I had written and try to complete it. And this is what I did. It did not always go smoothly though. I had moments when I had to stop, put it aside and turn to other things. There were times when I became confused by what I was doing, bored by what I was doing, or filled with feeling that no-one would be interested in this study anyway so why continue with it. Each time that happened I was amazed that after putting it aside for a few days or even weeks, I would suddenly see what I was meant to do next and out it would come and I would carry on writing with enthusiasm.

Reading what others have written has been at times enlightening and also confirmatory. I have been excited to find new ideas and have always read with what I think of as split attention – one part of me is reading for the doctorate, and one part of my is reading for new ideas to use in the FLP. Now that I am no longer director of the FLP it is difficult for me not to bombard the new director with ideas collected from articles, books and conversations. I don't do this because I feel that she must take the project forward in the way she and the FLP staff members want to take it, with guidance from the board. As I am on the board, I am able to contribute ideas but do this only when invited to do so. This is not an easy role to play but one that I am working on playing sensitively. So, all the reading I have done more recently has been used in this study. I have reflected on how I have used this reading, past and current, and see that at times I have taken passages to take further my own thinking while at others I have used quotations to underline my own practice or ideas. There have been times when I have been irritated by the need to use quotations at all, believing that I don't need to show that others also think in a particular way, or that my ideas have a wider foundation. That I must show that I have taken seriously what others think has been a useful way of remaining humbly aware.

My involvement in the FLP provided opportunities for me to learn more about people from whom I had been kept apart by the apartheid regime in South Africa.

I was able to make mistakes, make assumptions and have these proved wrong, and blunder in ways that could have spelt the end of a relationship. However, thanks to the generosity of those I worked with, I was helped to understand ways of behaviour different to my own. I think that I helped those same people to see things at times from my perspective. In this way we were able to move into a more open relationship from which I like to think we all benefited.

This study has opened my eyes to the richness of all that I have experienced. It has forced me to think about what I have done and why I have acted in a particular way. I was probably too busy being active to do this properly before. In a way I wish I had been more reflective from the start of the project, but I acted mostly on a gut feeling and it is with interest that I have reflected critically on these gut feelings. On the whole I am not sorry that the reflection has come late, as it has helped me make the transition from being involved so deeply in a project to taking on contract work where I am responsible only for a part of some bigger whole. I think too that as I am older, reflections are more meaningful to me and show that I have contributed to something to the lives of people who have been deprived of so much. I have also been able to see how much I have been strengthened and enriched by their commitment and dedication to making the lives of their children better.

The Family Literacy Project

The main conclusion I have reached is that I have been able to develop what I referred to in Chapter 2 as what Whitehead (2008: 104) refers to as a living theory:

A living theory is an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work.

Another point made by Whitehead and to which I referred to in the same chapter, Chapter 2, where I said that Whitehead (2008: 107) sees an important question

as being “How do I improve what I am doing?” One of the first questions I asked when I started the FLP was how I thought I must do what I thought must be done. The question which Whitehead asked of “How do I improve what I am doing?” became my question, because I realised that that was what I had been doing all along; looking for ways to do what I was doing better. He continues with the following thought

My imagination worked to offer possibilities about improving what I was doing. I chose a possibility to act on, acted and evaluated the effectiveness of what I was doing in terms of my communication with my pupils. This disciplined process of problem-forming and solving is what I call an action reflection method. (Whitehead 2008)

I cannot claim that I consciously followed this ‘disciplined process’ in everything I did in the FLP. However, by organising an annual external evaluation, I did take each of these as opportunities to reflect on what had been achieved during the year and use the recommendations to guide the plans for the following year.

In this conclusion I want to draw out the important points to share with others who might want to initiate a family literacy project in the area in which they live or work. What are the key considerations? As I read through my own writing I am able to see these key considerations emerging and I present them here. These are based on a reflection on the influences I have noticed and which have contributed to the development of a family literacy project. I do not think that there is a recipe that can be followed or that we can take one project and plant it in a completely different area and hope that it will be successful. What can be done is to take into account the following:

Reason for the intervention

There has to be clarity as to why the intervention (project or programme) is necessary. Has there been research conducted where the findings point to a problem that can be solved by the person or organisation working with the local community? Have members of the local community, a local non government

organisation, a community or faith based organisation, or teachers at pre-schools or primary schools expressed the need for some support to improve early literacy development in young children? In other words, who wants this intervention and why do they want it?

Where this differs from the FLP is that I am suggesting that a base line or a needs survey be conducted if there is not a local organisation or group requesting the intervention. In the case of the FLP, I went in because I felt that in the light of research findings²⁶, there was a need to pilot an approach that involved those other than pre-school practitioners. However, now that this experiment has been conducted and the family literacy approach shown to work in at least the sites served by the FLP, interventions can now be implemented where a need has been established and the family literacy approach seen as one way to address the problem.

Context

It is important to look carefully at the place where the project or programme is to run. The physical surroundings, and this includes the level of infrastructure and natural resources, as well as the way in which people live, must be taken into account. In an under resourced area, at times even the most basic requirements such as water, paper, books will have to be brought into the area.

The meeting place will have to be chosen by those to be served by the intervention. The times and frequency of meetings, workshops or training sessions will have to be negotiated and these will be dependent on local work schedules – job-related or home-based.

The families

Here, my recommendation will be to respect the contribution of ideas made by families to the project or programme. No-one comes empty handed, least of all

²⁶ Khulisa Management Services

adults who come with all their experience and knowledge. The way in which the FLP addressed the inclusion of local knowledge was to use aspects of Reflect. This, or other participatory approaches, are invaluable in creating opportunities for people to share what they know, for the facilitators to acknowledge the importance of this knowledge and then build on it either by adding new information or through discussions where group members come to their own understanding of what needs to be done to solve the problem or meet a need.

It is also important to recognise that families come in a range of shapes and sizes. With the violence experienced in the country, and the ravages of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, families in South Africa are often skip-generational²⁷ or even child-headed.

A positive attitude to families is essential if the intervention is to build on the strengths of these families. If the family is seen as the problem i.e. a deficit model of family, it will be difficult to build the confidence necessary for family members to see and act out the important role they play in the development and support of young children. Parents, or those who take the parenting role, as the first educators of young children is an important truth that needs to be acknowledged and acted on.

The children

The children are the main beneficiaries of a family literacy approach. However all family members benefit if the approach is broad enough to accommodate their needs and interests as well as those of the child but all within the boundaries of literacy development. It is important to keep a focus on the core business of the project and not try to become one that meets all needs. Links should be made with other organisations providing support on those needs that the family literacy project cannot meet.

²⁷ Families headed by grandparents

I have been asked many times about the sustainability of the FLP, and the contribution of the project to the eradication of poverty. My response is that if we help children to become literate, to enjoy reading, writing and books, this is a foundation for all future learning and development. If children are literate and able to make good use of educational opportunities, they are less likely to be unemployed and will, in the very long term, also contribute to the development of their children. It is a cycle of literacy and learning that will continue.

The facilitators

The FLP facilitators are all women local to the project. They are from the same communities as the people they work with. I would recommend that this is the way to provide an intervention that is built on trust and acceptance. The group members are more likely to accept a local person, especially if they have been involved in choosing that person to do the work.

In times when finances are constrained, and for most non government organisations this is their usual state, then the facilitators who are local to the project will not be incurring high travel and accommodation costs.

The only problem that could arise is that when the intervention comes to an end, for whatever reason, the facilitators may be too highly trained and experienced to find similar work in the area especially if it is one that is deeply rural or isolated. However, the skills that the facilitator is able to bring into her own family will continue to be valuable even when the employment opportunity is no longer available.

Evaluation

The importance of reflecting regularly on the work that is done cannot be over emphasised. The monitoring and evaluation aspect of any intervention

should be built into the programme from the beginning. Most funders nowadays insist on this and will contribute to its implementation.

A consideration is the approach taken. Whether the evaluation is external or internal to the project, everyone should be as much part of it as possible. If people feel that they are being observed, judged and that plans are made without their participation, it will be difficult to get a true picture of the work and impact of the project. Once people feel that their views are important, they will be more willing to share honestly what has been achieved as well as highlighting problems and even proposing solutions.

Sharing learning

There has been so much benefit to sharing what has been learnt in the FLP. By sharing with others, the project has been enriched in several ways. For example, in preparing what to share, the project work has to be examined to see what is important, what has worked and what has caused problems. In addition, if the group members know that what they are achieving, or that the programme they are part of is interesting to others, they will be more confident that family literacy is important.

Sharing can be two-way. In conferences or in responses to articles and other presentations, a lot can be learnt about other approaches or aspects of similar projects. It is in these exchanges that new understanding can be gained, or new ideas incorporated into the existing programme.

The emphasis on the community and developmental issues within family literacy is similar to that found within groups in Africa, far more than in family literacy groups in the so-called developed world where they have a more focused approach to books and reading rather than issues of, for example, sanitation, HIV/AIDS, poverty alleviation. It is by sharing these experiences, that the profile of work done in the developing world will be raised and there

will be less of the attitude that we have to be 'taught' to find solutions. Instead we can contribute to the solutions sought by those in better resourced countries.

Recommendations for further study

There are many ways in which family literacy interventions can be strengthened. Some of these have been mentioned, e.g. sharing and learning between similar projects. Another way is to initiate relevant research projects and then use the findings to strengthen or promote the family literacy approach. Some of the research that could be conducted includes:

Long term literacy development

- A longitudinal study of the children of the families involved in family literacy projects could be designed to show whether or not the children whose parents (or those taking on the role of parents) who attended family literacy sessions, continued to show an average or higher than average literacy development.

In the FLP, the studies conducted by Kvalsvig and her colleagues (Kvalsvig et al 2003) and Pretorius (2003) showed the benefits to children of those mothers who attended FLP sessions. What is needed now is a study to show how long-lasting this benefit is to children and if their literacy development continues to be more long-lasting and of a higher level than their peers whose parents did not attend family literacy projects or programmes.

- A study designed to find out if children who are exposed to books at an early stage in their lives, continue to read when at secondary school would benefit those who recommend the provision of community and school libraries. In the FLP, the young children of FLP members as well as in the wider community, appear to enjoy borrowing books from the book boxes

and community libraries. However, there has been no follow up on these children as they progress through school. It would be interesting to see if book-borrowing habits, if established early in life, continue to play a part in the lives of adolescents.

- A study could be conducted of whether or not members of family literacy groups become more involved in local issues. This would be interesting to those who would like to investigate the effects of low-literacy levels on community participation in development forums or local political organisations.
- A study on the role of fathers in the development of their young children's literacy skills would be helpful to those who want to target or improve participation of men in literacy initiatives. In the FLP we did not have many fathers attending sessions. Although we did try to address this we were never successful in keeping those men who did attend one or two sessions. However a sister project of the FLP, the Farm Family Literacy Project, was successful in attracting men as group members. The factors contributing to this success could be investigated as could other family literacy projects where men have become members.
- There are differences between what are commonly referred to as family literacy projects from the north and those from the south. These could be investigated and documented so that each could learn from one another.

Final Reflection

I have tried, in this study, to highlight the importance placed on strengthening families so that the young children in these families can benefit from a foundation in early literacy. However, as has emerged in this study, the approach to family literacy that has been developed within the FLP has been more holistic than a narrow focus on building early literacy skills. This approach to family literacy

encompasses a broader understanding that to build early literacy skills, you also need to consider and address the many challenges facing families, especially in deeply rural areas.

There are two aspects of this approach to family literacy that I want to stress. The first is the commitment and dedication of the FLP group members to their children's well being. They have been, and continue to be, people who see the importance of involving themselves in their children's education. They see that they are role models for their children and that if they work hard at improving their levels of literacy, their children will also want to learn to read and write. Their confidence as the first educators of their children has grown and taken them out to the wider community to share this understanding of the role played by parents. Parents can and do make a positive difference in the lives of their children.

The second aspect is that of not only becoming competent readers, but the enjoyment that can be had from reading with understanding. This has been achieved through the provision of a range of books that interest adults and their children. It is my belief that books and reading have become part of the communities in which the FLP works, and that families have been supported in their efforts to deal with all the challenges that face them, to overcome past injustices and to set their children on a path where they will find enjoyment and satisfaction in learning, both formally and informally.



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