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Interactive reflective journal writing as a tool for mentoring and teacher professional development: A Case-Study

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Faculty of Humanities

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Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____ Date: 28.01.2011 _____

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Abstract

Despite a range of literacy strategies and teacher training efforts devised by the Western Cape Education Department, there have not been significant changes to classroom practice or to learner achievement. This dissertation explores interactive reflective journal writing as a tool for teacher professional development and mentoring. The aim of this case-study is to ascertain whether and how one grade two teacher's practice developed as a result of keeping an interactive reflective journal during the process of on-site coaching. The main question that it aims to answer is whether interactive, reflective journal writing can enable the teacher to develop her understandings of alternative approaches to literacy and help her to develop her practice. Sub-questions are: What can be considered as evidence of the take up of emergent literacy and balanced approaches in a Grade Two teachers' journal writing?; What can be considered as evidence of take-up of reflective practice in the Grade Two teacher's journal?

Drawing on a socio-cultural approach to literacy (Barton, 1994, Heath, 1983, Street, 1984, 1993, 2002), I investigated a teacher's take up of early literacy approaches which include emergent, whole language and balanced literacy approaches. Furthermore, drawing on studies of reflective practice (Dornbrack, 2008, Potter and Badiali 2001, cited in Villegas-Reimers, 2003), as well as an action research approach (Kemmis, 1993, McNiff, 2002), I investigated the take up of reflective practice.

The main findings of the study show that:

- Interactive journal writing can be a significant teacher development tool though it is easier to encourage technical reflection than practical and critical reflection. This is evidenced by the fact that:
- the teacher developed a relatively good understanding of emergent literacy and balanced approaches to literacy learning.

However, the teacher's reflection was mainly of a technical nature. Take-up is an uneven and non-linear process that develops over time. I argue that interactive reflective journal writing as a tool for continuing professional teacher development succeeds best when teachers themselves are integrally involved, reflecting on their own experience and where there is a strong school based component (DoE, 2007).

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List of acronyms

CTLI	Cape Teaching and Leadership Institute
LHH	Literacy Half Hour
LIT/NUM	Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
LTP	Language Transformation Plan
MTBBE	Mother Tongue Based Bilingual education
NLS	New Literacy Studies
PIRLS	Progress in Early Reading Study
QUIDS –UP Public Schools	Quality, Improvement, Development, Support and Upliftment Programme for Public Schools
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation explores interactive reflective journal writing as a tool for teacher professional development and mentoring. Firstly, it aims to contribute towards better understanding among teacher trainers of how to train teachers in ways that enable them to learn effectively. Secondly, it aims to contribute to knowledge about the critical aspects of in-service early literacy teacher training which include pedagogy and classroom methods for early literacy development and reflective practice. In this introductory chapter, I present the origins and focus of the study and clarify my role in the study. I also provide a brief outline of the chapters that follow.

1.2 Background

Teacher professional development has been one of the major concerns of the post-apartheid South African national as well as provincial departments of education. Two major issues that have concerned the national and provincial departments of education are, firstly, the poor training of teachers within the racially divided education provisioning during the apartheid regime and secondly, the fact that despite so many teachers upgrading their qualifications, there have not been significant changes to classroom practice or to learner achievement (Bertram, 2003; DoE, 2007).

Ahead of the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development of 2007, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) established the Cape Teaching and Leadership Institute (CTLI) in 2002 to provide in-depth in-service teacher training. In 2008 alone, 2000 teachers were trained at the Cape Teaching and Leadership Institute. It has also been reported that about 6451 teachers have been trained at the Institute since 2004 (Atwell, 2009). Alongside the establishment of the institute, the WCED also adopted various strategies to improve literacy results such as the Literacy Half Hour (LHH) in 2001, the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (Lit/Num) in 2006, the Qids-Up programme and most recently, the Foundations for Learning Campaign adopted in 2008 by the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor to improve learner performance in reading, writing and numeracy in all South African schools.

Despite all of these well intentioned strategies and training programmes, the South African education system has been characterized by poor academic performance of many learners at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The Grade Three tests administered in 2001 to 51 000 grade three learners nationally showed that learners could not perform at the expected Grade Three level (Fleisch, 2008:4). Similarly, a Grade 6 study of 34 596 learners in 1 077 schools in 2003 showed that only 35% of learners passed the test (Fleisch, 2008). And most recently, Howie et al's (2008) summary report of the Progress in Early Reading Study (PIRLS) showed that South Africa came second last in comparison with 40 other countries in literacy performance.

It has thus become clear that there is a disjuncture between what teachers are exposed to in their training and what they do in practice. There are also problems with the training – especially with doses of once off workshops because these are not always followed up by monitoring of implementation. Furthermore, teachers are expected to teach reading and writing in contexts which lack reading texts in appropriate languages and writing materials as well as school and classroom libraries. Where there are storybooks, teachers frequently do not know how to use them. In addition to this, teachers are often trained in a language they do not use for teaching and learning.

The national department of education (DoE, 2007) recognizes through its policy on continuing professional development that teachers need to reflect on their practice. The strategy claims that:

Continuing Professional Teacher Development succeeds best when teachers themselves are integrally involved, reflecting on their own practice, when there is a strong school based component, when activities are well coordinated and when employers provide sustained leadership and support (DoE, 2007:3)

However, in general teachers have been expected to implement educational changes as well as to learn to reflect on their practice alone as there is minimal school based support and mentoring from the curriculum advisors (Dada et al, 2009).

1.3 Origins of the research

In 2007 the WCED was the first of nine provincial education departments to begin its Language Transformation Plan (LTP) which is a plan to introduce mother-tongue based bilingual education (MTBBE), i.e. six years of learning through the mother-tongue as well as the introduction of learning through another language. This plan is being piloted in sixteen WCED schools. According to the WCED, the need to transform was based on the fact that many children who are not assessed in mother tongue have not been doing very well in systemic evaluations and on the consideration of the consequences of dropping mother tongue too early (WCED, 2007). Therefore, the Language Transformation Plan supports both the use of mother tongue as language of learning and teaching till the end of grade six, and, where practicable, the development of communicative competence in all three languages of the Western Cape: Xhosa, Afrikaans and English. A first step is that all schools develop a written school language policy that shows how Mother-Tongue Based Bilingual Education will be introduced.

Originator of the term 'emergent literacy', Clay (1992) argues that the least complicated entry into literacy is to begin to read and write in the language children already speak (see also Bloch, 1997, Alexander, 2002). Furthermore, firm grounding in mother tongue (including literacy) has been found to assist with the development of second and subsequent language and literacy learning (Dutcher, 1995, Freeman and Freeman, 1992). Such research supports the policy move of promoting mother tongue instruction together with sound teaching methods.

An important consideration however, is that mother tongue instruction has to be coupled with appropriate teaching methods, approaches and materials. Most literacy teachers in African Language classrooms have been trained in methodologies that favored mainly narrow skills based teaching methods where the focus is still on relationships between sounds and symbols. The result is that the "oral heritage of Africa is neglected and teachers tend to underestimate and subdue young children's capabilities and the knowledge that they bring with them to the classroom", (Bloch, 2006). As a result children are expected to learn to read and write without engaging meaningfully with texts and without exposure to real books. In fact, storybooks and other meaningful texts are discarded as supplementary reading materials.

Thus, it is common in South Africa, for some young children to be taught in mother tongue but nevertheless to be denied opportunities to experience the richness of stories in their own languages in print (Bloch, 2006).

In order to address some of these challenges, PRAESA's Early Literacy Unit (for which I have worked over ten years as an early literacy teacher trainer and researcher) undertook a research and intervention project. Its aim is to deepen knowledge about the critical aspects of early literacy which include pedagogy and classroom methods for biliteracy, resources for multilingual classrooms, environments for literacy and family and community involvement. Our objectives include to:

- contribute towards better understandings among teacher trainers and teachers of how to teach in ways that help ensure children are motivated and successful literacy learners;
- establish the validity and viability of emergent literacy/whole language approaches to literacy learning within the DOE and pre-service training institutions;
- help to create environments in school and outside that are conducive to literacy learning;
- help to establish meaningful reading and writing habits among teachers and children.
- assist teachers to become reflective practitioners.

This research report is located within this broader research and intervention project. My intervention in the foundation phase in the project was designed precisely to improve literacy teaching and learning to include holistic and emergent literacy approaches. Secondly, it aimed to develop teachers' abilities to reflect on their practice as well as their ability to implement changes to their practice based on such reflection and on the in-service training and mentoring they received. Interactive reflective journals were chosen as the central strategy to develop teachers' reflective capacities.

This case-study therefore explores interactive reflective journal writing between Bulelwa, a grade two teacher and myself as mentor, as an alternative model for teacher training and continuing teacher professional development with specific reference to literacy teaching and reflective practice. The aims of the case-study are to ascertain how, if at all, one teacher's practice changed and developed as a result of keeping an interactive journal. It also aims at determining the extent of take-up of particular early literacy approaches and of reflective

practice. The main question that this case-study aims to answer is whether interactive, reflective journal writing can enable a teacher to develop her understandings of alternative approaches to literacy and help her to develop her practice. Following from this are two sub-questions:

- What can be considered as evidence of the take up of emergent literacy and balanced approaches in a Grade Two teacher's journal writing?
- What can be considered as evidence of the take-up of reflective practice in the Grade Two teacher's journal?

My choice of journal writing as a mentoring and reflective tool was supported by literature on teacher professional development. Journal writing is seen as a valuable instructional or learning tool in adult education as it enhances learning and professional development (Hiemstra, 2001). Reflective journal writing has been used in English second language adult classes to develop learner's language skills. In its various forms, it is the means for recording personal thoughts, daily experiences and other evolving insights. Hiemstra (2001) argues that in an adult learning classroom, this learning method becomes a tool to aid participants in terms of personal growth, synthesis and reflection on new information that is acquired. It also has the potential to promote critical self-reflection, where dilemmas and contradictions are questioned and challenged.

Although they focus on beginning teachers, Maloney and Campbell-Evans (2002) argue that it is widely accepted that all teachers should become reflective practitioners. Schon (in Brooks and Sikes, 1997) explains that reflection is a process of learning by doing with the help of a coach. The coach finds ways of inducting teachers into reflective practices so that they can reflect on their actions.

There are various tools of self-reflection and an interactive journal is one of them. Maloney and Campbell-Evans (2002) and Stevens et al (2010) recommend reflective journals as a key tool for developing reflective skills. Campbell-Evans (2002) also promotes the interactive style of a journal as it allows teachers and coaches or mentors to engage in a joint journey where the teacher coach facilitates the enquiry by asking questions, giving feedback and

providing alternatives. However, on the issue of asking questions, Reed (1993) argued that her students' writing was much more elaborated and interesting when her own writing was elaborated. She argued that making contributions and saying things were more successful strategies than asking questions. In addition to the above mentioned responsibilities of a coach, the coach or mentor supports, guides and extends the teachers' thinking about teaching by channelling them into fruitful areas of inquiry. S/he prompts, probes and deepens the inquiry so that teachers can examine alternative possibilities thus broadening their perspectives (Brooks and Sikes, 1997). Teachers on the other hand can maximise their learning by questioning and challenging the coach, ask for clarification and together build new understandings. In this way, teachers become reflective with their partner.

Interactive journal writing often has been found to be very beneficial in classrooms where teachers and students write to each other (Bloch and Nkence, 1998; Bloch, 2005; Hall, 1999; Kreeft-Peyton, 1993, Reed, 1993) often for meaningful reasons. Language development and personal development are some of the benefits of journal writing. When used with teachers as well, interactive/dialogue journals are also known for fostering the important and intimate relationship between the coach and the teacher. These journals get teachers to engage in open and collaborative discussions with their mentors by regularly writing up their learning in a journal (Stevens et al, 2010). Although Kreeft-Peyton (1993) studied children's dialogue journal writing, she discovered that:

The same dynamics that promote oral language development promote writing development, for they are dynamics that promote learning. That is, oral and written language development as does all learning grows out of personal knowledge and interests, occurs in interaction with others, grows out of diverse experiences, takes diverse forms and takes a great deal of time, (Kreeft Peyton, 1993:3)

Used between the teacher and myself, the interactive journal offered us a space to write up what happened in our classroom practice and also to record the development of new understandings. Since we face a huge challenge in South Africa of developing professional development activities and programmes for teachers that actually impact on their practice, I felt I was justified in taking a careful and detailed look at the response of one teacher to a potentially worthwhile strategy. I hoped that journal writing could enable the teacher to reflect on her teaching and on the training input she was getting from me so that she might begin to implement changes in her practice.

1.4 Chapter outline

In this chapter I have provided a brief overview of the background to my study as well as the origins of the research and the research questions. I also provide a brief outline of the subsequent chapters.

In Chapter Two, the conceptual framework and literature review is presented. This chapter is divided into two sub-sections: first the socio-cultural approach to understanding literacy is presented and literature on early literacy is reviewed; a section on reflective practice follows thus providing theoretical bases for both aspects of my study.

In Chapter Three, I outline the research design and methodology of the study. Case-Study and Action research methodology is discussed briefly and interactive journal writing as a preferred data collection instrument is also discussed.

In Chapters Four and Five respectively, I present analyses of the take up of literacy approaches that the teacher was exposed to as well as the take up of reflective practice.

Chapter Six presents conclusions and recommendations from the study.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter with an overview of the theoretical approach to literacy which informs this research: a socio-cultural approach and the emergent literacy paradigm. I then review literature in two broad areas, firstly the teaching of early literacy and secondly, the use of reflective practice in the professional development of literacy teachers.

2.2 A Socio-cultural approach to literacy

A socio-cultural approach to literacy argues that being literate involves an individual being engaged in a range of socio-cultural practices rather than in acquiring of a set of decontextualised, abstract skills. Heath (in Hannon, 2000) and other New Literacy Studies researchers (Barton, 1994; Bloch 2005, 2006; Gee, 2002; Hornberger, 2003 and Street, 1984, 1993, 2002) focus on studying people's activities and uses of literacy in their daily lives, thus examining literacy processes as socially embedded, rather than starting with literacy as an abstract concept. Street (1993) contrasts what he terms the ideological model of literacy with the autonomous model that views literacy as a decontextualised skill.

2.2.1 The Autonomous model of literacy

Street (1993) describes the autonomous model of literacy as an approach which perceives literacy as a stand alone, distinctive and neutral skill that is universal across different contexts. One of the major assumptions of this model is that literacy has transformative powers to the poor and so called 'illiterate' people. It is believed once literacy is applied and taught universally it will enhance people's cognitive skills, improve their economic prospects and make them better citizens (Street 1993; Bloch 2005).

2.2.2 Critique of the autonomous model: The ideological model

Street (1993, 2002) developed the ideological model as a theoretical model, that helps us understand the power relations surrounding literacy practices that people engage in as they go about their daily lives. Dissatisfied with the autonomous model, Street (1984, 1993, 2002) and other New Literacy Studies researchers (Barton, 1994; Bloch, 2005; 2006; Brice- Heath, 1983; Gee, 2002; and Hornberger, 2003) argue for a socio-cultural view of literacy. As opposed to the view of literacy as a set of decontextualised skills learned only in school, they have come to view literacy as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society and to recognise the variety of cultural practices associated with reading and writing. Street (1993), Gee (1996) and Edwards (2009) criticise the autonomous model for disguising the cultural and ideological assumptions that underlie it and for taking no consideration of how people from various cultures view literacy, often privileging certain types of literacies and certain types of people. Edwards (2009) shows that in English speaking societies for example, schools tend to attach sole importance to literacy in English and to be ignorant about or dismissive of children's experiences in minority languages.

The NLS researchers accept that literacy varies from situation to situation and has various uses and functions in each situation. Gee (1996) also argues that there is no such thing as reading and writing only but rather reading and writing **something**. That is, what is being read or written will influence the kind of reading and writing that takes place.

Street (1993) argues though that most of the research on literacy has tended to focus on the literacy activities and output of the intellectual elite. He therefore argues for cross-cultural comparisons of literacies — exploring what people in non-elite communities think of literacy and how they apply it in their day to day lives. In the ideological view of literacy, people are perceived as using literacy in various ways depending on their social context. Following from this, there is thus no single literacy programme which can be applied to all, regardless of the social context in which people find themselves (Street, 2002; Hornberger, 2003).

Street (1993:9) and Hannon (2000) argue that literacy skills emerge in the meaningful contexts in which literacy is used and therefore, literacy is seen not as a discrete set of skills which one has or doesn't have but rather as a set of practices which one engages in and which involve different skills.

In describing literacy as a social practice, NLS researchers use the terms ‘literacy practices’ and ‘literacy events’ in their language of description. Literacy practices are defined by many scholars (Barton 1994; Gee 2002 and Street, 2002) as the range of activities that people engage in as they go about their daily lives in which they use the technologies of reading and writing. They are common practices or ways of using reading and writing regularly in particular situations like buying the newspaper regularly for example. Street (2002) and Barton (1994) also talk of literacy events. These describe daily instances or specific enactments of literacy practices like reading a story on a particular occasion.

The significance of literacy practices and literacy events for early childhood literacy learning is in the interaction between an adult and a child which can lead to understandings about both adult and children’s literacy learning. Therefore, the shift from literacy as an individual ability to literacy as social practice suggests that literacy learning, like all learning begins long before formal schooling.

2.3 Emergent literacy approaches

Emergent literacy approaches to understanding the development of literacy can be understood within a socio-cultural perspective. The emergent literacy perspective is a growing body of research into early childhood development. It is also one of the main contenders against the traditional skills based view of young children’s literacy development and it offers an alternative understanding of how children come to be literate from the previous reading-readiness approach (Crawford, 1995).

Sulzby and Teale (1991) argue that emergent literacy is a term derived in part from Clay’s 1966-1967’s influential research. Various known as roots of literacy (Goodman, 1984, 1986) or initial literacy, it is a new way of conceptualising early reading and writing development in the pre formal schooling period. It often refers to unconventional reading and writing behaviours that develop into the conventional reading and writing practices of formal schooling (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Bloch (1997), Clay (1972), Goodman (1986) and Hall (1987) outline some of the fundamental principles underpinning the emergent literacy perspective.

Firstly, in literate communities, literacy development is observed to begin with babies and toddlers as opposed to those starting formal school as is the view within the skills based methods (Bloch, 1997; Bloch and Edwards, 2003; Clay, 1972, 1991; Goodman, 1986; Hall 1987; Purcell-Gates, 1997 and Sulzby and Teale, 1991). Like all other learning, literacy learning starts in home and community settings. Children's development of literacy grows out of their experiences as well as the attitudes and values they encounter as they interact with social groups (Goodman, 1986).

Secondly, literacy involves language and like oral language development it is a social phenomenon concerned primarily with meaning making. It involves social interaction between children, parents and caregivers around literacy events and print. For literacy to emerge, Clay (1972, 1991) and Goodman (1984) argue that the role of the 'adult' in modelling literacy learning and print awareness is crucial. Children need to interact with adults (or more literate children) around print, with the adult being a reading and writing as well as an oral language role model for the child in order for the child to be shepherded to conventional uses of written language (Clay, 1991). Print rich or print saturated environments become stimuli for children to want to make sense of the print around them (Goodman, 1986; Hudelson, 1994) but this is not sufficient on its own without active engagement of both adults and children. Conditions that are there for oral language development, such as: a less stressful language environment; encouragement; interest and trust in children's capabilities to learn also play a very crucial role in children's literacy learning (Goodman, 1986).

Emergent literacy scholars (Clay, 1972; Goodman, 1982; Hall, 1987) believe that parents and caregivers seldom teach children explicitly but respond to the language needs of the children and participate in conversations with their children around the written word. They believe that literacy learning is not always explicit and systematic but usually happens without us even noticing. They also believe that children do not need to perform reading and writing readiness exercises and phonics exercises before they start learning to read and write. Literacy learning begins at any point when children experience written language as personally meaningful.

In emergent literacy therefore, literacy development is seen as emerging from children's oral language development and their invented words/unconventional attempts at reading (usually based on pictures and writing (at first scribbling) (Bloch, 1997; Clay, 1972; Rog, 2007; and Sulzby and Teale, 1991). Children's unconventional attempts at speaking, reading and writing are mediated by adults who are always interested in the child and what s/he does.

Furthermore, one of the important things about this perspective is that reading and writing, speaking and listening are seen as integrated parts of the whole where reading and writing skills develop simultaneously from early exposure to the literacy practices of family members just as listening and speaking are developed (Sulzby and Teale, 1991).

Cambourne (1995) summarises the issues I have discussed above into the kinds of learning requirements or conditions of learning children need in order to learn effectively. These conditions include immersion or exposure, demonstration, engagement, expectations, responsibility, approximations, opportunities to use reading, writing and oral language, and response from adult reading and writing role models.

One of the criticisms of this approach however, is that it usually describes literacy practices in print saturated environments and where parents are literate and see reading and writing practices as integral to the child's socio-cultural socialisation. In Africa where we have oral but print scarce environments, conducive environments and conditions for learning have to be created (Cambourne, 1995; Hannon, 2000; Bloch, 2006; Bloch, Guzula and Nkence, 2010). However, these attempts are often school based rather than home, family and community based. Sometimes, where family literacy projects are concerned, it is usually the school's conception of literacy that is imposed on parents and the children.

2.4 Approaches to teaching early literacy

Moving from the view of literacy as a social practice and from the understanding that children learn to read and write way before they get to school, I now describe two overarching pedagogical approaches to literacy teaching that have often been presented in a polarized fashion as phonics versus whole language. Here phonics signifies the narrow/instrumental view of literacy that focuses on the mechanics of reading such as

decoding the phonetic sounds, letters of the alphabet and accuracy in word recognition and pronunciation. Whole language takes a holistic view of literacy that focuses on meaningful reading of real, authentic texts and active engagement with texts that matter to the reader (Dombey, 2004). Disputes between proponents of the two different approaches are often regarded as ‘the reading wars’ (Ewing, 2006). These have been politicized in the North and in my view have for some time also affected pedagogy in South Africa.

2.4.1 The phonics approach

Traditionally literacy development was understood to consist of the learning of a set of skills before one could read and write (Adams, 1990; Gray et al 2007). Adams claimed that deep and thorough knowledge of letters, spelling patterns and words and the phonological translations of these are of inescapable importance to both skilful reading and its acquisition. Furthermore, the more children struggled to acquire the decoding skills, the more emphasis was put on explicit teaching of phonics (Gray et al, 2007:18) and the speed and accuracy of word recognition (Adams, 1990). This is what led to reading readiness programmes where children are not viewed as ready to learn to read until they know letters of the alphabet and phonics system devised for English (Edwards, 2009). Their method of teaching became known as a behaviourist, skills based method— a method which emphasized that learning should proceed from parts to whole (Edwards, 2009). Usually, the learning of these skills depends on the reading of basal readers that have been written specifically to teach the skills systematically (Flanagan, 1995).

Failure to recognise words and to learn the skills became associated with the individual. Learning is understood as an individual psychological process with little or nothing to do with human relationships. It is because of these understandings about learning that literacy came to be defined as the ability to read and write (Hudelson, 1994).

2.4.2 The whole language approach

The whole language perspective on literacy teaching and learning developed in the USA as part of the movement for inclusive pedagogy, a philosophy of curriculum and teaching which puts purposeful language use at the centre of learning (Goodman, 1986). It also became a

movement that challenged skills based teaching as a starting point for the teaching of literacy (Clay 1972; Goodman 1984; Goodman K, 1986, Hall, 1987).

The whole language approach can be aligned with the emergent literacy perspective which believes that literacy learning involves a process of social and personal invention (Goodman, 1986). It emphasizes that learning should proceed from whole to part; that lessons should be learner centred and that learners play an active role in the construction of knowledge; that lessons should have meaning and purpose right from the beginning of instruction rather than later and that oral and written language should be acquired simultaneously (Goodman, 1986; Freeman and Freeman, 1992; Bloch, 1997).

Proponents of the whole language approach (Goodman, K 1986; Goodman, 1984) criticise phonics approaches for ignoring children's prior knowledge and for using contrived and inauthentic texts. They argue that this holds children back from reading real books and encourages children to read words separately in a sentence. In contrast to this, literacy learning in whole language classrooms means introducing children straight away to real books and environmental print (Bloch, 1997; Clay, 1972; Goodman, 1986 and Hudelson, 1994). It is about letting children play with books to discover what books and written language are about (Flanagan, 1995). In this way, children acquire decoding skills incidentally through immersion in print rich environments. The significance of this approach is that it facilitates learning, depends less on packaged programmes and links learning to children's everyday lives.

However, critics of the whole language approach such as Adam (1990) and Gray et al (2007) argue that this approach to teaching literacy is unstructured and incidental. They argue that only systematic teaching of phonics yields better literacy results. Some South African scholars (Reeves et al, 2008) and those who have done research in other parts of Africa (Trudell and Schroeder, 2007) have also come out heavily criticising whole language approaches and socio-cultural approaches to literacy learning arguing that these approaches have been borrowed from the West where there are high levels of literacy and print saturated environments. They support explicit teaching of phonics particularly for African Language speakers, forgetting that the phonics approach also originated in the West and has had influence in South Africa as well. These claims have also been made by Reeves et al (2008),

despite the fact that whole language approaches have not been implemented in South African schools, by the department and teachers alike.

2.4.3 Balanced literacy approach

The fundamental challenge for those concerned with how children learn to read and write has been whether to approach reading with an emphasis on overall meaning, assuming that phonics will take care of itself or to emphasize learning of letter sound combinations first (Snow and Sweet, 2003, Dombey, 2004).

Balanced literacy approaches have been developed to overcome the polarization of whole language and phonics approaches, and to encourage use of a variety of teaching methods rather than focusing on one method, which may not be suitable for all children (Edwards, 2009). 'Balance' in literacy teaching is a philosophical perspective about what kinds of reading knowledge children should develop and how these kinds of knowledge can be attained (Fitzgerald, 1999). It is also about synthesizing the social context and skills development in literacy (Snow and Sweet, 2003)

Here, the reading process is seen as one of simultaneous, multilevel and interactive processing involving both meaning focused and decoding processes. It is therefore argued that the most successful teachers of literacy are those who give pride of place to a range of meaning making activities with whole texts that children find interesting and who also give explicit instruction in phonics (Dombey, 2004). The phonics teaching is however not decontextualized as children attend to the spelling of words in the context of using them for a meaningful purpose (Edwards, 2009).

Fitzgerald (1999) outlines three broad categories of knowledge within a balanced approach. First he argues that the balance is characterized by local knowledge about reading and this includes areas such as phonological awareness, sight words, knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and some orthographic patterns. Secondly, it is characterized by global knowledge that includes areas such as understanding, interpretation and response to reading as well as strategies for enabling understanding and response (i.e. comprehension strategies), and thirdly, affective knowledge or developing a love for reading, which includes feelings, positive attitude, motivation and the desire to read.

Both direct instruction in the form of explicit teaching of comprehension strategies (through explanations, modelled reading, shared reading and guided reading) and indirect instruction in the form of reading for enjoyment (independent reading), free writing and independent discoveries are valued components of balanced literacy (McLaughlin, 2003; Snow and Sweet, 2003, Wild, McArthur and Self, 2006). Such a balanced literacy curriculum initially acknowledges meaning-making involved in the full processes of reading and writing, while recognizing the importance of the role of language, strategies and skills used by professional readers and writers (Dombey, 2004:4). This is contrary to the view that comprehension or meaning making occurs effectively only after the decoding skills have been mastered (Pretorius, 2002).

Below I discuss some of the pedagogical strategies that have been applied in practice which characterize the balance from a holistic point of view.

2.5 Pedagogical approaches

One of the strategies adopted in 2001 by the WCED, was the Literacy Half Hour. It was envisaged that the Literacy Half Hour would heighten reading awareness in schools, allow learners the time to read for enjoyment and encourage teachers to expose learners to a wide range of different texts (WCED, 2001). In 2006, the WCED launched the Literacy and Numeracy strategy which further emphasized reading for enjoyment, meaningful writing as well as family and community literacy. The Foundations for Learning and the National Curriculum Statement further emphasized guided reading, comprehension strategies as well as phonics instruction.

Within the context of the WCED strategies for promoting reading, (Bloch, 2006, Bloch, Guzula and Nkence, 2010) the early literacy unit in which I am involved has taken the socio-cultural view and emergent literacy approaches even further by beginning to create conditions for people to use literacy as part of their daily lives. Below I refer briefly to literature which has informed some of the ‘unconventional’ strategies I use for encouraging and promoting meaningful reading and writing (which in my view, when used with teachers’ phonics approach lead to a balanced literacy instruction), i.e reading for enjoyment, interactive writing and comprehension strategies.

2.5.1 Reading for enjoyment as a strategy to improve the culture of reading

The ‘reading for enjoyment’ strategy which aims to improve children’s literacy development as well as to encourage positive attitudes to reading was informed by: Krashen’s (1993, 1999) insights on Free Voluntary Reading (FVR); studies on creating a culture of reading (Graham, 1999; Fernwick, 1999); studies on book-floods (Elley and Mangubhai, 1983); literature based curriculum programmes (Morrow, 1999; Nicholson, 2006) as well as studies on the literacy development of second language children (Elley, 1991; Hudelson, 1994). Krashen (1993) explains free reading as when:

... individuals read because they want to. It is about putting down a book one doesn’t like and choosing another one instead. (Krashen 1993:x)

Despite the fact that this aspect of teaching reading, variously known as “extensive reading,” “voluntary reading,” “reading for pleasure,” “reading for enjoyment,” “free reading,” and “leisure reading”, is widely known and acknowledged as valuable, it is often ignored in formal education or merely tolerated as supplementary (Joseph & Ramani, 2002). For example, it has been shown to have positive impact on language skills, such as vocabulary development, spelling and knowledge of grammar. Moreover, research into ‘bookflood’ projects, where learning is taking place in multilingual environments with the ideal of promoting additional languages (Elley, 1991), suggests that there is a strong connection between story reading in the target language and effective language learning in the target language.

2.5.2 Interactive writing as a strategy to motivate and inspire children to write

Interactive writing is one of the strategies claimed to inspire children to write (Hall, 1999, Redfern and Edwards, 1997). Redfern and Edwards (1997) argue that interactive writing changes perceptions about writing, so that writing is understood as communicating for real reasons rather than about perfecting handwriting, spelling and punctuation only. Because letters and dialogue journals are based on a genuine desire to communicate, they act as catalysts for writing. They offer children opportunities to write for real audiences, to talk about their experiences and to understand that writing uses language and can be used as a powerful tool for communication. Dialogue journal writing and letter writing (i.e private

communication between two consenting readers) are some of the interactive writing strategies I have tried out to encourage meaningful communication.

2.5.3 Guided comprehension as a strategy to improve children's comprehension

Comprehension involves more than teachers setting questions for learners to answer after reading a text. Cunningham and Allington (1999), Snow (2003) and McLaughlin (2003) argue that guided reading/ comprehension is about helping children to think as they read, thus developing strategies they can use to solve problems they encounter. The teacher explicitly models for children the processes to follow such as making connections, making predictions, activating prior knowledge, asking questions, making inferences and drawing conclusions. Learners are also taught strategies such as “seeing it in your mind,” self monitoring and self-correction, rereading, pictures as cues, asking for help when you cannot make sense of what you read as well as determining the most important events and seeing how they are related to name a few.

In the section above I have reviewed literature on literacy approaches. The next section reviews literature on reflective practice as my intervention focused on developing both the teachers' literacy understandings as well as her ability to reflect on her practice.

PART TWO

2.6 Reflective Practice

Working within the field of teacher professional development, Brooks and Sikes (1997), Dornbrack (2008) and Postholm (2007) trace reflective practice back to Dewey (1933) and Schon's (1983) understanding of reflection as purposeful thought about one's actions and their consequences. Dornbrack (2008) describes Dewey's notion of reflective practice as a process that occurs when a person deliberately and consciously engages in thinking about a specific problem with the intention of solving the problem or improving the situation identified. Postholm (2008) argues that reflection exceeds what has already been thought about ideas and actions—it is to think of something in a new way or to see things from alternative angles pointing the way to development. Dornbrack (2008) argues that this kind of

deliberate and purposeful reflection requires active and persistent consideration of a problem, the context in which it occurs as well as the consequences that might emerge from it.

Schon developed Dewey's (1933) notion of reflective practice by making a distinction between "reflecting- on action" and "reflecting- in- action" (in Dornbrack 2008: 49; Brooks and Sikes, 1997:21, Postholm, 2007). Reflection on action can occur before or after an action. Reflecting before includes planning and thought about one's teaching whereas reflecting after action includes the conscious thinking about the action, usually with the intention of making improvements (Dornbrack, 2008, Brooks and Sikes, 1997). It also refers to recalling, explaining and evaluating after a lesson (Adler et al, 2002). Reflection- in- action on the other hand, refers to 'on -the -spot' thinking while in class (Dornbrack, 2008:50), what according to Reed et al (2002:121) is Russell and Munby's notion of 'hearing differently' or 'seeing differently'.

Reflective practice requires that the teacher pay attention to daily routine and the events of a regular day to reflect on their meaning and effectiveness. Major assumptions of this practice include the teacher's commitment to serve the interests of students by reflecting on their well being and on aspects that are beneficial to them; a professional obligation to review one's practice in order to improve the quality of one's teaching and a professional obligation to continue improving one's practical knowledge (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

Villegas-Reimers (2003) and Reed et al (2002) describe the attributes of a reflective teacher drawing on Schon as well as Zeichner and Liston's model which explains that a teacher is reflective when he or she examines or is curious about or intrigued by some aspect of the practice setting; frames that aspect in terms of the particulars of the setting; reframes that aspect in the light of past knowledge or previous experience and attempts to solve a dilemma if ever identified and develops a plan for the future. Other attributes of a reflective teacher include that a teacher is reflective when s/he takes responsibility for his/her own professional development, takes part in curriculum development, reflects in action by suggesting alternatives and reflects on action thus planning forward (Reed et al, 2002). Reed et al (2002) argue that a teacher who does not reflect on action is likely to end up teaching in a fragmented way with different topics following one another in an unconnected fashion, and with no development from the previous lesson. A reflective teacher also reflects on aspects

that attend to learners' needs or that are beneficial to learners and improve the teacher's area specific content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge.

There seems to be agreement among scholars that reflection is a 'must' in the professional development of teachers (Villegas-Reimers, 2003; DoE, 2007; Pluddemann and Jabe, 2009 and Postholm, 2008). In fact, it can be argued that learning to teach involves learning to reflect on one's teaching in a systematic way. There is also an acknowledgement that teacher's professional development and learning is on-going, with reflection integral to their on-going learning (Atay, 2007).

According to Jay and Johnson (2002:76), Villegas-Reimers (2003) and Dornbrack (2008), teachers might focus their thinking on particular things as they reflect. Zeichner and Liston (2006 in Dornbrack, 2008) described these foci in terms of the four 'traditions' of reflective thinking. These include an academic tradition that focuses on presentation of subject matter to students in order to promote understanding; the social efficiency tradition that focuses on intelligent use of generic strategies proposed as a result of research undertaken in teaching; the developmental tradition that focuses on the process of learning, development and understanding of the students, and the social reconstructionist tradition that focuses on issues of equality and justice and the social conditions of schooling.

Dornbrack (2008) argues that in the social reconstructionist tradition, reflection involves the examination of one's own practice in terms of how it may knowingly or unknowingly reproduce unjust relations. English (2001) argues that the central question here is about how educators can become thoughtful, critically reflective educators who raise ethical questions regarding decision making relating to practice. She points out that no code can make us ethical or reflective but asking ethical questions moves educators towards the basic human orientation to good. Therefore, each of these traditions can guide what teachers think about as they reflect.

As teachers reflect in the different traditions, three forms of reflection should be encouraged (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Firstly, technical reflection, which refers to considering the curriculum and adjusting teaching according to the situation presented at a particular time, describes the matter of reflection in terms of what is happening and what should happen. Secondly, practical reflection concerns teachers' thinking and deliberating about the means

and purposes of particular lessons, thus thinking about ways of improving what is not working and if there's a goal, looking at other ways of accomplishing it. And thirdly, in critical reflection, teachers raise issues related to moral and ethical situations. Here the teacher also looks at the implications of the matter, looking at the deeper meaning of what is happening. In the analysis of data, I will use these categories. I will link the academic tradition with technical reflection as these seem related. Secondly, the social efficacy tradition will be linked with practical reflection and thirdly social reconstructionist tradition is linked with critical reflection. The developmental tradition does not link with any particular form of reflection. Therefore, I analyse for all the levels of reflection in this tradition.

2.6.1 In-service training programmes

Villegas-Reimers (2003) conducted an international review of teacher professional development and argues that the meaning of in-service education changes and varies from country to country. For most developed countries, it includes

Those education and training activities engaged in by primary and secondary school teachers and principals, following their initial professional certification and intended to improve their professional knowledge and skills in order for them to educate children more effectively. In most developing nations, however, in-service education might be the only preparation teachers receive since they are often hired without being qualified, (Villegas-Reimers, 2003:12).

In South Africa, in-service education is one of strategies of departments of education to develop teachers professionally, particularly teachers who received impoverished pre-service teacher education provided under Bantu Education during apartheid as well as teachers from poorly performing schools. Teacher professional development thus includes both teachers who already possess teaching qualifications of some sort and those not yet qualified. At one end of the spectrum, it is the form of education that takes place wholly away from the school, possibly in some specifically designed training environment and on the other end it is site based in the form of teacher support in schools.

Although in-service training programmes are recognised as one form of teacher professional development, they have been criticised by McNiff (2002) and Villegas Reimers (2003) for working from the point of view of the person delivering them, with emphasis placed on teaching and training rather than on learning. McNiff (2002) argues that the trainer usually knows all the answers and passes them on to teachers, then supervises the teachers to make

sure that they apply them correctly. Other criticisms of in-service training programmes have been summarised by Villegas-Reimers (2003) and include the fact that the content of in-service courses does not always cater for the needs of teachers; teachers do not often have a systematic way of communicating with administrators in charge of developing courses; educators in charge of in-service training are often poorly prepared and courses tend to be theory oriented and do not address practical concerns; courses are also offered at locations difficult to reach, particularly by those teachers who need the courses the most. South African teachers have reported not having enough in-service training, as well as lack of follow up sessions and regular onsite-visits by curriculum specialists (Reeves et al, 2008).

In contrast to the short term in-service training model, teacher professional development can be seen as a long term process that includes opportunities and experiences planned systematically to promote growth and development in the profession (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The need to improve educational practice in literacy has given rise to an evolving, growing and unstable alternative to workshop-style in-service training in the form of literacy mentoring/coaching onsite (Casey, 2006). With regards to literacy training, Casey (2006) argues that the basic role of the literacy coach has evolved as a way to provide job-embedded, context specific, on-going support to teachers and students.

Literacy coaches help design and facilitate professional development sessions tailored to address issues facing teachers. They work alongside teachers in classrooms, demonstrating instructional strategies and guiding teachers as they try out strategies. They evaluate teachers' literacy needs and collaborate with teachers to design lessons and meet those needs. In Casey's (2006) view, in order to improve the quality of teaching, the process of reflection must be embedded in practice so that we reflect after each lesson on the evidence of student learning to decide what students need. In this way, literacy coaches become reflective coaches at the same time, assisting teachers with their acquisition of content and pedagogical knowledge, while at the same time, assisting them in becoming reflective teachers.

2.7 Evidence of take up of reflective practice

Adler and Reed (2002) use the term ‘take-up’ to refer to the internalisation and externalisation of the academic subject taught as well as the use of the pedagogical strategies demonstrated in a way that shows that such knowledge and strategies have become part of the teacher’s repertoire and habits.

Evidence of the take up of reflective practice might be observed first by looking at the content of reflection i.e, the four traditions of reflection developed by Zeichner and Liston (2006). Secondly, aligned with a specific tradition, teachers have to be able to describe what they are reflecting upon (technical), consider practical implications of the matter (practical reflection) and finally apply critical reflection to their perspective on the matter, thus looking at the social, moral and political aspects of schooling. I use technical, practical and critical reflection as categories for analysis of the teacher’s take up of the reflective practice.

In their study of South African teacher’s take up of reflective practice in under-resourced multilingual contexts Reed et al (2002) investigated what counts as evidence of the reflective practices of teachers and the factors that enabled and constrained the development of reflective capability of the teachers in their study. They used attributes of a reflective teacher as inspired by Schon, Zeichner and Liston’s model of a reflective teacher as discussed earlier. They also attempted to align teacher’s reflections with the forms of reflection and highlighted the difficulties of distinguishing between technical and reflective responses of teachers (Reed et al 2002:124).

Adler et al (2002) show that there is no easy correlation between teacher development programmes in South Africa and improved teaching and learning in the classroom (see also Bertram, 2003). They grapple with the issue of what counts as evidence of reflective practices of teachers and suggest that patterns of reflective or unreflective practice can be explained with reference to a teacher’s English language proficiency, their subject, pedagogical and educational knowledge, their attitudes and working context (Bertram, 2003). The most important finding in their study is that improving teacher’s conceptual knowledge alone will not necessarily lead to improved teaching and learning.

2.8 Constraining factors

Firstly, Reed et al (2002) argue that the discourse on reflective practice has been produced and used predominantly in ‘developed’ countries in which educational resources are readily available, where teachers deal with fewer learners in class and where they might have more homogeneous classrooms than what South African teachers experience. Secondly, they argue that South African teachers tend to follow the syllabus very strictly even if what is in the curriculum is fragmented. This leaves no room for reflection (Adler and Reed, 2002:127) in the form of planning and on whether the syllabus works for their context.

Furthermore, reflective practice is time consuming and teachers might lack the time for reflection (Dornbrack, 2008). In South Africa, teachers grapple with ‘policy overload’ and huge administrative burdens associated with the National Curriculum Statement (Pluddemann and Jabe, 2009). Other barriers to reflection include the fact that teachers might experience the fear of discovering uncomfortable things about themselves; they might also be resistant to change. Reed et al (2002) also highlight the fact that when teachers are expected to reflect both orally and in writing in an additional language, they might experience difficulties in expressing themselves.

Reed et al (2002) therefore argue that take up of reflective practice differs across contexts and that programmes for teacher professional development need to be tailor-made. They also argue that residential or on-site modelling sessions where lecturers and trainers model good practices work better than when in-service training is conducted away from school. In-service training also works far better when the teacher coaches engage in reflective coaching where they reflect together with the teachers, thus modelling, guiding and supporting teachers in reflection (Brooks and Sikes, 1997).

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter looked firstly at literacy defined within a socio-cultural and emergent literacy paradigm versus literacy as autonomous skills based process. It discussed whole language as a pedagogical approach that can be aligned with both literacy as social practice and emergent literacy principles. It showed that skills based phonics approaches can be aligned with the autonomous model of literacy. I take the stance that successful literacy teaching involves a balanced approach which prioritises meaning making while recognising the importance of the explicit teaching of language and skills in context. Pedagogically I advocate the use of indirect teaching strategies to promote a culture of reading and writing, i.e. reading for enjoyment and interactive writing. I also advocate direct teaching strategies, i.e. modelling comprehension strategies and the writing process and encouraging teachers to build their language teaching activities i.e. grammar and phonics into the context of a story.

Secondly, this chapter has reviewed literature on reflective practice arguing that reflection is an integral aspect of teacher professional development. I advocate dialogue/interactive journal writing as a strategy to encourage reflection. Having discussed the literacy approaches I have coached teachers in and encouraged reflection on, I now turn to the methodology chapter, where I explain how and why data for this study was collected.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter first describes the research methodology employed in the study. Secondly, it describes the teacher's approach to literacy prior to my intervention. Thirdly, it clarifies my role as mentor and coach at Sibulele¹ Primary School as well as the pedagogical approaches and strategies for teaching literacy that I have taught teachers in workshops, in their classrooms and through our interactive journal writing.

3.2 Case Study and Action Research methodology

This study combines the methodologies of case-study and action research. Firstly, it is a case study of one Grade Two teacher's take up of the discourses of a particular literacy pedagogy, as well as of reflective practice, as evidenced through her use of an interactive reflective journal. A case-study is particularly appropriate to this research because, as Knobel and Lankshear (1999:96) point out, it involves the in-depth study of a phenomenon in a real life context, and usually focuses on one instance of the phenomenon. Knobel and Lankshear, (1999:96) point out that "[a] chief purpose of a case study is to *better understand* a phenomenon." In this study, my case focuses on ascertaining whether and how one Grade two teacher's practice developed as a result of keeping an interactive reflective journal during the process of on-site coaching. I am thus concerned with developing a deep understanding of the teacher's process of take up and its potential impact on her teaching practices.

Secondly, this study applies action research methodology, though it does not claim to be a full action research project. It was conducted over a period of almost a year from the 12th of May 2009 to the 6th of May 2010, within a broader longitudinal study called The Three Rs Project, a three year onsite intervention in schools. The sub-project within which this study is located is called Creating Literate School Communities.

¹ This is not the school's real name but a pseudonym given to protect the identity of the school.

In carrying out action research, I draw on the work of McNiff (2002), Kemmis (1993) and McKinney (2005) who argue that action research involves a cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflection aimed at improving the teacher's practice and understanding. As a reflective coach/mentor at Sibulele Primary School, I have been helping teachers to try out different approaches to teaching literacy and reflecting on them in order to improve their practice. This project further engages me in reflecting on my own practice as a coach or mentor.

Although the study did not expect the foundation phase teachers to be action researchers, I applied some of the stages in the cycle of action research, for example, I and the foundation phase teachers identified poor performance in literacy as a problem amongst children, and we planned how we were going to try and improve the problem by studying our own teaching methods. We studied the WCED's literacy half hour strategy (2001); literacy and numeracy strategy (2006) and subsequently the foundations for learning literacy strategy (2008). The teachers and myself took particular decisions about how we were going to implement the plan, by implementing the literacy half hour strategy, getting teachers and children to read storybooks daily and getting children to write in sentences from the outset. We observed how children were doing and reflected on our strategies. For example, we wanted children to have one on one attention and introduced paired reading with more knowledgeable readers, so we brought in Grade Four children to read with the grade twos. We also decided on writing a journal weekly as it was time consuming to respond to all of the children's journals. I assisted the teachers in becoming reflective practitioners in various ways, including through using interactive journal writing, as reflective practice is not synonymous with action research (McKinney, 2005). I decided to use interactive journal writing as a key tool to model and develop reflective practice and to monitor teachers' take up of both literacy approaches and reflective practice.

3.3 Research Site

The study was conducted at Sibulele Primary School, one of the 16 pilot schools of the WCED's project for Mother Tongue Based Bilingual Education. Sibulele Primary School is located in Site B, a working class informal settlement with a poor community within one of the big sprawling townships on the outskirts of Cape Town, called Khayelitsha.

The school takes children up to Grade Nine and accommodates a total of 800 learners. There are 28 children in each of the two grade 1 classes so numbers are relatively low compared to many schools but some classes in the intermediate and senior phases have up to 56 children. Sibulele Primary School was built in 1989 at the same time as three other primary schools in a row in one street.

Until recently the school followed a typical subtractive bilingual/early exit approach with teaching and assessment being done through Xhosa up to Grade 3 after which English was used for all reading and writing tasks and assessment, after being introduced orally in Grade 3. Although the school is relatively well managed compared to the neighbouring schools and has been teaching literacy in the mother-tongue in the foundation phase, it has not achieved particularly well in systemic evaluations of both Grade 3 and 6 classes. Having recognised literacy results and literacy teaching as a problem amongst other concerns, the school welcomes support from several NGO's.

3.4 Participants

Bulelwa², the focus teacher in the study, teaches Grade Two. In 2009 she taught Grade 1 but showed little interest in the work I was doing with the other Grade 1 teacher, Nellie. In 2009, there was only one Grade 1 class and Bulelwa was moved up to Grade Two after the Grade Two teacher left the school. She was not the only teacher I worked with because the project was longitudinal.

In 2009 she completed a course on barriers to learning at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. She had received a pre-primary school qualification at Goodhope Training College in 1989. She has twenty years of teaching experience of which sixteen have been

² Names of the teachers are also pseudonyms

spent in the foundation phase. She was described by one of the teachers as a teacher who is passionate about Xhosa as a language and also passionate about writing.

Though the focus of the intervention was in Bulelwa's class, with regards to coaching or mentoring and demonstrations, all the teachers in the foundation phase (four) were involved in the workshops, group discussions, meetings, some demonstration lessons and journal writing.

3.5 Typical teaching methods of the participant

The National Curriculum Statement and literacy strategies proposed by both the National and the Western Cape Education Department have accepted that teaching needs to build on children's prior knowledge and that children should participate in constructing their own knowledge in the process of learning. However, the extract below from our initial observations of Bulelwa's teaching methods at the start of the project (2007) show that this was not necessarily the case in her class and this was typical of all the foundation phase classrooms that we observed. Rather, teaching seemed to be based exclusively on the direct phonics teaching method. The activity included children retrieving their knowledge of vowels, for example, how many vowels there are. In a further activity, children whose names start with a particular vowel were asked to stand up. Children were also asked to match vowels with consonants:

³*Bulelwa :Zingaphi izikhamiso zethu / How many vowels do we have?*

*Learners: (in unison) **twenty five (English)***

Bulelwa: Hayi / No.

Learners: ziyifive/They are five.

Bulelwa: Abantu abanesikhamiso esingu a (ah) mabaphakame/learners with vowel 'a' must stand up.

[Only a few children stood up.]

Teacher: Abantwana abanamagama aqala ngesikhamiso u-a mabaphakame/ Children with names beginning with vowel a must stand up.

³ The original transcription is in italics font, while my English translation is in bold italics.

[Some of the children stood up (the ones with names beginning with a). The teacher also asked children with names beginning with E to stand up and then followed up with whose names began with vowels i, o and u.]

This kind of teaching happened systematically with reading and writing following a particular sequence of skills from parts to the whole (vowels, word building, and single consonants, double consonants to triple consonants, the word, the sentence, paragraph and finally the page).

Bulelwa captures this in her journal entry:

...As the time goes on, I forgot completely about other methods and focussed on the phonics method because in those years, it looked like it was working because children came from Grade R and did school readiness programme for three months. My classroom was full of phonics in this way:

<i>a, e, i, o, u,</i>	<i>M</i>
<i>A, E, I, O, U,</i>	<i>ma me mi mo mu</i>
<i>i, e, a, u, o</i>	<i>Umama umeme umimi</i>
<i>S:</i>	<i>V:</i>
<i>so sa si se su</i>	<i>vi va vo ve vu</i>

I did everything in this sequence until I finished all the sounds of the alphabet. Children began writing in sentences in the third quarter and even then they wrote easy sentences like usana lulele (baby is sleeping); umama umeme umimi (mom invited mimi). (Bulelwa, 08 September 2010)⁴

Furthermore, most wall charts in the foundation phase classrooms were phonics centred. Xhosa charts tended to be more phonics based than English charts. Generally, except for the charts, classrooms seemed to lack connected print in the form of sentences in stories, news, rhymes and songs. English charts seemed to be of a better quality compared with those that were written in Xhosa. There was little effort spent on making good quality Xhosa materials.

⁴ Although this journal entry comes a long way after the cut off date for this study, I found it very useful in illustrating my point about the phonics approach the teachers are using and that the bigger research in which this study is located is still ongoing. I chose May 2009 as the starting date and May 2010 as an end date because Bukelwa only started teaching Grade Two in May after the Grade Two teacher I was working with left the school. We were expected to support each teacher at least for a year before moving on to the next teacher. However, the larger project predated and continued beyond the cut off date.

Teachers tended to use print from previous years that was often worn out and contained spelling errors. Most teachers' hand written print was particularly of poor quality and there was no children's work displayed in some classes. Available books and other learning materials were mostly graded language books that were usually phonics based — teaching certain sounds and letters. Xhosa readers were very old, with some published in the 1960s with the English selection larger than mother tongue books, even though teaching happens in the mother tongue in Foundation phase classrooms.

3.6 Mapping out the Intervention: mentoring and coaching teachers to improve their literacy approaches

During the period October 2007- June 2010 I was involved in an intervention at Sibulele Primary School designed to assist the school in implementing its language policy as well as to improve teachers' approaches to teaching literacy and methodologies in the mother tongue in particular. I took a balanced approach to literacy where emergent literacy principles and whole language approaches were fore-grounded and explicit teaching of phonics was embedded within meaningful activities. My role as a literacy coach and mentor was to carry out on-going classroom observations, giving advice and suggestions aimed at improving teachers' literacy approaches and methods. Initial classroom observations on current teacher practices were followed up by demonstration lessons designed to model alternative teaching methods. These were followed by oral debriefing sessions after the demonstrations and journal writing. Two initial advocacy workshops on implementing Mother-Tongue Based Bilingual Education systematically, using appropriate teaching methods were followed by teacher professional development activities as outlined in the table below:.

3.6.1 Professional Development Activities that Sibulele Primary School teachers were offered from 2008-2010

Workshop	Date	Demonstration lessons	Date
Environments for literacy			
Print environments	2008	Ongoing	2008-2010
		Creating and organising reading and writing corners	2008-2010
Reading for enjoyment strategies			
Reading for Enjoyment strategies (reading aloud, shared reading, storytelling, paired reading, silent reading, languages games, rhymes and songs)	2008	On-going with every visit	2008-2010
Reading aloud and shared reading	June 2009 (Ronnie Snitcher-Sea Point Library)	Shared Reading and reading aloud Xolisa	March 2009
Storytelling	June 2009 (Ronnie Snitcher-Sea Point 2009)	Lisa from Earth child (Foundation Phase & Intermediate Phase), Xoli (Foundation Phase) Xolisa (Intermediate Phase)	June 2009 23 July 2009
Paired Reading		Xolisa	28 July 2009
Interactive writing			
Journal writing		Ongoing from	March 2009- December 2010

Letter writing		On-going	August 2009- December 2010
Genre based approaches			
Poetry		Acrostic Poem Xolisa	23 July 2009
Recount Genre		Frame	September 2009
Narrative Genre		Story Elements	15 October 2009
English First Additional language			
English 1 st Additional language		Using a rhyme (I am a little teapot), and story books, 'I love My Mum', 'Root a toot toot'	2009-2010
English 1 st Additional Language	27 July 2009	Storybook (Hic hic hiccups, greetings, prayer) Xolisa	23 July 2009
Materials Development			
Materials Development	30 August 2009	Making a recount book based on Heritage week's events at the school. Using shared writing strategy to help children to make books	September 2009
Emergent Literacy			
Emergent Literacy	13 October 2009	On-going discussions and demonstrations with children's journal and letter writing.	2008-2010

Comprehension Strategies			
Comprehension strategies	May 2010	Predictions	14 October 2009
		Summary	13 August 2009
		Summary	14 April 2010
		Questioning	05 May 2010
		Making connections	13 May 2010
		Shared Reading and Shared writing	13 May 2010
School library			
Creating a school library and Model use of library through block loans and timetabling for the whole school		Ongoing.	2008-2009
Interactive writing (Journal and letter writing) as a strategy to motivate children to write for real reasons. Journals were written once a week by children and teachers answered back and opportunities were created to get children to write letters)		On-going	2008-2010

Table 1: Professional development activities teachers were exposed to.

3.7 Method of data collection

I have used the interactive reflective journal as a reflective tool and qualitative data collection method focussing on the development of Bulelwa's understandings about how children learn to be literate as well as her application of these understandings. Because this case-study included coaching and mentoring I aimed to influence Bulelwa's understandings through my own beliefs, explanations and explicit teaching through the journal.

3.7.1 The journal writing process

The introduction of learner interactive journals at the school and my explanation of interactive journal and letter writing in my entry in our journal soon thereafter provided a model for the teacher's journal. Bulelwa observed me as I communicated with children for real reasons in their own journals, without judging them on their language use and grammar. I stressed the importance of responding regularly to children's journals as one of the principles of journal writing (Hall, 1999). I responded promptly and wrote often in both learner journals and the teacher journal as a way of modelling for Bulelwa the importance of keeping regular contact with the children. In our journal I also developed strategies for raising ethical issues, self-evaluation and asking questions (which I will explain in more detail in chapter five on the uptake of reflective practice) to model reflective practice. Stevens et al (2010) showed that role modelling is a very powerful practice.

One of the positive contributing factors to the writing of the journal is that we wrote in Xhosa, Bulelwa's mother tongue, except for a few occasions where we wrote in English. The advantage for writing in Xhosa was that Bulelwa could express herself confidently. Secondly, I believe that good communication happens better in the languages that individuals know best and by using the home language for teacher training we are carrying out best educational practice (Alexander, 2002). The other advantage of using both Xhosa and English was for us to develop understanding and terminology in both languages. Because Xhosa was not used for academic purposes in pre-service teacher training, teachers might only understand some terminology in English. However, the other underlying purpose for using Xhosa in the journal was to raise the status of Xhosa through its use in high status functions including teacher training and academic terminology. For the latter we used strategies such as borrowing, coining new terms and transliteration.

I raised ethical issues, evaluated my beliefs and asked questions as a way of prompting reflection.

We tried to write the journal every alternate week but we had to be flexible with it as there were many personal and school related activities competing for Bulelwa's time. Journal writing often took more than an hour to read and respond to given that we also had children's personal journals to respond to as well. Therefore we had to be flexible about how often the

journal was returned. By the 6th of May 2009 I had written thirteen entries and Bulelwa had written fourteen entries.

Even though in 2010 I did not work formally with Bulelwa, I still visited her class to see what she was doing and to steal moments. We continue to write the journal and steal moments to share our professional knowledge.

3.8 Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, I analyse evidence of Bulelwa's take up of literacy approaches, methods and strategies or lack thereof through her use of disciplinary specific discourse in the journal. I have used a form of discourse analysis as analytical tool (cf Zubair, 1999) to identify Bulelwa's use of the disciplinary specific discourses (Gee, 1996) of emergent literacy, whole language and balanced approaches to teaching reading and writing. This discourse has also been discussed in the literature review.

Secondly, in the analysis of Bulelwa's take up of reflective practice, I first identify the strategies I have used to prompt reflection. I then analyse what Bulelwa's reflection is focussed on and use categories drawn from the literature on reflective practice as tools for analysis. The categories used are technical reflection (which refers to the technical aspects of teaching –considering the curriculum and adjusting teaching according to the situation presented at a particular time), practical reflection (where teachers think about the means and purposes of particular lessons and assumptions underlying classroom practices) and critical reflection (where teachers raise issues related to moral and ethical issues) (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

3.9 Ethical considerations

The research proposal for this project was submitted to the university's ethics committee which then approved the research. The data was collected as part of a larger research initiative and permission was granted in advance by the funder of PRAESA to individual researchers allowing them to use such data for individual studies. In addition to this, I asked for permission directly from the grade two teacher to use our interactive journal data and

interviews for the purposes of this study. This was done through a consent form submitted to the University of Cape Town as a requirement for me to embark on this study.

I encouraged Bulelwa to ask questions at any time about the nature of the study and the methods that I was using. I also guaranteed to her that neither her name nor that of her school would be used at any point in the written report; and that pseudonyms would be used instead. She understood that her participation in the research was voluntary and that she had the right to withdraw at any point of the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. To honour the privacy of our journal entries, we did not share contents of the journal with anyone other than ourselves.

Regarding the validity of the study, Merriam (in Stevens, et al, 2010) has shown that personal documents are a reliable source of data concerning a person's attitudes, beliefs and the view of the world. However, the material is highly subjective as we were the only ones who chose what we wanted to write about. The data we collected in our journal could be considered personal and therefore I offer my interpretation and reflection on what the journal entries meant to us.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the broader project in which this study is located. I have outlined the teacher's approach to literacy teaching prior to the intervention as well as the kind of intervention we implemented in the school. Furthermore, I have offered a rationale for using interactive journal writing as a tool for data collection and explained how I analysed the data in relation to my research questions. In the next two chapters, I turn to the analysis of Bulelwa's take up of literacy approaches and take up of the reflective practice I modelled to her based on the categories I have described above.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF TAKE UP OF LITERACY APPROACHES

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I begin by identifying the strategies I used to encourage interaction and reflection through the journal. Secondly, I analyse evidence of the take up of literacy approaches and strategies modelled for the teacher and finally, I analyse evidence of the lack of take up of these strategies. I identify and analyse the teacher's use of discourses of emergent literacy, whole language and balanced approaches as evidence of the take up of literacy approaches demonstrated to the teacher.

4.2 Analysis of the strategies I used to motivate and encourage interaction through the journal

In order to analyse Bulelwa's take up of the literacy approaches demonstrated I needed to identify the strategies I used to encourage interaction and reflection through the journal. Therefore, I begin by analysing my own strategies after reading the journal entries as part of my own reflection on my practice.

Considering that South African teachers in general are swamped with administrative overload, as well as teaching responsibilities (Dornbrack, 2008; Pluddemann and Jabe, 2009), I realised that it was going to be a tough call to get teachers to write and that they were unlikely to write as regularly as I would like them to. The process of analysis has enabled me to investigate the strategies I used to encourage interaction and reflection through the journal as well as their effects. I identified the following strategies: free writing and prompt responses; encouraging and praising; explicit teaching and linking information to the teacher's planning documents.

4.2.1 Modelling journal writing

Because journal writing is an unfamiliar genre to the teachers, they often found it difficult to write journal entries. Dornbrack (2008:78) shows in her study of professional development that when teachers were given journals to write, they simply gave summaries of the academic readings they were given without adding any personal comments. Similarly, in my study some teachers often gave me point form notes of what my demonstration was about without reflecting on it. The teachers simply praised me on how well I taught the lesson, without really getting to the bottom of why the lesson worked, what I could improve, how they would have taught it, and whether it suited their contexts and so on.

I tried to encourage every teacher I worked with to reflect through the journal. Together with the teachers, we then discussed how journal reflection is a developmental process where teacher educators or teachers reflect on the process of their understanding about how to do things, what problems they encounter and how they could solve them. Moreover, because there is not enough time during school hours to have debriefings at short break (10 minutes) or long break (20 minutes) the teachers agreed with me that we should use interactive journals as a tool for keeping in communication and exchanging ideas outside of school time. We also discussed how journal writing gives us space and opportunities to build on the knowledge we share while trying to improve our reading and writing strategies for the classroom.

So the more I wrote freely in the journals, the more Bulelwa started to imitate my free writing style, a strategy used by Reed (1993) to use the journal to communicate rather than for essay writing. I communicated about strategies for teaching literacy, my thoughts, suggestions and advice as well as my personal evaluations of things both inside and outside the classroom. Below is an example of my model of journal writing for Bukelwa and her replication thereof:

I would suggest that we use the radio or CD player early in the morning when we teach the children new songs and rhymes. Music calms them down and gets them ready to start the day. When we teach new rhymes and songs, we could have these written up in cards and get the children to read as they sing along with the cd. Remember that in some churches that use hymn books, children learn to read by reading the lyrics as they sing. At least this is how I learned to read myself. (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 26 May 2009)

I have learned that singing songs makes the children calm and ready for the story to be told. (Bulelwa, 26 May 2009)

My interaction with Bulelwa as seen from the entries above shows that the relationship between the mentor and the mentee needs to be built on trust. My use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' showed that I was not distancing myself from classroom practice but rather that we were together in this. I was not there to judge her but was rather there for us to share our experiences and knowledge. However, although I was writing more regularly, the journal took a long time to be returned to me by the teacher.

4.2.2 Encouraging and Praising

Villegas-Reimers (2003) criticises the traditional approach to teacher development where administrators enter classrooms to conduct an inspectional process, either taking notes or checking according to a list of criteria whether the teacher is achieving all the necessary requirements and then leave again without giving any feedback to the teachers. She argues that the effect of these evaluations on teachers' professional development has been negative, as they offer no support to the teacher who is evaluated. She also argues that these evaluations focus only on classroom practice and show nothing about the teacher's preparation, planning, thinking processes, interests and motivation. As a result teachers can develop resentment and negative feelings and attitudes towards being observed.

In order to motivate teachers to accept the new approaches and methods I was suggesting, I praised their attempts, however small they were and encouraged them. On one occasion, when teacher trainers from Rhodes University and teachers from Sosebenza Primary in the Eastern Cape visited the school, Bulelwa had already taken up reading aloud to the learners and had arranged paired reading with the Grade 4s. I told her what the visitors had said about observing these practices in her class in the following journal entry:

They were very impressed by the fact that our Grade Two children can read and write and want to write in English as well. They think that we are doing great work. In whatever challenges we face, let us remember how important this is for our children and how important for you to do this because in no time you will be teaching others. Other schools can learn from you. You could be tomorrow's literacy facilitators. You

can never know. Keep up the good work and please don't get tired of writing to me. I am here to help. (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 17 August 2009)

Positive feedback like this encouraged Bulelwa to become enthusiastic about the journal and she started to write more. She began to tell me about interactions she had with other people and was becoming more confident to share what she does in her class.

You have changed me in the way I taught children to read and write. I wish this could spread to all teachers, especially foundation phase teachers. Yesterday I was at PSP (Primary School Project) and they were doing mass planning with language teachers. I spoke to Vivian Canyon and told her about the way we teach reading and writing to children in our class. Man, she said we are doing the right thing and that we must spread it to other schools in the Western Cape. She said she will visit our school to see children's work and observe the way they learn. She encouraged reading for enjoyment and listening to stories. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 29 October 2009)

Dornbrack (2008) also showed how important our comments are to teachers as one of the teachers in her study explained to her that she required feedback on her thoughts. My positive reinforcement seemed to work because Bulelwa could see that I was genuinely praising her. She could also see that other literacy specialists were confirming what I had been sharing with her and appreciating her interest in the subject and her progress.

4.2.3 Explicit teaching

Explicit teaching refers to all those instances where I gave and explained new knowledge to the teacher through the journal. It also refers to all the instances where I reinforced knowledge previously shared about a topic. Such communication is either content specific or specific to planning and method. It also includes all the instances where I modelled disciplinary specific discourse to the teachers. This strategy is therefore subdivided into three subcategories of explicit teaching, namely: new knowledge, modelling and reinforcement.

4.2.3.1 New Knowledge and Modelling

New knowledge refers to lessons I gave through the journal, when I explained to teachers about balanced approaches to literacy teaching and strategies for achieving this which include

reading for enjoyment, interactive writing, guided comprehension, and why children needed to engage in these types of activities. It also refers to my explanations of reading for enjoyment strategies, interactive writing strategies as well as comprehension strategies. Modelling on the other hand refers to my use of the above literacy terminology as disciplinary specific discourse including terms such as emergent literacy, literacy as social practice, whole language, phonics approaches and balanced approaches and strategies for these. For example, this is how I explained shared writing:

Shared writing is a process in which the teacher and the children write together. The teacher leads the children to share ideas and then records the ideas as the children watch. This can be used to write a wide variety of things. One thing I like about shared writing is that we are able to show children the link between ORAL LANGUAGE and WRITTEN LANGUAGE. Remember we demonstrated this through classroom news? Children dictate their news and we act as their scribes. We then read what we write. It makes reading very easy for them because the things they read come from them. They get to recognise some words and ways in which we use writing. We need to do shared writing every time we introduce new ways of writing e.g. writing a letter, writing a journal or making a book or making a birthday card etc. (Written in English, Xolisa, 17 August 2009)

To respond to Bulelwa's journal entry where she told me that she did not understand what I meant by comprehension strategies, I explained comprehension strategies one by one as we dealt with them and this is how I explained making connections:

I am thinking that maybe next week I should demonstrate to you another comprehension strategy called making connections. With this strategy, you link what is happening in the book together with what has happened to your life or someone you know. This kind of connection is called text to self-connection. You also link what you read to another text you have read before, and this is called text to text connection. Furthermore, you also link the text to what is happening in the world and it is called text to world connection. When you teach this strategy, it does not mean that the children should stop using the self-questioning strategy we have taught them. These strategies can be used simultaneously. Good readers draw on all these strategies and this enables them not to forget the strategies they learnt first. (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 13 October 2009)

I decided to introduce teachers to disciplinary specific discourse because some of these terms are used in the education department's documents and often teachers do not know what they mean. This was also important in raising the status of isiXhosa in the academic field.

4.2.3.2 Reinforcement

Reinforcement refers to all those instances where I reminded the teachers of the decisions we took especially when they did not implement them. It also refers to further explanations given when necessary. For example, although we had decided to teach phonics within a whole language approach and Bulelwa was teaching Xhosa this way, she reverted to teaching phonics first and single isolated words when she began teaching English as additional language. This is how I reinforced the whole language first principle:

About sounds of the alphabet in English, it is very important not to forget that we must teach sounds within a whole language approach, like we are doing in Xhosa now. This means that you start with a story, song or rhyme and read, sing or recite with the children before you go to your sounds. For example if you decide to teach your B sound, you might like to do the following rhyme... Remember that we have alphabet and rhyme cards from Praesa and Elru in your class. All the letters of the alphabet in these cards have a rhyme with them, some rhymes in Xhosa and some in English and Afrikaans. You might want to look for other English rhymes that teach your sounds. It is easy to teach in this way. I hope you are going to start to teach like this in both Xhosa and English. (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 25 August 2009)

The need for reinforcement showed us how learning for adults is also a process and reminds us that input does not necessarily lead to immediate output.

4.2.3.3 Linking interventions with planning documents

At the beginning of my intervention, some of the teacher's resistance to the intervention seemed to be related to the fact that they thought we would do things differently from what the WCED expected them to do. Therefore a further strategy was to show them that I was helping them to implement the literacy and numeracy strategy of the WCED. This included the literacy half hour strategy as well as the foundations for learning. For example, when Bulelwa opened her planning documents, she became excited when she discovered the amount of work we had covered. She thanked me in return,

When I looked at how far we have come, at the amount of work we have done I realised that there is a lot of work we have covered when I look at the foundations for learning. I saw that a lot of things like comprehension strategies like self-correcting, decoding that we did not know how to teach have opened my eyes and I became able to follow what I am expected to teach to children. Thank you Mamgcina (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

In common with many teachers whom I have worked with, Bulelwa tended to view the department's planning documents as prescriptions. Even if the documents are exemplars and they specifically say so, Bulelwa would follow them slavishly. If one wants to train reflective teachers, we have to train them to look at their context, look at the co-curricular content they need to teach and re-arrange the curriculum so that it makes sense for them and their learners. This again has to do with the confidence that the teachers have with their content, their pedagogical knowledge as well as their experience.

4.3 Evidence of take up or lack of take up of literacy approaches modelled to the teacher:

This section presents and analyses evidence of teacher's 'take up' of the different approaches, methods and teaching strategies I modelled for teaching literacy. As discussed in Chapter 2, Adler and Reed (2002) use the term take-up to refer to the internalisation and externalisation of the academic knowledge taught as well as the use of the pedagogical strategies demonstrated in a way that shows that both the knowledge and the strategies have become part of the teacher's repertoire and habits.

Based on Bulelwa's journal entries, her take up of literacy approaches, methods and strategies has been categorised into the take-up of emergent literacy discourse as an overall approach and the take up of whole language and balanced approaches to teaching reading and writing as pedagogical strategies.

Bulelwa's use of disciplinary specific discourse in the journal is analysed as evidence of her take-up of the academic knowledge and pedagogical strategies she was exposed to. Terminology such as emergent literacy (with the accompanying discourse based on Cambourne's framework); reading for enjoyment (with the accompanying terminology which includes storytelling, reading aloud, shared reading, paired reading and silent reading); interactive writing (letter and journal writing); comprehension strategies (including predictions, questioning, connections, retelling and sequencing and summaries) and language structure (including phonics, punctuation, spelling and vocabulary) constitute some of the disciplinary specific discourses for literacy.

4.4 Use of the discourse of emergent literacy

In the literature review, I have shown that emergent literacy is concerned with the developmental aspect of learning to read and write in the preschool period (Bloch, 1997, Clay 1979, Goodman, 1986, Sulzby and Teale 1991). It often used to refer to reading and writing behaviours that develop into the conventional reading and writing practices of formal schooling (Bloch, 1997) and it offers an alternative understanding on how children come to be literate.

Part of the work I did with Bulelwa was to engage her in discussions and workshops on emergent literacy. We drew on this knowledge when we responded to children's journals and letters and we tried to understand the stages that the children were at so that we could better plan our focus for instruction. Therefore, I analyse Bulelwa's take up of emergent literacy looking at her use of this disciplinary specific discourse. Below are some of her journal on the condition of immersion in print, stories and books in the journal:

We spoke about telling stories, reading aloud, reading in pairs, silent reading, songs, rhymes and games. Children will be doing all this for enjoyment. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa 12 May 2009)

I would be very happy if we could make a plan for Grade Two children to loan books even if it is for one day and to get them to use the library once a week. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 09 June 2009).

I asked them to choose books to read for themselves. I also asked them to read to me and I read with them. We did this every day and I observed them. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 18 August 2009)

The book by Angela Redfern 'helping your child to read' is very inspiring especially when she says, "They notice print everywhere." So really, when they see written stuff and read it every day with encouragement there's nothing holding them and making it difficult for them to learn. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 09 March 2010)

Although Bulelwa does not use the terms "immersion" (Cambourne, 1995) or "exposure" (Goodman, 1986), she demonstrates an understanding that children have to be immersed in and exposed to stories and print for them to develop as literate beings. Her plans to tell stories and borrow books for her children from me or the library shows her understanding that adults need to provide an environment that is rich in literacy artefacts and activities (Sulzby and Teale, 1991). Bulelwa's use of terms such as stories, reading aloud, books and

print suggests that she is developing an understanding that children need to be enveloped, bathed in and saturated with what is to be learned (Cambourne, 1995). Earlier, I argued that emergent literacy is aligned to the socio-cultural perspective on literacy development. Therefore, Bulelwa's use of story reading and telling is a socially created activity (Sulzby and Teale, 1991).

Secondly, in the journal entries below, by using phrases like 'when we do not read to the children', and 'modelling letter writing' Bulelwa demonstrates having taken up the condition of learning from demonstration (Cambourne, 1995, Clay, 1972).

It is really true that when we do not read to the children, they will not know how to read... (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, October 2009).

Thank you again sisi for modelling letter writing. I don't believe what I see when I read some of the letters that the Grade Twos write. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 18 August 2009)

Cambourne (1995) argues that demonstration refers to modelling or leading by example and that all learning begins with demonstration. For literacy to emerge, Clay (1979, 1991) and Goodman (1984) argue that the role of the more experienced adult in modelling literacy learning and print awareness is crucial. Clay (1979) argues that children learn the language of parents and playmates. From Bulelwa's journal entries, we can see her developing these understandings and using terms like 'modelling' appropriately.

Thirdly, Bulelwa's use of phrases like, 'help each other', 'exchange roles', 'paired reading' and 'play' in the journal entries below demonstrates to us her understanding of the conditions of interaction and engagement. Below is an example of where Bulelwa seems to be noticing that children learn effectively in interaction and collaboration with other children.

Xoli, I have noticed that when the children work with comprehension strategies they help each other a lot when they write and in correcting their spelling. They exchange roles once they see that the one who is leading them in "being the Teacher" struggles to read or to write. (Bulelwa, 15 September 2009)

Paired reading is doing wonders and I also enjoyed it because it also helps me to listen to different stories from different readers. (Bulelwa, 18 August 2009)

Paired reading and group discussions on comprehension strategies are collaborative activities where two or a group of children read to and with each other. In Chapter 2, I showed how learning happens in a socio-cultural context. Bulelwa therefore demonstrates evidence of an understanding that learning is not an individual activity. She seems to have taken up the understanding that children need to interact with adults (or more literate children) around print, with the adult being a reading and writing as well as an oral language role model for the child in order for the child to be 'shepherded' to conventional uses of written language (Clay, 1991).

Bulelwa's ability to contrast teaching through play and through phonics seems to suggest that she is noticing the difference between these teaching approaches. She seems to be aware that play encourages learning as a collaborative and social activity rather than just an individual activity when she wrote:

You know, the way you do things reminds me of the 90s where I was using play a lot and whole language using the Montessori project. Other people thought I was merely playing in class when I used play and sat the children on the mat. Because there was nothing written guiding me, except for the syllabus that required me to teach the child double consonants and single consonants and which determined how many of these children should know before they progress to another grade, I ended up changing to that approach. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

The idea of using play also seems to correspond to Cambourne's (1995) condition of responsibility, where children have a space to make decisions and choose what they will engage with, in the text. He argues that the context of play supports meaning making, is always relevant and usually includes real language use in no predetermined order.

Furthermore, Bulelwa's use of the phrases such as , 'even if they make mistakes', 'writing freely', 'I do not put pressure' and 'creating a positive atmosphere' demonstrates her developing understanding of the condition of approximation in emergent literacy. Cambourne (1995) argues that this condition refers to an attempt to emulate what is being demonstrated without anxiety about the child's unconventional forms of language. The journal entries below seem to demonstrate this understanding.

I learnt something new today when the children started writing journals, freely and even if they made mistakes like omitting vowels or sounds. (Translation from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 19 May 2009)

I encourage the children in improving their handwriting but I do not want to put pressure on them and we will see as we have seen in Bridgette that the development of the reading and writing skill takes time to develop in other children. (Translation from Xhosa, Bulelwa 22.10.2009)

...but she grade 3 teacher becomes stressed when the children leave out vowels. I tell her not to stress because we as adults leave out letters when we write. I told her that she must teach the children to edit their own work. But she tells me to leave her alone with my big terms. (Translation from Xhosa, Bulelwa 24 March 2010)

Bulelwa seems to demonstrate an understanding that emergent writers need to go through trial and error in order for them to develop. She is becoming aware of very important fundamental principles of emergent literacy which include the fact that children invent their spelling before they learn to spell conventionally. Goodman (1986) argues that children are often inventing, discovering and developing in their search for meaning. They usually “stretch out” words (e.g waykape-wake up) to hear all the sounds and represent all these sounds with letters. Rog (2007) showed that children who are encouraged to invent spelling become more proficient in conventional spelling and word recognition than children who are not encouraged to use invented spelling. Clay (1979) argues that correcting children is often fraught with dangers. Therefore, the editing stage of the writing process means correcting all the high frequency words already taught in class.

Bulelwa uses the term ‘editing⁵’, a term she acquired from our writing process workshops and our informal conversations on how to teach language structure within whole language. This is where we showed teachers that editing is an important aspect of the writing process. Bulelwa seems to have internalised the understanding that teachers do not have to harass children about spelling errors in their first drafts but that these should get edited before they get submitted as final drafts. Her thoughts in the example below seem to reinforce this understanding:

The children also corrected errors in their example extracted from one child’s writing, which you wrote on the board. They did it themselves and saw for themselves which words and vowels have been omitted, which words have not been separated, where there needs to be a full stop or a capital letter and their grammar etc. (Translated from Xhosa, Bukelwa, 19 May 2009)

⁵ In order to push children towards conventional spelling, the children are taught to edit their work. Editing at the emergent literacy stage means correcting all the high frequency words already taught in class.

From the example above, Bulelwa also seems to embrace the idea that children need to learn the structure of language in the context of meaningful reading and writing activities.

Furthermore, Bulelwa seems to have developed and is taking cognisance of Krashen's (1985) theory of affective filter and Cambourne's (1995) condition of response, which state that children learn better in stress free environments where adults encourage and praise more than they criticise. The following journal entries illustrate this point:

...I like the saying, "Do not push the child if she is not ready. (Written in English by Bulelwa, 22 October 2009)

Mamgcina (clan name), thank you so much for exciting my mind and for noticing things that children do every day they are in school. Creating a positive atmosphere in everything that the children do and encouraging them made me able to notice the way they learn, without pressurising them because I want to finish the work schedule, leaving some behind empty. (Written in English by Bulelwa, 09 March 2010)

The journal entries above show Bulelwa developing a sense of awareness of the role of emotions in learning, particularly for young children. From an emergent literacy perspective effective learning takes place in low-anxiety environments. Bulelwa recognises that putting pressure on children is a hindrance to effective learning and that children learn better when the atmosphere is positive. She seems to be very confident of this belief because she emphasizes it even in our general conversation. In a telephone conversation in March 2010, Bulelwa was telling me about the Grade 3 teacher and what she had been observing. The journal entry below is what I recorded in my personal journal from the conversation we had on the telephone

You know, I wish I could have a very big poster written in big words that I can put up in teachers classrooms about positive attitudes to children and reading and writing. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 24 March 2010)

Bulelwa also uses disciplinary specific discourse when she writes about, 'opportunities to read and write' and 'exploring print'. Through this discourse Bulelwa seems to have appropriated the condition of use, where young learners need both time and opportunity to use their immature, developing language skills (Cambourne, 1995). The journal entries below are examples of evidence of Bulelwa's take up of this condition of learning in emergent literacy.

...and we should give them opportunities to write as much as they can. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 19May2009)

I like the flexible approach that says, "Give opportunities to children to write for real reasons in the language they feel at home with. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 22 October 2009)

...and exploring print has made our children curious to want to read and write. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 22 October 2009)

The journal entries above illustrate that Bulelwa is beginning to understand some of the conditions that need to be created for children to engage in emergent literacy, one being that children should be given opportunities to write. In practice, this involved us in creating reading for enjoyment and writing periods in the timetable, creating a writing corner with writing tools (papers, pencils and crayons) as well as a reading corner with children's literature and a futon for comfortable seating. This also led to Bulelwa giving her children opportunities to write letters and journals once a week on different days and to make books. Without these opportunities, it is difficult to create a culture of writing (using writing regularly for meaningful personal reasons) and to see what the children are capable of writing.

Furthermore, Bulelwa's use of terms such as, 'encouragement', 'trust' and 'patience', demonstrates developing understanding of the condition of response. Cambourne (1995) argues that response refers to feedback or information that children receive from the world as a consequence of using their skills. Bulelwa's journal entry below shows evidence of her take up of this condition of learning:

So really, when they see written stuff and read it every day with encouragement there's nothing holding them and making it difficult for them to learn. (Bulelwa, March 2010)

Linked to the condition of response, one of the conditions that need to be created for children to engage in emergent literacy is the condition of expectations. Cambourne (1995) argues that these are messages from significant others. Sometimes, these messages are subtle and

powerful coercers of behaviour. One such powerful message is trusting in the children's ability to learn. Bulelwa expresses this understanding by saying,

I also told them (other teachers) that there are children who develop last but we also have a way of assisting them because we trust that they will read and write but they need to be shown how to and be given opportunities to write (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

Bulelwa shows evidence of having learned that teachers and adults need to trust and have faith in children's ability to learn. To illustrate this point, Bulelwa also told me,

Xoli, my repeaters, Rebecca and Achuma and others, they are doing so well. Remember the squiggles they wrote last year? Well they are now readers and writers. I did not want to refer them to remedial teacher yet. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 24 March 2010)

At Sibulele Primary School, teachers tended to panic and refer children who are at an emergent literacy stage (where they write squiggles) to learning support teachers who normally give them more phonics. From the journal entry above, what Bulelwa seems to have learned is that children do not necessarily need to be referred to remedial specialists. She is beginning to develop patience and trust that children will learn. She expresses pride in the fact that she did not misdiagnose some of her emergent writers who are now making good progress.

She also no longer refers to children who can't read but refers to them as readers and writers at their appropriate stages. She is aware that many teachers do not believe that children can read and write in Grades 1 and 2, partly because of their beliefs that readers are readers only when they read conventionally. Bulelwa has learned that emergent readers develop reading and writing behaviours they observe from the people who read and write around them.

In the schools around us, they have never seen what we do and they do not believe that children from grade 1 can read and write so much in their journals in Grade Two."
(Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 22 October 2009)

Finally, in order for teachers to approach children's spelling appropriately they need to understand the stages of learning to read and write. Bulelwa shows this understanding by saying:

I learned that children develop writing at different stages. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 19 May 2009)

However, she does not explain what these stages are and how then children get propelled through the next stage of reading and writing development, nor does she even allude to the stages she finds her children in.

From the evidence I have presented here, Bulelwa can be seen to have appropriated some aspects of the emergent literacy discourse, through her use of disciplinary specific discourse. She can be said to have taken up an understanding of some of the most important conditions for emergent literacy such as, immersion, demonstration, engagement, expectations, responsibility, approximations, use and response.

4.4 Analysis of use of the discourse of whole language

In chapter 2, I showed that the whole language approach refers to engaging in meaningful reading and writing practices that have real life purposes for children (Bloch, 2005). Reading for enjoyment and interactive writing are some of the strategies for making reading and writing meaningful that I have discussed in the journal and implemented with Bulelwa in her Grade Two class. I now turn to an analysis of Bulelwa's use of the discourse of whole language and balanced approaches as a tool to assess her take up or lack of take up thereof.

Although Bulelwa does not explicitly define and explain whole language in her journal, it can be inferred from her entries that she has taken up some of the ideas around whole language. In the journal entry below, Bulelwa uses whole language discourse when she uses phrases like, "writing for real reasons", "to write about real things that they know", "in a language they feel at home with".

I like the flexible approach that says, "Give opportunities to children to write for real reasons in the language they feel at home with." Remember Lihle's letter to S.P.C.A? (Written in English, Bulelwa, 22 October 2009)

...and when we do not give them opportunities to write about real things that they know they will not be able write (Written in English, Bulelwa, 29 October 2009)

Proponents of a whole language approach (Bloch, 1997, Goodman, 1986) argue that lessons should always have immediate meaning for children and therefore children should be given opportunities to use language functionally and purposefully. Bulelwa's reporting of her use of interactive writing strategies (journal writing and letter writing) and reading for enjoyment strategies in the journal entries below is testimony to her growing understandings of whole language.

They were very interested in our approach especially teachers from K1 Special School. They asked if whole language approach is working. I told them that this is the second year since we started with this approach at our school. The children started learning like this since Grade 1 and now they are in Grade Two. They write journals and letters and they can read. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009).

Letter writing is developing a lot and the children love it. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 18 August 2009)

We spoke about telling stories, reading aloud, reading in pairs, silent reading, songs, rhymes and games. Children will be doing all this for enjoyment. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 12 may 2009)

Bulelwa seems to have developed an understanding that children need to be encouraged to read and write for themselves and others from the beginning. Her understanding of the whole language approach seems to be evident in her ability to apply strategies of interactive writing (journals and letters) as well as strategies of reading for enjoyment from whole language. These strategies motivate children to read and write for personally meaningful reasons. Bulelwa now seems to have developed a language of description for what she does, which is a necessary tool for planning and reflection.

Her use of the words and phrases such as 'everyday reading' 'comfort' 'reading for enjoyment', 'choosing books', 'library', and the strategies associated with enjoyable reading such as 'storytelling', 'reading aloud', 'paired reading' and 'silent reading' in her entries below signal her take up of reading for enjoyment as a strategy for meaningful reading.

I asked them to choose books to read for themselves. I also asked them to read to me and I read with them. We did this every day and I observed them.” (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa 18 August 2009)

I would be very happy if we could make a plan for Grade Two children to loan books even if it is for one day and to get them to use the library once a week. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 09 June 2009)

I like to tell and to read stories. I would like you to loan me storybooks, at least one book a week.

We should give them opportunities to write as much as they can.”(Bulelwa’s journal entry, (Written in English, Bulelwa 19 May 2009)

The journal entries above seem to illustrate Bulelwa’s ability to apply Goodman’s (1986) idea that children learn to read from meaningful wholes. Stories in books are such meaningful wholes. From the journal entries above Bulelwa seems to have also developed an ability to apply Smith’s (1978) idea that children learn to read by reading and to write by writing. Teachers therefore need to show their own uses of reading and writing in real life situations in order for reading and writing to make sense to the children. In addition to lessons having immediate meaning for children, Bloch (1997), Clay (1991) and Goodman (1986) argue that emphasis should be on the child’s first language. Although Bulelwa has always been teaching in the mother tongue, she now seems to have a well-supported reason for using the mother tongue initially.

Secondly, Bulelwa uses whole language discourse in a phrase such as, “they notice print everywhere”, in the following journal entry:

The book by Angela Redfern ‘helping your child to read’ is very inspiring especially when she says, “They notice print everywhere.” So really, when they see written stuff and read it every day with encouragement there’s nothing holding them and making it difficult for them to learn. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 09 March 2010)

Bloch (1997), Clay (1972), Goodman, (1986) and Hudelson (1994) argue that environmental print is very important in developing awareness in children that print makes sense. Goodman, (1986) argues that in whole language classrooms, materials including print need to be

available in the language(s) of the learners otherwise one cannot make sense of or through language if the language is not available to you.

Although she does not articulate explicitly what whole language means, Bulelwa has shown that she understands that children need to be exposed to the meaningful reading of authentic texts and be actively engaged with texts that matter to them (Bloch, 1997). By exposing children to print and books, by reading to them and by allowing them to choose their books and behave like readers children will develop an awareness that written language makes sense (Goodman, 1986).

Furthermore, Bulelwa uses phrases such as, “you did sight vocabulary from a song”, and “teaching sounds from songs” in the journal entries below:

I liked how you did sight vocabulary from a song they have sung e.g. umzi watsha. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 26 May 2009)

In your story, I picked up a few words which need to be explained. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 26 May 2009)

Thank you for your advice about teaching sounds and songs rhymes and stories. I am going to try it out. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 11 September 2009)

This discourse of teaching parts from wholes is a major argument of whole language proponents, for example, Bloch (1997) and Goodman (1986) argue that in the whole language approach learning moves from whole to parts, meaning that form follows function in language development. The teaching of language skills has to be done in the context of meaningful reading and writing. Therefore, Bulelwa’s journal entries are evidence that she is beginning to take up whole language as an approach in her practice. Bulelwa also uses terms such as, “they made mistakes” in her journal entry below.

I learnt something new today when the children started writing journals, freely and even if they made mistakes like omitting vowels or sounds. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 19 May 2009)

Goodman (1986) argues that language learning is a process of social and personal invention and involves risk taking and making errors. Bulelwa seems to be developing an understanding that making errors and mistakes is part of learning.

Lastly, and similarly to the take up of the condition of expectations under emergent literacy, her use of the discourse of whole language is evident in her use of terms like “need to trust” and “believing that learners can”. The discourse she uses illustrates her understanding of whole language principles which emphasize the need to trust in learner’s potential.

4.5 Analysing use of the discourse of balanced literacy approaches

As discussed in the literature review, a balanced approach to literacy teaching outlines what kinds of reading knowledge children should develop and how these kinds of knowledge can be attained (Fitzgerald, 1999). It synthesizes a whole language approach with skills based approaches to literacy.

Regarding the strategies of a balanced approach in the classroom, Bulelwa can be shown to be taking cognisance of Fitzgerald’s (1999) affective knowledge when she addresses reading for enjoyment and letter writing in her literacy programme, where children choose to read what they want and to write about what matters to them for enjoyment.

We spoke about telling stories, reading aloud, reading in pairs, silent reading, songs, rhymes and games. Children will be doing all this for enjoyment. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 12 May 2009)

The entry above shows Bulelwa using the discourse of reading for enjoyment and attempting to instil the culture of reading and writing by structuring a reading for enjoyment period in her literacy programme.

She can be said to be taking cognisance of what Fitzgerald (1999) refers to as global knowledge (understanding, interpretation and response to reading, strategies for enabling understanding and response and an awareness of their strategic use) when she reports incorporating comprehension strategies in her literacy teaching. Bulelwa’s use of terms such as ‘predicted,’ ‘sequencing,’ ‘self-questioning strategy,’ ‘comprehension strategies,’ and ‘comprehension’ provides us with evidence of her take up of the discourse of comprehension strategies, which when used alongside reading for enjoyment and the teaching of language skills characterize the balance in literacy teaching. Below are examples of Bulelwa’s journal entries on comprehension.

They also predicted what was going to happen next and sequenced events because the story is repetitive (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 19 May 2009).

Xoli, I have noticed that when the children work with comprehension strategies they help each other a lot when they write and in correcting their spelling. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 15 September 2009)

I saw that a lot of things like comprehension strategies like self-correcting, decoding that we did not know how to teach have opened my eyes and I became able to follow what I am expected to teach to children. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

I still need to carry on with predictions next term because some of the children have not fully understood making predictions. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa 29 October 2009)

Cunningham and Allington (1999) argued that while making sure that children are reading and writing for enjoyment, this essential component, while necessary, is not sufficient on its own. They argue that while children continue to read for enjoyment, struggling readers make more rapid progress when given explicit instruction in how to read and write.

Bulelwa seems to have appropriated the discourse of comprehension strategies from my classroom demonstrations as well as through explicit teaching of these strategies in the journal.

Through her use of the disciplinary specific discourse in her journal entries above, Bulelwa seems to have developed a language of description for her practice. Prior to the intervention, most of her time was spent on teaching phonics, sight words, dictation of individual words and vocabulary. By incorporating reading for enjoyment and comprehension strategies in her teaching, Bulelwa can be said to have taken up the concept of a balanced approach to teaching literacy. The comprehension strategies seem to help Bulelwa to develop a checklist for monitoring children's mastery of the different strategies. This is important because she is developing a language of description for her assessment and evaluation of her children's literacy development. Bulelwa's journal entries below illustrate this point.

...This made me realise that I have a lot of things for assessing the children, when I look at the children's letters, journals and their self-questioning strategy. This strategy really has to be taught for a long time until the children have mastered asking questions and know about what they read about in the story. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

My children and I love this strategy a lot because it encourages them to read a lot of books and know authors. This approach man Xoli covers all the learning outcomes at once because I read to them and they listen without disruptions, they ask questions and answer questions in writing about what they have learned.(Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 13 October, 2009)

Bulelwa's take up of a balanced approach is illustrated in her journal entries by the fact that she discusses literacy approaches that have been considered to be opposites or contrasts in a manner that does not prioritize one over the other. Her comments on my demonstrations and advice I have given her illustrate this point on a number of occasions in the journal:

I liked how you did the sight vocabulary from a song they have sung e.g. "Umzi, watsha. (Translated from Xhosa, 26 June 2009)

In your story, I picked up a few words which need to be explained during the language structure period because most of our learners grew up in the urban townships. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 26 June 2009)

I liked your folktale. It also taught me another language, Uganda and Xhosa idioms that we no longer use. I have written them down and I am going to explain the words and teach vocabulary. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 09 June 2009)

This is a positive shift from the focus on decontextualised phonics first that she was accustomed to. Thus, Bulelwa shows evidence of synthesizing skills with real stories when she makes decisions to teach sight words, and vocabulary from a story, song or a rhyme.

4.6 Analysis of lack of take up of literacy approaches

The idea of teaching letters and sounds in context was however not an easy idea for Bulelwa to process. For example, although she understood that we need to teach sounds and letters in the context of a story when we worked with Xhosa, she fails to take up the whole language of teaching parts from whole when she approaches the teaching of English as an additional language. Her journal entry below shows evidence of her lack of take up or inability to transfer this principle from mother tongue to additional languages:

Coming back to the issue of teaching children in our class, yesterday the 24th of August during the English period I was introducing sounds of the alphabet. We did letter A, B and C. I asked the children words that begin with each of these sounds. They gave me lots of words, I wrote them down and we all read them. I am happy with

the idea of a word wall for English so that they can see the words every day, and read them to increase their vocabulary. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 25 August 2009)

From this entry, Bulelwa's teaching of letters of the alphabet and sounds seems to be decontextualized. This also signaled that the concept of embedding the teaching of vowels and sounds or phonemic awareness within a meaningful context such as a story was not fully understood and that Bulelwa is still internalizing this approach.

The fact that Bulelwa was able to pass on knowledge as reported in her journal demonstrates that she has taken up some aspects of the balanced literacy approach. Her journal entry below is an example of her developing understandings of the balance in literacy teaching.

I told her (referring to a grade 3 teacher) that she must teach the children to edit their own work. But she tells me to leave her alone with my big terms. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 24 March 2010)

Though there were many strategies we used for encouraging reading and writing including shared reading, reading aloud, storytelling and silent reading and journal writing, it seems that paired reading and letter writing have made an impact on her class. One of the reasons for her focus on these strategies is that we dealt with the strategies monthly and August was the focus month for paired reading and letter writing. We applied these strategies together on the days I visited her class. It is not clear in the journal whether she applied the other strategies in my absence. She also did not get enough chance to apply them with me since we started working with each other towards the end of the term. It seems that the motivation to work came from knowing that I was there to assist, whereas, on the other days, she had to do things alone and did not report on them. Bulelwa also seems not to have fully taken up the condition of response as she failed to respond to children's journal entries but rather seemed to prefer letter writing. There is also no mention in the journal entries of Bulelwa's feelings about the use of dialogue journals in her classroom.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that Bulelwa has taken up some of the whole language principles. These include the understanding that children need to read meaningful wholes first, children need to make sense of print, lessons should have immediate meanings for learners, emphasis should be on the child's first language, learning needs to move from whole to parts, language learning involves risk taking and making errors as well as the fact that teachers need to trust in learner's potential. Secondly, Bulelwa has also taken up some aspects of a balanced literacy approach by introducing stories first and then embedding her teaching of comprehension strategies and language skills on such stories. However, she is still in the process of learning and needs to transfer her knowledge of the balanced approach to her teaching of English as an additional language. The analysis tells me that Bulelwa is one of the many teachers out there who show a lot of potential to learn but need guidance and support. It also shows that once she started seeing evidence for herself rather than being told, she became motivated to learn more about how young children learn to read and write.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF TAKE UP OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

5.1 Introduction

The first part of this chapter identifies and analyses additional strategies to those discussed in chapter 4 that I have used to encourage interaction and reflection through the dialogue journal. In the second part, I discuss evidence of ‘take up’ of reflective practice through the dialogue journal. Using the four traditions of reflective practice outlined by Zeichner and Liston, (cited in Jay and Johnson, 2002; Villegas-Reimers, 2003 and Dornbrack, 2008), namely, the academic tradition, social efficacy tradition, developmental tradition and social reconstructionist tradition (see chapter 2) I analyse Bulelwa’s take-up of reflective practice. In my analysis, I identify technical reflection in the academic tradition; practical reflection in the social efficacy tradition and critical reflection in the social reconstructionist tradition.

I have shown in the previous chapter how I used the interactive journal as a tool for encouraging interaction and reflection between myself and the teacher, Bulelwa. I also mentioned that I had to write often and promptly so as to model writing to the teachers. I encouraged and praised the teacher’s attempts at improving her practice and taught Bulelwa explicitly through the journal. Evaluating some of the management aspects in the school that affect learning, asking direct questions to Bulelwa and raising ethical issues are some of the additional strategies I used to prompt reflection.

Below, I discuss my evaluation and questioning strategies for prompting reflection. However, I discuss the strategy of raising ethical issues together with the social reconstruction tradition later on as the two are linked.

5.2 Self evaluation

The purpose of the strategy of self-evaluation was for me to demonstrate critical reflection to the teachers. I tried to show Bulelwa that teachers do not have to accept everything without questioning it, including the National Curriculum Statement. The way that the curriculum is mediated by the department to the teachers does not encourage reflection. The Foundations for Learning document, for example, prescribes through lesson plans that have been developed for teachers, what to teach and when (DoE, 2008). As a result teachers seem to take the syllabus as prescribed and that leaves no room for reflection in the form of planning and evaluating whether the syllabus works for their context. Reed, Davis and Nyabanyaba's (2002: 127) research showed that teachers struggle to reflect on their choice of topics to teach beyond saying 'it is in the syllabus.'

Below is an example of how I reflected on the learning outcomes and assessment standards:

If I must tell you the truth, I do not use Learning Outcomes and Assessment standards but I know what I need to do when teaching children to read and write. I am the same as a parent who raises his or her child and teaches them to talk without going by the book. I use my knowledge and intuition about learning when teaching students. But, I understand that you have to implement the NCS and the Foundations for learning by the book. What you have to do there, like you have seen is not different from what I have been telling you. The advantage I have is that no one is after me wanting this or that. Instead, I follow the children's pace. I let them guide me. (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa's journal entry, 20 October 2009)

In this journal entry, I deviated from my usual practice of using the inclusive pronoun 'we' and used the personal pronoun 'I' to show Bulelwa that this is where I differed from her in my practices. I was showing her that I had personally assessed the curriculum documents and reached the conclusion that I was not going to follow them word for word and line by line but that I would apply things in a principled way, depending on my knowledge, experience, beliefs and values. I wanted to show her that she needs to be critical of what she gets and that she is not an empty vessel but is full of knowledge and experience. This had an effect because Bulelwa responded by saying:

Thank you for encouraging me. Indeed, I must stand for what I believe in and what I do. I am not worried about my classroom work because the children's writing tells us

exactly about how the children have improved in reading and writing. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 22.October 2009)

5.3 Asking Questions

A further strategy I used to prompt reflection was to ask Bulelwa direct questions. For example I asked a question to find out what she thought about the workshops we had conducted on storytelling and the writing process.

Lisa did a storytelling demonstration. Peter did a workshop on the writing process. I would like to hear your views on these activities. (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 26 May 2009)

Sometimes, when she told me that she'd been in a workshop, I wanted to know what Bulelwa learned and what value it added to her practice.

Please tell me more about the course on the barriers to learning and what you told them? (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 12 October 2009)

At another stage, I wanted to find out what she had internalised from our interactions when I asked,

What important things would you tell a new teacher or a substitute teacher if you were to be absent from school for sometime? (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 12 October 2009)

Significantly, none of the questions were answered.

I also tried asking questions about the things teachers often get blamed for to find out what Bulelwa thought of them. For example,

Did you know that people are reluctant to give teachers books and other stuff to read because they believe that teachers do not read? Teachers are known to be illiterate because even though they are educated and continue to be trained, they are seen as people who do not read and who are a disgrace. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS STATEMENT? (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 20 October 2009 with capitals in original)

Bulelwa responded by saying,

We can't run away Xoli from the fact that we, as teachers do not read or are lazy to read but not all of us. Maybe we are going to change as the time goes on because

when you are a teacher, you are a researcher all the time, wanting to know why this child does things this or the other way. In order to get help, one has to read and find out what other people say in their research about language development as well as reading and writing skills. The readings you give me put me in the green light. I wish I could always research how children learn and about solutions for the struggling learners. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 22 October 2009)

Bulelwa responded promptly to my provocative question in defence of teachers like herself who liked to read but did not respond to larger issues involving most schools for African language speaking children. When the *Sunday Times* newspaper released its list of top 100 schools, I was interested in knowing why there were very few schools from the former Department of Education and Training (previously catering for African language speaking students only) on the list. I wanted to know whether she is aware of this information and what in her opinion schools need to do. So I asked,

What do you think about the recent newspaper announcement of the top 100 schools in the country where only one African language school made it to the top 10? And no other school made it to the top 100? What do you think our schools need to do? (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 20 October 2009)

Although Bulelwa responded to a few questions I posed, in general, asking direct questions did not prove to be a very good strategy for prompting reflection. Perhaps the questions were too direct and intimidating and made Bulelwa feel uncomfortable about divulging information that would put herself and her school at risk of being judged. English (2001) on the other hand showed that adults writing journals often worry about who is going to read the journal and may not write exactly the things they have in mind. Her lack of response indicated that Bulelwa did not like being interrogated. Kreeft-Peyton (1993) also showed that asking questions was not effective in encouraging students to write in their journals.

5.4 Analysis of teacher's take up of the reflective practice

In this section, I now turn to the analysis of Bulelwa's take-up of reflective practice as modelled through the strategies I discussed above. As has been mentioned earlier, teachers might reflect within an academic tradition; a social efficiency tradition; a developmental tradition and a social reconstructionist tradition. Within these traditions, Potter and Badiali (2001, cited in Villegas-Reimers 2003) and Dornbrack (2008) argue that there are three levels of reflectivity that should be encouraged. These include: technical reflection, which refers to

the technical aspects of teaching (considering the curriculum and adjusting teaching according to the situation presented at a particular time); practical reflection, where teachers think about the means and purposes of particular lessons and assumptions underlying classroom practices; and critical reflection, where teachers raise issues related to moral and ethical situations. For the purposes of this study, I will link the academic tradition with technical reflection as these seem related. Secondly, the social efficacy tradition will be linked with practical reflection and thirdly the social reconstructionist tradition is linked with critical reflection. The developmental tradition does not link with any particular form of reflection. Therefore, I look for evidence of all levels of reflection in this tradition.

It is worth mentioning that the take up of reflective practice is a complex developmental process rather than a linear process. Input does not equal output. This must be taken into consideration in the analysis of take-up. Some of the evidence of the teacher's take up came much later than at the time when the issues were raised by the mentor and therefore, this does not mean the teacher did not think about the matters we considered. Sometimes this evidence comes up in forms other than in the journal. For example, I noted some of Bulelwa's reflections through informal conversations and telephone calls that she and I engaged in rather than in the journal. This further shows that reflection can happen through both oral and written modes.

5.4 Academic Tradition and Technical Reflection

The academic tradition of reflection focuses on the teacher's reflection on her presentation of subject matter to learners in order to promote understanding (Jay and Johnson 2002, Villegas-Reimers, 2003, Dornbrack, 2008). Here, the teacher considers the curriculum and takes responsibility for her professional development. She takes steps to improve her subject specific knowledge by attending professional development workshops or reading professional books and keeping the journal. She reflects on those elements of the curriculum that she finds challenging and tries to master them. The teacher also reflects on new knowledge developed from training, finds out how it relates to her prior knowledge and adjusts her knowledge to accommodate new knowledge or synthesizes old and new knowledge. In looking for reflection within this tradition, I use technical reflection as evidence of the take up of reflection.

After considering my suggestions about the curriculum which include literacy aspects such as reading for enjoyment and interactive writing and comprehension strategies in addition to the language structure she already teaches, Bulelwa became aware of the gaps in her knowledge. She can be said to be reflecting on the technical aspects of the curriculum when she realised she needed to understand what comprehension strategies are. *“I did not understand well when we started talking about comprehension strategies,”* and when she also requested help with developing a rubric for the assessment of letter writing,

“Please help me to do a rubric for the letter”, (Written in English, Bulelwa, 25 August 2009)

Secondly, Bulelwa then considers what she needs to do in order to improve her children’s literacy learning, thus further focussing her reflections on technical aspects of her practice.

I found out that it is important for me to read a lot of children’s literature so that I can tell stories and folktales all the time. I have learned that singing songs makes the children calm and ready for the story to be told. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 26 May 2009)

Thirdly, Bulelwa can be said to be reflecting on aspects of the curriculum when she reflected on emergent and phonics approaches to literacy learning in relation to the curriculum,

With regards to the emergent literacy workshop, I hope it showed our school direction because all of us in the foundation phase have to understand how reading and writing develops so that when the children get to the intermediate phase they will be used to this style of learning... You know, the way you do things reminds me of the 90s where I was using play a lot and whole language using the Montessori project. Other people thought I was merely playing in class when I used play and sat the children on the mat. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

It can be seen that Bulelwa now embraces the idea that children’s reading and writing develops in stages as described in an emergent literacy approach. She wants all the teachers to know this. She considers play as an important practical aspect of the emergent literacy approach. Bulelwa also shows how foundation phase teachers are often not taken seriously when they engage in play. Often, they are told that they are playing rather than ‘teaching’ which is associated with formal and direct instruction. Direct instruction therefore tends to involve direct and explicit teaching of phonics. What is embedded in this statement is that, because foundation phase teachers want to be taken seriously in the teaching profession, they

then suspend their theoretical knowledge about teaching and learning gained in their training and engage in more instrumental skills-based teaching approaches.

After considering what she needs to learn, which includes researching how children learn to read and write, Bulelwa then takes responsibility for her professional development. She engages in three types of professional development activities over the time of the intervention: These include attending workshops, writing the dialogue journal with me and reading professional books.

She reports that she learns a lot in workshops and they are helpful.

Our visitor (Xoli inserts- Notozi) from Read/Oxford (for Foundations for learning) taught us about ways of improving children's reading and writing. She also helped us a lot because she touched on the issues we have dealt with like paired reading and shared writing. She also showed us how to timetable English as an additional language. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 25 August 2009)

The materials development went very well. I left the workshop feeling that I have learned a lot about writing poetry using the acrostic style and making big books. It was very nice working together with other teachers. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 11 September 2009)

She expresses disappointment when she misses workshops.

I am not happy for always missing your workshops because there's a lot one can learn and I would like to be involved in whatever happens. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 25 August 2009)

Bulelwa also empowers herself professionally by reading professional books on early literacy, many of which I recommended to her.

...In order to get help, one has to read and find out what other people say in their research about language development as well as reading and writing skills. The readings you give me put me in the green light. I wish I could always research how children learn and about solutions for the struggling learners. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 22 October 2009)

The book, First Steps into literacy (Chloe's Story by Carole Bloch) has given me a lot of ideas. I would like to have my own copy. Please find out for me how much it costs. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 22 October 2009)

The book by Angela Redfern “helping your child to read” is very inspiring especially when she says “They notice print everywhere. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 09 March 2010)

Bulelwa reports that she gets many ideas from the books she reads about literacy development and finds them inspiring. Research tells us that in print saturated environments, children notice print and learn to read words incidentally (Goodman 1986 and Hudelson 1994). Although Bulelwa and I discussed print rich environments earlier when we started working together, it took her a while to put up print in her classroom. I had to reinforce this in the journal a few times but now that she has read about it, one can see improvements in her class, much later, confirming that take up is an on-going process.

Because the academic tradition focuses on curriculum aspects of Bulelwa’s development, I argue that her reflections were mainly about the technical aspects of what she needs to know. Below I discuss practical reflection as another level of reflection that Bulelwa needed to develop.

5.5 The Social Efficiency Tradition and Practical Reflection

The social efficiency tradition (Jay and Johnson, 2002:76, Villegas-Reimers, 2003, Dornbrack, 2008) focuses on intelligent use of generic strategies proposed as a result of what we know from existing research. This refers to the teacher’s practical reflection on her pedagogy, where she reflects on her expertise and assumptions, changes her practice and adds increasingly effective strategies and skills to produce profound improvement in student learning. The teacher also reflects on her strategies, thus reflecting on action for new action. I use practical reflections as tools to analyse the level of reflectivity of the teacher in this tradition.

Practically, as pointed out in chapter two, the emergent literacy approach and whole language as pedagogical strategy have been criticised for not giving clear instructions of what teachers need to do and when (Reeves et al, 2008). Bulelwa captures this criticism in her reflection by saying,

Because there was nothing written guiding me, except for the syllabus that required me to teach the child double consonants and single consonants and which determined how many of these children should know before they progress to another grade, I ended up changing to the phonics approach. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

Bulelwa can also be said to have applied practical reflection to the literacy approaches we were exploring. According to her, the emergent literacy approach gave little written guidance compared to more explicit instructions for teaching phonics. This might then account for the lack of implementation of whole language and emergent literacy approaches in literacy instruction, but she by no means says phonics approaches are better. She demonstrates that she finds understanding how children learn through emergent literacy approaches challenging and fascinating and she tries to find ways in which she can develop this knowledge:

Working with you on this approach (referring to emergent literacy) has revived and encouraged me and made me to reflect back and become interested in researching so that I can know deeply about how children learn to read and write. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

She can also be said to be reflecting on the practical aspects of teaching comprehension when she wanted to find the best ways to encourage children to ask questions:

I would like you to explain this bit more and how we can encourage children to ask questions. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 12 May 2009)

Although she reports finding the workshops helpful and gives details of what she learned in them, thus describing what she learned from the workshops, she lacks practical reflection about how this is going to change her practice, how she is going to implement the knowledge she has learned and what might be the impediments in the implementation process.

In her journal entries, Bulelwa wrote:

Today, I sat with Xoli from Praesa. We had a conversation about how we are going to work together this quarter with our Grade Two children. We spoke about telling stories, reading aloud, reading in pairs, silent reading, songs, rhymes and games. Children will be doing all this for enjoyment. We structured our literacy half hour from Monday to Friday every day. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 12 May 2009)

In this entry, her reflections seem to be based on what Potter and Badiali (in Villegas-Reimers 2003) term technical reflection where she only reflects on what needs to be done and

when. She thus neglected to reflect on practical considerations of using such a strategy as reading for enjoyment. First, she has not reflected on how she taught reading and writing prior to my intervention and therefore how the introduction of reading for enjoyment alters or matches her current practice. In terms of language considerations, she does not reflect on the languages in which children ought to be reading. Furthermore, Bulelwa does not seem to have thought about how she will get her supply of books for her reading corner and what kinds of books children need to read and why. It is only after four months, in September that she mentions taking children to the library, only after we had stocked up the schools' store room and changed it into a library.

Although she mentions the reading for enjoyment strategies, Bulelwa does not define them and tells me neither what they mean nor how best they can be used within the literacy half hour. She also does not mention who should be doing the reading aloud and storytelling and why. Furthermore, one of the things that she needs to reflect on is how she is going to assess her children on this knowledge. How will she know that children have developed a passion for reading?

Bulelwa also does not discuss what the implications of reading for enjoyment are for the dominant approach which prioritises explicit teaching of phonics, and how she is going to defend this approach to her teaching. As such, her reflections are merely technical. That said, she reports that she has tried out reading for enjoyment strategies and found that when she gave children more time to read and choose their own books, the children improved.

At the time when we were waiting for the curriculum advisors for pre-progression, there were learners who weren't confident about reading yet and I asked them to stay for a while after school. I asked them to choose books to read for themselves. I also asked them to read to me and I read with them. We did this every day and I observed them....Last week when we had the visitors during our paired reading session, I went around and listened to how they read. I was so happy when I listened to how Pheliswa read. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 18 August 2009)

As mentioned earlier Bulelwa had told me that she does comprehension with her children by giving them texts to read and answer questions on; she admitted to not understanding when we spoke about comprehension strategies and she wanted them explained.

I did not understand well when we started talking about comprehension strategies. I would like you to explain this bit more and how we can encourage children to ask questions. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 12 May 2009)

The curriculum tells teachers to assess children's use of sequencing, retellings and predictions, but does not explain how these strategies fit in to the bigger picture of meaning making and comprehension and why they need to be taught such strategies.

Regarding her approach to literacy teaching, Bulelwa reflects on the whole language approach she has adopted as part of her balanced approach in the following way:

The way we do things here in our class made me able to share with other teachers about how we teach children to read and write. They were very interested in our approach especially teachers from K1 Special School. They asked if the whole language approach is working. I told them that this is the second year since we started with this approach at our school. The children began learning using this approach since in Grade 1 and now they are in Grade Two. They write journals and letters and they can read. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

...In the schools around us, they have never seen what we do and they do not believe that children from grade 1 can read and write so much in their journals in Grade Two. I am here to challenge that and show them the evidence. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 22 October 2009)

These two entries demonstrate that Bulelwa is beginning to trust that a whole language approach works. However, she does not recall and explain what she understands about the whole language approach. She also does not give details of how she goes about implementing whole language, what whole language entails and why her literacy teaching must be nested in a whole language approach. However, it can be inferred from her entry that she considers writing journals and reading real texts as examples of a whole language approach.

5.6 The Developmental Tradition

The developmental tradition of reflective practice focuses on the process of learning, development and understanding of the learner. The teacher reflects on aspects that attend to the learner's needs or are beneficial to learners. This includes informal assessment of the learners by the teacher in order to inform her teaching. It therefore includes judgements, evaluations and effects of these evaluations on the children.

Bulelwa seemed to be reflecting technically and practically on the developmental aspects of learning to read and write when she wrote the following,

I learned that children develop writing at different stages and we should give them opportunities to write as much as they can. (Bulelwa, 19 May 2009)

I also told them (teachers from another school) that there are children who develop last but we also have a way of assisting them because we trust that they will read and write but they need to be shown how to and be given opportunities to write. (Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

She wrote about giving children opportunities to write and about trusting that children will learn and these are practical considerations of what teachers should do when they understand the process of learning. This is a progressive move away from South African teachers' generally low expectations of children (Fleisch, 2008).

Regarding Bulelwa's assessment of the learners in order to inform her practice, Bulelwa assessed the stage at which two of her learners (Sive and Rebecca) were at towards the end of 2009 and she decided they needed to be given more time to learn to read. She spent time reading with the struggling children. It seems that her judgements and intervention for these children were starting to pay off as she was beginning to see their progress.

Sive and Rebecca are improving in their writing and reading. I thank you once again for suggesting that we should give them extra time for reading and be shown how to do things. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

From the journal entry above, Bulelwa seems to be assessing both reading and writing levels of her learners as she is noticing their improvement. However, she does not dwell much on the kind of writing the children need to be doing and what language they need to be doing

this in. She also does not give an indication of what stages of emergent literacy these children are at, and what teaching focus she needs to emphasize in order to propel the children through the stages, thus failing to reflect on the technical aspects of the stages and practical aspects of teacher's focus for each stage.

Secondly, Bulelwa seems to have developed a sense of awareness of the role of emotions in learning, particularly for young children. This is an important aspect of learning in early childhood development. In our oral discussions, in preparation for the introduction of English as an additional language, we touched on Krashen's (1985) theory of the affective filter, which claims that effective learning takes place in low-anxiety environments. Bulelwa recognises putting pressure on children as a hindrance to effective learning and that children learn better when the atmosphere is positive. This is how she captured these understandings,

I encourage the children in improving their handwriting but I do not want to put pressure on them and we will see as we have seen in Bridgette that the development of the reading and writing skill takes time to develop in other children. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 22 October 2009)

I like the saying, "Do not push the child if she is not ready," and exploring print has made our children curious to want to read and write. I like the flexible approach that says, "Give opportunities to children to write for real reasons in the language they feel at home with." Remember Lihle's letter to S.P.C.A? (Written in English, Bulelwa, 22 October 2009)

Creating a positive atmosphere in everything that the children do and encouraging them made me able to notice the way they learn, without pressurising them because I want to finish the work schedule, leaving some behind empty. (Written in English, 09 March 2010)

Because she wants to create a positive atmosphere, she also recognises that encouragement plays a big part in confidence building, thus reflecting on the practical aspects of improving her practice.

So really, when they see written stuff and read it every day with encouragement there's nothing holding them and making it difficult for them back to learn. (Written in English, Bulelwa, 09 March 2010)

According to Bulelwa's assessment and evaluation of the children, three learners needed more time with a caring adult who understands the developmental stages of reading and writing. She decided to keep them back in grade one and was wary of referring them to the

remedial teacher whose interventions are limited to teaching of phonics and this is what she says this year about them.

Last year, I had three children who struggled a lot to read. They are Rebecca, Achuma and Veliswa. This year, they are doing very well as a result they are leaders in their groups. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa 09 March 2010)

Bulelwa is excited that the children have developed confidence. Her decision to keep them behind seems to have paid off.

Bulelwa also seems to have been reflecting on how children learn language. She seems to suggest that children develop language awareness when they notice how language is used within meaningful activities, such as when they self-correct rather than being corrected by the teacher.

The children also corrected errors in their example extracted from one child's writing, which you wrote on the board. They did it themselves and saw for themselves which words and vowels have been omitted, which words have not been separated, where there needs to be a full stop or a capital letter etc, their grammar. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 19 May 2009)

She also started to develop the habit of observing the children and informally assessing their understandings. She realises that there is a difference between the standard Xhosa language variety (the Language of Learning and Teaching) used in stories and the colloquial Xhosa language variety used by the children. She mediates the differences in language use by paying close attention to language in the stories that she needs to teach to her children. The statement below captures this.

In your story, I picked up a few words which need to be explained during the language structure period because most of our learners grew up in the urban townships. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 26 May 2009)

Bulelwa seems to have assessed the learners' language repertoire and realised that some children who have grown up in urban areas may not have experienced the rich language variety that comes with the experience of having grown up in rural areas where the 'deep' Xhosa is spoken. She seems to have also assessed their knowledge of story language as she may have noticed that some of the children might not be told stories at home. Thus she seems to be locating spaces for both implicit teaching and explicit teaching. She has time for reading stories for enjoyment and the language structure period which she uses for direct instruction

on language, thus developing both their love for stories and books and knowledge of language structure (Fitzgerald, 1999).

Furthermore, Bulelwa also reflects on the impact of modelling by adults. This is one of the principles of emergent literacy, where the knowledgeable adult behaves in ways that she expects children to behave. She shows that children learn by observing others when she says the following

Thank you again sisi for modelling letter writing. I don't believe what I see when I read some of the letters that the Grade Twos write. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 18 August 2009)

It is really true that when we do not read to the children, they will not know how to read and when we do not give them opportunities to write about real things that they know, they will not be able to write. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 29 October 2009)

Bulelwa seems to have noticed how her children were coping with modelling. She is showing signs of taking up the modelling condition of learning advocated by Cambourne (1995) when he says that adults need to do demonstrations, which in turn engage children in order for them to learn effectively.

Lastly, Bulelwa also noted in her evaluations of her teaching strategies that children feel like writers when they construct their own writing.

The children liked their book on heritage day, especially when they saw their names and pictures, especially something that they wrote. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 29 October 2009)

Bulelwa seems to notice the importance of treating children as writers, thus reflecting on possibilities and alternatives to her current teaching practice. She seems to be starting to find practical ways to motivate her children to write without stressing them about language conventions yet. The journal entry below illustrates this point further:

I learnt something new today when the children started writing journals, freely and even if they made mistakes like omitting vowels or sounds. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 19 May 2009)

Bulelwa however, does not reflect on what she practically needs to do when children invent their own spelling, and what the role of the teacher or an adult is in this process. She does not indicate practical steps she is going to take to fight the battle for invented spelling with those teachers who insist on accuracy from the start in her school.

5.7 The Social Reconstructionist Tradition and Critical Reflection

The social reconstructionist tradition focuses on issues of equality and justice and the social practices of teaching in relation to how they may knowingly or unknowingly reproduce unjust social relations (Dornbrack, 2008). A teacher reflecting in this tradition needs to apply critical reflection to her or his own practices and to be aware of the social context in which she or he is teaching, at the level of the school and beyond.

One strategy I used to prompt critical reflection from Bulelwa was to raise ethical and moral issues associated with our own practices. One of the things that often concerned me at Sibulele Primary school was how teachers seemed not to be bothered by the fact that they tended to leave children alone in classrooms for long periods of time. What often happened during the three years I worked there, was that whenever the WCED officials were about to visit the school, teachers would panic and spend more time preparing for the officials than teaching. Most of the time, they went to work with other teachers in the staffroom or in someone else's classroom and spent very little time with the children on task. Frustrated by this, I wrote in Bulelwa's journal:

I am aware about the work that the WCED requires from you. This upsets me because; when they come we stop everything we should be doing because we are preparing for them. I wish there was a way in which schools including Sibulele can be confident enough to tell the WCED that teaching the children and spending time in the classroom is more important than the admin work they want. When they come, we stop doing the important things and in most cases the children are left alone. I don't blame you because the WCED instructs you to do what they want. I am just pouring my frustrations on you. (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 26 May 2009)

In my journal entry above and below, I used the inclusive pronoun, 'we' as a strategy to prompt reflection because I wanted Bulelwa to understand that I was not judging her but that I was also part of the problem we were experiencing with the WCED. I attempted to create

an 'us' including myself, Bulelwa and other teachers against 'them' (the WCED) so that she could see us as allies and that I was supporting her rather than there to judge her.

A further ethical problem I identified in the school was teachers getting called to the office through the intercom, often for meetings. The teacher could spend more time daily out of the classroom rather than in their own classrooms. This is how I addressed the problem in the journal.

The other problem is school related. It is the issue of calling teachers through the intercom to the office all the time to attend meetings during class time. It really concerns me or rather worries me. In the end we end up teaching for half the time we are supposed to. This is what leads to many teachers rushing to complete things whenever the department comes. It is because we do not use our time effectively. This is an issue we can address with the SMT if it also concerns the staff. It is small things like these that affect learning so much, even though the school seems to be doing well on other things. (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 26 May 2009)

Even though I was being critical of the school situation, saying the intercom is a problem, I also used a softening strategy where I included a phrase like, 'the school seems to be doing well' to try and highlight what is positive, instead of framing everything as a problem.

A further ethical issue involved teachers often keeping their cell phones on and answering them during teaching time. Bulelwa seemed to notice nothing wrong with this practice. I also addressed this issue in the journal as follows:

...To add to this, I would like to suggest that we switch off our cellphones or put them on silent during teaching time or ask people to call us at break time or sms if it is an urgent issue. I would also suggest that we should not even read smses during class. I think the cellphones can be disruptive. (Translated from Xhosa, Xolisa, 26 May 2009)

In criticising this practice, I again included myself by using the pronoun, 'we'. Sometimes I used to verbalise the fact that I had forgotten to switch off my cellphone and explained how embarrassed I get in such situations. In that way, I also did not want her to feel judged.

In raising these issues, I was trying to prompt reflection from Bulelwa about these issues. I wanted to know what she thought of them and what she thought should be done. I wanted to know whether she was aware of the consequences of her actions for the children.

Initially, Bulelwa did not apply critical reflection in this tradition. In the journal entries she wrote in 2009 it seemed that she had accepted that her school has a particular way of doing things and that she had no power to challenge authority. However, there is evidence eight months later that she reflected on the matter of leaving children unattended in the classroom. She reports about the decisions she has taken in 2010:

I do not go when they call me on the intercom anymore. I want to be there, in the classroom. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 17 March 2010)

You know, my husband left his keys in my car and I did not want to leave my class to sort him out. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 17 March 2010)

What became evident is that it seemed like she was determined to change the way she did things in her class. First, she reports being determined not to leave her children alone, even when she is called through the intercom. Secondly, she communicates her decision that she will not attend to her personal issues during class time. This is significant in that, she has tried to reflect on her own actions and realised when she has been unfair to the children and needs to change her practices.

However, she struggled to challenge bigger problems involving school culture and management because after raising the moral and ethical issues which involve teachers leaving classrooms every time the WCED came to school, teachers answering cell phones in class and teachers being called through the intercom many times in the day Bulelwa responded,

I do not like leaving you in class but our work situation makes us do this. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 09 June 2010)

She did not respond in the journal regarding the cellphone issue. My interpretation of what Bulelwa refers to as the “work situation” is that she means that this is a school culture and management issue. This is the way things are done in the school. Bulelwa’s brief response might also suggest that she feels that this is something beyond her control; she feels that she has no power to change it and therefore, she has resigned herself to this issue as if there’s nothing she can do about it.

This might also mean that Bulelwa felt judged by my comments and did not want to discuss the issue. This later became evident, when during an informal conversation, where one of the teachers at the school did not want to write a journal fearing that what she writes might become permanent Bulelwa reported that she told that teacher that this is how she felt at first about the journal. She also said that she decided to sit down and think about the issues raised and really tried to put herself in the children's position, then she realised that this was not a personal attack on her but was for the benefit of the children. (See appendix 1)

Again, it became clear that the take up of reflective practice is a complex process. It shows that when teachers do not write about an issue, this does not necessarily mean that they are not reflecting on it but that such reflection takes place overtime and sometimes leads to changed practice at a later stage. Although Bulelwa tries to solve this problem in her own class, teacher absences continue in other classrooms. Bulelwa does not reflect on how this practice can be ended by the whole school. She also does not reflect explicitly in the journal on how these practices might have been unjust to the children.

As demonstrated in the entries about struggling readers, Bulelwa also seems to be concerned with struggling learners. In all fairness, she tries to focus on them so as not to leave them behind. She asks and takes up advice on how to assist struggling learners. From our discussions on emergent literacy and stages of reading writing development, Bulelwa started to embrace the idea that maybe teachers have been unfair in labelling some learners 'weak' or 'struggling'. She started to understand that there are factors not intrinsic to the child that might cause children to lag behind others. She started to embrace the idea that teachers are not modelling reading and writing enough to the children and this might impede children's learning. This is how she reflected about these learners after implementing different strategies to help them catch up:

Sive and Rebecca are improving in their reading and writing. I thank you once again for suggesting we should give them extra time for reading and writing and be shown how to do things. (Translated from Xhosa, Bulelwa, 13 October 2009)

While Bulelwa's reflection regarding practice seems to take on a critical level of reflection of her own actions in her class at times, operating in an authoritarian environment might present a challenge for Bulelwa, as she might be disciplined for her insubordination. Unless ethical

issues such as leaving children unattended are addressed by the whole school, individual efforts might not be effective.

5.8 Conclusion

The data I have presented in this chapter shows how the development of reflective practice is not a linear process. It is a complex non-linear process that develops unevenly overtime. Bulelwa's reflection seems to have revolved more around the technical level of reflection where she pays attention to the technical aspects of her teaching, describing the content of what she needs to teach and the strategies she is using. She seems to lack practical reflection where she needs to pay attention to what she is going to need in order to apply her strategies effectively. For example, if she needs to get her children reading for enjoyment, what she is going to do about the school library she often finds closed, and what she is going to do if she runs out of the few Xhosa books she has.

Bulelwa's level of critical reflection is also very low. First she fails to reflect about the broader issues affecting education in South Africa, issues of unequal educational provisioning of resources and training from the previous apartheid dispensation as well as the remaining two tiered education system for the rich and for the poor (Fleisch, 2008) thus failing to reflect on the political aspects of our education system.

She also fails to reflect critically on her school's management and cultural practices and how these might be improved to provide just and fair social relations, thus failing to address unequal power relations that impact on teachers' practices. However, Bulelwa might be said to have applied critical reflection only to her own personal practices. Even though she might not have written about her unjust actions, she is speaking about them in our personal conversation. For example (Reported in Xolisa's personal journals), she also asked for photographs of her classroom when we first came and said that she was ashamed of the way she taught then. Changes in Bulelwa's habits of leaving children unattended in class seem to signal the beginnings of critical reflection at a personal level. Although some of her reflections are not written in the journal, at the time when the issues were raised, it is becoming clear that reflection is an evolving and assisted process with the help of a reflective coach.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This dissertation aimed to answer the question of whether interactive, reflective journal writing can enable a teacher to develop her understandings of alternative approaches to literacy and help her to develop her practice.

Sub-questions were

- What can be considered as evidence of the take up of emergent literacy and balanced approaches in a Grade Two teachers' journal writing?
- What can be considered as evidence of take-up of reflective practice in the Grade Two teacher's journal?

In order to answer these questions, I examined the interactive journal writing of myself as literacy coach and one teacher. I treated Bulelwa's written journal entries as data, analysing them for evidence of the uptake of the literacy approaches I taught as well as for the take up of the reflective practice I modelled through the journal. In this concluding chapter I consider what we have learned about the use of interactive journals as a teacher professional development tool.

6.2 Findings

Bulelwa's journal entries provide evidence of some relatively good understanding of emergent literacy and balanced approaches to literacy learning. In order to answer the question 'What can be considered as evidence of the take up of emergent literacy and balanced approaches in a Grade Two teachers' journal writing?', I analysed her use of discourse specific to emergent literacy, whole language and balanced approaches in her journal entries as evidence of uptake of these approaches. With regards to the uptake of emergent literacy, first, I argue that through her use of terms such as, 'stories', 'reading

aloud’, ‘books’ and ‘print’ in her journal entries, Bulelwa demonstrates that she has understood the importance of immersion or exposure to print and stories. This condition is critical to early literacy learning. By taking up reading for enjoyment regularly and letter writing, she can be said to have appropriated the understanding that children need to be immersed, saturated and enveloped in books and writing materials and activities (Cambourne, 1995). Secondly, Bulelwa’s use of phrases such as, ‘when we do not read to the children’, and ‘modelling letter writing’ shows that she seems to have taken up the condition of learning from demonstration (Cambourne, 1995 and Clay, 1972).

Thirdly, Bulelwa’s use of phrases like ‘helping each other’, ‘exchange roles,’ ‘paired reading’ and ‘play’, demonstrate her understanding of the condition of interaction and engagement as well as the understanding that literacy learning, like all learning, happens in a socio-cultural context. Furthermore, her use of phrases such as ‘give opportunities to read and write’, and ‘exploring print’, seems to suggest her take up of Cambourne’s (1995) condition of use where young learners need time and opportunities to use their developing language skills. Lastly, Bulelwa’s use of terms such as, ‘encouragement’, ‘trust’ and ‘patience’ in her entries demonstrate her developing understanding of the condition of response to children’s attempts at reading and writing.

Regarding the take up of a whole language approach, Bulelwa uses disciplinary specific discourse when she uses phrases such as, ‘writing for real reasons’, ‘write about real things that they know’, and ‘in a language they feel comfortable with’. Although Bulelwa does not explicitly define what whole language is, she seems to have taken up Goodman (1986) and Bloch’s (1997) argument that lessons should have immediate meaning for children and that they should be given opportunities to use language functionally and purposefully. Although she has been teaching in the mother tongue previously, she now seems to have a well supported reason for using the mother tongue. Therefore, it seems like she has taken up the understanding that in whole language, emphasis should be on the child’s first language to build concepts (Goodman, 1986 and Bloch 1997).

Bulelwa seems to have developed an ability to apply Goodman’s (1986) idea that children learn to read from meaningful wholes through her use of phrases like, ‘reading for enjoyment’, ‘storytelling’, ‘loaning storybooks’. She has developed an ability to apply reading for enjoyment and storytelling as whole language strategies in her classroom. Further

evidence of Bulelwa's take up of whole language discourse is in her use of a phrase such as, 'they notice print everywhere'. Whole language proponents (Bloch, 1997, Clay 1979, Goodman K, 1986, Goodman, 1984, Hudelson, 1994) argue that environmental print is important in developing an understanding that print makes sense. Furthermore, Bulelwa uses phrases such as, 'you did sight vocabulary from a song' and 'teaching sounds from songs' in her journal entries. These entries seem to show that Bulelwa has appropriated Goodman's (1986) understanding that the teaching of language skills has to be done in the context of meaningful reading and writing.

Lastly, evidence of take up of both emergent literacy and whole language approaches is seen in Bulelwa's use of phrases such as, 'even if they make mistakes', 'writing freely', 'I do not put pressure', 'trust', 'believing that learners can' and 'creating a positive atmosphere'. Her use of this discourse demonstrates her developing understanding of the condition of approximation (Cambourne, 1995), where children are allowed to take risks at reading and writing and can be allowed to make errors without stressing about language structure initially, for example in using invented spelling (Rog, 2007, Goodman, 1986). Linked to this condition, is the role of emotions in learning. Bulelwa understands that in emergent literacy, effective learning takes place in low anxiety environments, where adults praise children's attempts at reading and writing rather than ignoring them.

Regarding the take up of a balanced literacy approach, Bulelwa can be said to be taking cognisance of Fitzgerald's (1999) different kinds of knowledge that children need to develop when she integrates global knowledge (comprehension strategies) with the affective knowledge (reading for enjoyment) and local knowledge (grammar) in her journal entries. Her use of terms such as 'reading for enjoyment' and strategies such as 'reading aloud', 'silent reading', 'paired reading' and 'storytelling' and terminology specific to comprehension strategies such as, 'predicted,' 'sequencing,' 'self-questioning strategy,' 'comprehension strategies,' and 'comprehension' provides us with evidence of her take up of the balanced literacy approach when used alongside the teaching of language skills such as, 'vocabulary' , 'sight words' and 'editing'.

However, Bulelwa seems to have only partially appropriated the condition of response. Although she uses the discourse of positive atmosphere and encouragement for children to learn, she does not demonstrate evidence of having successfully taken up the important

condition of responding to children's interactive journals. Although she understood that children need to write more, she did not particularly model the writing behaviour in the children's journals by writing back to them. She seemed to have taken up letter writing, which did not require her to respond directly to the children, as long as there were other children responding to the letters. In emergent literacy, experienced adult responses are seen as important for modelling the conventions of written language to the young apprentices.

Bulelwa's entries indicate that she needs to develop her understandings of what the various emergent literacy stages are, what they entail and how she needs to propel the children forward to the next stage. Although she mentions in the journal that children learn in different stages, it is not clear what she understands about the stages yet. This is important because it can help her to differentiate her instruction, with the knowledge that not everybody needs to do the same thing, depending on the stage they are at.

In order to answer the question, 'What can be considered as evidence of take-up of reflective practice in the Grade Two teacher's journal?', I began by discussing the strategies I used to prompt reflection. Then I used the four traditions of reflective practice outlined by Zeichner and Liston, (cited in Jay and Johnson, 2002, Villegas-Reimers, 2003, Dornbrack, 2008), namely, the academic tradition, social efficacy tradition, developmental tradition and social reconstructionist tradition (see chapter 2) as analytical tools. In the analysis, I identified technical reflection in the academic tradition, practical reflection in the social efficacy tradition and critical reflection in the social reconstructionist tradition.

As a teacher educator, analysing my own journal entries has enabled me to identify and make explicit the strategies I use as well as to analyse the effects of these strategies. I identified free writing and prompt responses; encouraging and praising; explicit teaching and linking information to the teacher's planning documents for encouraging interaction around the early literacy approaches. I also identified evaluation; questioning and raising ethical questions as strategies for prompting reflection. The strategies worked in the following ways:

- Once Bulelwa observed my free writing strategy and was sure I was not judging her, she started to write more. Initially, the journal took longer to be returned and had brief responses, but the more she noticed my free writing style and prompt responses the more she began to do likewise.

- Regarding the encouraging and praising strategy, once Bulelwa observed that I cared about her, wanted her to succeed and believed in her potential, she became enthusiastic and started telling me about her interactions with other literacy specialists with confidence.
- Explicit teaching worked especially in introducing and modelling disciplinary specific discourse which Bulelwa seems to have taken up.
- Once Bulelwa noticed that everything I was teaching her is in her curriculum documents, she started to trust that I was not giving her extra work but helping her to implement the curriculum.
- The strategy of self- evaluation where I taught Bulelwa to critique the curriculum had an effect because she reported that she needed to start standing up for what she believes in.
- The strategy of raising ethical questions only worked after eight months of journal writing, and only with regard to her own practice. Bulelwa struggled to challenge bigger issues that had to do with school culture and management. Her lack of take up of this strategy might suggest that she felt judged, even though I used softening strategies from time to time.
- Finally, the direct questioning strategy did not prove to be a very good strategy for prompting reflection. This suggests that Bulelwa did not like being interrogated and did not feel comfortable to divulge information that would put herself and her school at risk of being judged.

Analysing Bulelwa's ability to engage in reflective practice through her journal entries has shown us that the uptake of reflective practice is a complex developmental process rather than a linear process and that it cannot be fully taught in a once off event such as a workshop. Bulelwa seemed to be reflecting at the technical level of reflection. This level includes descriptive writing which is a mere listing of events that occurred without any explanation. Bulelwa mostly reproduced the reading strategies back to me and did not explain what informs the reading for enjoyment strategy she is implementing i.e., why it is important to read, tell stories and get children to read in pairs and why they need to choose their own books. She also did not explain how different these strategies are from the current reading strategies she has been using.

The journal entries provide some but not sufficient evidence of Bulelwa's ability to apply both practical and critical reflection. Practical reflection means that Bulelwa needed to step back from the strategies we were exploring and perhaps analyse what each strategy would require from her and her teaching context. She needed to include considerations of what the strategies would really mean in practice. For critical reflection, she needed to reflect on how she knowingly or unknowingly became unjust to her learners through some of her actions and practices. She needed to look both inwardly and outwardly to understand some of the factors that impact on her teaching. By the cut-off date of the journal entries, Bulelwa was beginning to apply some critical reflection, but could not comment on the whole school culture and management. Nevertheless, this study has shown how the interactive journal writing has contributed to teacher's professional development and changing practice. Given more time, the journal has more potential to develop the teacher's reflectivity even further.

6.3 Limitations

The first limitation I would like to point out relates to journaling itself. In journal writing, people select what they write about which means that they don't have to reveal the 'whole story'. The oral mode of reflection is also very important. English (2001) argues that people often have fears about who will read the journal and also fear being judged. The fact that someone else will read the journal may inhibit teachers from writing what is in their minds or from engaging in meaningful writing, reflection and learning. Secondly, the findings in this case-study can of course not be generalised for all teachers as I have focussed on only one teacher. Bulelwa might also be an example of a very motivated teacher who is eager to learn. However, since we face a huge challenge in South Africa of developing professional development activities and programmes for teachers that actually impact on their practice, I felt it was justified to take a careful and detailed look at the response of one teacher to a potentially worthwhile strategy.

6.4 Implications

Because we know that learning is a process, we need to find ways to facilitate follow up of teachers after workshops. This study has shown how interactive journaling can be used as a tool to facilitate such follow up. The significance of this is that even after training workshops; follow up needs to be done by the education department or teacher trainers to reinforce new

knowledge and practices, to show how knowledge can be applied in practice and how teachers can adapt ideas to suit their contexts. Most of all, the use of the mother tongue in explaining discourse specific terminology was very significant in the journal.

The journal also became a strategy for individualised attention, for teaching and role modelling, for free writing, support and reflection. Mentoring and interaction through the interactive journal has implications for the quality of services rendered to the teachers. Although bringing together teachers in clusters for workshops is important to enable teachers to share their experiences, the journal became a tool for individualised attention for Bulelwa. This one on one interaction through the journal seems to suggest that this is one aspect of training that is valuable and yet neglected. A significant advantage of journaling is that it makes it easy for teacher trainers to see the results of an intervention immediately.

Furthermore, the journal became a safe place to explore new ideas in the form of content knowledge and information about critical aspects of early literacy learning as well as pedagogical strategies for literacy instruction. Departmental curriculum documents given to teachers are often laden with disciplinary specific discourse, which needs not only to be explained to teachers but demonstrated as to how it works in practice.

6.5 Conclusion

This study provides evidence of how an interactive, reflective journal enabled one teacher to develop her understandings of alternative approaches to teaching literacy. The in-depth examination of one teacher's take up in this case study has given me the opportunity to examine how an interactive journal used in a real life context might work as a tool to impact on teachers' practice in the process of teacher professional development. Analysis of the teacher's use of discourse specific to early literacy in her journal entries has shown us that she has taken up some aspects of emergent literacy, whole language and balanced literacy approaches. It has also provided her with a starting point in developing her reflective practice. Her partial take up of the condition of response and lack of take up of practical and critical reflection reminds us that learning for adults is a process, but there is still more room for the teacher to develop these understandings further. This case-study shows us that the journal is a potentially powerful tool that has proven to be a bridge between input from training and the teacher's implementation.

As a recommendation for future training, I suggest that journaling be used during training workshops to get teachers to reflect on how to apply new knowledge. Journaling can also help trainers to assess informally. I recommend that between teacher workshops, a process of hand written or online journal writing needs to be embarked upon as a monitoring and support process between teacher trainers or mentors. Because this is a time-consuming process, it could then be followed up with group discussions within a cluster of educators who have participated in the training per district. Because it is also easy for teachers to get caught up in a lot of things when they come back from training, it is very important to find ways of supporting and putting subtle pressure on them to implement the knowledge and practices that they have been exposed to. The journal is one such tool for doing this. However, Brooks and Sikes (1997, Reed et al, 2002) emphasized that on-site modelling sessions where the lecturers and trainers model good practices work better than when in-service training is done away from school and this study attests to this.

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APPENDIX 1

Entry from Xolisa Guzula's personal journal, 05 May 2010.

Bulelwa told me that after I had taken the grade 9s to her class last week, she spoke to the principal about this. She says the Grade 3 teacher has also said to her, "Why did you not tell us that working with Xoli is hot coals?" Bulelwa said she told her that even though she does not know what I wrote in her journal, she now knows how important it was for her to reflect on what she does in class. She reported that she told her that she first cringed when she read something from me about switching off cellphones in class. She explained to her that, taking attitudes aside, what I (Xolisa) write about in the journal are the correct things that they should do, and those that they should not be doing professionally. She then told me, "I personally do not like to be called to the office when I am busy teaching. I should not be answering cellphones during tuition time." She agreed that it could be an attitude problem and thanked me for everything I have done with her in her class.

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