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**A CONTRASTIVE CASE STUDY OF ORTHODOX AND ALTERNATE ADULT LITERACY
INITIATIVES, AS REGARDS THEIR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LITERACY, PEDAGOGY, AND
CURRICULUM**

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WLKZEL003

**A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the award
of the degree of Masters in Education (Applied Language and
Literacy Studies)**

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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.

Zelma Fine

28 January 2009

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate and contrast two sites of literacy tuition, the one being an orthodox night school, set-up and run according to departmental requirements, and the other, an innovative endeavour situated within the walls of the South African Museum. My concern was to examine how different constructs of what literacy is and how it should be taught manifested themselves in curricula, pedagogy, and organisation at the two sites. I used ethnographic-style methods to gather data at the two sites. From the perspective of orthodox literacy instruction, as it has developed in adult education, the emphasis in literacy instruction is on the transmission and acquisition of a set of skills, imparted to learners in order that they might 'become literate'. Literacy is viewed in this perspective as a single, unitary phenomenon attached to formal education institutions, and, therefore, this approach neglects to consider the context and variety of social practices. I found that the approach to literacy of the night school studied, had particular limiting consequences for curricula, pedagogy, and organisation. The orientation and methods employed at the literacy class held in the Museum, in contrast, entailed the utilisation of objects contained therein, in conjunction with the knowledge brought to the learning environment by the learners themselves, as the impetus for improving adult participants' speaking, reading, and writing in English. The view of literacy and learning shaping these activities was that of literacy as situated and variable social practice, not simply a technical skill to be learnt in a uniform and decontextualised fashion. The research shows that interactive use of multimodal resources for purposes of adult learning, such as was used in the museum classes, creates an environment that stimulates learning in ways that did not happen at the adult night school, and thus points to problems with the way literacy training is organised and carried out in the night school environment.

Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Outcomes-based Education and Constructivist Theory	4
1.2 Background to the research	6
<i>The ABET organisation</i>	6
<i>The SAQA Act and ABET</i>	6
<i>The Draft Policy for ABET</i>	7
<i>Interim Guidelines</i>	8
<i>Commerce and Industry</i>	9
<i>Careers in ABET</i>	10
<i>Recent developments</i>	10
<i>The Museum literacy class and ABET</i>	11
2. Theoretical Review and Theoretical Framework/Contexts	13
2.1 Literacy as social practice	13
2.2 Functional literacy	17
2.3 Challenges to the functional literacy approach	19
2.4 Museums and adult education	21
2.5 Learning in museums: perspectives from the literature	24
2.6 Museums and adult literacy	25
<i>A British project</i>	25
<i>A Canadian programme</i>	26
3. Methodology	28
3.1 Purpose	28
3.2 Ethnographic research	28
3.3 Qualitative research	30
3.4 Research Design	31
<i>The research experience</i>	31
<i>Access</i>	32
<i>Data Collection</i>	32
3.5 Limitations of the research design	32
<i>Bias</i>	32
<i>Outsider intrusion</i>	33
<i>Interviewing</i>	33
<i>Protecting names and identities</i>	35
<i>Employing the terms Black, Coloured, and White</i>	35
4. The Night School: Discussion and Analysis	36
4.1 Background	36
4.2 The English Class	37
4.3 The Afrikaans Class	38
4.4 The night school organisers' perceptions	40
<i>Autonomous perspective of the night school organisers</i>	40
<i>Self-esteem issues</i>	41
<i>Finances and self-esteem</i>	43
<i>WCED issues</i>	44
<i>Criticism of literacy campaigns</i>	44
<i>Low intake/high dropout rate</i>	45
<i>Promoting the school</i>	47
4.5 Being an ABET beginner	48
<i>The domestic workers</i>	48
<i>The retired gentleman</i>	52
5. The Museum Literacy Class: Discussion and Analysis	54
5.1 Background	54

<i>The reason for the establishment of the class</i>	54
<i>The manner in which the lessons were conducted</i>	54
<i>The Saturday morning class</i>	56
<i>The driver of the Museum van provides valuable insight</i>	59
5.2 The Museum class learners articulate their views	62
<i>The desire to improve English skills</i>	62
<i>Lack of opportunity to practice English and negative attitudes towards speaking English and the Museum</i>	64
<i>Issues to do with school</i>	65
<i>Issues of confidence</i>	67
<i>Complaints and criticisms</i>	69
<i>Wendy's positive input</i>	72
<i>Enjoyment derived and knowledge gained</i>	73
<i>Eagerness to have others benefit from the class and to share knowledge gained</i>	75
<i>Participation in decision-making</i>	76
<i>Learners' attitudes towards education</i>	78
<i>The learners' responses</i>	78
6. Conclusion	80

Chapter One

1. Introduction

This study describes research into two sites of literacy learning in Cape Town, South Africa, and focuses on the differences in their approaches to adult learning. The orthodox night school set-up, run according to departmental requirements, exemplified the teaching of literacy in line with current South African adult basic education policy, which sees literacy as a set of skills that can be mastered and learned disembedded from the contexts in which it is used and appropriated. In this approach, those who do not possess this standard requirement for literacy are regarded as being deficient, and their deficiencies can be addressed by learning the basic skills of coding and decoding text in a decontextualised way.

Research has shown that, despite ambitious expectations, the reality is that formal adult literacy classes worldwide are characterised by low intake and high drop-out rates (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996). Furthermore, they have not been widely found to lead to empowerment, to facilitate jobs, or to create social mobility. It has also been claimed that such formalised and hierarchic procedures 'infantilise' learners (Kell, 1996). In these classes, which are frequently modelled on school hierarchies, literacy is taught as a set of skills, in stages of linear development. In the New Literacy Studies, an interdisciplinary body of work, literacy is viewed as a social practice, as is demonstrated in the two projects mentioned below (Stein, 2008:29). The Social Uses of Literacy (SoUL, 1996) project demonstrated that, in the case of adult literacy in South Africa, there should be a shift toward seeing reading and writing as situated social practices, instead of as merely individual, discrete skills.

This has also been demonstrated in the CELL Research Project (Prinsloo, 2005:141) which focused on literacy as a social practice, albeit literacy practices amongst children. Whilst earlier emphasis in the New Literacy Studies, as demonstrated by the two projects above, was on social practice, literacy

theorists are currently considering facets such as materiality (Prinsloo and Baynham, 2008:9). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:230–232) argue that materiality, that is, writing, objects and artefacts are part of literacy practices. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:19) representation is not only in the form of speech, but also the visual, in other words there is more than one mode of communication involved in meaning making: communication is multimodal. This research assumes museums to be multimodal, with different affordances given to different design elements such as an object, label, diagram or photograph. Ravelli (2006:121) makes this claim in the following way. “The texts which arise at the level of exhibition and institution are *multi-modal* texts, that is, texts which make their meanings by drawing on a variety of semiotic resources”. This will be discussed on page 15.

The following section outlines the development of adult literacy provision in South Africa since the early 1990s.

In the early 1990s, a ‘T’ for ‘Training’ was added to Adult Basic Education (ABE) in policy initiatives, to demonstrate commitment to the integration of education and training: literacy on its own was perceived as being insufficient to support empowerment and transformation. The intention was to provide a suitable path to a general education that hopefully would result in improved quality of life. However, developments in the later 1990s and 2000s, have shown that while there is overall support by literacy providers and some researchers (Aitchison, 1999, and French, 2002) for the concept of ABET, it is apparent that the actual integration of adult education and training does not often translate well into practice, and what transpires is actually just ABE on its own. Originally ABET was meant to have been Level One of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), but it has been relegated to ‘ABET Levels’, a subordinate status. French (2002:2) has suggested that, despite high hopes for adult literacy provision within the ABET model, in actual fact, “ABET is marginalised, impoverished, generally in decline and, arguably at least, in a terminal condition”.

In June 2000, after identifying literacy as a high priority, the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, launched the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI), but by the second half of the

year it had stalled, his excuse being that the plan needed to be reconsidered as it was too ambitious (Macfarlane, 2001). The following year he promised increased access to ABET and the mobilising of three million participants in literacy programmes. In 2004 Asmal stated that SANLI had been able to advance literacy delivery, and that, "...we are making real progress in breaking the back of illiteracy" (Aitchison, 2006:109). He also stated that he was "committed to achieving a 50% decline in illiteracy by 2005, especially for women" (Aitchison, 2006:108). However, SANLI failed to deliver on its promise to "break the back of illiteracy" in five years, and millions of Rands were returned to foreign donors (Adult Learning Network (ALN), 2005).

When the ABET Act was passed in 2002, as French (2002) describes it, ABET activists hoped that it would lead to meaningful commitment on the government's part. However, the act merely involved official recognition of non-government centres, and limited requirements as to how Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs) were to be managed. The PALCs (former night schools), remained unchanged in many ways, and state funding provides just about enough to cover their maintenance. Therefore, as French (2002) argues, despite all efforts to impose change, and to replace rote learning with Outcomes Based Education (OBE) practices, the situation hardly differs from what was in place before.

As things stand, ABET educators are still expected to teach the same learning areas as that of the formal schooling system, and the curriculum is meant to be equivalent to that of formal school. Kell (1997:7) argues that within the new discourses shaping ABET, literacy was seen as the foundation for further learning and as an individual commodity that people either do or do not have. She further argues that within the new discourses, reading and writing are seen as non-problematic, instrumental activities and that this view therefore imposes a rigid framework on all literacy learning.

In 2007, the government undertook to launch a mass literacy campaign, the motivation apparently stemming from a growing recognition that the current ABET system had failed to have a significant impact on the high levels of illiteracy. The proposal spoke of "eradicating illiteracy through a single

integrated campaign that is independent of (yet in harmony with) the current ABET system” (ALN, 2007:2). The importance of a post-literacy programme was stressed, but discussion around the implementation thereof was absent. In 2008, the government put its plan into action when it launched The Kha Ri Gude (Let’s Read) campaign to address the problem of the five million adults who cannot read. The approximately 29,000 facilitators, mostly unemployed matriculants, were given two week’s training, after which they were to receive a monthly stipend of R1, 200 for their teaching efforts (De Lange, 2008:7).

Next I discuss outcomes-based education and show how this approach is influenced by, but also has different aspects to constructivist theory.

1.1 Outcomes-based Education and Constructivist Theory

In terms of the NQF and Skills Development Act, the current approach to education and training is outcomes based. It differs from the traditional approach in that the inputs of traditional curriculum-driven education and training are replaced by intended outputs (outcomes). The focus is on the mastering of knowledge and skills to achieve certain outcomes. An outcome is regarded as what a person can do and understand, whereas a competence is what a person is able to communicate regarding the use of skills, information, and understanding necessary to a particular situation. An essential outcome is a competence a learner has acquired at a required level of performance (Nel, 2004:427).

A principle of the NQF is that qualifications and skills gained in one area will be transferable to another site of learning, that through the integration of education and training, learners would be prevented from being “trapped in one learning situation”, and would be able to “move more easily from one place of learning to another” and “from one level of learning to another”. Education was seen as the “area of learning where you gain knowledge”, and training as the “area of learning where you gain skills” (IEC and IEB, 1996:15). Different routes leading to the same learning ends would be

provided, and the achievement of national qualifications through both formal and informal learning situations was possible.

While OBE concepts fit in with contemporary approaches to learning, such as constructivist theory, in that student-centred environments are proposed, French (2002:17) has described only “gestures of support for the new order, rather than serious conceptual adoption”. He asserts that the approach at many centres reflects the “negative side of the carry over from the past ...the *de facto* continuance of the official curriculum practices of the 1980’s...” (French, 2002:12), namely, conventional teacher-centred approaches that emphasise rote learning and that involve the acquisition of factual and conceptual information; focusing on quantitative as opposed to qualitative learning.

Constructivist theory, on the other hand, emanating from the perspectives of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky, embraces the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves: each learner individually (and socially) constructs meaning as he or she learns (Hein, 1996). Learners are provided with the opportunity to, firstly, interact with sensory data, and, secondly, to construct their own world under guidance. Important principles of constructivist theory include ideas that learning is an active process, a social activity and contextual; that one needs knowledge to learn; and that motivation is vital for learning.

Museums have tended to be overlooked in studies conducted on adult learners (Matthew, 1996:70), although they do potentially provide the ideal environment for the execution of constructivist principles in teaching programmes. Hein (2001:6) argues that the constructivist view of education is the most appropriate for museum education. The Draft ANC Policy For The Transformation And Development Of Museums and Monuments For A Democratic South Africa acknowledged this potential when it stated its intention to make museum premises and facilities “available and accessible for wider community activities e.g. adult education and literacy classes, ... i.e. (to) function as community resource centres” (ANC, 1992, Section 3.3 vii).

The Museum class studied embodied the kind of educational facility envisaged in the above document. Conducted as it was within the Museum environment, it offered an alternative setting, both stimulating and extraordinary.

I outline the background to this research project in the following section.

1.2 Background to the research

This research project was stimulated by an earlier experience of having to analyse an ABET organisation, and by the subsequent introduction to an adult literacy class taught at a national and social history museum in Cape Town.

The ABET organisation

When, during post graduate studies, I was required to analyse an ABET organisation, I chose one that was run by a large company. I found that the set-up in their classes emulated school, to the point of having a minute's silence at the lesson's completion. The workbooks appeared more appropriate for children, and the answers to the exercises had been inadvertently attached. Certain facilitators admitted that their motives when volunteering had been purely financial, and this, coupled with minimal training, did not make for an ideal ABET practitioner.

The SAQA Act and ABET

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), established by the SAQA Act (1995), and responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the NQF, adopted an eight level qualifications framework. ABET was meant to provide the first of these, but was later moved to sub-levels (ABET levels), which are incorporated into Level One (General Education and Training). At the ABET organisation, learners who had completed Level One in mother tongue Xhosa or Afrikaans, found the transition to Level Two (Further Education and Training) in English difficult. As a result, about half of them dropped out at this stage. The few who were able to progress to Level Four

(Further Education and Training), had to wait, sometimes up to a year, for Level Five (Higher Education) to be provided.

The facilitators insisted that there were learners who had managed to obtain better jobs as a result of ABET provision. The company running the ABET classes employed thousands of people, yet only a few hundred were receiving ABET instruction. Street (1996:6) has observed that:

Formal schooled literacy practices may indeed have facilitated power for some. It will not, however, necessarily provide power for many, when the kinds of literacy needed in their specific contexts are often very different and, in a social sense, more complex.

The reality is that it is more difficult and challenging to accommodate the latter level of complexity than to simply provide a package of 'neutral' literacy skills through centrally designed programmes.

The Draft Policy for ABET

The Department of Education's (DOE) Final Draft policy for ABET (DOE, 1997), described previous literacy provision as being largely a second chance schooling system, unsuited to the needs of adult learners, and having "an inappropriate, narrow, formal school focus" (DOE, 1997:8). In 2001, the Minister described the new system of education as promoting human dignity, equity and democracy. Central strategies to 'seed' these democratic values were identified, critical thinking being first and foremost (Asmal, 2001). Originally, literacy was proclaimed a Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) Presidential lead project, but was not given funding. Foreign donors were meant to have provided this, although in the experience of NGOs, they generally possess an oversimplified understanding of literacy, with the tendency to view it as a simple task with clear, time-clocked products (Stromquist, 2001).

In pre- and post-apartheid South Africa, most ABE was provided by NGOs, but now less than 40 of the 400 in existence in 1994 still operate, the reason being lack of funding and support, and a regulatory framework that the Minister agreed needs revising (ALN, 2005). During the struggle period, the influence of Paulo Freire's teachings, utilised as they were within radical literacy work,

led to advances being made in local anti-apartheid movements. However, the past 10 to 20 years have seen a shift from that of non-formal and informal provision, towards that of formalisation and standardisation. The Adult Basic Education and Training Act (Department of Education, 2000) excludes any references to community empowerment and culture, or to literacy and basic education as being ends in themselves. In 1993 outcomes-based examinations, developed by the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) led to the establishment of standards that had a marked influence on the concept and quality of ABET, a situation apparent in industry, but also reflected in various aspects of national policy (French, 2002).

Interim Guidelines

After the 1994 elections, as French (2002) describes it, state provision of literacy tuition became part of ABET with the drafting of the National DOE's Interim Guidelines for ABET in September, 1995. ABET was viewed as the basic foundation for lifelong learning within a formal system of adult basic education, linked to the NQF and an outcomes-based approach. Most of what ABET stood for could not be properly recognised except as contributing to a qualification. The integration of education and training was meant to aid the transfer of qualifications and skills gained in one area, to another site of learning. The intention was to provide an appropriately adult route to a general education geared to greatly improved quality of life.

However, subsequent changes to the original concept led to the ultimate marginalisation of ABET within the NQF, a situation further exacerbated by the introduction of the Skills Development Act, which makes use of 'learnerships'. These are characterised by "leading to a qualification", the achievement of which, for an illiterate adult, will most likely take up to seven years. In addition, many of the qualifications being generated for NQF Level 1 seem to be dominated by a narrow skills focus: "...fitting ABET into the system requires various contortions. ...all the energy going into developing Learnerships is being invested way above the ABET levels" (French, 2002:15).

OBE has resulted in increased attention to 'quality' concerns regarding outcomes, standards, assessment, quality assurance, etc. Partly as a result, implementation of OBE is said to have led to 'severe information overload', thereby compromising productivity. What was urgently needed was the provision of uncomplicated curriculum material and syllabuses to remedy the situation. In addition, the integration of adult education and training can be extremely difficult and challenging, placing both educators and learners under unnecessary pressure, and, as a result, what usually transpires, according to French (2002:11), is that literacy instruction takes place in one room while welding is taught in another.

When the PALCs adopted OBE and the NQF, they were not given additional financing for new training and learning materials. In practice, these centres are mostly being utilised by those learners taking a second chance at matriculation, rather than 'beginner' learners (the very opposite of what was originally intended). This situation has even lead to talk of some of the centres being closed or privatised (French, 2002:20). Opponents of the introduction of ABET had warned that the dominance of the schooling model would prevail, and indeed, despite all the best intentions of the new policies, it does appear to be a case of "sending adults back to primary school" (Aitchison, 1999).

Commerce and Industry

Commerce and Industry, the largest providers of ABET (Aitchison, 2007), were inclined towards a competency based approach that can be quite narrow, and French (2002) reveals that what is found in their centres is just ABE, without any training. Literacy, Communication in English and Numeracy/Maths are offered as additional subjects, as opposed to being workplace-related. There is disillusionment with ABET, probably owing to the confusion brought about by policy requirements and the NQF, and support for it may dwindle further as training more directly related to production and staff advancement comes to be viewed as preferable (French, 2002). Salim Vally, of the Education Rights Project, accuses the state of shirking its responsibility for ABET and of placing more and more reliance on business and the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs),

when it means that the needs of business, and not of communities, will dominate the curriculum. "... government needs to do more than pay lip service to ABET, we need to be able to measure their commitment in terms of concrete funding, time frames and implementation plans" (ALN, 2005:5).

Careers in ABET

ABET educators do not derive similar benefits to counterparts in mainstream schools: there is high turnover and few incentives to encourage acquisition of qualifications. Nevertheless, although there are few substantial providers, an ABET Practitioner Standards Generating Body, was established to encourage quality training. At UNISA, ABET is one of few departments not subsidised by government (Lake, 2006:3). Also, the level required for registered qualifications appears inappropriate for the existing "marginalised and impoverished" set up (French, 2002:2). In the PALCs, formal teaching qualifications are deemed adequate, and only ten per cent of staff possess any special training for ABET. DOE staff is not required to have ABET specific training, with only some ten percent actually having any. Therefore, there is little on offer in the way of jobs and no chance of job security, despite the fact that the illiteracy rate has grown by half a million since 1994 (ALN, 2006:1).

Recent developments

In 2005, the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, at an ABET Roundtable, declared that ABET needed to be more responsive, and that it had become "utilitarian and narrow", and had "sought to make adults like children" (Aitchison, 2007). ABET, thus, required re-conceptualising and revamping. Subsequently, similar statements were heard at conference and official state education gatherings. Then in 2006, a Ministerial Committee of Literacy was established to plan for a mass literacy campaign. It was hoped that this would be a better way of dealing with the problem of illiteracy than the formal ABET system, which did not appear to be making much of a difference.

Literacy expenditure remains at less than one percent of the education budget, although the recent 2007/2008 budget did include an extra amount for ABET and literacy of over R800 million. There

have been attempts to have a national board for adult education, for which the ABET Act of 2000 made provision, but this has never been implemented. There is not much evidence of systematic national *monitoring* and *evaluation* mechanisms for adult education. In the case of state run ABET, there has been the occasional evaluations of particular foreign donor funded projects and developments, but they are not publicly accessible and there is little evidence that such evaluations have ever been taken seriously (Aitchison, 2007).

The Museum literacy class and ABET

French's (2002:27) statement that, "The pockets of worthwhile, even inspiring, work in ABET around the country appear as yet to have tenuous links to the massive apparatus of the NQF", aptly described the South African Museum class. Wendy, the Liaison Officer and facilitator, of that class was engaged in a Masters in Adult Education, and also possessed a substantial amount of experience as a literacy educator. The idea to start the class arose after a visit to the South African Museum with her St. Francis night school learners: she was surprised by their lively reaction to the exhibits. There was much animated discussion and exchange of information among them as they related to the Museum's Xhosa-speaking Education Officer what the exhibits meant to them, especially in the African Studies display area. Wendy immediately realised the potential of the Museum for enhancing literacy skills. Furthermore, the fact that the Museum also possessed lecture rooms and audio-visual facilities, as opposed to the poorly equipped night school, was an added incentive (Personal communication with Wendy).

In August 1995 thus, the Museum Literacy Project was formed, the long-term aim being to introduce similar projects in other museums. (To date these aims have not yet been realised, and, in addition, the South African Museum Literacy Project has subsequently ceased to exist.) Although the Draft ANC Policy for the Transformation and Development of Heritage Resources (ANC, 1992:5, Section 3.4) stated its intentions to engage museum education programmes in adult education and literacy, and to

provide the necessary resources for them, the project had to be funded by the Museum itself, and by the Friends of the Museum.

In the next chapter I discuss the theoretical review and framework that underpin this research project.

Chapter Two

2. Theoretical Review and Theoretical Framework/Contexts

I have focused on two sources of theoretical orientation: the writings of contemporary theorists in the field of literacy, namely, proponents of the New Literacy Studies (NLS); and from literature expounding the role of museums in the provision of adult education, specifically with regard to the teaching of literacy. Various South African education policy documents were also referred to.

I will begin by discussing literacy as a social practice, followed by a discussion on functional literacy.

2.1 Literacy as social practice

I have drawn on the theories of the NLS since they furnish a framework for investigating the social dynamics involved in reading and writing activities. Key to the theories underpinning the NLS is the notion of literacy as a social practice (Gee, 1996; Street, 1984, 1995; Barton, 1994).

The NLS is a body of work oriented to the ethnographic study of literacy practices and focused on the social and contested nature of literacy in social practice (Street, 1984, 1993, 1995; Heath, 1983; Baynham, 1995; Barton, 1996; and Gee, 1990, 2001). NLS researchers look at the wider context within which literacy practices are framed (Prinsloo, 1996).

Street (1984) identified the approach to literacy as comprising basic skills as an 'autonomous model' of literacy. The autonomous model has been influential in the study and implementation of literacy for some time now, he claimed, and has subsequently been criticised more widely by NLS scholars since Street's first critique. The model views the absence of literacy as a form of intellectual disability which renders its unfortunate victims dependent and vulnerable. The very word 'autonomous' denotes the conception that the mere act of literacy acquisition, regardless of context, will result in heightened cognitive ability. Literacy is conceived of in the model in technical terms, independent of social

context. As far as oral versus literate cultures are concerned, members of the former are viewed as being altogether different, until such time as literacy is introduced, to lead them on the path to 'progress'.

The wide range of positive associations that were attached to literacy from within the autonomous model came to be known as the 'literacy myth' within the NLS, a term first coined by Graff (1979) when describing ideas that literacy in itself had consequences, regardless of context. The literacy myth not only perpetuates stereotypes of so called illiterates, but is also an ethnocentric perspective. The ideological model, developed by Street (1983) and colleagues offers an alternative approach, one which sees literacy as being dependent on social context and which reveals multiple literacies, as opposed to a single, unified competence. The term 'ideological' is intentionally employed to suggest that there are always contests over the uses and meaning of literacy (Street, 1993). This more culturally sensitive stance underpins the contemporary body of research by NLS scholars that focuses on what individuals actually do with reading and writing.

A shift in focus to a perspective which stresses literacy as situated social practice was first seen in the argument and findings of Scribner and Cole (1981), after their research among the Vai in Liberia. This study, initially undertaken to test the influential theory that learning how to read and write fosters the development of higher intellectual skills, revealed that cognitive shifts are the result of specific social practices, for example, schooling, rather than literacy independent of its particular uses in social practice. Amongst the Vai there are three different literacies in social use, each with its own script, its own method of transmission, and its range of social functions. An indigenous writing system, 160 years old, is acquired without schooling and passed on through individual tutoring. English and alphabetic literacy is taught in government schools and, thirdly, Arabic writing is learnt in Koranic schools. Scribner and Cole's (1981) research concluded, amongst others, that some illiterate adults, especially those in urban areas, shared some of the skills usually associated only with literate persons. Their research also concluded that cognitive attributes were the outcome of particular social practices, such as schooling, and were not the direct results of the acquisition of literacy. They further argued

that sweeping claims for substantial and universal cognitive skills resulting from literacy were not sustained by their research.

The observations that their research provided lend support to the view that literacy practices that develop in a particular society depend on that society's history and structure. It was found that societies differ in the functions they generate for literacy and in their perceptions of its instrumental and ideological values. It was also demonstrated that, as among the Vai, in most societies literacy has a plurality of functions even when only one writing system is in use. The more complex the society and the more developed the technologies for producing writing, the more diverse the literacy practices within that society (Tobach et al, 1997:203).

A study undertaken by Shirley Brice-Heath (1983) found more than sufficient evidence of these diverse literacy practices when investigating communicative patterns within three communities, two of which were working class mill settlements, one black ('Trackton'), one white ('Roadville'), located close to each other in the south-eastern United States, and, the other from the same town, who were middle-class ('townspeople'). Her study revealed how different social strata in an advanced society use and select between the language and literacy skills and resources available to them. It was found that there were multiple uses of written and spoken language, and members had access to, and used both. It was not possible, therefore, to characterise Trackton and Roadville by way of existing descriptions of oral or literate cultures when they were neither, yet both. However, the forms, occasions, content, and functions of their reading and writing differed greatly from each other, and each varied in degree and kind from patterns followed by the townspeople. In Trackton, there were very few occasions where solitary reading or writing of any great length was engaged in. Instead, much conversation revolved around these activities, which were both collective and carried out in public.

From a NLS perspective, literacy as a social activity can best be described in terms of the literacy practices which are drawn upon in literacy events. The former refers to common patterns in using

reading and writing in a particular situation, such as when a person writes a letter. The latter can be any occasion where the written word has a role, for example, an adult reading a bedtime story to a child. These 'events' often have a social interactional component where literacy and spoken language combine (Barton, 1994).

For Gee (1998:1), literacy practices:

... always fully integrate language, both oral and written, with non-language "stuff", i.e., with ways of acting, interacting, feeling, valuing, thinking, and believing, as well as with various sorts of non-verbal symbols, sites, tools, objects, and technologies.

The availability and provision of objects in the Museum classes and their effectiveness as teaching aids lend credence to Gee's (1998) statement above. His view of the NLS as arguing for a focus not on reading, but, rather, on oral and written language "as composed of diverse, but closely inter-related 'tools' (mediating devices, Wertsch, 1998) for learning, development, and activity within concrete social practices at specific, socioculturally diverse sites..." (1998:1) further strengthens the case.

Subsequent to the aforementioned statements, Gee (2007) has described recent research that suggests that people only really know what words mean and learn new ones when they can "hook them to the sorts of experiences they refer to, that is, to the sorts of actions, images, or dialogues the words relate to". He explains that this gives the words situated meanings, not merely verbal ones (2007:8).

Street (2006:18) is of the opinion that future developments for literacy research, policy, and practice could involve an amalgamation of literacy as social practice, and literacy as one component of multimodal communicative practices. Kress (2001:2) addresses the questions of how different modes interact with one another to make meaning, as well as what effects the representational uses of these modes have on the very forms of language itself. Kress argues that representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, which all contribute to meaning. (2001:2) Modes facilitate the making and taking of meaning differently, for example, written texts often contain sequential accounts of events, while visual texts can present relationships between people and things by using spatial relations to indicate social relationships. In addition, the meanings of the modes are always

interwoven with the meanings made with all the other modes present; this interaction produces meaning. (2001:2).

Kress and von Leeuwen (1996) present the argument that language – speech or writing – has always existed as only one mode in a totality of modes involved in the production of written or spoken text. A spoken text is both verbal and non-verbal, combining non-verbal modes of communication such as gesture and facial expression. Written text involves more than language – it is written on something with something using letters and is laid out on, for instance, a page or a computer screen. (1996:39).

Museum displays consist of more than one semiotic mode. Meng (2004:1) states that museum displays typically consist of photographs, three-dimensional physical objects, space and language. Ravelli (2006:121) argues that in considering museums to be multimodal, there is the potential to extend their communicative frameworks to broader notions of text. One of the important modes used in the museum class was that of the three-dimensional artefacts, or the ‘tools’ referred to by Gee (1998), for example the use of fossils, described on page 26.

2.2 Functional literacy

The concept of functional literacy stresses the importance of focusing on the uses and applications of reading and writing in the real world (Prinsloo, 2005). There are those who embrace functional literacy as a desired standard of ability for which to aim, but the targets for this standard emanate from western ideas conforming to school-type learning situations. Developmental adult literacy work promotes functional literacy as a means to overcoming poverty and disease, and, to increasing production (Barton, 1994).

The functional literacy perspective sees literacy in terms of a single, universal set of skills which can be applicable anywhere. To date, there is no overwhelming evidence to support the claim that achieving designated levels of literacy in standardised text situations significantly changes the life trajectories of otherwise disadvantaged adults. This is substantiated by the view of the Ministerial

Committee of Literacy when it states that, "... any literacy that is only functional and meaningful within a schooling environment is inadequate" (Aitchison, 2007:4).

In fact, low enrolment and high drop out figures reflect the reality of international formal literacy provision. Adult literacy discourses can actually serve to raise false hopes for those who manage to acquire literacy skills on the one hand, while inflicting a sense of failure for those who do not, on the other (Morphet, 1996; Kell, 1997). In addition, the issue of sustaining literacy with an infrastructure providing appropriate reading matter, and other relevant purposes for reading and writing, should be investigated prior to launching any literacy initiatives (Barton, 1994).

The publicity heralding mass campaigns may, inadvertently, serve to create a hitherto non-existent awareness among so-called illiterate people of the stigma attached to a lack (perceived by the providers) of literacy. Such individuals may then experience feelings of inadequacy, whereas before they had been coping in their everyday lives. Headlines using descriptions such as a 'war' on illiteracy automatically cast negative connotations on the word (Randall, 2000:13). Such rhetoric exaggerates the effects of adult literacy campaigns, and it is assumptions such as these that the NLS challenges.

When policy is being determined, decisions should be made regarding what specific literacy is relevant for which particular group of people. In illustration, McEwan and Malan (1996:197) focused on rural women in the Eastern Cape who, unsurprisingly, in the light of other NLS research (Street, 1984; Prinsloo and Breier, 1996) did not see the acquisition of literacy as a top priority: what was uppermost in their minds was to see their children educated. They viewed literacy as a surrogate for other social desires, such as that schooled literacy was supposed to bring them wealth. They perceived the real problem to be not illiteracy itself, but the realisation that the ability to 'decode' the letters might not bring forth what was promised. The researchers thus felt that it was highly unlikely that women in rural areas such as those studied, would regard adult literacy classes as crucial for their own involvement in social and economic development.

In the National Literacy Campaign launched by the South African government in 2007, specific outcomes targeted were meant to include “alphabetisation and functional literacy focusing on the mother tongue with only a very small component addressing spoken English and the language of the economy” (ALN, 2007:2). Levine (1986:42) argues that low standards of functionality expected in mass campaigns appear to represent official endeavours to “minimise the embarrassing scale of the problem”. Tuchten (2000) contends that adult literacy campaigns alone will not necessarily serve to minimise the extent of the phenomenon of illiteracy, since it is the result of a number of factors, many of which are present in South Africa today. These factors include lack of schooling, poor quality schooling, poverty, social and geographic isolation, community disruption due to violence, crime and substance abuse.

2.3 Challenges to the functional literacy approach

The NLS approach and the findings of the SoUL (1996) research project should have alerted policy makers to the reality that western or middle-class concepts of what constitutes literacy and its efficacy cannot to be imposed on other groups of people with predictable or uniform results. Instead, developing an understanding of what literacy means to the people themselves is required, together with an awareness of the social contexts from which reading and writing obtain their meaning (Heath, 1983). Farm workers, taxi drivers and political activists are examples of persons highlighted in Prinsloo and Breier (1996), all of whom would be identified as illiterate if viewed in terms of a universal norm, but, who, in fact, utilise literacy practices for certain purposes and in certain contexts. People are inclined to make their own judgements of what is really relevant and this often leads to a rejection of formal classes and school based literacy where it is not related to local communicative practices. Furthermore, the essayist prose associated with formal school type tuition can be at odds with the communicative patterns of some ethnic groups (Baynham, 1995:42).

Stromquist (2001) emphasises that, “... teaching adults to become literate using the model of the primary school, a practice prevalent in many developing countries, is often unsuccessful”. The reality

is that adults who approach literacy classes have chosen freely to learn. In comparison with children, they already possess a large store of knowledge concerning the everyday world. It is therefore imperative to review student's existing abilities in order to plan tuition. One suggestion is that unschooled people produce their own texts, in conjunction with trained helpers (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996:263). Levine (1986:115) describes the Nottingham Literacy Scheme in which each teacher-student partnership reached a unique blend of teaching and learning styles, resulting in 115 different versions of how the teaching was planned and carried out. He stresses adaptation, experimentation and innovation, and avoidance of an overall teaching system or strategy.

Teaching materials in a series forming part of a publication of Women's Education Workbooks in Spain, are, in Mendes's (1994:71) opinion:

...very respectful of the acquired wisdom and rights of women. Such a process calls for an atmosphere favouring women's self-esteem...it calls for active participation, where women take a leading role in the process. The teaching guidelines.... are of a general nature and must always be adapted to specific group characteristics, they should be considered simply as suggestions and classroom application should be flexible.

Needless to say, these methods have proved to be effective, but appropriate teacher education and materials development are a prerequisite. The former entailed, amongst other things, training in perceptiveness and social sensitivity, while the latter required the efforts of a team whose members were vastly experienced in women's education. Consequently, this sort of approach takes time and money to organise, makes great demands on the educators involved and accommodates only small groups of learners at a time. In other words, it is not a 'conveyer belt' solution.

Having distinguished between the autonomous and ideological approaches to literacy acquisition, in the next section I discuss the impact objects in museums have on adult learning and how this ties in with the concept of context in the NLS.

2.4 Museums and adult education

I now focus on the role and potential of museums in adult education. I highlight aspects of the literature that demonstrate the effectiveness of a museum environment in adult learning, firstly in the United Kingdom and then in South Africa.

Taylor (1995:1) believes that “museums provide for those working in the field of adult education a vital opportunity to convey their message using exciting concepts and imaginative approaches to objects within museum collections”. Tuckett (1995:3) emphasises that “seeing things at first-hand could bring them alive, like a picture saying at least a thousand words”. Chadwick and Stannett (1995:7) mention case studies (Dulwich, Age Exchange, Geffrye, V&A) that reveal that adult learners benefit not only in the gaining of specific knowledge, but also in general self-confidence, which, they feel, should help them in their daily lives. “This is something that cannot be measured easily, or evaluated statistically, ...” (Chadwick and Stannett,1995:9).

A project at a museum in London’s East End involved English second language speakers taking part in collaborative courses with the local community college, using the theme of English domestic interiors and related objects as the context for learning. An accredited course based on historical crafts for women from the local community was also offered. As well as achieving educational outcomes, such as confidence building and accessing further education pathways, the participating women gave the museum useful suggestions to make itself more accessible to woman, particularly mothers, in the local community (Goulborn, 2001:12).

In 1857, the director of the South Kensington Museum in London, when engaged in an experiment in public education, expressed regret that workers were not present in greater numbers in museums. However, initiatives in public education in 19th century English museums were eventually eroded by national education initiatives, and the interests and values of the middle classes assumed dominance (Anderson, 1995). The exclusion of museums from developments in the adult education sector has led Anderson (1995:20) to remark that:

...museums have been deprived of the energy, commitment and sense of purpose that have been characteristic of the adult education movement of this century. But, at the same time, the adult education sector has also failed to utilise one of its most important educational resources.

In South Africa, under the apartheid system of separate development, middle class interests and values, that is, of the white population, also dominated in museums. In 1992, the ANC announced their intention to make museums accessible to all:

Most public institutions ...are seen by the majority of the people as ...not belonging to them. ANC policy will enable and allow the people to lay claim to their institutions by ensuring that they are non-racist, non-sexist, democratic, accessible, accountable, responsive, sensitive, participatory, dynamic, relevant, educational and are grounded in the communities from which they arise (Draft Policy for The Transformation and Development of Museums and Monuments for a Democratic South Africa, ANC, 1992, 3.1 Introduction).

It has been noted that, once students realise that they have a rightful place in a museum, the objects there become sources of interest to them, and thus cultural contexts such as museums offer great potential for literacy learning that is both practical and transformative (Dubinsky, 1999). Objects as sources of interest have led Silverstone (1994:164) to remark that:

...the meaning of an object, its communication, does not stop with its display, nor is it determined either by its place in the display or the description offered of it in the adjoining label. The meaning of an object continues in the imaginative work of the visitor who brings to it his or her own agenda, experiences and feelings. ...It has a magic potency. ...Museums, galleries, exhibitions are texts.

Anderson (1995:22) feels that Brookfield's (1986) research on adult learning is highly relevant to museums in that he found that learning activities and learning styles vary so much with physiology, culture, and personality that generalised statements about the nature of adult learning have very low predictive power. He also found, amongst other things, that adults like their learning activities to be meaningful to their lives. In his view, most research is biased toward the measurement of the *quantity* rather than the quality of learning. Gee (2007:11) refers to the "performance before competence" aspect of how language acquisition works. He argues that this is not usually the case in school-type environments, where learners are expected to gain competence through reading texts before they can perform in the domain they are learning. The Museum class learners interacted with 'texts' (material

culture of the Xhosa people) that were meaningful to them (performance), and assessment (competence) was not the top priority in these classes.

Since museum education offers the sight and the handling of original physical objects, it has an immediacy that no other learning source can offer. In the case of the South African Museum, objects pertaining to the material culture of the learners, for example, beadwork and basketry were on display. Also, bones play a significant part in Black peoples' culture, where they are used in various ways in divining ceremonies and by sangomas (traditional healers), and thus the fossils provided added impact. The learners were familiar with, and possessed knowledge about these objects, and thus could relate to them.

Leinhardt and Crowley (2001:5) state that learning, whether carefully orchestrated in classrooms or when it emerges from spontaneous activity, requires examples, and objects in museums can be thought of as special cases of example-based learning. The objects are real, as opposed to representations, and thus they maintain that, "... the genius of the museum exists somewhere in an analysis of how unique and powerful objects support learning". They describe the evocative impact, in a history museum, of a replica of the bombed Greyhound bus from the Civil Rights Struggle, and how it served to enliven "the impersonal historical record that had vacuous labels, such as struggle, injustice, prejudice ...".

In Cape Town, objects at an exhibition evoked similar impact:

Although the major political events and tragedies of 20th century South African history are featured (the women's march, Sharpeville's coffins), the main focus is on the way material objects form a nexus between different cultures, and how these objects link east and west, north and south, the personal and the political, and past and present. Above all, this exhibition testifies to the extraordinary eloquence of material objects. The entire display resonates with a vigorous excess of meaning. ...It is uncanny how seemingly innocent ornaments can encode complex histories and cultural contacts. ...Through the truthful mouthpiece of objects, history is revealed as mere contingencyThe myth of an isolated and timeless pre-colonial Africa is imploded by the stubborn evidence of its surviving objects (van Robbroeck, 2004:4).

Objects in museums can provide illumination to teaching in a whole range of subjects, for example, samples of phenomena such as rocks of different ages and stages, and fossils indicating the

development of plants and animals. Museums also offer provision for the study of themes, which may relate to various types of identity, such as occupational or cultural (Brown, 1995:46). For example, at the South African Museum, a theme that related to learners' cultural identity was that of ethno-astronomy. The process of learning from objects is relevant to adult learners only in so far as museum staff is able to share the same learning processes and experiences. According to Anderson (1995), there is a need for the introduction of staff directly responsible for adult learning who have been trained in the varied needs and different learning styles of adults.

In the next section, I will discuss learning in museums and adult literacy, giving examples of a British and a Canadian adult literacy project.

2.5 Learning in museums: perspectives from the literature

Gammon (2003) maintains that 'learning in museums' means more than just the acquisition of new knowledge. The 'educational experience' can encompass aspects such as: increased self-confidence and self-efficacy; motivation to investigate further; associating curiosity and thinking with enjoyable experiences; interest and curiosity; awe and wonder; increased sense of identity and self-worth; skills of numeracy, literacy, and the use of Information Technology; acquisition of new knowledge; reinforcing of prior knowledge through repetition/direct concrete experience; accommodating/assimilating new knowledge into existing schemas; setting prior knowledge into context.

The motivation referred to above is especially relevant to constructivist theory as discussed earlier. The most important insight to emerge from constructivist theory, according to Donald (2006:107) is that the urge to learn is built into human development. This motivation is a natural, internally driven consequence of the need to adapt, that is, to develop progressively more effective ways of understanding the world and acting on it. Roberts (1994:14) has noted that, over the years, exhibits have tended to become increasingly more sensitive to the viewing public. He attributes the latter phenomenon to a much wider epistemological shift that has made its mark on everyone concerned

with the business of knowledge. This shift has seen traditional views in which knowledge is objective and absolute overturned by the notion that it is socially constructed, shaped by the interests and values of the knower. This change in the format of exhibits only serves to make museums even more appealing environments for literacy tuition.

2.6 Museums and adult literacy

A British project

London's Museum Club is an example of museums being utilised successfully in literacy tuition. The learners involved are enrolled in basic skills literacy courses at colleges, and the clubs collaborate with their tutors to enable those learners with low levels of literacy to use museum artefacts as an inspiration to literacy development. Most of the learners had never been to a museum before, and the few who had been while at school had expressed quite negative views about museums at the start (Gould, 2002–2003:9).

The response from college tutors to the club's initial approach was overwhelming:

...in most cases the colleges nearly bit their hands off, recognising how the museums could help them bring literacy teaching to life. ... students handled objects hundreds of years old and were prompted to look for clues to discover how they were made and what they were used for. College tutors had received training from ... Museum staff in object handling techniques ... a great help in engaging students in conversations about the collections. This helped to develop their speaking and listening skills as they searched for words to describe the shapes, textures and colours of objects. The experience inspired participants to produce some wonderfully expressive writing. ...The students produced exhibitions of all their work ...this really helped to boost the confidence of the learners and the profile of the courses (Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries (clmg), 2002–2003:13).

The club claims that students developed their literacy skills, confidence, self-esteem and motivation to learn; it broadened their horizons and opened their eyes to new opportunities; their writing skills improved; they developed greater independence as learners; and they became inspired to visit museums independently. A learner explains:

I've learnt because I've seen old things, which is nice. I think it's helped my reading and writing; I have learnt a lot of things from the project. The writing...helped my literacy; I am going to send the leaflet to my dad in Africa.

The clmg (2004:2) describe the effectiveness of museums thus:

...collections ...have a 'wow' factor which can motivate learning in a way that just isn't possible in some stuffy old classroom. They can bring the past back to life, provide inspiration or underpin scientific theory.museums ...could be the 2nd (sic) most important learning infrastructure (after schools). ... The experience of learning through museums ...has led to some of the young people on the projects who had previously been turned off learning by school going on to college courses and apprenticeships.

A Canadian programme

'Reading the Museum', a Canadian Museums Association programme, encourages literacy in and through museums, and aims, amongst other things, to make museums more accessible to literacy learners. The belief was that adults who could neither read nor write, or had reading and writing difficulties, would avoid museums if they did not, or believed they did not possess society's basic education credential. At the time it was realised that literacy had come to mean so much more than reading and writing, and so it was decided that the programme should not favour one instructional method over the other, as this would have been counter productive to the main objective of making museums available as an educational resource and cultural source to many groups and individuals (Dubinsky, 1997:10).

In the Northwest Territories, learners combined writing and traditional knowledge in their recording of elders' descriptions about how they made fish-scale art and tanned caribou hides. In Nova Scotia, learners took on the role of nature reporters whose accounts of plant, animal and bird life were put on display, along with specimens and artefacts from the museum's collection that related to their observations. In Ontario, learners were given the task of developing a clear language brochure about the site that was made available to all visitors. Each project thus attempted to meet the needs and interests of learners.

The outcome of these projects led to the suggestion that it may be advisable to focus less on the place of subjects in a prescribed curriculum, and to concentrate more on the places where learning can happen. Consequently, one of the topics discussed at workshops for museum staff and literacy educators has been 'the use of oral history as a tool for literacy'. A spokesperson for 'Storylinks', a literacy organisation that has done pioneering work in the use of oral history to encourage reading and writing, states that:

I can't say we have caused anyone to become fully literate. What we have done is to help people develop the intangible skills and strengths without which literacy learning cannot happen: a sense of place, the courage and ability to question and the freedom and power to voice their experience (Dubinsky, 1997:11).

This chapter has provided insight into the utilisation of museums in aiding literacy acquisition. Examples of museum literacy programmes were described, and it was demonstrated that cultural contexts such as museums offer great potential for literacy learning that is both practical and transformative (Diamantopoulou, 2007). Such programmes require commitment from all involved to attempt to go beyond the parameters of conventional museum and literacy education (Dubinsky, 1997:12). Ames (1992:xiv) suggests that, to begin with, the word 'museum' be replaced with 'cultural centre'. The renaming of the South African Museum into Iziko (people gathering round the hearth to share knowledge) Museums of Cape Town, has thus been a step in the right direction.

In the following chapter, the methodology used for the research is outlined. In Chapters Four and Five, background to the two sites of literacy learning is provided, and primary data from interviews is analysed. In conclusion, there is an attempt to lace together these analyses to draw out answers to the research question.

Chapter Three

3. Methodology

In this chapter I outline the methodology and the research design. The purpose of this research, the general approach and the limitations of the research are discussed at the beginning and end of this chapter. The research methods and design as well as the approach to the data gathering are explained.

3.1 Purpose

Maxwell (1996) distinguishes between *personal*, *practical* and *research purposes* and urges researchers to be explicitly aware of these purposes when embarking on a project. The personal focuses on the motivations of the researcher, the practical focuses on ‘accomplishing something’, and the research focuses on ‘understanding something’ (Maxwell, 1996:16). In my case, the three are quite closely related. As Wendy’s co-student in the MEd programme, I was eager to document the existence of the literacy class she taught at the South African Museum, whilst simultaneously gaining a greater understanding of adult education issues and also meeting post graduate requirements.

3.2 Ethnographic research

Purcell-Gates (2004:92–3) explains why literacy researchers who operate out of a theoretical frame that views literacy as cultural practice are particularly drawn to ethnography as a methodological tool:

This is because ethnography is grounded in theories of culture and allows researchers to view literacy development, instruction, learning, and practice as it occurs naturally in socio-cultural contexts. ...it allows literacy researchers to explore and come to understand phenomena about which little is known. As such, it provides those researchers who are so inclined a method for exploration and making sense of their data that is scientific and trustworthy.

Researchers involved in the study of literacy as social practice in South Africa (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996) employed only ethnographic techniques, such as, participant observation, unstructured open-

ended interviews and life history interviews. Survey research, more commonly used for policy purposes, would have been unsuited for getting in-depth information on the people who were studied. Previously, studies and writings about literacy in South Africa had focused only on literacy provision and literacy providers, not on literacy acquisition and the recipients thereof (Prinsloo, 1995). The research thus represented a paradigm shift in its attempt to focus away from the discourses and practices of policy-makers, and instead concentrate on those who were the object of policy-makers and providers' attention: people with little or no schooling. Its findings highlighted the inadequacy of the quantitative estimate of fifteen million so called 'illiterate' adults on which much policy and planning has hitherto been based (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996). For example, certain farm workers, who might initially appear to be 'illiterate', were in fact found to be able to interpret and use complex instructional documents in order to build and maintain irrigation systems (Gibson, 1996:55). A pertinent question for policy-makers thus evolved: which particular literacy practices are important for which individuals? (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996).

Ethnographic research is not geared towards delivering large-scale specific policy proposals, but it can nevertheless make important contributions to policy discourse (Breier, 1995). Previously, quantitative research methods dominated the policy research arena here and elsewhere, mainly because of the policy-makers' need to generalise, but qualitative research methods present policy-makers with questions that statistics alone do not reveal: why, how, what is happening, and what does it look like? The latter questions need to emerge from within a theoretical framework and should pertain to issues that are acknowledged by others as being of significance and of interest. Explaining, describing, and providing insight into human behaviour in context is what ethnography tries to do: it is not designed or intended to provide statistical generalisations.

3.3 Qualitative research

Ethnographic style, or quasi-ethnographic research in education is often referred to as 'qualitative' research, to distinguish it from large-scale survey research, or quantitative research. Evans (1998:247) defines qualitative research thus:

Qualitative research is a valid mode of inquiry in the field of education ...in qualitative research the role of researcher as instrument provides the flexibility to discover whatever is in the data without the constraints or limitations of defined variables in controlled settings.

Qualitative research sets out to develop theories that are grounded. Inductive logic, typical of this research, is defined as "reasoning that proceeds from specific experiences to general truths, from facts to theory" (van der Merwe, 1996:279). Studies employing such logic are usually hypothesis-generated and their goals are normally exploratory. Not all ethnographic research data is qualitative, but what sets it apart from other qualitative research is that it is rooted in the concept of culture: it uses the concept of culture as a lens through which to interpret results. "Ethnography generates or builds theories of cultures - or explanations of how people think, believe, and behave - that are situated in local time and space" (Purcell-Gates, 2004:93). It has its strengths and weaknesses, but for the most part, it can be used to its full advantage when directed towards producing valid knowledge that is of general relevance (Hammersley, 1992).

Robinson-Pant (2001) describes an ethnographic project in Nepal that followed earlier, unsuccessful quantitative approaches, and sought to provide insight into how or why a link might exist between women's literacy and health. Informal observations of people's behaviour revealed big differences between what they said they did (as people are wont to respond in questionnaires), and what they actually did. The research, therefore, did not provide the answer that a particular literacy programme led to improved health behaviour, but what it did reveal was strong evidence of problems in implementation that could not be overlooked. "The complex analysis that emerged through ethnographic research meant that piecemeal, incremental changes to the programme were inappropriate in this case..." (Robinson-Pant, 2001:66).

3.4 Research Design

The research experience

This ethnographic-style study employed methods of qualitative research, utilising both observation and interviewing to obtain data. Detailed field notes were recorded and taped, and unstructured interviews and classroom interaction were tape recorded and transcribed. The research was loosely guided by a general hypothesis, without there being any explicit conceptual framework (Van der Merwe, 1996). In keeping with the ethnographic approach to social research, the emphasis was on the “process of social interaction through which social reality is constructed and maintained, rather than on the end result or product of such interaction” (Bailey, 1987:288).

The research relied heavily on verbal analysis, thereby aiming to develop a more detailed understanding of the participants than questionnaires would allow. The flexibility of unstructured observation and recording of whatever occurred enabled concentration on any variables that proved important. Extended periods of time spent with the learners allowed for much more informal interaction, and ongoing behaviour could be discerned as it occurred. The study, carried out as it was in the actual setting, involved face-to-face interaction, as well as observations. I attempted to approach both classrooms as a new and unfamiliar community, and to forge trusting relationships and rapport with the learners.

The relationship between participant and observer has been described as a continuum, with the researcher positioning herself at varying points along the latter (Purcell-Gates, 2004). In the classroom, the researcher is positioned nearer to the observer end, and this position entails making oneself as unobtrusive as possible. Being present over a period of several weeks meant that the learners eventually came to ignore me, and I adopted a non-participatory stance. I recorded detailed descriptive notes over a lengthy period of time which I used for orientation purposes. Behaviour was observed as it occurred without my attempting to interpret it on the spot. Audio recordings of

classroom interaction were made as a source of back-up for me to listen to when required, as well as to capture the ambience of the environment.

Access

Researchers often experience difficulty when seeking approval for a study, and even when permission is granted, the observer is often regarded with suspicion (Bailey, 1987). An ethnographic approach required detailed observations of the night school class, and for this reason, the Supervisor was reluctant to permit access. She did eventually relent, but I always felt I was intruding. In contrast, Wendy, the Museum class facilitator, welcomed and encouraged the research.

Data Collection

I attended the Saturday class at the Museum for several months, not only because I needed to obtain information, but also because it was enjoyable. There was always new knowledge to be gained, whilst simultaneously witnessing the benefit being derived by the learners, who became friends. I even managed to find employment for one learner as a laboratory assistant in a food factory.

The night school classroom, on the other hand, made me feel uncomfortable and the time spent there dragged. My attendance there was not encouraged in any way, and so I merely gathered the relevant data and then ceased to attend.

3.5 Limitations of the research design

Bias

The possibility of bias does exist when measurement generally takes the form of the observer's unquantified perception (Bailey, 1987). Although I had no prior expectations regarding either class, I

did, nevertheless, find it very difficult not to have a preference for the more pleasant and inviting atmosphere of the Museum class. However, my friendship with the museum class teacher did not influence my perception of the classes. I sat in as a neutral observer, and also interviewed students individually, not in the presence of the teacher. The students provided both positive and negative feedback when being interviewed, thus indicating that they perceived me as neutral.

Although my reception at the night school was, and continued to be unwelcoming, I believe that I retained my neutral attitude when observing. The students did not appear to be affected by my presence, but the one teacher, Tessa, seemed daunted by my presence, believing, no doubt, that I was there to assess her. The students at both the Museum and the night school were keen to be interviewed, and this demonstrates that they had all become accustomed to my presence in their respective classes, even though I spent less time observing the ABET classes. I did state that I was an English speaker when doing the interviewing, and even though the one group consisted of Xhosa first-language speakers, and the other Afrikaans first language speakers, they did not appear to experience difficulty in communicating with me.

Outsider intrusion

My presence might have caused learners to be ill at ease and to act differently, but if so, it was more apparent in the night school. In the Museum, as a friend and classmate of Wendy's, it made the intrusion far less problematic than it might have been.

Interviewing

Ethnographic data collection usually includes interviewing, which enables insider information to be elicited, and the exploration of topics in greater detail. Interviews can be informal, off-the-cuff question-answer types or more structured and carefully planned (Purcell-Gates, 2004). However, they can be time consuming; there may be lack of accessibility; and the quality of data may be weakened

by biases or aspects of the interviewer-respondent relationship (Bailey, 1987). Interviews with night school staff were conducted on the premises, whereas learners were interviewed at their homes. All the female learners interviewed were working as live-in domestics, and their employers were mostly hostile. They appeared displeased about 'working time' being taken up, and also wary that worker conditions were perhaps being investigated.

However, most of the domestics seemed to welcome the social contact and attention, though my being white, middleclass, and English-speaking probably affected the interviewing relationship somewhat. The learners possibly viewed me as an authority figure, just like their employers, and the majority were Afrikaans-speaking. Ideally, interviewers should emanate from the same social class and ethnic group as respondents. Bailey (1987) reported that a study with black respondents revealed that white interviewers elicited results significantly different from those obtained by black interviewers. It was found that status differences produced greater deference to interviewers of the opposite race among low-status respondents.

Interviews at the Museum were conducted during lesson time, in an adjoining room. The interviews were semi-structured and also focused on the learners' shared experience of the literacy class. The questions, posed in English, were open-ended to provide flexibility and allow for unanticipated responses. The two major advantages of interviewing, flexibility and spontaneity, thus proved helpful. The questions were composed as I went along, and I was able to tailor them, if necessary, in order to investigate relevant issues that arose. I strove to be adaptable, friendly, and responsive in order that I might establish a rapport with the interviewees, despite the obvious differences in our backgrounds. The written data was studied carefully and pertinent observations selected to lend credence to the narrative. The interviews were transcribed and the responses analysed to detect how the learners perceived their classes.

Protecting names and identities

The interviews were conducted on an anonymous basis and confidentiality maintained: pseudonyms have replaced names of people and the ABET centre, but the name of the South African Museum remains unchanged in the interests of objective research.

Employing the terms Black, Coloured, and White

The legacy of apartheid makes it unavoidable that I utilise the above terms in my discussion, but I do so without any racist intent. The term Black refers to those of Nguni- and Sotho-speaking origin; Coloured to those of mixed race and of Khoi descent; and White to those of European origin.

In the next section I provide background information regarding the establishment and running of a Western Cape Education Department (WCED) night school that formed part of this research.

Chapter Four

4. The Night School: Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Background

In the original promotional literature distributed by the night school, it was described as aiming to assist learners in upgrading qualifications, completing secondary education, and acquiring skills to equip them for employment. It also mentioned being proud of the quality of their teachers and the dedication of the learners. The school, which was situated within the walls of a white suburban high school, fell under the ABET sub-directorate of the WCED, which monitored and approved all programmes. The school strove to achieve the teacher: learner ratio of 1:25, but Yates, chairman of the governing body, claimed it was not always possible to attract that many learners in basic Xhosa, English, and Afrikaans classes. There were various sponsors, but less and less was being received from the WCED. Subsidised taxi fares were provided, and budget constraints had resulted in teachers' salaries being lowered. Government funding allowed for learners' fees to be subsidised only once, even if enrolled for different subjects on different nights.

A few years down the line, and the promotional literature had been reduced to a single sheet containing information about courses offered and relevant costs thereof, yet Yates insisted the numbers (150) had remained fairly consistent. He felt the school was a lot less expensive than others at that point in time (R80, plus R50 a subject). A governing body, in line with official requirements, had been introduced, and an independent chairman, a businessman, had drawn up a strategic plan for the running of the school. A new centre manager, a former Coloured primary school principle, had been appointed. A proposed new taxi programme, sponsored by an overseas foundation, was geared towards reaching more learners.

In the next section I provide an account of my experiences whilst observing two classes at the night school.

4.2 The English Class

The English class began at 6.30 p m, and the mostly female learners trickled in and queued up to buy their partly subsidised transport tickets. I was sent to observe Tessa's class. A former pupil of the night school, she appeared unsettled, no doubt assuming she was being assessed. By 6.45 p m only five learners were present. Tessa was showing these Level One learners cards with the words "my name is", and the learners were repeating the words. She then asked them to write them down. The exercise was geared towards writing application letters for identity books, and their homework involved name/surname words. Afterwards they grouped names of fruit or vegetables under their respective headings. This was a recap of the previous week's work that Tessa was hoping to reinforce.

The following lesson they progressed to 'addresses'. Tessa's advice was to "look and look and look" at the example of an address in their workbooks. Three learners sat quietly on their own getting on with their own work. Tessa sat with six learners and asked what an address consisted of. She praised those who responded correctly, and pointed out where some had incorrectly used only one line for all their details. She went on to explain the different codes that one can come across, such as telephone codes, and they digressed into various other topics, such as Telkom's special offers.

Tessa instructed them to count their lines and each had to show his or her work to the class. She told them to practice writing the addresses correctly at home, as it was imperative that they possess this knowledge. They were then given ten minutes in which to read a paragraph, but it was a difficult one. A learner's cell phone rang as Tessa was assisting her and so she moved on. There were individual learners in the same class who were at a higher level of competence and she spent time with them. They were attempting to draft a reply to an example letter that required demonstration of an understanding of grammar, syntax, etcetera. A young black male read a letter aloud, and Tessa then discussed the learner with me in his presence. It was possible that she had witnessed this type of

inappropriate teaching behaviour whilst still a learner at the school, and was thus unaware of the insensitivity that it demonstrated. The Learners' Portfolio of the WCED English Level Two was being used. It resembled a 'flip file' containing personal information about the learner. The section being worked on was titled *The Women at Mboza* and the learners were required to circle words that described life in the rural areas. A large proportion of the work revolved around comprehension and appeared difficult for second language learners.

Tessa took two learners aside and wrote words on green cards for them to look at and memorise. A group of women sat and read in unison at a table. The classroom became quiet as Tessa checked on learners to see whether they understood what they were reading. They had been involved in the task for more than the ten minutes allocated. Although Tessa had a pleasant manner and did her best under the circumstances, the fact that there were learners of different levels placed together in one classroom, served to hamper her efforts. Apparently, there were not going to be any further examinations because of the anxiety they produced in certain of the learners, and because of problems experienced with the actual examination instructions.

4.3 The Afrikaans Class

This Level One class was attended mainly by domestic workers, and taught by Smith, a primary school teacher. An impatient individual, he resorted to comments such as, "you're not stupid are you?", and "no, man!" in response to incorrect answers. Smith discussed the learners in their presence, and, although an Afrikaans class, he also used English while teaching. He wrote numerous lists on the board, such as diminutives, plurals, etcetera, and made the learners recite them after him. He said they could write slowly, but also wanted to learn to read.

Another time, the five learners present were doing a departmental test with Smith giving assistance when required. It included work not yet covered, and the learners were experiencing difficulties with the comprehension. Smith said they were expected to do the test without being prepared for it. He then revealed that he had been doing grammar with the class, "mainstream stuff", using a primary

school textbook, and ignoring the ABET syllabus. He also used a “New Reader’s Project” book he felt was superior and also necessary because some learners had been there a while already. He felt prescribed material was “repetitive and monotonous”, with “baby sentences”, but he declined to show me any such material to back up his claim.

Smith felt he was “not getting anywhere” with the learners because classes were held only once weekly (all this within earshot of the learners). He had used alternative material to try to improve matters, and he felt they could relate to the reader he had chosen. Progress was slow, although he felt some of the learners had improved. Smith stated that the learners liked magazines, that they wished to learn to write letters, and that they came to class in order to socialise.

An elderly man, reprimanded for irregular attendance and told, “you’re so far behind”, completed the previous week’s work while the others carried on. They were given five sentences to write regarding the story in the reader. The learners asked Smith to write words on the board that would help them with the assigned task, and his response was to write out five full sentences. Later, they all read the book aloud together, but the learners were obviously reciting from memory, as the illustrations guided their responses. Smith said everything was *maklik* (easy), and that the problem was that they were all at different places. He wrote vowels on the board, then a few words which contained these vowels, and then erased them. He went through the entire book, asking questions which the learners answered in parrot fashion, without even glancing at the text.

Smith scolded the elderly man for doing something incorrectly, chastised all the learners for poor attendance, and said that they “must help each other on the phone - that’s what life’s about”. Someone responded that she had to pay to use the phone at work. Smith’s excuse for the poor turnout was that attendance tended to taper off towards the end of the year (it was October), and that “men particularly don’t like to be seen as stupid in front of the women”. He said anyone willing to teach was employed as the pay was paltry.

4.4 The night school organisers' perceptions

In this section I provide a description and analysis of the information gleaned from interviews with both the organisers and learners at an ABET programme taught at a WCED night school. In this discussion I show how the principles of the autonomous approach to literacy, as outlined earlier, manifest in this programme. An analysis of comparable issues with the museum class is found in section 5.

Autonomous perspective of the night school organisers

Yates, governing body chairman, and Verne, programme supervisor and centre manager, appeared committed to what Street (1984) called the 'autonomous model' of literacy acquisition. When shown the SoUL (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996) report, Yates condemned the contention that literacy does not necessarily improve lives and that sometimes people get along without it as "a preposterous notion". He instructed advocates of NLS theory to "... just go and jump off a cliff. Stay a long way away from me". He believed the example of a former pupil who had matriculated and gone on to do nursing was more than sufficient evidence of his standpoint, and asked if NSL theories were working anywhere in the world. The idea of literacy activists and informal literacy acquisition, as advocated in the SoUL report, was met with:

You see the little Che Guevara's going around from shack to shack. It's a pretty image, but show me the money, show me where it works. These people want to learn to read and write. What about self-esteem? What about the ability to be able to read stories to your grandchildren? What would it be if it wasn't a school, is what I'm trying to get? How do European funders measure that then? I mean, in the real world?

When I suggested that, instead of formal letter writing, the learners should be permitted to write in a manner which was meaningful and made sense to them, Verne said:

Ja, but that's all very well if you want to make them literate, but if they actually want to move up in the education system, which is also one of the main aims of the school, then they've got to conform to certain standards.

Later, Yates contradicted her, saying that:

The idea of someone working their way through our literacy classes to the top is not really what this school is about. In a sense we've come to the realisation that we are two schools, we offer two courses. Basic literacy and we offer matric.

Yates admitted that only "isolated cases" ever managed to rise up the ranks, and that most of their learners, after failing at high school, just wanted to complete one or two subjects to try for a 'second chance' at matriculation. ABET literacy classes were meant to have provided the starting point on a ladder of qualifications up which people could progress, but the literacy learners at the night school demonstrated the reality that beginners seldom got very far.

Self-esteem issues

It became evident that, unlike the Museum classes, the nurturing of self-esteem was not apparent in the night school classes. Donald (1997) argues that, in negative cycles of disadvantage – and the domestics at the night school fell into this category – an individual's sense of self-worth may have been progressively undermined, and that fostering self-worth must therefore be at the centre of the teaching/learning process. Furthermore, constructivist principle, as referred to earlier, stresses the importance of motivation for learning, and the development of self-esteem is a necessary component of this motivation.

Yates had mentioned self-esteem, yet his own generally authoritarian manner was not helpful in this regard. Further, he had coerced some learners, still grappling with one language, into taking on an extra language, Afrikaans, the reason being his focus on funding. Another teacher, Mr Smith, turned out to be somewhat of a bully, and Yates himself revealed that the Xhosa teacher tended to, "sort of boss them into order". None of the aforementioned behaviour was conducive to the fostering of self-esteem.

The actions of the WCED, who merely stipulated outcomes that needed to be met, also did little to enhance self-esteem: they did not consult the school when introducing examinations at Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4, an action which caused the learners great distress. Verne described it as, "the most stupid thing

out. The learners were so terrified and so frightened, especially the Level 1 and 2's, that it's totally shaken... they burst into tears".

Furthermore, placement tests expected of new learners created anxiety and were also discouraging:

They get such a fright, the level that they expect them to do is so high, that they get a fright and they don't even come back, some of them. They should make it much more basic really for the Level 1. I don't even test anybody who comes in who hasn't been to... (school), you just talk to them and you actually get the feeling that they've got to start right at the bottom.

The self-esteem of Xhosa-speaking learners from the Eastern Cape, who possessed grade eight or nine, was also affected by their being placed in Level 1: they had expected to be placed in grade ten, and Verne stated that they thus felt humiliated. Verne felt their poor command of English was to blame:

If they've got no English, they can't do anything. So you actually have to put them at Level 1, which is terribly degrading for them and to explain that to them is...

Since proficiency in English was obviously regarded as being of paramount importance, why had not classes in conversational English been introduced? The Museum learners, who will be discussed in the next section, had expressed a desire to improve their English, but were not relegated to humiliating 'levels' in order to learn.

A student council represented the learners on the governing body, and Yates maintained that they welcomed input from the council and always consulted them about school matters such as the introduction of a new timetable:

When we want something done, like now for instance, this timetable we brought up. We give it to them and say, go and suss it out with the learners and see how they feel. They're having a meeting now, and I'm just going to leave them to it.

Yates refused their request for him to be present at such meetings, even though they had complained about the chaos that usually erupted, saying, "If I don't ever leave you, you'll never know how to run a meeting". Not surprisingly, the council were not as effective as anticipated, but Yates chose to blame "the usual time constraints" for this.

Finances also continued to be a problem, an issue next discussed.

Finances and self-esteem

The issue of taxi fares was regularly raised by the council. Even though fares were subsidised, learners were still expected to contribute towards them, and this proved burdensome. On arrival, learners lined up to receive these subsidies, and the transaction appeared to be conducted in a patronising manner. They were never suspended for non payment of fees, but were expected to be forthcoming about any financial problems they might be experiencing. However, there were those who attended without paying, and without any explanation. At the instigation of the student council, a list of such individuals had been put up. Yates felt that, “frankly, if quite often people are employed, in full time employment, who are not willing to pay fees of a maximum, I would say, of R180 for a year, it’s wrong and it’s unfair”. Perhaps it was still excessive for people earning very little, and probably supporting dependents? A private discussion with the individuals concerned might have been more constructive and less damaging to their self-esteem. Verne stated that some employers actually brought their domestic workers along, and even paid for them, only to discover later they had not been attending, which caused upset. Verne explained that, “They want them to get on and to move up”.

On the other hand, ambitious learners who wanted to undertake subjects such as mathematics and science were given “hard talks” to dissuade them from doing so: Yates believed that the student profile was unsuitable for such subjects. Verne declared that it was, “very much an image thing to be able to do maths, or say you do maths”, and said that the mathematics results had been very poor, “mostly because they just don’t have that background”. Yates “sold” them the idea of commercial maths instead, although “it was quite a hard sell”, using tactics such as enquiring whether they wanted to be pilots, doctors, or architects, such tactics not being conducive to building self-esteem.

It became evident that the WCED presented obstacles to learning which I next discuss.

WCED issues

Yates described the WCED as being the single biggest obstacle to learning in the centre, and, in response to my showing him literature that provided examples of NLS theory, declared that:

You just need to have the Education Department say what you say, and I think all the people in the adult sector would just throw up their hands and just say 'Okay, keep it!' Because we're already bombarded from the Department with admin. Lashings and lashings.

He and Verne also complained about the new instruments (forms) that the WCED was constantly devising, and which required ever more detail. "They have no capacity to deal with the stats that we send them. They all get chucked in a lift shaft". The school received a lump sum from the WCED, and thus everything was organised in a way that would "stretch the budget further". It appeared that the administrative demands of running a night school, coupled with the necessity for juggling the funding available, overshadowed the actual rationale for the school, thereby affecting the quality of the learning on offer.

Criticism of literacy campaigns

Yates and Verne were critical of envisaged large scale literacy initiatives and campaigns, stressing rather the need for strengthening existing institutions such as theirs. They felt that those 'other learners' who were being targeted were going to be drawn from centres like theirs, and this would affect registration and funding. Ironically, they questioned the quality of educator training in such initiatives:

So by all means, if they've got tens of thousands of committed cadres who are going to go out there, but watch the programme, watch the training. How do we check up on these people? How do you keep the register? And what is the measurement if they are literate or not, or are we just satisfied to fill in registers and then fax the European funders and say 'All done'. I'm terrified of this European funding!

Yet Yates had earlier confessed that he himself did not possess sufficient knowledge regarding ABET pedagogy, despite the fact that he was at the helm of such a centre. His staff, mostly primary school teachers, also lacked any ABET training.

In addition to problems presented by the WCED, the low intake/ high drop-out rate and the reasons for this, became apparent whilst doing this research. This will be discussed in the next section.

Low intake/high dropout rate

Verne spoke of some 'cruel' employers who attempted to thwart their domestics' efforts to attend, and when asked whether a letter from the school might remedy this, she answered:

We've got to be very sensitive because, firstly, I think their job, their livelihood is very important. Even if they can't read or write, a lot of them function fairly well, even with that. If they don't have an income, it doesn't help that they can write.

Verne might have been surprised if told that the above remarks inadvertently endorsed NLS perspectives. She perceived the dropout rate as being "fair", but Yates saw it as "significant". They had dropped numeracy in Xhosa and Afrikaans because of minimal interest, but intended continuing to offer literacy in all three languages, namely English, Afrikaans and Xhosa, because, "that is really the original mission of this school, even though the numbers are low". This dropout problem is consistent with low take-up/high dropout rates on formal literacy programmes worldwide (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996:5). In recent years, however, Verne had noticed an increase in numbers: more would-be matriculants were registering. Conversely, fewer beginner literacy learners were apparent, and Yates declared that, "It's almost like the people at ABET level are either, there isn't such a market out there, please God that's true, or they can't get here".

This statement corroborates the findings of Prinsloo and Breier (1996:5) with regard to rejection of formal literacy classes and school-based literacy. Verne thought the location of the night school might be a factor, because prospective learners were "so scattered". However, there had been far more learners when the school first inhabited the new premises (when they also introduced matriculation classes), and intake had dropped only afterwards. The situation of the previous premises had eliminated transport costs, and thus Verne pondered that:

... possibly the transport could have been a problem, but we did supply taxis then for them to come here. They now have to pay something towards the taxis. ... Although it's very heavily funded, and they still don't pay the full cost for the taxi, but in that way I suppose it was different.

They explained that at the start of each year, the learners appeared very keen, but that afterwards, for various reasons, they ceased to continue:

A big factor is they lose their jobs, or they get transferred - their employer works further away and they can't get to school. We also sit with the customs of the Xhosa people. They disappear for a couple of months, the woman has to go and look after the family, people in the Transkei, so there are various reasons. And of course the weather in the middle of winter, it's a - if you haven't got transport.

There were also a "significant proportion" of individuals who signed up, but were never seen again.

This contrasted with the situation at the Museum, where learners went to great lengths to attend, and some even had to be turned away. Note that this will be discussed in the next section. The night school staff did attempt to do occasional follow ups on those who had dropped out, but again time constraints prevented anything further being done. Setting aside a date during the first term for this purpose was being considered. One teacher, Tessa, was known to be conscientious about following up, but Verne felt that the others were unlikely to be doing so since they worked at a lower than departmental rate per hour as it was, and also agreed to teach one lesson a term without being paid. Nevertheless, Verne was quick to add that there was a "lot of goodwill amongst our educators". Yates' concern that the learners "don't all gel" and his intention to arrange outings, picnics, and parties in order to improve matters, and "to try to lift the spirits of the school", were further indication that the real problems were being overlooked.

Unreasonable employers also served to hinder attendance in different ways. Verne described one incident where an external examination had been scheduled for a Friday afternoon, and this prompted an irate employer to write a letter stating that the economy could not survive if people did not to work on a Friday afternoon. Certain of the learners thus preferred to keep their attendance a secret. Verne remarked that, "Some people are not sympathetic towards the Xhosa".

Putting out the word in the community that ABET classes were being offered at the night school posed a challenge for Verne and Yates.

Promoting the school

The school had not embarked on a concentrated drive to recruit learners, since Yates felt that it was “difficult to know quite how to do it, quite frankly”. However, he and Verne had considered what seemed to be excellent promotional tactics, such as going to ANC meetings, and putting flyers in taxi ranks, but had not acted upon these ideas. They felt that word of mouth was the main conduit of awareness about the school, and Yates also placed articles twice yearly in community newspapers. He said that, “Those little stories, I think, are terribly important. Little success stories, someone’s passed matric or whatever, and the little picture and little story”. Yates did admit though, that “the difficulty is that those who are illiterate can’t read the newspaper article”.

When an article about one of their ‘star’ pupils, *Now she can dream of being a nurse*, was published in the local newspaper of a mainly Coloured residential area that was situated in fairly close proximity to the school, it had garnered a greater response than usual, thereby altering the learner profile of the school. Whereas before they had catered almost exclusively for Xhosa-speaking learners, the new intake now consisted mainly of Afrikaans-speaking Coloured learners.

Verne had once visited a military camp to promote the classes, “but that came at the higher levels, not at the literacy level”. In order to save money, the school had had no choice but to offer certain matriculation subjects in alternate years only. It appeared thus that while the school struggled to meet the required quota of 25 learners to one teacher in all three of the basic language classes, the organisers were at the same time having to turn away other, more advanced learners because of budget constraints, thereby losing out on much needed subsidies.

In the next section I discuss a number of the learners at this school, their reasons for attending the classes, and their experiences of this programme, as well as issues such as self-esteem and the progress or lack thereof of the learners.

4.5 Being an ABET beginner

The domestic workers

A middle-aged woman, Mary, appeared to be the unofficial spokesperson for a group of domestic workers attending the school. Her lack of progress appeared to exemplify why it was that only isolated cases ever advanced beyond beginner's level: after attending the school for four years, she could still neither read nor write at all.

Mary had to walk quite a way to get to the school, and although she said of the classes, "It's my enjoyment", she also admitted that she found it difficult to study:

You can't do your homework. You can't find the time - it's very busy, ja. Because I do cooking and I do the ironing and the washing.... It's very difficult, ja.

Despite her lack of progress, she was nevertheless encouraged by Yates to undertake English, in addition to Afrikaans, her home language, although neither subject teacher was aware of this fact. Nobody seemed to acknowledge that she had not acquired any reading or writing skills as yet either, and she said that she found it "confusing" to study two languages at once. Needless to say, Mary found the Afrikaans test I saw her doing difficult, because it required her to write a story, which she could not do:

I was actually shy to say to Mrs Verne that I won't do it because she thought, you know, I can read, but it's you know, I find it so difficult to read and write...I nearly burst out and cried, but I tried to be brave. I tried to be brave and I'm telling Mrs Verne nothing. I can't write a story that they want me. Because she said to me, 'you won't go to a higher class'. I said, Mrs Verne, I don't mind staying in the same class at least if I start learning something. I don't mind even if I sit another four years, or what, if it means I can just read and write. ...That's all I want to do. I don't want to go like higher. What must I do with a degree? I'm just doing my housework.

The episode had undoubtedly affected Mary's self-esteem, and, after four years of struggling with Afrikaans, she resolved to switch exclusively to English, which she had undertaken the previous year, as friends had told her that English was the easier language to study. I suspected that her decision had more to do with the Afrikaans teacher than with actual language problems. This was confirmed when she praised the English teacher, saying, "I've only been this year and I understand her work, the way of working already. I enjoy her class, she actually explains to you". The Afrikaans teacher was less patient. "If you ask him now, (its) wait, wait, I've only got two hands, so I think I stick to Miss Tessa". Her decision was not well received:

Mr Yates said to me "Just English?" I said no, I want to cut out Afrikaans. He said "Why you want to cut out now?" You know, he didn't understand.

Although Mary and others in the Afrikaans class felt that they were not making progress, they were loathe to complain because, "They never ask our opinion ...I don't want to complain about Mr Smith, because they must ask, you know, without you can't complain". Later she stated that, "You know, I don't want – he is a good teacher. He's older than me, so I must respect him". Perhaps the fact that Smith was both white, and male, also played a part in her reluctance to challenge him.

Another learner, Sannie, had once complained that, "it's no good we doing this writing and writing and writing and we don't know what we're writing", to which Smith had replied, "I can't help it. That's the work I must give you". Sannie had also once asked when they would start reading, because, as Mary explained, "He doesn't give us any reading, he just give us write, write, write, write. The whole book is full words. He put it on the board for us". Mary described the classes thus:

Sometimes it's nervous you know, because he (Smith) doesn't stick to one thing that you can get through – like the story, he doesn't get the next night, he starts with another story. And it's a little bit nervous you know, because you don't know what you're going to do tonight.

The school children attending the Museum literacy classes had also described similar experiences of feeling nervous whilst being taught by their teachers at their respective schools, as opposed to their feelings of being relaxed when attending the Museum classes.

According to Mary, several learners had given up the Afrikaans class, and would not provide reasons for this when asked by the organisers. There were other learners also hoping to switch to English, the reason they gave being that they wanted to improve communication with employers. Mary said she knew the only reading book that Smith ever used by heart, using the pictures on each page for recognition. Smith did not allow books to be taken home, although Tessa permitted this for practice purposes.

When Mary was given the examination papers at the end of the previous year, Verne said to her, "Surely, Mary, you can read a little?" Mary's negative reply was met with disbelief because she had been there such a long time already. Her employers were also surprised at her lack of progress, but, nevertheless, Mary still regarded the work as a challenge, and insisted that she was really trying her best:

Ja, maar, I don't feel like giving up you know, I feel like I want to, I want to read and write and do that. I said to my people, even if I can't read and write I still want to go because I enjoy it.

Mary still spoke a lot of Afrikaans but found that, "The ABC I can say much easier in English, than in Afrikaans. Afrikaans I left words out". At the rate Smith raced through his lessons, it was not surprising Mary that had experienced problems, despite the fact that Afrikaans was her mother tongue. At the close of the interview, she spontaneously raised the subject of the test. "It's only another seven weeks, that test paper that we got to do". When asked if she felt nervous before the test, she replied, "I do, I do".

Mary described to me how her friend, Angela, had wanted to leave the Afrikaans class because of the dreaded tests. "She was bursting into tears because we didn't know anything what's going on". It appeared that Angela, 38, and unschooled, was not only subjected to unpleasantness at the night school, but also experienced unpleasantness at the hands of her employer, who saw fit to thwart her efforts to learn. Ironically, it was the same employer who had originally contacted the school, and her subsequent contradictory behaviour puzzled Angela. "Man, she offered me for the school. She said, Angela, I'm going to pay all your bills for the school".

For Angela, on the rare occasions when she was able to get away from her workplace, the night school provided a welcome opportunity to socialise with her friends, and also to study. Therefore, aside from being upset by the test, Angela nevertheless derived enjoyment from attending the school:

I'm friends there, and my teacher is nice to me. So, so I like the school, I - ek kan nie skryf nie, ek kan nie read nie. Ek probeer maar net (I can't write, I can't read. I just try).

Angela had taught herself to count using a calculator, and was proud that she could pay her own accounts. She was Afrikaans-speaking, and explained that, "Xhosa is difficult for me. I'm a Xhosa, but it's difficult in Xhosa. That's why I take Maths and Afrikaans". Angela seldom had time to do homework because of her job demands, and said she was constantly tired, and therefore unable to concentrate. She had decided not to attend the following year, because, "*Die mense verstaan nie*" (her employers did not understand).

Dorothy's experience of the classes appeared to be more positive than most. Her employers encouraged her learning, and even paid her fees the previous year. Her employer, unfamiliar with Afrikaans, had tried to teach her English, but Dorothy had found it too difficult. A friend had recommended the night school:

Since she told me last year, so I did start classes. I just feel like doing - it's for myself. And that's the only feel what I would like to do and I really enjoy it, so I'll only do Afrikaans, that's the most important thing what I want to do, to read and write.

Dorothy was unschooled, and had started working when she was 12. Now in her second year, in Level Two in the Afrikaans class, Dorothy had also undertaken mathematics the previous year, but had found it too difficult. However, she had thought about trying again the following year. Her family, apart from her husband, were all very encouraging. Dorothy was very motivated and tried to practise regularly. She had found the test I saw her writing in class "much better, was not that bad" compared to the previous year:

Last year was difficult because we actually didn't know what was actually going on, so they explain to us and so now this time, now we know. ...we didn't understand it well, and we didn't learn that work and they didn't give us enough of work. So that's why we didn't actually know what to do. ...and so this now, I think now we understand.

Apparently, in addition to not being fully prepared for the Afrikaans test, they were also mistakenly given an English test paper. The error, on the WCED's part, was eventually rectified. When Dorothy progressed from Afrikaans Level 1 to Level 2, she received a certificate, which served to boost her self-esteem, and make her feel very good because, "I didn't actually know nothing because I didn't get school at all".

Dorothy said her employers were "good and lovely people", and that attending the night school was something she was doing for herself. Dorothy's case illustrates the fact that having supportive employers, and not having to be concerned about transport costs, all contributed towards her regular attendance, motivation, and progress.

The retired gentleman

Henry was a 76 year old unschooled Black man who had been attending for two years. His daughter kept telling him he was too old to learn. However, Henry had made sufficient progress for Tessa, the English teacher, to leave him to work quietly on his own, since she had her hands full trying to cope with learners from different levels in her class. Henry did not mind because:

I know more better than they. Because it's not busy with me. She just give me what to do and I'll just do it. She's busy with the others. She still comes to find out how I'm getting on and that's all right.

He found that since attending the school he had made some progress:

I find I can even start to wrote the English in letter. Yes. Not a hurry, I can make letter. Since I went there. And the reading, I also from reading, and I'm reading well, anything I don't understand, I bought a dictionary, I check on a dictionary. Yes.

Henry was yet another learner who was persuaded to undertake Afrikaans as well, but he found it difficult doing two languages. He decided though to carry on because he had started the classes already, and felt that, "I can get on it. Let me see how far I'll go".

Henry was a loquacious interviewee, but I noticed that he behaved subserviently at the night school, particularly in the Afrikaans teacher's class. He worked only part-time, had many hours to spare, and wanted to use them constructively:

Then when I'm here, I've got something to do. To do the homework. I'm don't sitting here and sleeping. That's the thing, I'm doing something for me. I enjoy that. ...I feel very good, very confidence for the school. I'm enjoying it.

Unlike most of the other learners, Henry did not experience transport problems, enjoyed financial security, and had time on his hands. It was because of these very advantages that Henry was able to make at least some progress, particularly in the English class. The domestic workers, except for Dorothy, endured long hours and had little free time to devote to their studies. For most of these women, the night school represented a place to socialise, coupled with the possibility of learning.

In the following section, I provide background to the establishment of the Museum class and describe the way in which lessons were conducted.

Chapter Five

5. The Museum Literacy Class: Discussion and Analysis

In this section, an analysis is given of pedagogical and other issues relating to the museum classes, and, where relevant, of comparable issues pertaining to the ABET classes.

5.1 Background

The reason for the establishment of the class

According to Wendy (personal communication), subsequent to 1994 museums sought to attract a different, broader, and more representative audience by establishing relevance and encouraging accessibility. The introduction of a literacy class, which aimed to improve fluency in English, formed part of this outreach effort. Learners were expected to be literate in their mother tongue, and also to possess some reading and writing skills in English. The first facilitator was a Xhosa-speaking woman who was eventually replaced by Wendy, the liaison officer.

The manner in which the lessons were conducted

Wendy explained how astronomers, archaeologists, and palaeontologists took turns to interact with the class. Instead of only the usual printed matter, objects on display, collections, planetarium shows, and visits to the departments behind-the-scenes were all incorporated into the lessons, and learners were given the opportunity to view and handle objects and artefacts. The San displays, fossil displays, and marine displays were mainly focused on.

There were also regular sessions in the online learning Centre, MindSPACE, where learners were assisted in acquiring basic computer skills. Two workshops were held, one about working with clay, and the other about making grass mats. An attempt was made to focus on and incorporate aspects of indigenous culture, and thus the African Studies gallery was used extensively. The learners themselves, in conjunction with Wendy, chose what it was they wanted to discuss and the topic formed the basis of the lesson. Wendy derived lesson material from scientific papers produced by Museum staff and researchers, and in the Museum publication, *Annals of the Museum*. The learners were encouraged to express their views on objects on display, both orally and in writing. For example, they had taken part in a debate during which very strong views both for and against the imminent closure of the controversial San diorama were expressed. Wendy had presented the views of the Khoisan interest groups involved in the controversy, along with other written material, prior to the debate.

Wendy recorded and transcribed relevant information that the learners provided and had it published and made available for neo-literates in other centres. The first publication, an in-house illustrated booklet, was titled, 'The English students at the South African Museum talk' and contained stories such as, 'Why do we cure skins?' and 'What I think of the new South Africa'. A glossary of English and Xhosa words appeared at the back of the volume. The intention was to use the learners' own knowledge so that it might be validated and used as a basis for discussion in class.

The second booklet of the learners' work was published by Juta and Co., and was inspired by the displays on San art (rock art) in the Museum. It was originally written in comic-book format and intended for neo-literate Xhosa-speaking learners. The learners wanted to create an awareness of the meaning and significance of rock art, and the importance of preserving it. They also highlighted the knowledge and experience older people had, and could share. It was intended for use both in the Museum and as a stand-alone publication, and appeared in Xhosa as *Amandla ezinyanya umoya wezinyanya*, and subsequently in English as *Spirits of the Ancestors*. The publication marked the first time that museum displays formed the source of a literacy booklet, and also the first time that a

museum in South Africa was involved in the teaching of literacy and producing materials. There were two other publications, namely, a small dictionary of Xhosa/English and English/Xhosa words, and also one on ethno-astronomy.

Wherever possible, learners' knowledge and information was incorporated into Museum displays and communications. For example, the learners' work contributed towards a temporary exhibition, *Go Bats*. The learners spent time in class reading about, and then writing about these creatures. They then put together a label that described Xhosa beliefs about bats (regarded as bad luck in Xhosa culture) that was used by the Museum display team and incorporated into the Museum exhibit. The utilisation of learner input was an attempt to inculcate a sense of 'ownership' of a previously alien public institution. Many places of interest were visited, among them being the Observatory and the Fossil Park. The Park provided an opportunity for discussion about palaeontology, astronomy, and botany. Before visiting the Observatory, the learners viewed planetarium shows, attended presentations by an astronomer, and read relevant literature in class. Xhosa words for celestial terms were used to explain concepts.

On analysis it became evident that the Museum classes' multi-layered and interactive approach fitted in with Gee's (1998:1) description of literacy practices integrating non language 'stuff' such as objects, and also with constructivist ideas of active learning. It was not just reading and writing. The night school learning was prescribed and limited, and there was no active participation. The learning was decontextualised, and there was no prospect of expanding the learners' knowledge base.

A description of the manner in which the classes were conducted follows.

The Saturday morning class

The literacy class at the South African (SA) Museum, held on a Saturday morning between nine am and twelve pm, consisted of 35 black and one coloured learner. The driver, Peter, attempted to create

awareness of the lessons, especially among his church group. Peter transported half the learners on alternate Saturdays, the rest having to make their own way every fortnight.

The first time I attended, the class was engaged in clay moulding. To avoid copying, they were taken to view pottery on display at the Slave Lodge only afterwards. All the exhibits generated much interest and many questions were asked. Male learners enlightened us about Samurai swords with knowledge gleaned from 'karate' films, and also as to the specific function of a Xhosa cultural weapon that formed part of the circumcision ritual. Back in class, Wendy handed out a comprehension exercise about pottery as homework. A planned outing to the West Coast was discussed. The group intended to stay over in order to study the night sky, but with only three learners in full-time employment, the contribution being requested was too steep. There was quiet discussion in Xhosa among the learners, and the translator reported that, in future, a majority decision must be arrived at when planning such outings. They opted to go to the Observatory instead. Photocopies from a book about pots were distributed and unfamiliar words underlined. Homework from the previous week was collected.

The following lesson revealed that the comprehension had proved too difficult for the learners.

Wendy demonstrated on a globe of the world where the different pottery regions were. Pictures in books were looked at and difficult words such as 'palaeolithic' written on the board and discussed. Dictionaries were provided and the words translated into Xhosa. The class was quiet and absorbed. Wendy discussed how she had obtained the relevant information about pottery from archaeologists at the museum and said that she too had learned a great deal. Volunteers were called upon to read from the extract and eventually Tito began to read softly. The learners explained to latecomers what they had missed.

The following lesson involved looking up words from the previous week's comprehension and the learners themselves explained to each other what the words meant. The comprehension was handed in and other writing work completed. The work was handed in voluntarily and those who declined were

requested to comply the following week. Previous written work was returned and common errors made by Xhosa speakers were focused on: it is difficult to (for) me; I like to play about (with) my dog; I'm (I) was so interested. The publication 'Museum News' was distributed and one of the learners read out an article about fossils contained therein.

Afterwards, when given the choice of doing various activities, one learner suggested a debate, as Wendy had already schooled them in that art. The topic chosen was, "The argument between the community and the police", but it seemed that all participants concurred! They also discussed doing a play about the debate and making that their project for the year. They had written a play previously and were now seeking a new topic. As Adult Learner's Week commenced on Women's Day, it was suggested that the topic be of relevance. Eventually, 'Family killings' was chosen, and Wendy had to keep reminding the learners to speak in English as things began to liven up.

During the following lesson, the class first looked at the fossil exhibits inside the museum, and afterwards at fossil bones on display in class. Xhosa equivalents of words such as "vertebra" were written up on the board. A discussion around fossils ensued. Peter arrived to relate his experiences about searching for fossils. He was proud to be skilled at spotting fossilised bones, and his own find was on display in the exhibit. Peter, 39, spoke of how he had not attended high school, and had started working at the Museum aged 18. He told the learners that they were being given the opportunity to study subjects usually reserved for tertiary education.

This talk preceded an outing to the Langebaan Fossil Park, and photocopies of an article in English about it were handed out for homework. They were permitted to take fossil specimens home, and urged to practice their English-speaking skills during the outing. During the following lesson, the learners described the incredulous reactions of friends and family when shown the bones. They had all written something about the outing to Langebaan, and told of the astronomy lesson given by the stand-in facilitator (a learner) during the return journey. The article on the Fossil Park was read aloud by various learners and difficult words written out up on the board and explained. During another

class, a video on dinosaur fossils was shown, and afterwards learners tried to identify the real fossil rocks in their possession from pictures in books.

When visiting the National Gallery to view a Braille exhibit, the learners noticed an unmarked *sangoma* (traditional healer) glass vase. The meaning of it was explained to the Muslim learner. She in turn explained the meaning of the word *Halaal* (Muslim dietary laws), and the symbols of the crescent and star appearing on some embroidery. The most competent learner read the labels for those who could not. Back in class, they discussed ideas for a poster for Adult Learners' Week, and then worked on that exclusively in the following weeks. By this stage, the transport had ceased and, as a result, the numbers started to dwindle. The learners wanted to write letters to request financial assistance, and Wendy suggested they start with BHB Billiton, the sponsors of the Fossil Park.

In the next section I present relevant data obtained from interviews with the driver of the Museum van, and the Museum class learners, and provide an analysis thereof.

The driver of the Museum van provides valuable insight

Peter, the Coloured driver of the Museum van, was involved in community work, and thus became aware that many Black people lacked communication abilities in English, despite having matriculated:

Then we started this classes, bringing them here and in the same time teaching them literacy and also making them aware of the museum of which they weren't aware of before they came to the classes. That is like killing two birds with one stone.

Peter described how the first teacher, a Black woman, previously in exile for more than 30 years, had not related well to the learners. Her classes were similar to school, and so attendance figures had dropped, a phenomenon experienced worldwide in formal literacy provision, indicating adults' rejection of such classes (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996:5). She also neglected to utilise the Museum's resources, thereby missing out on an opportunity to make the learning relevant:

The teacher's interest was not in the Museum, also they knew little about the Museum, that's why they didn't share. They expected more from her being a Black person than from anybody, and this was very disappointing, and it's also because she doesn't know the culture so much even being a Black lady, they were disappointed.

An elderly White woman took over, but she too proved unsuitable, because she "couldn't stoop down to the level that they actually wanted her". Peter said attendance had suddenly increased only when Wendy, the Liaison Officer, became the facilitator. The idea for the class had originally been hers, and so, once she stepped in, "we never had people two years in without not coming to class, the same people". Peter declared that only rain would keep learners away:

Not that they don't want to come but they haven't had sleep over the night because places they have and it's so wet and the day time is the only time they can have a rest.

Apparently it was the content of the lessons, such as the focus on fossils, astronomy, and material culture, that Wendy presented that gave rise to the learners' enthusiasm. For example, the lesson on fossils, during which learners handled specimens, had stimulated their interest to such an extent that they were trying to raise funds to visit the Fossil Park. Another such inspiring lesson had been on astronomy, which also incorporated a visit to the planetarium. I better understood the learners' enthusiasm for astronomy after I discovered (whilst reading the synopsis of a course being offered as part of the annual UCT Summer School) that as far back as the Middle Ages, astronomy was being studied by African scholars.

Peter maintained that:

The Fossil Park is an ideal place to teach them about the fossils, they are near to the sea, and at night there is no better sight you could have than standing outside in the dark.

The learners were desperately seeking to obtain work, and wished, more than anything else, for their English-speaking skills to be improved. The focus on outcomes and qualifications did not exist here as in the WCED classes. Peter described the female learners as "desperate to learn", and revealed that many were forced to be deceitful about classes, since their male partners would disapprove. Peter felt that, "they got a low opinion of women in their community because the man, um, he's, he has all".

The learners had written a play about the class, which won an award at the Adult Learners' Forum Literacy Day in 2001. It depicted a worker, unable to communicate in English, being forced to pay a co-worker to act as translator for the boss' instructions. The worker hears about the Museum class, and, after attending for a while, upsets his co-worker by conversing with the boss directly. He then encourages the co-worker to join the class. Peter described their message thus:

Improve English, go to the South African Museum, and they teach literature, and I just think they came up with it themselves.

Peter attempted to create awareness about the class, and was proud that the learners were "very much interested in what they do, that's why they go the extra mile by coming". He spoke of the "big sacrifice" that younger learners were making by getting up early on a Saturday morning to attend. Peter felt that if the class was taken into the townships, it would attract more learners than they could cope with. He encouraged learners to speak only English in the van but, "now and again they get carried away". The learners had expressed the wish for an attendance register to be kept in order that a written record might be made available to determine which learners were tending to disrupt the progress of the lessons with their irregular attendance.

Peter emphasised that if transport funding were to disappear, it would affect attendance drastically, even to the point of the class' demise. He transported half the learners on alternate Saturdays, the other half having to find their own way on alternate Saturdays. This had come about because of an increase in the number of learners:

Some of them can't basically actually afford to come to the classes, because you'll find out sometimes they don't pitch, and they don't open up easy, you really have to get to know them only to find out that they can't even afford to come into the classes.

Peter's account of the class history demonstrates the fact that the adult learners in question were not prepared to be treated like children in school. It also shows that simply conducting lessons inside a classroom in a museum building without skilful use of available resources is not enough to motivate learners. The attitude of the educator towards the learners, and what she knows about how to teach effectively, is of great importance as well.

In the night school, the learners were given the opportunity to make up for lost schooling within the confines of a set curriculum, and also the opportunity to socialise. The Museum class, on the other hand, provided an opportunity to de-mythologise the Museum, thereby altering any preconceptions that it was for 'whites only'. The learners were able to increase their knowledge base, instead of just learning facts, and also able to acquire basic computer skills. The schoolchildren who did manage to slip in were able to gain knowledge regarding palaeontology, which forms part of the school curriculum. All were given the opportunity to practice their English speaking skills.

The learners' experiences and opinions of the classes based on interviews and observations are discussed next.

5.2 The Museum class learners articulate their views

The Museum learners were mostly unemployed Xhosa speaking people who were required to be literate in their mother tongue, and also to possess some reading and writing skills in English. On the other hand, the night school learners consisted mainly of Afrikaans speaking, Coloured domestic workers, most of whom had had little or no formal schooling.

The desire to improve English skills

There was a strong desire to improve English skills, because, in the learners' opinion, it would better their chances of finding employment. The learners I encountered at the night school, on the other hand, were not driven by desires to find employment, and were thus more interested in trying to make up for lost schooling, and in the social aspect.

Portia, 23, felt she had improved her English speaking skills:

It was difficult to me before I came here, although I passed matric, because in Transkei you don't use to speak English, you speak in Xhosa, so now I can speak English just a little bit because of this school, and even writing, because, because she use to give us homework so that you can spell it right. So now I can speak with other people.

Portia seldom got the chance to speak English, and although she felt she was not yet “perfect” in English, she was motivated to keep up attendance in the hope of becoming “perfect”.

I like that here we use to speak English, that was my problem, I can't speak English although I passed standard ten and sometimes I can't hear some people, I can hear Blacks only.

Martin, 20, had had little opportunity to practice English, both at school and at home:

Ja, I think it's good, and I learn so much because I didn't, before I wasn't know how to speak English better, but now I'm getting there, I'm in the process of learning, it's good. ...I want to learn, I want to improve my English, so that is one of the main point.

Martin worried that he might be perceived of as “rude”, because of his lack of proficiency. He also felt that if he attended classes he was not wasting time, because he was not lazy, and liked to share information with people.

Nancy, who matriculated in the Eastern Cape, felt that knowing English made it easier to seek work:

I improved because I didn't have guts to speak English, I was afraid, but since I came here, you see... it helped me a lot, because now I have that confidence...

Tumi, keen to improve her English, had initially thought that others would be more proficient than she was, but, “it was not like that”. She maintained that, “people are struggling with English, they don't know how to speak”.

Lerato possessed grade 10, and attended classes because they were free, and to improve her English skills. She managed to acquire computer skills at the same time, and this, combined with her improved English, no doubt strengthened her chances of finding employment.

Isaac, a Swazi artist, acted as part-time facilitator because of his English skills, and also assisted with art and drama projects. He wanted to bring his eldest school-going child to class, but there were too many like her wanting to attend already. Unfortunately, Wendy had been forced to restrict the attendance of school pupils as the class was meant to be for adult learners only, and in any case, the classroom was not large enough to accommodate other, more youthful learners.

However, despite this restriction, a few scholars had nevertheless managed to slip in, particularly after attendance began to diminish. According to feedback from the learners, the withdrawal of the transport was the main reason for this. Vivi was one such school pupil, aged 16, and in grade ten. She did the homework, in addition to her schoolwork, and maintained that:

Wendy has helped in my English. By coming here I've learnt English in, in many ways, I've learnt to write it, to talk and to read it, because we are doing that here on Saturdays, and that at school.

Lack of opportunity to practice English and negative attitudes towards speaking English and the Museum

Tumi described the negative attitudes she encountered:

At our homes we don't speak English, and the other people get bored outside if you speak English and they don't understand, they just get bored and say to me, "you want to make yourself a English lady" and they press you down instead of improving.

Others were able to speak English, but just did not want to, and criticised Tumi for trying.

Isaac spoke of the negative perspectives of the Museum:

If you talking about I'm coming, maybe their friend on a train asking, "where you're coming from? Oh, the Museum, mmmm, you like those white areas, white people areas", because we involved with the whites always, you know, so it's whereby I have to explain for them, what is the problem with the white people?

Isaac himself had held misconceptions about the Museum until he attended classes:

Because of the classes, even myself, I don't know want to shy myself by saying, I, I do know a museum long ago. I didn't know it's for the people, I know it's for the tourists and the white people. ...that's why even I find out, even the other people, they have that believe of, it's for the white people, it's for the tourists, it's not for the South Africans.

It was only because he was asked to assist that he had attended. Otherwise he would have anticipated having to pay, and the word 'museum' would have put him off. This coincides with what Ames (1992) has suggested about the renaming of such institutions in order to make them appeal to all sectors of society.

Sipho mentioned having being called a liar, and being mocked for his efforts to extend his knowledge:

We classified the different stages (of animal fossils), so I told my friend about that, and the first fossil to be discovered of the human being was seven million years ago, they say to me, no man, we talk lies man.

Sipho felt that people who behaved like that were usually the ones who did not study, and who placed having money and possessions above all else.

This negative attitude towards education did not appear to be an issue in the WCED classes, and no doubt stemmed in part from the legacy of 'Bantu' education, an apartheid-era construct, the effects of which are still being experienced today (Rule, 2006). It was the content of the learning in the Museum class that encouraged learners to engage in discussion with others outside of the classroom. The same could not be said about the uninspiring night school syllabus. Another kind of negativity towards education was that experienced by certain female members of the Museum class, who had to keep their attendance a secret from their male partners, who did not wish them to better themselves.

The night school learners' experience of negativity emanated from the following people: certain selfish employers who attempted to thwart their domestics' efforts to attend; the elderly man's (Henry) daughter who discouraged him from learning in his senior years; and the domestic worker's (Dorothy) husband who did not provide her with any support in her efforts to make up for lost schooling

Issues to do with school

Tito said he would not have attended classes had they resembled school in any way, and described the Museum lessons thus:

... we are not just sit down read and write, we're going somewhere to see something else (inaudible), watching videos, go to the galleries. ...I came from disadvantaged schools, we don't have equipment, infrastructures, we are just learning from the book. Even our teachers, some of them, I found them they are not well qualified, they just came from colleges, they just learn a book, a code. Once you ask more information about that if he get, he don't have a lot of information.

At the Museum, Tito was given the opportunity to increase his knowledge base instead of just learning facts, as was the case at the night school. A lesson on fossils, for instance, would begin with a visit to the exhibits, and then be followed by the actual handling of such items in class, and in conjunction with the perusal of reading matter and pictures pertaining to the subject. This multi-layered input provided an additional, extended level of learning, as opposed to the learning in the WCED classes, which was prescribed and limited.

Sipho had visited the Museum while at primary school, but saw “just the animals and the other things”. It did not make much of an impression on him. Tumi complained about the previous teacher not making use of the Museum’s resources, and being taught as if at school. Also, learners had been expected to provide lesson topics, and so the classes became boring. It was indeed unfortunate that neither Sipho nor Tumi had been afforded the opportunity of viewing displays that were of relevance to their culture, such as the African Studies gallery, when first introduced to the Museum. Even if raised in the city, as opposed to the rural areas, they would have been in contact with family members who would have made them aware of their cultural heritage, and therefore able to respond to seeing aspects of it on display.

Bhatsi had not been taught about fossils at school:

Like now I know even the fossil, I’ve read about the fossil at school, but I don’t know what is a fossil. I just think, thought, maybe fossil is a, maybe a rock, just a rock.

Initially, Nancy had been reluctant to attend classes together with her work mate, Tumi. However, while helping Tumi with homework, she had been surprised to see what the work entailed, and immediately changed her mind. She realised that it was more than just “reading and writing”, which, according to this research, was all that the WCED night school seemed to provide.

Alice revealed that they did not have any dictionaries at school, as opposed to Wendy’s classes, where dictionaries were always on hand. Vivi’s school had few computers available for use during extra mural activities, and, after spending time in MindSPACE as part of the classes, she felt she had

become “a star” at computers, to the extent that even her school teacher had noticed. Vivi preferred Wendy to her teachers because, “sometimes they get frustrated and that, you don’t know what happened and that, she (Wendy) does not do that, she’s always happy”. The relaxed atmosphere in the class, and observing other learners as being “free” had helped make her less “tense” than when at school. Vivi’s ‘tense’ school experiences seemed to be reflected in many night school learners’ experiences of their classes. For example, the WCED tests appeared to upset learners at the night school, and also the ‘tense’ atmosphere in the Afrikaans class was not conducive to learning.

Vivi revealed that, “everything we are doing here, I come to school on a Monday and tell them everything”. Her teacher had been unaware of the fossil park, and now intended to visit it. This type of response must have done wonders for Vivi’s self-esteem. Vivi’s school outings were usually confined to places such as the beach, which no doubt had little to offer in the way of outcomes-related learning, whereas a visit to the Museum could incorporate palaeontology and computer literacy, which form part of the current curriculum.

As has been seen, the content of the learning materials at the night school was not relevant to the learners’ lives, for example, the formal letter writing required. Even Smith described the material as repetitive and monotonous, with ‘baby sentences’. The Museum classes offered content that was relevant, such as ethno-astronomy, and which could be expanded upon. Different points of entry for learning were provided, there was plenty to ‘stir the imagination’ (Goulborn, 2001:4), and there was the opportunity to build on previous knowledge.

Issues of confidence

Tumi said she had been shy to begin with, but had become more confident, and both her English and general knowledge had improved. Nancy too had been “a little bit shy” to start with, just like many other newcomers she had observed. Just as Nancy had done, they all grew in confidence over time, and started to contribute.

Alice had been reticent about speaking English, but said that attending classes had helped. “By coming here I know I’m doing well to speak”. Vivi had been a ‘very, very, shy person’ prior to attending, but now she was very confident during debates, and enjoyed contributing towards discussions.

I like working with different people like Wendy and all of them, and that I’m a person who likes to talk, talks too much, and that when I’m here I talk too much, I am free, we don’t have to hide anything, everyone talks what she wants or he wants to talk, so I like it. I debate by coming here, I get that confidence of talking to many people and that’s good for me, because I have input.

Bhatsi said that, in the beginning, many learners were too shy to speak English. “Many get scared of could not say alright, in front of the others”. She elaborated further:

I just tell them that we are here to learn. If we were perfect we have to stay in our offices, so no one to, have to laugh at each other so that’s the main thing that I can say, mmmm, but I can see the other one improved because they used to just sit and listen, they gain something even if they are quiet.

The atmosphere in the class was thus most conducive to learning, and even the quiet ones managed to benefit because of the encouraging way in which Wendy presented the lessons. She had schooled the learners in the art of debate, and they thoroughly enjoyed engaging in discussion on the pros and cons of contentious issues.

Lerato said:

The class, ne, is very good, cause, cause like I am afraid of talking with, with other people, but now I’m stay. I, I have a proud of self-confidence, so I’m stay... like there is a debate... my first topic is: Christmas day - should abolish? So, they discussed. Others say it’s not abolished, others says it is abolished. So my second topic is: I do not believe in a censors.

Sipho felt his social skills had improved by ‘thirty percent’:

I also learn how to work with people at the same time, not saying I didn’t know how to work with people, I was know how to work with people just forty percent, but when I came here, I increase my average by thirty percent, so was forty percent and thirty percent, so was seventy percent.

Martin had noticed improvement in learner confidence:

They got something here that those who have been attending here, they got something, just because when I looking at my classmates, they managed to speak, they trying to write if you look, whether it doesn’t matter,

whether you go higher standard or lower standard, we are treating one and the same and that thing, so that is one, that is the reason why they are improving, so, to help each other.

Issues of confidence have bearing in adult literacy provision. The Museum class learners spoke of their self-esteem being boosted, of increased confidence, and of improved social skills. The autonomous view advocates literacy for empowerment (Stromquist, 2001), yet it was not evident at the night school. While literacy programmes are meant to facilitate the acquisition of feelings of self-worth, the night school served mostly to undermine them.

Complaints and criticisms

The Museum class learners, having been encouraged to voice their opinions, were able to offer constructive criticism of the classes. Tito spoke of some learners having an “attitude” about the classes, which stemmed from their dissatisfaction about the way things were being done. They also sometimes complained of being bored. However, he pointed out that, although encouraged to, they refrained from speaking up about what interested them, and remained silent. A few merely chose not to return. When pressed for reasons, they were untruthful. Tito stated that learners who were interested and willing to work would return regularly. He maintained that the main reason for the drop in attendance was the withdrawal of the fortnightly transport.

Nancy expressed irritation that the same people tended to voice their opinions all the time. She had told quiet learners that they were not demonstrating acknowledgement of Wendy’s efforts by not speaking up, and this appeared to have made a difference. Nancy became annoyed when lessons did not begin punctually, and reprimanded those who strolled into town while waiting for others to arrive. She would have preferred the lessons to be extended, and felt that more learners would attend if transport was provided.

Isaac, the part-time facilitator, expressed frustration with learners not confident enough even in Xhosa to ask or answer questions with ease. He was also critical of certain younger learners who stayed away during winter, and felt that he and Wendy did not “push” them enough:

They're melting at winter, but someone want to get the things they want to, you have to compromise. ...they don't participate fully, sometimes they skip two, three weeks, you know.

He had suggested a register be kept to curb absenteeism, but did not want to challenge Wendy's authority in this regard. He realised that it was a difficult issue for Wendy to deal with, although he himself would not have tolerated such behaviour. Isaac felt that learners were being untruthful when questioned about absenteeism. He said that irregular attendance served to disrupt a lesson's sequence, as the repetition involved in catching up caused boredom for regulars. Isaac and others also wanted the class to be extended. Further he complained that, whenever an outing was planned, learners not registered suddenly made an appearance.

Vivi said that it was difficult for those who had no transport money. She said that some missed classes when it was not their turn to be transported. Since the lifts had ceased, the numbers had dwindled. Alice maintained that only lack of money kept her away, and that she wished to attend more regularly. She wished that others would also attend regularly so as to minimise disruption.

Martin relied on borrowed weekly tickets for transport purposes, which in turn meant sometimes missing classes. He felt disappointed when forced to do so, and would have liked classes to be held more often. Siphon too was not always able to borrow a ticket, and really missed the classes if forced to. He thus tried to save a few rand during the week for transport.

Bhatsi felt the class was “very slow”. A few people had dropped out because of this, “because of we just sit and talk”. She said that Wendy “have to be strict for us because we need a strict person as I, as I see”. Bhatsi said the learners got away with speaking too much Xhosa, and that this aspect formed the focus of complaints. She expressed the need for practical activities such as drama, to encourage English speaking, and more opportunities for art and craft work. Bhatsi had approached Wendy about

grouping the learners according to ability, because “sometimes to the other people it is difficult but they don’t want to say”. Bhatsi thought it might keep some learners from attending if the standard was too high, that they would be unable to manage the homework, and would not do it. The cessation of the transport had made things difficult too. She attempted to do the homework, but found that it took a “long time”.

Tumi would have preferred to do more writing work, and to go on more outings. She said that others wanted to attend during weekdays, because of being unemployed and unavailable on Saturdays.

It appeared that the bulk of the criticism emanated from the fact that learners did not all arrive at the same time, as in the night school, and this served to disrupt the flow of the lessons, resulting in boredom and a slow pace of work. Transport fares were a hindrance for the learners, most of whom were unemployed. The night school learners, on the other hand, enjoyed subsidised fares and were mostly live-in domestic workers. The issue of learners in the same class being at different levels had cropped up in both sites, and this factor also interfered with the pace of the lessons.

Issues relating to different levels of knowledge of learners, as well as other issues that made teaching and learning difficult came to the fore. The Museum learners voiced complaints about the following: disruption caused by late-comers; irregular attendance; not sufficient practical work being done; not enough English being spoken; not enough written work being done; and the same people speaking up all the time. Unpleasant school experiences were mentioned on the one hand, but there were also requests for Wendy to be ‘stricter’ on the other. Some felt that the differing levels of competence led to some learners being put off, while others became bored. Transport issues, especially after the lifts were stopped, were ever present. The mostly unemployed Museum learners found lack of transport money a problem, and the inadequate living conditions of some also hindered attendance.

The night school’s subsidised transport did serve to make it more accessible, but the annual fees posed a problem for some. The night school learners complained mainly about: the tests, Smith’s impatience, his not following through with the work, and his giving only writing; the lack of

understanding on the organisers' part and their unwillingness to discuss learners' problems; and lack of progress in acquiring literacy.

Wendy's positive input

Isaac stated that Wendy always encouraged learners who seemed reluctant to speak up to voice any concerns they might have:

Her doors only be opened for anything you want to know about, ...she say, "okay, next week I'm sure I'm going to organise for you". She don't say, "we don't dealing with this at the Museum", and then she left you there, she always try to accommodate everything so long you want the information, you want to learn more, you want to do the things more, you know.

Isaac mentioned how Wendy had gone out of her way to show his daughter the beading exhibits in the Museum, thereby encouraging her in her endeavours. Isaac felt that another person would merely have said that literacy, not beading, was her focus.

Vivi had been told that Wendy was a "nice person to work with". She would be "sad" if Wendy were to be replaced, because "she's a friendly person, she talks, she laughs, and do some sort of things. She makes us happy".

Alice liked the way Wendy conducted the lessons:

I love the, the thing that she talks to us, like when we spell the word, we know now how to spell the word. When we don't have to know, Wendy gives us the dictionary, so we can check the other words.

Bhatsi had found the classes boring under the previous teacher, and they had been attended mostly by school children, but when Wendy took over:

Then it was fine because the many things improved and there were many things changed, we had a lot of things to do, like writing, reading and all that stuff, then 2000 it was fine too, we had a more things to do like outings, go to see stuff that we're learning about inside the museum and outside, it was very fine.

Enjoyment derived and knowledge gained

For Tito, the class was the highlight of his week:

It's always good to be here because I learn a lot, each and every day I've learnt something new from others and around the museum.

Tito frequented the library, but felt that the Museum offered him more of what was relevant and interesting to him:

As a student, to learn a lot I came here. I learn from the books, only but something like animals and other stuff, Bushmans, I see. I learn a lot here, I get more information and knowledge about the animals and other animals where, where no longer exist at all, yes.

Martin referred to the education in the class as being "very broad", and the tuition as being "a challenge" to learners who did not possess much schooling:

I want to know more about knowledge in, more around in South Africa, around in Western Cape, what have happened.

Nancy liked the fact that the learning also involved the acquisition of knowledge. She had no transport problems, but emphasised that she would try to attend even if she had, as she had "learned a lot".

Isaac felt he had gained much from the class, "Since I'm been here, I learn a different cultures, different languages and religion, you know, so it's how it helps a lot and a life skill". Portia agreed, "Here I've learnt something, like you doing things with my hands, and sharing ideas with other people". She spoke of how they continued unfinished debates on the way home, and sometimes chose to debate topics that had not received the majority vote in class.

Alice said she "loved" the classes and would return the following year. She said that in the van the learners discussed how much they enjoyed attending, and that they were "good" classes.

Vivi said that:

I've learned to swallow my pride and work with other people whom I didn't know at first and that I believe that I can now do anything, ummm, from any age, because bigger things start at smaller age and that and doing computer, in that I can now do anything I want to do, ja.

Bhatsi felt she had gained a lot by attending, even if the learning did take a while. Her friend, Tumi, explained why she kept on returning:

My first thing I was surprised even to see the Museum, I always see the words Museum, but didn't know what is inside the Museum then. Until I came here, then I get surprised because I've seen some of the things which I didn't see past years, but now I know what is a fossil, so to come here helped me a lot.

Zulpha, the only Afrikaans speaking learner, would have preferred to attend more often, as they made her feel "very happy":

They do a lot, and I learn a lot in classes, they did tell us a lot and we go out a lot of times. I feel they friendly people, nice people, meeting people and very nice.

Lerato mentioned how the classes had given her the opportunity to see places she had not known existed, such as the Astronomical Observatory, where she had been able to see the stars. She kept returning because:

When I'm here I saw, I'm saw so, so many things, like interesting things, so like, she, it make me happy. ...like last year Wendy was taught about the, like the Bushmans, how the, like many years ago, how to eat, and how to like the Bushmans, the English is... (inadequate).

On Sipho's first visit to the Museum, he had been to the planetarium. "I decided to attend again so that I can get more information and increase my knowledge". He returned every Saturday because:

I saw many things, like I didn't know nothing about the stars, but I just know just a little thing, not say hundred percent. Fossil, I didn't know nothing about fossils. I didn't know nothing about the different kind of traditions, like cultures, just because like I'm a Xhosa, I know, like I know other things like another tribe traditions, but there are some I didn't know, just because no one is perfect, but when I came here, we share ideas. I started to know other things... some they tell me, some things I saw by myself. I never go to Fossils Park before. ...as from last year I start attending exhibition here at the Museum. ... So, many things, that's why I came each and every time.

The MindSPACE computers were more advanced than those at Sipho's college, "so that's the other thing I like, that caused me to come here, and many things".

The Museum learners' motivation to attend classes was evident in the resourceful way they used working friends' weekly transport tickets to attend. For many, the classes represented the highlight of their week, and they wished they could be held more often. They were also eager to improve their English speaking skills as a means to finding employment. Vivi spoke of the relaxed atmosphere in the classes, as opposed to her school experiences. The night school learner, Dorothy, spoke of doing things for herself, and received encouragement from her children and employers. For another learner, Angela, the classes represented her only contact with the outside world. Henry, the elderly learner, was determined to use his free time constructively.

Eagerness to have others benefit from the class and to share knowledge gained

The learners told friends, workmates, and schoolmates about the classes. All had been eager to attend, but lack of money or the weather usually proved to be obstacles. In the case of the schoolchildren, no additional school pupils were being admitted.

Isaac liked to share his new-found knowledge:

Even on the way to home to PE, to Queenstown, I use to watch on the way, like in Karoo. I'm saying, I'm showing even the others, do you know about the fossils? There is a sort of a, a fossils, what is a fossil is. Most of the fossils were found here in Karoo. I want to go there to see practically, and so on, you know.

He wanted to show real fossils he would be given to people in his community. Isaac felt that more people should be able to access the Museum, even if just once monthly.

Bhatsi had even put up a poster at the bus stop, thereby hoping to 'announce' the class to the community. She was also involved in teaching her neighbour how to read and write, going there for short periods in the evenings when convenient. The neighbour had found it too difficult to attend night school:

She came late from work, she have to do some things at home, and she have to rush to school. Sometimes the classes, she, she comes late the classes, then she gain nothing from that.

Bhatsi had stepped in:

I asked her to give a help, and I, I teach her how to write and read, and in three month's time she was ready to write her name, surname, her daughter's name and read some sentences, and write all the alphabet and read that properly.

By assisting her neighbour in this way, Bhatsi had unwittingly assumed the role of 'literacy activist', an approach to literacy teaching suggested by Kell (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996), and also akin to the teacher-student partnerships of the Nottingham Literacy Scheme (Levine, 1986). The neighbour had evidently made more progress with Bhatsi than she would have at the night school I researched.

Tumi had brought fossils home with her, and shared her knowledge:

First of all, I just told them, I just compare the, the zoo and the Museum, so, because when you go to zoo you see animal far away from you sometimes cause some of the animals are wild animals so it's not easy to come closer so you can see, so I'll say if we mention something in the animal, that something is in the animal maybe I said, no, it's better if you go straight to the museum it will be easy to come closer to that and see that, without our doing...

Sipho's friend had even offered to provide him with transport costs so that he could attend. Sipho liked to share the knowledge he gained:

If I learn some things, I don't hide it for me, I tell other people, some you can, for instance, previous week, I told my friend about the fossils, the first fossil like the first fossil to be found was three hundred and forty million years ago, the fossil of a, it's not a human being fossil, ja I know it's like old animals, but...

The museum learners were treated as adults, and encouraged to express their views and to take an active role in their learning. In the night school, however, the learners were generally treated like children. They were not encouraged to voice their opinions, nor to contribute in any way to the learning process. As a result, they were loathe to complain, and in some instances, would not be forthcoming about being unable to pay the fees. The situation appeared to mirror the master-servant relationship of their working lives.

Participation in decision-making

Bhatsi said that Wendy had consulted the learners as to what they wanted from the lessons, and had welcomed their opinions. They had decided to focus on two subjects over a four week period, and

then to try to connect the subjects with something else in order to provide more stimulation, “like beads in our culture connected to the diviners”. This was something of relevance to the learners, as opposed to the WCED class, which offered little in this regard.

The learners had also requested that practical work, such as ceramics and drama, be undertaken at least once a month. Isaac felt that it was very important, especially to the unemployed, to teach people to create things with their hands, so that they could perhaps sell the products eventually. He described this as a ‘life-skill’.

Tumi spoke of how all learners expressed their views about what they wanted, and as to what was decided:

If you are shy, we tell you, we hear what we’re saying, if you said, no, said you have to come out with your views and to tell the others what you want us to do, everybody is allowed to say anything. ...everybody had their say, nobody kept quiet, everybody said what they wanted. ...We are now going after the writing, so we have talked together and discussed how we’re going to work now, we know now to work, sometimes it’s writing and reading, next week we change again, maybe reading and talking, yes, now.

Tumi said they hoped that the changes would introduce more balance into the lessons, thereby resulting in an improvement on the current situation in which she felt there was too much discussion and not sufficient writing. There was thus a forum for each and every learner to contribute to the way in which the lessons were conducted, as opposed to the night school, where learners were not encouraged to voice their opinions, despite the fact that they were adults, and in spite of the ABET Act.

Isaac felt that, as facilitator-assistant, he played a crucial role:

Sometimes it’s difficult for them to express themselves to Wendy, that’s why, um, I notice I’m needed to be here really, because it’s difficult for Wendy to read those things, you know because sometimes they’re hurting inside, inside you know.

Isaac mentioned that the learners were even more inclined to express their feelings when on outings:

That’s why I say even the outing must be balanced with the classes inside, inside the room you know must be equal so that, it’s whereby they can... I’m sure that environment to be out works a lot. ...even for everybody, even for me, sometimes I feel free when I’m there, you know.

Learners' attitudes towards education

Thumi did not think that the withdrawal of the free transport would be a problem, because, "those who wants serious the class, I think they can come . . . I believe if you want something, you have to sacrifice".

Vivi, determined not to be deterred by the withdrawal of the transport, said that, 'if you put your mind on doing something, you can try and do anything, because I did want, I do want these classes".

Isaac explained that although people did believe in education, it was nevertheless very difficult for them to study further because of their circumstances.

Sipho suggested that the learners each bring a few rand every week so that they could pool their resources in order, for example, to buy beads. (The learners had expressed the wish for some practical work to be incorporated into the lessons). He felt that it was incorrect to depend on one person to provide everything for them.

The learners' responses

It would appear from the learners' feedback that, as a result of the classes, they developed not only their reading, writing, and speaking skills, but also confidence, self-esteem, and renewed motivation to learn. For Hein (1996:32), motivation in constructivist thinking is not only seen as helping learning, but also as being essential for it. The learners were aware that an attempt was being made to meet their needs and interests, something which was crucial to their learning, more so because they were adults (Dubinsky, 1997:11). They produced exhibitions based on their experiences, an activity in accord with constructivist views that learning is contextual, active and social, and cannot be separated from our lives.

...learners need to be active, ... in order to participate in learning we need to engage the learner in doing something, in hands-on involvement, in participatory exhibits and programs. ...the more important point, ...is the idea that the actions which we develop ...engage the mind as well as the hand (Hein,1996:31).

The learners' frequent utilisation of the African Studies gallery was in keeping with another constructivist principle: that one needs knowledge to learn, that new knowledge is more easily assimilated if one has some structure developed from previous knowledge to build on (Hein, 1991:32). The learners' excitement at being able to handle artefacts validated Goulborn's (2001:4) contention that, "The main components of any museum can provide enjoyable, interesting, entertaining matter to 'stir the imagination', irrespective of the learners' language or literacy skill".

Chapter Six

In the concluding section I highlight the issues raised by this research project.

6. Conclusion

The relevant literature points to the literacy tutor as being the single most important factor in the success of any endeavour. Also, that adult educators need to understand the cognitive processes by which people become literate, and that they must be able to use a variety of approaches appropriately (Tuchten, 2000). Wendy, the Museum facilitator, held a masters degree in adult education, and had extensive experience working in various adult education environments. In addition to that, her being familiar with the Museum's resources, enabled her to utilise them effectively. Yates and Smith at the night school were both qualified, and employed as, primary school teachers, while Tessa was an ex pupil of the night school. They all lacked knowledge of adult education approaches, and this became apparent in the quality of teaching and learning on offer.

The Kha Ri Gude campaign, launched in 2008, is employing out of work matriculants as facilitators, and giving them only two week's training. They should have undergone proper training, and in an ongoing manner: 'one-shot' training has not been found to be effective (MacLaughlin, 1997).

Furthermore, Rule (2006) has remarked upon "...the continuing dysfunction of schools in the democratic era". Considering the type of school experiences related to me by most of the Museum learners, it seems unlikely that these matriculants will become effective adult educators.

The Museum classes were conducted along Freireian lines. Assuming the role of facilitator, Wendy drew on the learners' knowledge to create focuses of interest. The learners participated actively in dialogue with her and with one another. The curriculum was not about a set of objectives to be 'covered' and measured, and Wendy adopted an experimental approach, trying out variations and modifications. In the night school, the form of curriculum was prescriptive and the teacher was

merely the transmitter of information. The learners were not encouraged to bring their own understandings to the process, and the learning consisted of a set of instructions which the learners followed – what Freire referred to as ‘banking’ education. This type of curriculum seemed to appeal to the teachers at the night school studied because it made few demands on them (Hoadley and Jansen, 2001).

However, rather than stating that one method is bad and the other good, it is more constructive to point out, firstly, when and why either might be appropriate and useful, and, secondly, when and why either might be inappropriate and unhelpful. For example, the experience at the Museum with the teachers who taught there prior to Wendy demonstrated that the prescriptive method was inappropriate and unhelpful in that environment. It has been acknowledged, however, that in the night school environment, the pedagogisation of literacy is not inappropriate. Further to this, it has been recommended that night schools should become far more institutionalised and professionalised, and that the teachers should become professional adult teachers (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996).

It would have been heartening had the ANC carried out its intention to provide the necessary resources for museum programmes in adult education and literacy, thus ensuring the continuation and possibly even the expansion of classes such as the South African Museum class. The introduction of similar classes at the Museum for school pupils who were being turned away would also have been well received. It would also have been encouraging to know that an effort was being made to improve on the existing night schools, thus, as was recommended, making them more professionalised, and, as was also recommended, to have the teachers undergo training in adult education. Aitchison and Harley (2006) contend that outputs for ABET do not match the targets, “...suggesting either a smaller number of enrolments than expected or very inadequate instruction”.

As a result of the above research, I concluded that the interactive and active education of the Museum class is better suited to adult education than the overly formalised school-like night school tuition. However, I also concluded that each educational approach has both advantages and disadvantages,

and that further investigation needs to be undertaken to determine ways in which to build upon the strengths, whilst diminishing the weaknesses, of both approaches. Furthermore, I concluded that proper teacher training is a critical component of any programme implementation if the teaching is to be effective.

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