

**An exploratory case study of a Foundation  
Phase learning program to examine how  
curriculum contextualisation contributes to  
environmental learning and relevance**

Half-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF EDUCATION  
(Environmental Education)

at

Rhodes University

Supervisor: Professor Rob O'Donoghue

By

Nonkoliso Maqwelane (nee Ndzuzo)

February 2011

## ABSTRACT

This study is an exploration of contextual environmental learning through integrated life skills and literacy in a Foundation Phase classroom. It attempts to document, explore and clarify some of the challenges of situated environmental learning in a Foundation Phase classroom through an integrated program of life skills learning and literacy acquisition.

The research draws on a rich but often overlooked cultural historical context of embodied intergenerational healthy living practices in a rural Eastern Cape context to construct a learning platform for a more carefully situated and potentially relevant education. The integrated life skills and literacy acquisition program thus unfolded as a contextual process of situated learning within a developing blend of listening, writing and reading to learn in a Grade 3 program of additive bilingualism.

The data generated in the study and represented in Chapter 4 suggests curriculum contextualisation in an integrated Foundation Phase program can contribute to environmental learning with enhanced relevance and literacy skills. The evidence from working with learner knowledge and experience in a community context appears to be a key to meaningful *curriculum contextualization* in an integrated Foundation Phase programme producing enhanced literacy and relevance. It was noted that engaging elders (gogos) enabled the process of opening up local knowledge to link with learner experience and school knowledge to foster *relevance*, appeared to contribute to more meaningful learning across other learning areas. There is evidence that acquiring *literacy* skills is a lengthy process that is supported by learner interest and the *relevance* of what they are learning especially when it is acknowledged by the teacher and the community.

The findings of an exploratory study such as this cannot be conclusive beyond the experience that I had of working with learners who were engaged in learning as well as acquiring literacy skills. My personal enthusiasm and work with the Gogos and with a community focus were key factors that strengthened *environmental learning* across school, home and community. The experience has convinced me that this is the way we must work to enhance relevance and literacy in our Foundation Phase teaching.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude goes to my Lord, my Saviour Jesus Christ and my Comforter during my entire tribulations in this course. I thank the Lord of Engenas, Edward Barnabas Lekganyane, for guiding my path throughout the entire study. Your Love, Peace, and Unity stayed with my family (my husband and children) whilst I was busy with this study. As a Provider and Comforter, you chose reliable people to work with me. They inspired my path by valuing my input as well as adding value through their critical and creative ways of doing things in this research centre. I thank you Lord for choosing a sustainable place like environmental learning for me to grow which provided creative learning for life.

My heartfelt thanks goes to my husband 'Tatakhe'. A man of few words yet of passion and care. In all these years of study he never complained nor showed stress of undertaking the job of being a mother and father simultaneously to our children. Instead your support, understanding, and encouragement enabled me to finish what I had already started.

To my children (Azie, Siphosethu, Lwanda and Zeze) your understanding and support never waived instead you assisted me the way you know how. Thank you Lwanda for taking care of the entire family (accompanying Zeze to school every day and cooking for the family). Azie, for your financial support to your sisters. Siphosethu for paving the way for others by dedicating your time to your studies, you never disappointed the family nor underestimated your role as the elder sister. Zeze your kindness, love and your smile kept me going whilst I was away from you; thank you 'baby girl' for your understanding.

My 'children' at school, the 2008-2010 classroom learners, your enthusiasm and willingness to work with me enabled the research to reach its fulfilment. Your co-operation and curiosity to learn more inspired your parents to support what we were doing in the classroom. Thank you for that. May the work of being young researchers continue in the coming years of your studies.

The support I received from the entire unit of the environmental research group (2008-2010) MEd students. Your input in my study through group work and

discussion beyond the classroom was amazing. Professor Heila, Professor Rob, Lausanne, Ingrid and Gladys I thank you too. You did not only provided support but you walked the journey with me.

A special thanks goes to Carmen for providing a place like home in her house. Every meal you prepared was delicious, nutritious and fit for a student every day. Your support and understanding was amazing. You lifted a burden of thinking about a place to stay whilst trying to cope with my studies. May God bless you with many years to come so that other students like me may not only hear about your generosity but live the experience as well. Thank you many times.

Lastly but not least by any means, Professor Rob O'Donoghue, this study would not have materialised without your guidance, and your creative ways of doing things. I have learnt a lot from you. You managed to alleviate my concerns and worries by listening to my story (teaching experience). This has enabled me to use my story as a platform to improve my teaching practice and to inform other researchers.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND DATA INDEXING:**

DA- DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

DoE- DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION

FP- FOUNDATION PHASE

FGL1- FOCUS GROUP LEARNER 1

FGL2-FOCUS GROUP LEARNER 2

FGL3-FOCUS GROUP LEARNER 3

FGL4-FOCUS GROUP LEARNER 4

FOL- FOUNDATION FOR LEARNING

GFG1- GOGO'S FOCUS GROUP 1

GFG2- GOGO'S FOCUS GROUP 2

GST- GOGO'S STORYTELLING

IK- INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

JE- JOURNAL ENTRY

LW1- LEARNERS' WORK 1

LW2- LEARNERS' WORK 2

LFG- LEARNERS' FOCUS GROUP

NCS- NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENTS

NRS- NATIONAL READING STRATEGY

OBE- OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION

LO- LEARNING OUTCOMES

AS- ASSESSMENT STANDARDS

LEARNERS' FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW- LFG

TWFL- TEACHERS WORKBOOK FOR LITERACY

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the study by providing background to the research and outlining the reasons why I was motivated to do research inside the classroom in a Foundation Phase school in the Ilitha Community, a small township in Berlin near East London. The chapter also provides a description of the context in which the study took place before outlining the research question and goals. Finally, it provides an outline of my role as teacher and researcher and then provides a brief overview of each chapter.

#### **1.2 Background to the study**

As a Foundation Phase teacher I teach all learning areas, Literacy (home language isiXhosa and additional language English), Numeracy and Life Orientation. During the past ten years of teaching Grade 3, I became concerned that learners come to my classroom, after two years of schooling, unable to read and write. They are thus not well prepared for the transition from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' and most are not ready.

In 2007 I enrolled myself with a Schools and Sustainability course in Environmental Education provided by Rhodes University in partnership with the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA). Here I learnt more about environmental issues and the impact of poverty, access to schooling and the quality of education received by the learner. What I gained during the course encouraged me to enrol for the Masters in Education (Environmental Education) course in 2008. The latter course informed me about the importance of the immediate environment and cultural capital in learner acquisition of literacy.

The course emphasized that a learner's previous knowledge and experience is vital for the development of relevant skills, knowledge, attitudes and values. I was surprised to note that this is also a key point in the Department of Education (DoE) (2003) policy documents for the Foundation Phase as this is not fully understood or acted upon by teachers, most of who teach topics and skills with little reference to these issues. The key point for me is that children need basic and relevant literacy skills so that they can learn better when exposed to new information and then be able to participate in the process of change.

In addition to the above key point, a creative and healthy environment enables learners to learn more about themselves, their surroundings and other natural things in the environment in which they live. In such environments learners are able to make informed choices about their lives and to be change agents in their own environment (school, home and community) and at large. The knowledge I gained from my first encounter with environmental education course inspired me to work with some learners from Grade 1 up to Grade 3. I soon realized that working with the same group of learners would create more opportunities for learners to learn from their immediate environment (school, home) and the community.

The emphasis on an environmental focus during lesson planning enabled me to support learners to learn and take note of new information about various topics that are inhibiting their way of life, such as healthy eating, sanitation, and water management among others. Using their home language to deliberate various environmental issues provided a relevance that enabled learners to acquire tremendous amounts of knowledge and skills. This also boosted a positive attitude and allowed them to identify their values and cherish them thus contributing to relevant content in context.

Practically, as I developed this approach, discussions and deliberations that took place in the classroom paved the way for me as a teacher-researcher to take note of the

importance of everyday knowledge in learning. Here as learners deliberated about issues that hinder their way of life in their immediate environment (school and home) they were learning with far more purpose and with a sense of relevance.

As I read more deeply into the DoE (2009 a) I noted how the oral component (listening and speaking) is intended to encourage learners to deliberate issues about their home environment in their home language. In my experience this is absent from most rural classrooms and we as teachers miss the opportunities to access learners' prior knowledge and link it to school knowledge as is required by the curriculum. The DoE (2009 a) also points out that prior knowledge enriches school knowledge because learners' home environment knowledge differs, and this is the knowledge learners bring to school. That means school knowledge must be relevant and meaningful to each learner and, be inclusive of her/his prior knowledge (in this case indigenous knowledge). As this picture of a different form of learning interaction in schools became clear to me, I resolved to explore how learning might be improved by bringing in an environment focus and working with the knowledge and issues that the learners bring from home.

I also noted that this idea is highlighted in the goals of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development UNESCO (2005) which calls for indigenous knowledge to be included in the contextualization of formal education to enhance relevance. This means that the education received must mean something to every learner irrespective of to his/her background in order to improve his/her quality of life. In their work on education quality Nickel, Jutta and Lowe (2009) propose that local relevance should be regarded as a norm to ensure that the role of education is enabling the creation of sustainable livelihoods. In this way learners will not only access schooling that is meaningful to them but they will be ensured of quality education that will change their lives forever irrespective of the material poverty in their home environments.

In my engagement with the literature, more fully developed in Chapter 2, I noted the research conducted by Hogan (2008), and Shumba, Kasembe, Mukundu and Muzenda (2008). These studies revealed that indigenous knowledge involves community ways of doing things that have proven relevant and should thus be considered as a situated culture for inclusion to foster quality of education and quality of life. The above notion depends on many factors; such as, educational policies which put forward curriculum to guide the process, willingness of teachers to draw from this knowledge, community involvement from which home environments are derived and, lastly the enthusiasm of learners to share their home environments with others. These became the concerns and a focus area that motivated my research to explore ways of working with indigenous knowledge and local context so as to enhance literacy acquisition and learning in my school.

The research thus seeks to bridge this gap between indigenous knowledge and abstract knowledge (school curriculum) in the classroom and thus to create a better context for learning and literacy. The work was undertaken to enrich quality of education (reading skills and writing skills and knowledge) accessed by learners and was linked to an attempt to improve their lives from an early age. In support of my approach to taking up indigenous knowledge as a focus for acquiring abstract knowledge and bringing about change, Vygostky as cited in Daniels (2004 :50-51) noted that both scientific knowledge and everyday knowledge should be blended together to empower children and enabled them to use both sets of knowledge to improve their lives.

In this way my introduction to environmental education developed interest in the importance of local knowledge and experience in the acquisition of literacy and knowledge that is of relevance to learners in the context in which I live and teach. What follows is a contextual profile to the area to provide a sense of how this became a focus for exploring ways of working that provide better literacy and more relevance.

### **1.3 Contextual profile of the study**

The study was conducted in my school Sosebenza Junior Primary School, where I teach as a senior teacher in a Foundation Phase environment. The school is situated in the community of Ilitha Township in the Buffalo City Municipality, between King William's Town and East London. The Buffalo City Municipality covers the entire East London and King William's Town area and includes urban, rural and semi-structures such as squatter camps, and farm settlement areas. Most areas in this municipality still lack infrastructure; for example, sanitation in most school buildings still needs to be renovated or be built.

The school where I work is still impoverished by the lack of employment, and the rising number of spreading diseases including HIV and AIDS, excessive drug use and alcohol and poverty. Most children are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and have tried alcohol and drugs at an early age. Some children are taken care of by extended families and that extends a burden to other families as well. In some cases older children are parenting their brothers and sisters even at the tender age of 10 years.

In some cases learners' parents are young, and there is a tendency to burden the elderly with the responsibility of being parents again. Such incidents take a toll on the elderly when it comes to children's school needs. On the other hand children who do not stay with their parents lack guidance and a will to learn at school, thus creating challenges for teachers in the classroom and how the school functions. Such challenges destabilize the normality of the home and school environment almost everyday.

Over the years, teachers and concerned community members have managed to collaborate with a team of social workers and health workers to assist these children. The importance of fostering a working relationship between the school, community and the government has been evident in this case. What assisted the situation is that the context of Ilitha Township has a wealth of healthy living practices. Knowledgeable elderly people embarked on ensuring that in their homes, healthy practices such as vegetable gardens, and counselling still exist to guide these children

and their families. The wealth of indigenous knowledge and of knowledgeable people in the area contributed to the research question and goals of the study.

#### **1.4 Research questions and goals**

The study that I undertook in my classroom was an attempt to make better use of local resource people and everyday knowledge so as to engage learners in literacy acquisition that enhanced reading, writing and knowing (quality of education) in the early Foundation Phase. My purpose was to enhance the acquisition of locally relevant knowledge (indigenous knowledge) as a core of everyday ideas so that learning to read and write was of more relevance to them.

##### **1.4.1 Research question:**

How can curriculum contextualisation in an integrated learning in the Foundation Phase programme contribute to environmental learning with enhanced relevance and literacy?

To explore this question, curriculum contextualization work was undertaken with an indigenous knowledge practice (ukuhlamba izandla) on a local environmental health concern (diarrhoea) through practical learning activities. These were developed and undertaken with the support of gogos (elders), in a Life Skill learning programme to enhance relevance and literacy. The learning programme was implemented in an exploratory process where I took on the role of teacher as researcher to carefully document how literacy practices were acquired and how this approach enhanced relevance and learning.

To address the research question the study was designed around a series of research goals that directed my attention to a process of data generation that allowed me to begin to assemble evidence on the possible effectiveness of giving more attention to local context and knowledge in teaching in the Foundation Phase.

##### **1.4.2. Research goals**

The following goals were developed for the unfolding study of work with indigenous knowledge to enhance healthy living practices with literacy acquisition and relevance:

- To investigate the opportunities to integrate indigenous knowledge practices in Languages and Life Orientation LO in Grade 3 (Analysis of curriculum documents).
- To develop a LO programme based on learner's prior knowledge and the indigenous knowledge practices of gogos. (Focus group interviews with learners and gogos).
- To implement and review how IK healthy living practices play out in a 'listen to write,' 'write to read' and 'read to learn' teaching progression across the learning areas (Life Orientation and Languages; isiXhosa and English) (Classroom research description of implementation process)
- To report and review evidence of literacy and knowledge acquisition observed, documenting learning interactions and any evidence of enhanced quality and relevance in children's work. (Analysis of data from observations and Learner work)

To enable this study to take shape I needed to situate it in my school, to engage elderly people from the community to work with learners in my classroom and be guided by the National Curriculum Statements (NCS). Below is a brief description of each aspect.

### **1.5 My role as a teacher and researcher in the Foundation Phase**

A key concern of mine in this study was to clarify my role as a teacher of children in a rural context and that of a researcher exploring the question of knowledge access, literacy and learning in my Foundation Phase classroom. I provide a brief outline in what follows to orientate readers to the thoughts and perspectives that allowed me to review the literature (Chapter 2) and to develop the research design that follows in Chapter 3.

#### **1.5.1 An environmental teacher**

My role is to ensure that all lesson plans designed in my school have environmental focus in them. I work with teachers to ensure that Learning Outcomes (LO) and Assessment Standards (AS) in the policy documents are relevant to context by relating them to context when implemented. Use of strategies such as giving learners

the opportunity in the morning to talk about things that concerned them, things learners regard as news, always sets the tone for Foundation Phase teachers to take note of emphasis when designing lesson plans with environmental focus in them. Most of the time such information (news) pertains to challenges children are faced with in their home environments and this thus forms the basis for contextual understanding for the teacher. Young children naturally voice their opinions freely in a creative healthy environment. In that way their way of doing things creates a platform for Foundation Phase teachers and allows them to design lessons that are relevant to learners and their context.

The importance of news in the morning is stated in the Foundations of Learning (FOL) (2009 a), that there should be provision for Learning Outcome (LO) 1 (oral speaking and listening) before teaching other learning areas to set the tone for the day as well as getting children to relax and welcoming the children into the school environment. Giving learners this opportunity to tell their stories enhances the acquisition of language thus encouraging learners to deliberate and bring into the classroom their everyday knowledge.

My other role as an environmental educator is to be a change agent in regard to environmental issues. Working with young learners in my classroom around topics such as healthy eating, exercising, spreading of germs, water management, pollution, sanitation to mention few, has made those around us (learners, teachers, parents) to take note and be aware of the impact of not taking care of the environment.

At school many environmental dates are observed and community members are invited to join in activities that draw attention to issues that need to be dealt with, as mentioned above. During these days the DoE, NGO, and various departments concerned about environmental education and learning as well as companies such as Dettol and, Protex are usually invited to be part of the celebrations and in that way awareness about the importance of a healthy environment becomes a culture of change and learning.

Observing the whole school joining in cleaning campaigns with the community, growing and maintaining our own vegetable garden and, observing learners learning

life skills encouraged the work that I do as an environmental teacher. Maintaining environmental projects that are already working in the school is a challenge that needs more collaboration from teachers and learners to ensure they do not fade as the time goes by.

For example the school's involvement with Eco-School and Umthiza programmes assisted in the improvement and management of environmental issues in our school and community. It also encouraged working relations between the school structure and the community thus enabling the school to deal better with socio-ecological issues that need every stakeholder to work together. These projects provide information and financial support in terms of necessary instruments such as garden tools, water tanks, and fencing to mention few. These projects also provide the necessary resource learning support materials and give guidance on how to use them in the classrooms and the school as a whole. Umthiza project also works with community members directly thus ensuring a link to programmes that are provided at school. These structures foster a good relationship that results in parents working with the school in a harmonious manner. These initiatives also encouraged parents to learn from their children's ways of doing things, thus creating a platform for school learning to link with the home environment.

The administration work is part of the school curriculum which involves supervision of classroom work to ensure quality learning is taking place in all Foundation Phase grades. I was elected as a member of the school management team (SMT) to ensure the school works in accordance with the curriculum framework. Since environmental education is the integral part of the curriculum, each Learning Outcome (LO) and Assessment Standard (AS) must have an environmental focus in them as stated in the DoE (2003a) policy document to ensure that each learner acquires the necessary life skills to face the challenges of the next level of learning.

### **1.5.2 As a researcher**

My role as a researcher in my classroom is to find out, through the intergeneration process, evidence that local knowledge that is, Indigenous Knowledge (IK), can result in the relevance of education in the school-community. As a concerned teacher, researching my practice to improve my teaching and learning is to better my teaching

skills to ensure learners leaving my classroom having gained the relevant knowledge that would ensure them a better education and quality of life.

As Stenhouse (1975) stated, any improvement in classroom teaching and learning rests on the work of the teacher, therefore the best person to investigate any challenge in the classroom or school is the teacher. Stenhouse (1975:143) added that “ the uniqueness of each classroom setting implies that any proposal-even at school level needs to be tested and verified and adapted by each teacher in his own classroom”. Therefore the concern I had after observing learners’ low performance at the end of Foundation Phase schooling motivated me to work with resourced local people and learners in my classroom to find out whether the use of local knowledge could increase the level of the learners’ performance.

As a researcher, I realized the importance of engaging learners’ parents in order to gain more information about their backgrounds and, diverse culture to gain their trust about their ways of doing things and, in the same way enhance progression in the classroom. Parents’ initiatives in regard to their children’s education were not taken lightly as their inputs proved that they know what their children should learn and know and the reason for that (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2008). For example parents would come and relate meaningful stories about what they used to do in the olden days and the teachings about these stories were relevant.

As a researcher I needed a strategy that would capture learners’ imagination and creativity, a strategy that would engage Gogo’s (elderly) in the classroom to share their ways of doing things in relation to environmental education, hence story telling was my starting point in my research topic. Gogos were invited into the classroom to introduce a story in the learners’ mother tongue, isiXhosa, about indigenous ways of everyday washing of hands. The content of the story was incorporated into the curriculum framework of Learning Outcomes (LO’s) and Assessment Standards (AS’s) in the Foundation Phase (Literacy, Numeracy and Life Orientation). The story telling would not only encourage learners to listen to write; -write to read- and read to

learn in all learning areas, but it would also create opportunities for learners to interact with the elderly encouraging an intergenerational process.

### **1.6 Overview of the study**

**Chapter 1** introduces the background of the research, a description of the context, the research question and its goals, my role as a teacher and researcher and an overview of the study.

**Chapter 2** reviews the literature, defines indigenous knowledge, explains the use of environmental health practices, the use of elders as resource people, briefly describes the South African curriculum,- South African context and curriculum, describes Life Orientation in the Foundation Phase, the curriculum and indigenous knowledge, looks at environmental learning and the curriculum, how the curriculum is contextualized, literacy performance and the relevance of content to context.

**Chapter 3** outlines the research design and gives a description of the research methodology that guided the study. As an interpretative case study it gives a clear description of the relation between the study and research design. The explanation of how data was generated and how it was analysed is clearly indicated. I further discussed aspects of ethics and trustworthiness as important elements in this study.

**Chapter 4** represents the data generated during phase one of the research process where I set out to identify locally relevant indigenous knowledge practices to include in the Life Orientation (life skills) and Languages (literacy) module to be implemented in phase two.

**Chapter 5** develops, justifies and discusses analytical statements that emerged from data presented in Chapter 4. The statements were made from the evidence that allows me to answer the research question.

**Chapter 6** provides a summary of the study and the findings that resulted from the work undertaken with Grade 3 learners in my classroom. Because I worked as a teacher-researcher in my classroom the findings of the study are more exploratory

than conclusive. This chapter will thus summarise trends and patterns of case evidence that were of note to me for my continuing work in the context of my classroom and community environment where the research was conducted.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2. 1 Introduction**

In this chapter I review indigenous knowledge, use of the local environment, use of elders as resource people, the South African curriculum, contextualization of the curriculum, performance in literacy and the importance of relevance in education.

The chapter also brought forward the discussions about curriculum change in South Africa. I tried to respond to curriculum contextualization by exploring the new curriculum in South Africa, the National Curriculum Statements (NCS). In this Chapter I outline much of the complexity that I had to probe before getting to the key point of contextualisation, a key issue that is often lost behind the complexity of the education problems and the complex arguments and data on the failings of the South African education system.

#### **2. 2 Indigenous Knowledge**

It is difficult to describe one group of people as indigenous especially in South Africa where people speak multiple languages, come from diverse cultural backgrounds and have multiple identities. The term indigenous knowledge (IK) used in this research refers to ways of knowing (knowledge), ways of doing things (practices) and the way of life (healthy living processes).

Takawira (2002:4) argued that “indigenous knowledge is the local community based knowledge that is unique to a given culture and often developed over generations of time and such knowledge is based on commonly held norms and values of that society”. In his discussion of IK as an important vehicle in understanding this knowledge Warren as cited in Shava (2000:19) noted that:

Of equal concern ... to many world citizens is the ascertain status of IK that reflects many generations of experience and problem solving by thousands of ethnic groups of the globe. Very little of this knowledge has been recorded, yet it represents an immensely valuable database that provides humankind with insights on how numerous

communities have interacted with their changing environment, including flora and fauna resources.

It is in the same sense that O'Donoghue (1995) who worked with indigenous people for a long time noted that IK is the taken for granted every day common sense ways of reasoning and living, yet it is the knowledge that needs to be utilized and shared among wider audiences in order for ordinary people to learn and continue with the intergenerational practices and processes for sustainable development.

Research conducted by Kota (2006), Hanisi (2006) and Hogan (2008) also added value that working with indigenous people in schools opened an opportunity for IK to be recognised as the local cultural knowledge that concerned itself with development and sustainability. It is the knowledge that can be utilised and is “critical to sustainable and balanced development as being more attuned to local conditions and contexts, and more inclusive of local people, offering them a voice within development process” (McEwan, 2009: 198).

Hence this study saw the significance of IK as situated ways of understanding what is happening around learners in their environments. Working as a teacher-researcher who was experiencing low performance of learners (see Chapter 1) I saw the need to consult the local community about their ways of doing things, especially healthy living practices to be covered in the school curriculum. On the same note UNESCO-UNEP (2008: 205) echoed for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in the mainstream of education whereby “educators and learners should explore and draw on local environments and knowledge critically and creatively to inform their work ”.

The above notion enabled elders (knowledgeable people) in various communities to play a role in the kind of education they envisaged for their children. That is why it is therefore proper to review the place of IK in education and to work with the knowledgeable of a community to inform the curriculum. Moreover The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development UNCED (1992) echoed principle 22 as a yardstick to engage and make people aware of IK as a way to sustainable development and practices. It states as follows:

Indigenous people and their communities and other local communities, have a role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development. (no page number ).

It is imperative for education to draw from local knowledge in order to utilize knowledge experience gained over the years and link with modern knowledge for more insight and understanding. The research goals in the study try to look closely at opportunities for IK to be included in the curriculum.

### **2. 2.1 The place of IK in education**

From the above, I saw IK as the common knowledge that is rooted to its people and it guides the way of doing things. This allowed me to see how in the education sector it serves as the basic foundation for new learning that learners acquire at school.

The Rio summit encouraged education to, among other roles, “...utilize indigenous history and local cultures” in order to promote cultural, linguistic and ecological diversity” (UNESCO-UNEP, 2008: 225). Furthermore opportunities for the use of indigenous knowledge are more prevalent in the DoE, (2002), for example in the Life Orientation learning area, the emphasis is placed on the development of self in society. That means learners “are empowered and expected to achieve and extend their personal potential positively to society, and to cope with and respond to the challenges in their world” (DoE, 2002: 5).

It is evident from research conducted by Shava (2000), that learners grow up observing what is happening around them and when they reach school-going age they bring the capital knowing to school. This means that spontaneous concepts in their experience and language have already been developed from their home environments. On the same note Vygotsky as cited in Daniels, (2004) argued convincingly that spontaneous concepts and scientific concepts mutually work together. This means that each helps the other to develop. Therefore teachers need to embrace and acknowledge this knowledge and bridge it with school knowledge in order to value the contribution of the community and its local context.

IK, sometimes referred to as local knowledge, means learners possess this knowledge from their home environment and the knowledge acquired contributes to meaningful and relevant education. The place of IK in education is emphasized by Mandikonga (2006) when he explained that IK is a knowledge production process that supports the logic of doing things without a need for explanation, while school knowledge is an epistemology that uses the logic of explaining. Co-engagement of these two forms of knowledge, IK practices and school knowledge, provide a space to bridge the two epistemologies into meaningful content in context. In addition, the co-engagement enhances understanding of scientific concepts (school knowledge) by linking it with local knowledge for more relevance and meaningful understanding. This allowed me to see how learning could be approached as an exploration of how home and school knowledge can blend to strengthen contextualisation for improved relevance and literacy.

Furthermore Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) added more value to this co-engagement of the two types of knowledge whereby teachers are expected to mediate learning for meaningful learning by enabling learners to be participants in dialogue, allowing opportunities for learners to play an active role and open opportunities for interaction to take place in a dynamic healthy environment . ZPD works well if it:

is situated within the context of the specific social and cultural environments in which the child is involved. These environments are constructed in a web of social interactions, and so learning in the ZPD leads not only to the development of concepts and knowledge but also to the development of culturally appropriate practices.

For this study of the engagement of learning, elderly people brought their way of doing things to the classroom for me to explore contextualisation in the education today. It is an educational approach that Kota (2006), Hanisi (2006) and Shava (2000) found to be significant in ensuring relevance in what learners acquire at school. It is also a way of ensuring that good working relationships are formed to foster partnership within school and community (Shumba, Kasembe, Mukundu and Muzenda, 2006). In addition, education in South Africa allows for local knowledge (IK) contextualisation in the classroom by recognizing that learners come from

different home environments and their background knowledge differs, DoE (2009). Including IK in the contextualisation of school curriculum takes account of the 'null curriculum' that according to Eisner (1985) is often ignored. To ignore that, means learners are not afforded the opportunity to tell their stories nor are they given the opportunity to use the concepts and skills that they have already acquired. Shava (2000) notes that such education produces 'graduates' whose education is less valued in their communities because their acquired knowledge is not practically applicable to everyday community life.

This was important in the study as teachers need more support in how to mobilize the kind of curriculum that Eisner (1985) mentions in order to integrate the experiences of learners into the curriculum. Moreover teachers need more exposure in relation to other knowledge (IK) that could contribute to meaningful learning and improve curriculum in schools. The idea of contextualizing curriculum means acknowledging the knowledge learners bring to school as well as the context where this knowledge is being considered FOL (2009a).

In regard to opportunities of integrating indigenous knowledge practices in school curriculum (languages, numeracy and life skills programmes) the unavailability of learning support material that supports the teaching and learning especially in the Foundation Phase, adds stress to even the capable teachers in the school especially in rural areas of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. O'Donoghue and Neluvhalani (2002) refer to this as the cultural capital of knowing 'in and of everyday life.'

Nel, as cited in Mandikonza, (2006: 14) argues that "IK is embedded and embodied knowledge, that means community-related and geared towards well-being and healthiness of everyone". For the study I have seen IK as part and parcel of the human being that challenges classroom-learning interactions that do not draw on contextual knowledge practices to ensure relevance of education. This supported my starting point that absence of connections and linkage between what learners learnt at school and their everyday life experiences (home environments) might have negative consequences to meaningful learning resulting in withdrawal and dropouts of learners in the long run.

Shava (2000) recommended that educational approaches should be contextualized and be encouraging to learners so that they bring and share their experiences in the classroom. On the same note Odora Hoppers (2002) mentioned that school in most cases ignores and negates what many children bring to school and in that way their foundations for learning is lost and most of the learning is meaningless to them. Hence the study seeks to explore the existing indigenous knowledge and associated ways of knowing and making learning more meaningful and encouraging learners to relate to the indigenous knowledge practices they use to sustain themselves.

Nel, as cited in Mandikonga, (2006) calls for context-specific 'social habitus' and notes that minor differences can be significant in learning. This suggested to the study that a contextualised curriculum ought to use methods that respect and elicit minor differences between learners who might differ in their social habitus, effectively making use of the knowledge learners bring to learning activities. Masuku Van Damme (1999) similarly noted that contextualised curriculum needs to be inclusive of IK for learning to make sense to learners.

The above view is echoed by Eisner (1985:107) in his discussion when emphasised three curricula that schools teach, defined 'null curriculum' as " ... the option that the students are not afforded, the perspectives they may never know, much less able to use, the concepts and skills that are not part of their intellectual repertoire". It is the kind of education that the Nelson Mandela Foundation report (2005) found where parents are aware that skills provided for their children are not working for them because they cannot find jobs after twelve years of schooling. They are afforded skills that do not matter to their own communities.

Nevertheless recent developments made by the DoE (2009) recognizes the importance of IK in the curriculum by emphasizing the important relationship between school environments and learners' home environments. The policy document emphasised that learning acquired during the early stages of life at home forms the basis for new school knowledge and includes environmental education which serves to include socio-ecological issues that are found at school and home. The policy document also recognizes that environmental education responds to challenges and issues that face

the communities, hence the first principle of NCS in the Foundation Phase tries to address these challenges. Since IK is embedded in culture and heritage, and knowledgeable people are the elders, their role is more crucial in the education system. Therefore allowing them the opportunity to visit school with the intention of sharing this rich knowledge is imperative for relevant education, hence the next topic is crucial for this study.

### **2. 2. 2. The role of elders as resource people**

Elderly people in the community of Ilitha township, where Sosebenza Primary School is situated, are known for their indigenous knowledge and their way of doing things. Over the years they have managed to sustain indigenous healthy practices such as growing their own vegetables, sowing, knitting, marketing their handmade materials and teaching people around them their skills for survival. In every activity they embark on, they invite community members to be part of their way of doing things and in that way they share their knowledge for generations to come. Once a quarter elders showcased their handmade material to community members encouraging interaction and learning to young and old.

Their place of work is regarded as a centre for indigenous healthy practices and sustainable projects. In such a place they work hand in hand with various environmental projects such as Buffalo City environmental officers, Social Welfare Departments, Umthathi projects among others. Youth in the community and school children gain more knowledge about how elders are doing things by interacting with them in their work. By sharing these healthy practices elders are assured that their way of doing things will live forever, and it brings pride to them.

Elderly people in the community of Ilitha understand indigenous knowledge as the local knowledge, the common everyday knowledge they use in their healthy lifestyle. In the community elders are regarded as resource people, knowledgeable people who are well vested with IK. The way they do things in their place of work and homes has enable their practices to be known and valued in the community including surrounding schools. Although the knowledge vested in them is not documented as found in schools, the authenticity of it as Odora Hopper, (2002) echoed, set elderly

knowledge apart from the rest of the world because the knowledge is rooted in culture and heritage.

McEwan, (2009:199) responded by stating that IK is contextual as it contains “local understandings of social justice, gender relations, familial responsibility, human-environment relations and so on.” This evidence is shown by the elders’ willingness to share their knowledge, they feel it is their responsibility to teach children their way of doing things because their knowledge is situated and relevant to their-community context (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005).

Chapter 2 of Agenda 21 UNCED, (1992: 44) supports the acknowledgement of knowledge possessed by indigenous people when it proclaimed that:

over many generations, indigenous people have evolved holistic, traditional scientific knowledge of their land, natural resources and the environment. Their ability to practice sustainable agriculture has been limited by economic, social and historical factors. Indigenous people should actively participate in the shaping of national law and policies on the management of resources or other developmental processes that affect them.

Elders in the community where I work showcase their ability to do things on their own in their own space and, as a result when they visit other places they always bring something from their world as a sign of what they were doing. They do not believe in buying things but they rather create things themselves and share the knowledge of doing such things. It is the notion voiced by elders in Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005:6) when they said, ‘in the olden days we used to reap the maize fields and sell bags of maize from this land. Let us make our own things, not compete with townships’. The literature often reflects ideals of the past and I had to be careful that I did not take these too strongly into my study as I am not young any more and would be seen as an elder. I thus recognised ideals as part of things but gave my attention to what the learners were bringing to their learning with me at school.

Voices of elders from the (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005) regard indigenous knowledge as a common local knowledge which is supposed to be known by everybody in the community, schools and other people as well. It is the knowledge that unites and enables people to share ideas in a cooperative manner. Labour undertaken by the elders in the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) study to renovate

schools in those communities was motivating and amazing. Hence UNESCO (2005:13) still emphasised that “education based on local cultural and contextual needs has been neglected in Africa”.

In Ilitha community elders maintained that indigenous knowledge (local language) differs according to context where people live and their way of doing things is determined by different cultures and their social orientations. On the same note people who come with different ways of doing things are given opportunities to share ideas but people are cautious about changing their ways of doing things (knowledge). Shava (2000) also found out that the indigenous community that occupied a particular geographical space over an extended period of time had a tendency of developing situated knowledges<sup>1</sup> and practices.

The research conducted by Hogan (2008) and Shumba et al (2008) both working with elders in their studies found that elders emphasised the importance of working together as a community. Engaging community members in the school environment enhanced opportunities of sharing and interaction thus creating ‘greater school-community’. By bringing elders into the classroom one is able to tap into rich knowledge encouraging interrelationship between schools and communities and fostering intergenerational processes where learners and elders learn from each other. The notion here is to learn sustainable practices that are healthy and could be developed further and passed on from generation to generation.

The study conducted by the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) found that elderly people knew what they wanted their children to learn at school, and they were keen to change things that would assist them in the process such as having electricity even though there were myths about electricity in the past. But they were not willing to change their ways of doing things if they believe those things were not beneficial to their communities and their children. They wanted career guidance, skills, and centres of learning where every member of the community could learn. In his conclusion to his study Shumba et al (2008:95) recommended that schools “need to

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<sup>1</sup> The use of knowledge is not an error here and is becoming a way of recognising the differing agency of knowing that people and cultures hold in education.

serve as a community centre that is also a centre of learning for all”. This is how I tried to position my school as I explored contextualising in the study.

Elderly people encouraged others in the communities not to compare rural with township lifestyle rather to “make their own things” like “reap the maize fields and sell bags of maize from this land” (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005: 6). Furthermore it was found that elders were showcasing how things were supposed to be done by doing it themselves without expecting remuneration. In the same study, the (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005) elders were people with skills such as painting, building, and doing things on their own to add value to the community.

Acknowledging elders as resource people in my classroom and in the community enabled my exploratory study to respond to a research question which seeks to find out how we can work contextually with indigenous knowledge to enhance curriculum contextualization and relevance in the Foundation Phase. Elders bring into schools local language hence UNESCO-UNEP (2008: 203-204) encourages change for thinking about education and learning:

Teaching and learning should make use of diverse methodologies and be sufficiently flexible to cater to the various needs of learners in different cultures, context, and nations. Such teaching and learning should incorporate ethical and critical reflection and creative thinking and learning approaches ... Educators and learners should explore and draw on local environments and knowledge critically and creatively to inform their work.

Local knowledge encourages learners to bring this knowledge into the classroom thus making the curriculum relevant to its community. Hence Grundy (1987) sees curriculum as a social construction which takes note of the society’s culture and its historical background. In addition Mandikonga (2006) added that how people interact with others in communities paves the way for curriculum contextualisation. It is therefore necessary to explain contextualised curriculum and briefly give a background to the South African curriculum and then the need for it in order to consider curriculum contextualisation as a key question.

## **2. 3 South African Curriculum Context**

For decades education in South Africa was modernized under the apartheid regime by segregation of educational institutions where race, and skin colour, determined the kind of education learners received. Nevertheless in 1994 South Africa democratically elected a new government which aimed to address the imbalances of the past that included the education system. As a result in 1997, the Outcome Based Education (OBE), the underlying philosophy behind South Africa's Curriculum 2005 was introduced with the notion of improving quality education to address the demands for an increased skilled working force (Botha, 2002: 315). According to Spady, (1994: 6) OBE in simple terms means:

focusing clearly and organizing everything in an educational system around what is essential for all learners to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences. This means starting with a clear picture of what is important for learners to be able to do, then organizing curriculum, instruction assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens.

OBE as an approach to the Curriculum 2005, promised the nation education that would be relevant and encompass all, including education and training, content and skills, values and knowledge( DoE,1995). To strengthen C2005 during its inception every stakeholder (parents, NGO, community leaders) were invited in order to include diverse cultures of society to ensure every child's' background is catered for in the designing of learning areas for each phase. To ensure transformation was upheld environmental education and learning were enforced as an integral part of the C2005 as it concerns itself with social ecological issues, not only at school level, but in the community as well. It was therefore decided that each learning area must have an environmental focus in it to ensure learners are well vested with knowledge in regard to challenges they are faced with in their home and school environments. The notion to improve quality education this way was encouraged by the first principle in the NCS curriculum that of; social change, healthy environment, human rights and inclusivity (DoE, 2003).

As the time passed, the promises which saw OBE as a yardstick for change was diminished particularly for rural schools because of many factors. Among the factors

that contributed to the dismal position were the inadequate training of teachers and, wide terminology that required a lot from the teachers and confused them in the process. The requirement of the new curriculum involved proper infrastructures such as library, textbooks and, school grounds which the rural schools were not provided with among other things by the former homeland. As a result it was difficult for both teachers and learners to perform as expected and parents called for quality education.

Taking Cornbleth's (1990) views on curriculum as a contextualized social process, and that context shapes the curriculum, C2005 failed to provide education because it was not improving quality education for every learner instead it was working for the schools that already had an infrastructure. Hence in her discussion Cornbleth, (1990) stated the importance of structural influences such as poverty, unemployment, high crime rate, and socio-cultural factors such as language and social relationships for a curriculum to work for its people. The taking for granted of such factors has a tendency of putting pressure on any curriculum in this case, the new C2005.

The problems that C2005 began to face as it was failing, were extremely complex. The complexity led to many unanswered questions. Contextualisation of knowledge was ignored and left hanging. A key question became, can C2005 manage to combine and include all relevant knowledge that encompasses the necessary skills, values and attitudes that include acknowledgement of learners' prior knowledge from the context where she/he grew up including his own identity and cultural background?

Curriculum 2005 was revised and simplified because teachers found it too confusing to work with, and the revised curriculum was the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). Clear Learning Outcomes (LO) and Assessment Standards (AS) were provided to guide learner performances in each grade. The values underpinning C2005 remained the same On the same note the NCS was perceived as underpinning the values and principles of the South African Constitution. Hence in the Constitution it is stated that NCS:

is an embodiment of the nation' social values and its expectations of roles, rights and responsibilities of the democratic South African citizen as expressed in the Constitution Developmental Outcomes is the underlying educational philosophy. ( DoE, 2003: 33 ).

From the experience of teaching and learning for many years, even this revised curriculum is still lacking in improvement in relation to quality education received by each child at the end of schooling in the Foundation Phase (read, write and know). This was the concern that made me realize learners were performing below their level of schooling in each grade, therefore I decided to research my classroom practice so as to explore how indigenous knowledge (IK) could be included to strengthen curriculum contextualization in the Foundation Phase.

Hence my research question tries to probe how curriculum can be contextualised for integrated learning in the Foundation Phase with enhanced relevance and literacy. Framing a research question across contextualisation, relevance and literacy was made possible by earlier research findings, notably Kota (2006) and others, who developed strategies for its inclusion in teaching and learning interactions. .

### **2.3.1. Life Skill and its expectations**

As mentioned in Chapter 1 the study was situated in the context of schooling in which three integrated learning programmes are provided namely; Literacy, Life Skill and Numeracy. Life Skills comprises 6 learning areas: Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Arts & Culture, Technology, Economic and Management Sciences and Life Orientation. For the purpose of my research I drew on the Life Orientation curriculum. When I refer to Life Skill I am referring to the requirements of the Life Orientation statements. Life Orientation opens opportunities for environmental education in the curriculum framework. As a result learners learn more about human and environmental rights as outlined in the South African Constitution DoE, (2002).

The purpose of the Life Orientation Learning Area is to “empower learners to use their talents to achieve their full physical, intellectual, personal, emotional and social potential. Learners are expected to develop the skills to relate positively and make a contribution to family, community and society while practicing the values embedded in the Constitution” (DoE, 2002: 4). In the process the Learning Area would “enable learners to make informed, morally responsible and accountable decisions about their health and their environment” (DoE, 2002: 4). The Learning Area has four Learning Outcomes that all highlight the concern for the promotion of health and the development of oneself socially personally and physically.

Each Learning Outcome (LO) has its set of Assessment Standards (AS) to guide the progression of learners from one set of LOs to the next up to the next level of learning (grade). For this study LO 1: health promotion was selected which states that “learner will be able to make informed decisions regarding personal, community and environmental health. AS 3: discusses the myths surrounding communicable diseases, and the causes and prevention of these” (DoE, 2002:16-17) .

According to the DoE (2002: 4) Assessment Standards provide an indication of a learner’s achievement. It also helps learners to make judgements about their own performances in order for them to work hard for their progression.

On the same note Life Orientation DoE expect learners to:

- To make informed decisions about personal, community and environmental *health promotion*.
- To enable learners to form positive *social relationships*, and to know and exercise their constitutional rights and responsibilities;
- To empower learners to achieve and extend their *personal* potential to contribute positively to society, and to cope with and respond to challenges in their world;
- To promote *physical development* as an integral part of social, cognitive and emotional development from early childhood through the General Education and Training Band;
- To develop a positive *orientation to study and work*, and the ability to make informed decisions regarding further study and careers.

The above expectations need teachers to model LOs not only as the content that guides LO in the Learning Area, but also as a process that allowed contextual environmental education to have a place in the curriculum. Although Life Orientation has its own LO and AS it needs to be infused in every learning area in the curriculum as it encompasses both health promotion and development of self (socially, physically, emotionally social, cognitively and emotionally). Life Orientation operates effectively in social interaction, for example in the classroom, creating a creative environment allowing the opportunity for learners to develop communication skills, creativity and critical thinking, decision making and interpersonal relations. Mutual respect and consideration of other learners’ needs need to be instilled in learners.

According to DoE (2002), Life Orientation comprises a range of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, which enable everyone to deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Therefore the social and cultural context in which learning takes place need to be taken into consideration in order to cater for different backgrounds of learners and relevant health promotion.

Maree and Ebersohn (2002: 254) said this about the concept of health promotion:

At its broadest the most basic, life skills education *is* health promotion. according to the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Ottawa Charter (1986). Health is viewed as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well being, and not merely the absence of disease. Thus, the concept of health promotion goes beyond concerns with physical health alone. It means promoting all those dimensions-including physical, cognitive, emotional, social and moral dimensions-of development which together, contribute to positive, competent, confident people

Hence it was proper for the study to use Life Orientation as the basis to integrate other learning areas.

### **2. 3. 2. Literacy learning area and its expectation**

There is a misconception that children speaking the same language (home language) speak it fluently and therefore are able to process knowledge derived from home environment to school environment. The FOL, (2009a) cautiously warns educators that home environments of learners differ, therefore the knowledge they bring to school differs as well. That means knowledge brought to school by learners is crucial as it informs the level of knowledge the learner possesses thus enabling the teacher to add new knowledge. Therefore Oral and Listening and Speaking time in the classroom should be adhered to as it provides a good opportunity to access the diverse prior knowledge and link it to school knowledge. FOL (2009a) provided the opportunity for IK, it acknowledges everyday knowledge and experiences of learners. Learners are given opportunities to combine their everyday knowledge with school knowledge. Story telling by elderly people in this study encouraged learners to listen to do and write to read. Oral presentation thus paved the way for curriculum contextualization through intergenerational process.

According to FOL (2009a) the following strategies improve quality education in the classroom not taking out the other strategies that teachers used to make learning relevant in the classroom. These are the key components from the FOL (2009a) that could work well in the classroom.

#### ***2.3.2.1 Daily Morning Oral Work***

This time is provided to tune the day's activity by allowing learners opportunity to tell their own experiences. FOL (2009a) states that this time is to capture learners' minds to talk about their personal experiences about what they see around them and the happenings of the day (day, date and weather etc.). It also opens up space for learners to be themselves in terms of peer talk which contributes to creativity (FOL 2009a) FOL (2009a) emphasised that at least this time must be utilize efficiently at least once every week.

The talk about any special happenings for the day encourages action response in the classroom. To spend quality time with learners listening to their news enabled this research. In other words the research materialized as a result of the daily morning session. Daily morning oral work encourages learners to use language, in this case the mother tongue. It also enabled me as a teacher and researcher to draw on learners' prior knowledge, in order to introduce them to new knowledge and skills. Most news that is shared at this time is about challenges learners face in their home environments and this enables environmental learning to be integrated into the orders of the day. Hence Teachers' workbook for Literacy (2003) emphasised the importance of integrating environmental education in all lesson planning especially in the Foundation Phase to enable learners to learn more about environmental issues and risks in their context at any early age.

#### ***2.3.2.2 Listening and viewing***

In essence learners managed to access information through listening and viewing of oral text (story) thus creating the opportunity to process information (comprehend and respond to a range of text including print and non-print media) (DoE, 2003: 25). Hence listening and viewing enable learners to communicate ideas and information.

(manage and exchange ideas, and to create these with precision, clarity and creativity). For this study it was imperative for this strategy to work well.

### **2.3.2.3 Writing**

The main purpose of a Literacy Learning Programme DoE (2003a) is to enable learners to read, write, and communicate hence it is a concerned issue when this purpose is not met by learners and teachers alike. My research question tries to address this concern by context providing the basis for writing. To respond to this concern the FOL, (2009a) emphasizes that learners work in groups for example, each learner in each group has a role be it scribe, timekeeper, speaker etc. That means the scribe must write legibly and what is written must be clear even when learners assess each other's work.

### **2.3.2.4 Reading**

In my research I mentioned the importance of instilling in learners the cycle of “listen to write, write to read and read to learn” which is a prerequisite for the Literacy Learning Programme in the Foundation Phase. The FOL, (2009a) also emphasizes that learners must “write to read and read to write” as a stepping-stone to improving quality education. The following teaching strategies were highlighted as key components to improve reading and writing in the Foundation Phase. In 2008 the DoE embarked on ensuring that reading was taken seriously and the outcome was the printing of the National Reading Strategy (NRS)

The NRS (2008) stated the following in its mission to improve reading.

Reading is part of nation building thus:

- Reading promotes confidence as an individual in a modern society, and as a member of a national and world community.
- Reading enables us to act creatively and critically in a world which is ever changing and competitive.
- Reading provides rapid, ready access to new information and knowledge that will help us in life-long learning.
- The main goal of this NRS is to improve the reading competence of learners.

More broadly the NRS aims to:

- Help learners to move through the education system;
- Improve matriculation results.
- Improve people's capacity to communicate in an ever-changing world;
- Bring economic benefits for the country by producing workers who are competent in their reading and writing skills. (p.5).

Of importance from this NRS is the fact that the targeted group of learners is Grade 3.

The intended outcome of NRS is that:

- all learners must be able to read basic texts by the end of Grade 3.
- After that, all learners will develop reading and comprehension skills according to the requirements of each grade (NRS, 2008: 11).

In the Foundation Phase all three learning areas are integrated to ensure that skills and knowledge are developed. One of the principles of NCS is the high level of skills for all in every learning area, but for this study I had to put the emphasis on Literacy and Life Orientation.

#### **2.3.4. Performance of learners in the Foundation Phase**

In the Foundation Phase performance of learners in all learning areas is still low when compared to other African countries. The literature review conducted by Nsubunga (2009) about learner performance in the Foundation Phase revealed that the majority of South Africa's Grade 3 learners do not have the expected levels of competency in Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills. But learner performance in Life Skills (54%) was significantly better in 2001, DoE (2003).

Although the NCS has provided teaching and learning with policy documents that state clearly LO and AS in each learning area, quality learning in schools is discourage by lack of learning support materials in particular considering the diverse needs of learners including the less fortunate children who relied on school material for reading at home. The few learning support materials provided in school from rural areas are not written in the learners' language nor are they relevant to their context. These factors are mentioned in Rosenberg's (2008) study as well as Hogan's (2008) study where they voiced the need for intervention if rural children were expected to perform better at school.

For the study I thus set out to engage learners in an integrated programmes which allowed the opportunity for learners to develop skills and knowledge to improve their performance.

Literacy performance is no exception and the 2001 survey revealed that learners obtained (54% ) overall, (DoE, 2003). Assessment tasks revealed that learners performed badly particularly in reading comprehension and writing (39%) in 2001. The study also found out that the majority of South Africa's Grade 3 learners have only a rudimentary grasp of the principles of reading and writing. Learners were also unable to perform at the expected national levels DoE (2003). In most cases it was revealed that learner performance was influenced by the medium of instruction.

While the majority of the Grade 3 learners underperformed in the assessed Learning Programmes, there was a small percentage who scored 60% and above DoE, (2003). About 10% of the surveyed learners scored above 70% in Numeracy, Literacy or both. This distribution of scores reflects a gap between advantaged (mostly formerly white) schools, and disadvantaged schools (mainly township and rural schools). Literacy scores followed a similar trend, with English and Afrikaans learners getting on average 43% and 48% respectively, as compared to 26% for Tshivenda learners.

On the same note numerous studies were approved, some conducted by the DoE, (2003) to ascertain the level of learners' performance in South Africa revealed learners were performing more poorly than other countries in Africa. National and International data has demonstrated that the vast majority of South African learners are performing below the minimum expected competency levels for their respective grades (The Primary Mathematics Research Project (PMRP no page no.)

In the same light more recent research indicates that there are a number of causative factors issues of quality education for example:

- Incomplete coverage of the curriculum
- The 'localisation' of assessment
- The 'localisation' of the syllabus of content
- Poor teacher content knowledge combined with the virtual abolition of textbooks

- Insufficient opportunities for regular and extensive practice of content by learners, especially in terms of reading, writing, and solving mathematical problems
- Insufficient level of monitoring by local-level DoE of management of curriculum and assessment by schools-emphasis is on compliance with formal policy and production of documents rather than quality.

Concerned to improve quality education the DoE (2003) conducted systematic evaluation first for Grade 3 in 2001 and later for Grade 6 in 2004 revealed concerned deficiencies in learners' reading, writing. And later in 2005, the Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS) study (Van Staden, as cited in Rosenberg, 2008: 28) revealed that learners tested in Literacy after four years of schooling across 40 countries, South Africa came last. During these studies it was noted that in some cases the problem did not only lie in what the curriculum expected but also in what was taught and learnt in the classroom that is the implementation of the curriculum. That is why (Lemke as cited in Daniels, 2001: 53) argued that "the movement between teacher and taught and between written text and talk is part of the process by which progressively more powerful conceptual tools are developed. In this way scientific concepts are developed through different levels of dialogue".

Findings provided by Moloi and Straus (2005) in their study revealed that access in terms of the availability and accessibility of learning support materials is a major determinant of the level and quality of learner achievement. On the same note UNESCO (2005) voiced that the socio-economic contextual factors could hinder or support access to and success in the curriculum.

In 2000 the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) tested Grade 6 learners in 14 countries. South Africa placed ninth, behind neighbouring Mozambique. In the same year Grade 4 learners' scores for life skills put them second-last among 12 African countries participating in UNESCO-UNICEF's Monitoring Learning Achievement Project DoE, (2003).

The complexity of these issues and statistics in the literature were complex and overwhelming but I kept on noting that what was missing in the discussion was

contextualisation. The factors indicated that localised curriculum needs to be taken into account as it is one of the factors that contributes to less relevant education. Curriculum contextualisation which concerned itself with the context where learning takes place as Cornbleth (1990) indicated, should be taken into account. In that way knowledges that is brought by learners will lay a foundation thus opening opportunities for more active participation from teachers, parents and the community.

### **2. 3. 5. Environmental learning in the curriculum**

In 1995 the new government's White Paper on Education and Training saw the need for environmental education at all levels and in all learning programmes in the school curriculum in order to play an active role, interdisciplinary and integrated orientation and its role in sustainable development of resources (Lotz Sisitka & Janse Van Rensburg, 2000). This perspective gave teachers an opportunity to engage learners in programmes that open more opportunities for them to learn widely about socio-ecological issues that challenge them inside and outside school environments.

Hence environmental education and learning sees the relevance of education as a matter of agency in order to address socio-ecological issues that faced learners and the community in their own environments (social, political, economic and cultural). In relation to the importance of environmental education as viewed as integral to improve quality education and its relevance to all people especially the rural and disadvantage section of the population, UNESCO (1992) mentioned six objectives that environmental education is embarking on:

- Awareness: sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems.
- Knowledge: basic understanding of the total environment, its associated problems and humanity's critical responsible presence and role in it.
- Attitude: social values, strong feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in its protection and improvement.
- Skills: acquire the skills for solving environmental problems.
- Evaluation ability: evaluate environmental measures and education programmes in terms of ecological political, economic, social, aesthetic, and educational factors.
- Participation: develop a sense of responsibility and agency regarding environmental problem to ensure appropriate action to solve those problems.(no page no).

In the NCS environmental learning is provided in a number of ways, and it takes place in the context of three learning programmes in the Foundation Phase. These are Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills. In all these learning programmes the emphasis is placed on healthy environment, environmentally focused learning outcomes and assessment standards. Here, the context of learning is provided by factors like self, the local environment, the home, school and community, through the exploration of local and wider environment (NEEP-GET, (2004) but this seldom happens in my experience.

The support and attention shown by the former Minister of Education (Kader Asmal) resulted in the development of National Environmental Education programme (NEEP-GET) and, the development of an environmental learning support project for the General Education and Training band in South Africa NEEP-GET (2004). The NEEP-GET (2004) was aimed at enabling the inclusion of environmental education in the OBE system at policy development that included professional development of subject advisors to ensure school were implementing the OBE curriculum that has environmental focus in it.

In the Foundation Phase, NEEP-GET (2004) emphasized that the Life Orientation learning outcomes form the backbone of the Life Skills learning area. Health promotion is emphasized as Learning Outcomes number 1 as it contributes to a healthy environment. Other learning outcomes also emphasize social, personal and physical development. All these outcomes are embedded with important skills in order for learners to interact with the environment. In the process of transformation learners are expected to show respect and care for each other and for other living things. According to NEEP-GET (2004: 22) the Life Orientation learning programme supports environmental learning by emphasizing:

- Making informed decisions about healthy choices, particularly relating to health promotion (including environmental health).
- Knowing and exercising ones right and responsibility
- The holistic development of the learner as an individual in society)

In Literacy the learning outcomes that form the backbone of the learning programme (languages) enable learners to use language effective and critically. Through stories;

reading of text and signs; writing and listening (among other skills) young learners are better able to investigate the environment. Learners are also encouraged to develop critical language skills, and use language to explain and talk about issues in the environment. They are exposed to the environment through the Language of learning and Teaching (LOLT) and additional languages (2003: 23).

South Africa is characterized by multilingualism as far as our school are concerned therefore the use of the LOLT for that particular context is essential for learners to acquire necessary skills such as listen, speak, write and read to enable learners to be more environmental literate. It is noted that “Being able to think and reason helps learners to make sense of information and to probe issues more deeply,” (NEEP-GET, 2004:24).

For this study in particular, the inclusion of environmental education as the integral part of learning has opened opportunities for IK in the curriculum. Indigenous knowledge system rest in communities and environmental education addresses issues that affect these communities. Environmental education encourages learners to actively participate in school and communities and that creates a platform for more interaction between school and communities.

Environmental education echoed for schools to work with the community in their context to ensure environmental issues are dealt with. Hence the government has allowed NGO such as Eco-School and Umthathi environmental projects to work with teachers and parents in schools-community (see Chapter 1). Environmental awareness encouraged learners and parents to interact in social and cultural context, thus creating intergenerational processes through dialogue (talking), encountering (doing things), reflecting (thinking) to ensure learners acquire necessary skills and knowing. Engaging learners in this way is responsive to the DoE (2003) which stated that the first principle of the NCS echoes for healthy environment, social justice, human rights and inclusivity.

Daniels, (2004) cites Vygotsky stressing the importance of the contextual knowledge of learners as the basis for new knowledge to have a place in their minds. This means

that how environmental education considers the context as crucial is in line with the policy document Foundation Phase (2003). The emphasis on environment and context emphasises how teachers should draw from the home environments of learners, the key focus of my study.

NEEP-GET, (2004) echoed the same sentiment when it mentioned that environmental education worked well in the context where learners live. In such cases learners talk about things that affect them. The context also enabled educators to create educational opportunities for learners such as school surroundings and what learners come in contact with in their home environments. The involvement of learners in the community in this study encouraged learners to learn from gogos (elderly) activities, thus creating space for “stronger school-community relationships that involved the teachers, and communities in ethical deliberations about environmental concerns” (Hogan, 2008: 51).

Integration across Learning Areas in the curriculum is another area environmental education emphasizes when preparing lesson plans for meaningful outcomes. There is a need for teachers to draw from more than one Learning Area to enhance learning that is holistic while emphasizing the unique features of a particular Learning Area NEEP-GET, (2004), and DoE, (2000). This informed the integration focus of my study.

When environmental education is an integral part of the curriculum such issues of context and integration are dealt with inside and outside the school environment. By doing so quality issues that might have been neglected or ignored are dealt with. These issues included poverty at home and at school, language of instruction, conditions of teaching among many issues (Rosenberg, 2008). On the same note the diverse background of learners needs to be taken into consideration as it is also a matter of concern when it comes to ‘epistemological access’ Morrow (2007) and the DoE (2003) also stated in the Foundation Phase document. The environmental education focus of the study not only gave attention to many issues that are often lost in the complexity of education issues but brought me down to the importance of curriculum contextualisation as the central focus for the exploratory study to enhance learning, literacy and relevance.

## **2. 4 Curriculum Contextualisation**

As it is stated (in Section 2.3.5) above, environmental education and learning seeks to address socio-ecological issues in the school and community. Starting to engage learners in the environmental education when they are still young, open their eyes to challenges they are faced with in their immediate environments such as lack of healthy sanitation at school and at home among other issues.

For education to be able to address such issues at school level and in society, the curriculum needs to be contextualized in order to include ideals and expectations of the community and the country at large. Contextualizing curriculum involves interaction between three learning environments, home, school and the community. That is why the study seeks to engage local knowledge. At the same time teachers are expected to play numerous roles inside and outside the classroom. Acknowledging everyday knowledge that learners brought with them could make a difference and improve learner performance as well as teaching and learning. That is why context where learning is taking place is vital as it provides necessary educational experiences to work with especially when teachers prepare lesson plans that cater for every learner's need for relevance.

According to Grundy (1987) curriculum is a social construction in actual learning environments, with actual students, and therefore it is subject to critique and reconstruction if it is not working. Stenhouse, (1975) recognizes curriculum as a way of organizing a set of human educational experiences, meaning the curriculum must take into consideration the culture of the society by acknowledging historical background and social interactions that make the society. This means that teachers, as the forefront in the implementation of the curriculum, need to view the curriculum as praxis, a social process that develops through dynamic interaction and reflection as Grundy (1987) stated in her view of curriculum. According to Grundy (1987) curriculum is not only a set of plans to be implemented but it is constituted through an active process that involves planning, action and evaluating that are integrated in an on-going process. Therefore situating curriculum in the context of learning is vital as well as it opens opportunities for it to involve diverse knowledges from the society.

Hence Stenhouse (1975) stated that a curriculum should be grounded and be subject to experiment by its users, teachers, in the classroom. Defining curriculum Stenhouse (1975: 4) stated:

as an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice. Curriculum involves both content and method, and in its widest application takes account of the problem of implementation in the institutions of the educational system.

In addition, Cornbleth (1990) emphasized that curriculum is an on-going process that is influenced by contextual processes such as socio-cultural and structural factors. By structural factors Cornbleth (1990) refers to poverty and, unemployment, whereas socio-cultural refers to language and social relationships in the community. That means taking into account these factors is to acknowledge learners' inability to perform at school and rests not only in how lessons are presented but also in how learning has a place in their prior learning and its challenges in their everyday life. That is what Cornbleth (1990) is referring to when she views curriculum as contextualized social process and stated that context shapes the curriculum therefore it differs from context to context.

My research question tries to enhance relevance and literacy in an integrated Foundation Phase programme through curriculum contextualization therefore considering context and its social factors of where the school is located would try to enhance quality education. In this way education systems are part and parcel of the fabric of the societies in which they operate (Cross, Mungadi and Rouhani 2003:180), what I was trying to work towards in this exploratory study.

My research goals are to explore opportunities that indigenous knowledge processes in order to integrate them in Life Orientation and Languages in the NCS (Grade 3). Cornbleth, (1991: 24) viewed "Curriculum as an on-going social activity that is shaped by various contextual influences within and beyond the classroom and accomplished interactively by, primarily the teachers and students". Therefore engaging learners in finding out more about their indigenous knowledge from their parents was part of accomplishing social interaction in order for their parents to

interact with what was happening in the classroom. Hence Grundy (1997:5) mentioned that “Curriculum is not a concept it is a cultural construction”.

When curriculum is socially constructed, socio-ecological issues such as poverty at home and at school are taken into account thus improving teaching and learning in the classroom. From my experience in teaching I found out that learners who are faced with such challenges do not easily cope with the pressure that comes with new knowledge nor do they cope with the pressure of trying to keep their lifestyle a secret. The result is low self-esteem coupled with violent and aggressive behaviour that is caused by these and other stresses. Sometimes they become shy, passive participants, unable to concentrate, not making sense of what is being learnt in the classroom or at school. Their concentration span is short, their level of understanding is weakened by stress causing damage to their self-esteem. Rosenberg (2008: 29) notes how:

International research has also shown that children from impoverished homes struggle to make sense of the academic, formal or principled knowledge they encounter at school”. As opposed to their everyday or experiential knowledge.

The argument that poverty depresses children’s health, motivation, intelligence and language echoed by Rosenberg (2008) allowed me to look deeper into the relationship between contextualisation, language and participation.

## **2.5 Language and Participation**

Stenhouse (1975: 8) referring to the importance of culture within social interaction said this about language:

Once we have learned language, we have command of an instrument which can be used not only for communicating with others but also for communing with ourselves. Language supports our solitary reflection. Given life in communication, it becomes the possession of the individual, who can, as it were, carry it with him into his inner privacy and use it as an instrument of thought.

Wood (1999:35) reflects the same notion that “children enter school speaking a range of different accents and dialects. These are often associated with a variation in social background and parental occupation”. Therefore schools need to expand on such knowledge taking into cognizance language already acquired from home.

Daniels (2004: 194) takes the discussion around language back to the time when he spent a lot of his time understanding how thinking and speech develop in children. He noted how conceptual development happens “when children are allowed opportunity to bring their experiences and language together to create new meanings and contexts”. This is what I had been noticing in my classroom environmental education and IK work therefore I wanted to look more deeply into it in this study.

As mentioned above teachers in particular should be aware and acknowledge prior learning of children in order for learning to be developed. In relation to language children need to participate in all processes of education using language that is why it is imperative for learners to develop language early in life to enable them to communicate effectively. Hence Vygotsky’s as cited in Daniels (2001:194-196) argument takes note that:

...spontaneous concepts and scientific concepts are mutually constitutive. Each helps the other develop. Whereas spontaneous concepts begin in concrete experiences, scientific concepts begin with abstract linguistic definitions “scientific concepts grow downward through spontaneous concepts; spontaneous concepts grow upward through the scientific concepts.

Vygotsky as cited in Daniels (2001:195) also stated that the development of spontaneous concepts is required to facilitate (or anchor) the absorption of scientific concepts. In turn, scientific concepts provide the theoretical frameworks that facilitate new understandings that change the structure and organisation of spontaneous concepts.

This research on language is a key to understanding the level of knowing learners bring into the classroom so that school knowledge can be added on to what is already known to them. Language also served as a yardstick for the formulation of policies including the South African policy document for education DoE (2003) which stated that schools have a mandate to select the language of instruction that is suitable for a school context, in order to develop language already acquired by each learner. In that way schools are empowered to develop a language policy that is inclusive of parents’ decisions around language selection. That is what concerned me (see Chapter 1) when learners were unable to read and write in their own language. My concern was confirmed by research on the existing curriculum practices in Progress in

International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Conducted in 2005 and as mentioned earlier, this revealed that many South African children, not only in my school were unable to read and write.

Many factors contribute to learner performance (see Section 2.3.4) but teacher's inability to design quality lessons also contributes to this dilemma. This was found by Lotz-Sisitka (2009) when she reviewed case studies on epistemological access on three different contexts. She noted that lesson plans compiled by teachers resulted in 'mis-teaching' and 'mis-assessing' on the part of the teachers. All of these research insights kept directing me back to the question of social context and the contextualising of curriculum.

### **2.5.1. Social/situated learning and the contextualised curriculum**

For the curriculum to yield effective results learning needs to be situated in context which involves social interactions, including bringing local knowledge into the classroom to be linked with school knowledge. The EFA Global Monitoring Report Education for All (UNESCO, 2004), in their quest to understand education quality, stated that education is drawn from different traditions of educational thought. Included in those approaches were humanist approaches, behaviourist theory, critical approaches, indigenous approaches and adult approaches. The report provided a comprehensive framework for understanding and improving quality education thus:

*Learner characteristics*- what learners bring to the learning experience can influence the quality of learning. Thus characteristics such as: previous learning experience, socio-economic background, place of residence, health, cultural and religious background, are important determinants of quality learning.

*Context*- societal values and attitudes, economic status, national policies for education provide an influential context for education.

*Inputs*- the success of teaching/learning is influenced by the availability of material and human resources. The management of these resources is also important in determining the quality of education provided. (Barret, Chawla-Duggan, Lowe, Nickel & Ukpo, 2006: 10)

Contextualisation, quality and relevance underpin much of the environmental education discourse.

Social learning is not only regarded “as a natural occurring phenomenon, but as a way of organizing learning and communities of learners” (Wals, 2007: 38). This stresses that school learners need to be reminded they are part of the learning process therefore they need to participate fully. Opportunities must be opened for learners to engage in discussions and to take decisions especially in health promotion and environmental learning to improve the school environment. For example designing and creating a preferred school garden where each grade had their own plots developed ownership, pride, and promoted a healthy school environment as well as promoted action competence amongst learners.

Situating learning enhances the relationship between school and the community for meaningful interaction. The intention of involving the elderly community in the learning process ensured shared indigenous knowledge with the school curriculum to improve quality education. Shared knowledge was integrated with the curriculum framework to improve learning and the quality of learning acquired by learners. Situated learning ensures that learning would be reflected, integrated, negotiated and mutual participation would be enforced. Shared knowledge by the elders has resulted into learning that embraced both knowledges (school and local). The notion of situating learning is to address socio-cultural and structural issues as mentioned by Cornbleth (1990) in her view of curriculum to promote health and environmental learning and management in schools and communities.

Situated learning works well in multicultural situations where learners come from different socio-cultural background backgrounds as in this case study (Agyemmann, 2002). In my school learners come from different backgrounds which include farms, villages, townships, poverty stricken home, homes led by the young children, single parent home and some come from the social welfare department and are placed in homes of safety in the township. Since the school works with the community (elderly) it has become a place for community members to come and share their indigenous knowledge.

Fien (1993:22-23) uses a socially critical orientation that “sees a reciprocal relationship between school and society in which formal education is both shaped by and responsive to the needs of society and, in turn, helps to shape society of which

schools are part of”. Stating a similar view Lave and Wenger (1991) note that learning should be placed in social relationships including social orientations where actual learning is taking place. Strengthening ties with the community enables knowledge to be social constructed thus opening opportunities for teachers, learners to plan, conduct, and assess tasks together.

The persistent theme of local context has been identified across so much of the curriculum and environmental education literature but it is not adequately being taken up in curriculum practice for relevance despite recurring in themes of education reform for relevance in people’s lives.

## **2.6. Relevance of education in the lives of the people**

Relevant content in context means considering curriculum as a social process that involves not only school matters separately from society, because schools are regarded as school in the community. Inviting elders into the classroom brought relevance to content learnt by learners and the knowledge they brought was linked with school knowledge content. UNESCO (2005) mentioned aspects that can enable the education system to work for people.

### **2.6.1 Improve access to quality basic education**

Learners need to be encouraged to remain at school by engaging them in meaningful activities that involve them directly. Contextualising curriculum enhances the chances of quality education received by learners because learners are exposed to education that is relevant to them . Take for example the demonstration of hand washing by elders in the classroom environment. The knowledge gained by learners through that process would be cemented for life. Hogan (2008: 51) echoed for the same sentiment after she found out that “integrating local environmental cultural knowledge successfully contributed to curriculum relevance both epistemologically and pedagogically”.

### **2.6.2 Re-orientating existing education programmes**

Education programmes should enhance skills development that opens opportunities for learners to initiate programmes of interest. In my context where health promotion still needs more orientating, exposing learners to a healthy indigenous practice of

washing hands regularly should be inculcated in their everyday practices to ensure sustainable healthy practices that could be passed on. On the same note such knowledge prevents diseases that are opportunistic to unhealthy practices such as diarrhoea. Another existing education programmes relates to maintaining vegetable gardens to alleviate poverty and as well as teaching learners to save money, and contributing to healthy bodies by using fresh produce. UNESCO 2005: 4) believed that “reorienting should be done in holistic and interdisciplinary context, engaging society at large, but carried out by individuals natives in a locally relevant and culturally appropriate manner”.

### **2.6.3 Developing public understanding and awareness of sustainability**

Public awareness about the importance of working together (school and community) in order to ensure relevant education which includes the community’s methods of sustainability is encouraged. For example the move by governments and businesses to support schools and communities to teach people about the dangers of not promoting health (washing hands) is encouraged. As a result of that Dettol and Protex organisations are visiting schools and communities regularly promoting health by distributing their products thus contributing to the welfare of schools in community through their action. Schools in community are responding by strengthening the cause. Developing a knowledgeable citizenry requires a concerted effort with consistent and realistic messages delivered to people of all ages.

### **2.6.4 Providing training**

Quality education most of the time is unobtainable even if measures such as ESD initiatives are in place because of quality issues that stand in the way of progress. Morrow (2007) mentioned that in South Africa in particular, quality education is difficult to define because of its past imbalances in education which were carried to new transformation of education post 1994 not knowingly so, but through incentives of the new curriculum that expected teachers to be facilitators and learners to be in the centre of learning without considering conditions of schools and the environment schools are in, including facilities to carry out such expected tasks.

To familiarise learners with learning at school, learning should be relevant to their everyday practices, hence (Hawes & Stephen, as cited in Nikel & Lowe, 2009: 6)

approached the meaning of relevance by outlining the key aspects of quality that need to be taken into consideration for education received by learners to improve their lives. They stated as follows:

(1) efficiency (as reaching standards, as improving standards as standards of efficiency); (2) relevance (to context, to needs, to humanity; and (3) “something special” (that extra quality of inventiveness, stimulation, excitement, concern for others or happiness’). In 2003 Stephens presented an extended version in which he lists ‘four pillars of quality which are relevance, efficiency, ‘something special’ and ‘inclusivity’ (2003,11). Inclusivity adds to the earlier dimension the requirement that a ‘relevant, efficient and “special” education must ... be available to all children irrespective of gender, ability or wealth’.

### **2.6.5 Efficiency**

According to Nikel and Lowe (2009: 8) “the amount of time, effort, financial or other resources invested by these individuals may be influenced by considerations of ‘whether it is worth my while’ which in turn influences not only the quality of education actually achieved but whether children and their families opt to remain in education or not”. That means parents, students, teachers, district officials need to participate to ensure they know exactly that learners are receiving quality education through monitoring and evaluation of learning processes inside and outside the classroom. Time spent at school should enable learners to acquire skills, knowledge, values and attitudes to act responsibly towards the environment. As much as everyone has the right to basic education, recognition of literacy, numeracy and life skills should empower learners (students) to be able to know, to be able to do, to be able live together as individuals, family members, communities, in order to create competency among people that could help them UNESCO (2004).

Parents put their hope for better lives in the provision of quality education; hence efficiency in schools should be taken seriously. Shumba et al (2008) find out from their exploratory research that community and schools must work together to ensure the efficiency in schools starting from the management of the school

### **2.7. Developing a research focus**

From the literature I was able to discover that opportunities for IK school curriculum would link school knowledge with everyday knowledge thus enabling the curriculum

to consider context as crucial in developing learners' knowledge and skills. This would enable learners to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in more meaningful ways, that of acquiring knowledge that is relevant in their everyday life (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005).

Acknowledging learners prior knowledge and experiences that they brought into the classroom and, utilising such knowledges in classroom learning would foster a good relationship between schools and the community, it would also allow space for learners to actively participate in classroom tasks with pride and confidence. Drawing knowledge from local community members and their practices is to learn more about their ways of doing which enabled their practices to be sustainable and developed over many generation of years.

## **2.8. Summary**

These concluding ideas brought me to the end of a long review of the complexities in the literature in writing this literature chapter as a review for the study. It reflects my critical reading of the research and perspectives that I uncovered on indigenous knowledge, a wide range of curriculum issues, school performance and the key questions of literacy and relevance across the landscape of change in South Africa. Behind all of the complexity and reading as a Foundation Phase educator I came across the recurring theme of contextualisation. This kept on appearing as the research focus for my interest in IK, literacy and relevance that had grown in my recent years of work as an environmental educator. In this way curriculum contextualisation brought my study into focus for me and I set out to develop a research design (Chapter 3). This was used to generate case evidence (Chapter 4) that would allow me to critically explore how curriculum contextualisation contributes to environmental learning and relevance (Chapter 5) in the integrated Foundation Phase literacy and life skills programme that I developed through the research process.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I outline the research design and the methodology I used in the study. The chapter also provides information on how I carried out this research, and how the actual process unfolded. It develops a theoretical framework that was used in analysis and explains why an exploratory interpretive case study approach was used. The chapter discusses in detail research methods that I used to generate data: namely, document analysis, focus group interviews, observation, and assessment of learners' work.

#### **3.2 The Research Method**

An interpretative approach was used to enable the researcher to understand the social world in which the learning was taking place. This was done by generating data as I worked with the participants in the school-in-community context of the study. Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) describe interpretive research as an approach that describes and interprets people's feelings and experiences in human terms. In other words an interpretative approach allowed me the opportunity to make sense of peoples' feelings, their experiences and social situations (learners, teachers, and elderly people) Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999).

In this study I wanted to first find out what opportunities there are in the NCS for Grade 3 in order to integrate indigenous knowledge practices in Life Orientation and Languages in the Foundation Phase. In order to do this I reviewed the curriculum documents and what local healthy living practices (IK) exist in the community, also what knowledge of healthy living practices learners have before (prior knowledge) and after the lesson (new learning). And thereafter how indigenous knowledge of healthy living practices integrates into a 'listen to write,' 'write to read' and 'read to learn' teaching progression across the learning areas (Life Orientation, Xhosa Literacy, English Literacy).

As noted above, in this study I relied on accounts of ordinary people's feelings, experiences, and the power of language used in their own settings to present the story. A number of data generation techniques were used; namely questionnaires, observation schedules, focus group interviews and document analysis. There were other data generation techniques such as my marking of the learners' work and the review of my field notes and photographic evidence that also enriched the interpretative data in the study. These techniques enabled me to stay focused on my research goals and research question; namely, exploring ways of improving my practice and contributing in a small way to environmental education and learning in the Foundation Phase.

To be able to gain more insight and depth of the study I had to use a case study method, which enabled me to work with people in the unique context of my classroom working with learners, community elders, colleagues and subject advisors. Also a case study approach enabled me, as the researcher, to generate data within my practice to allow me to probe the contextualizing of the curriculum in relation to the everyday realities and experiences of learners. An interpretative case study provided a contextual approach that also allowed me to generate data on the mobilizing of indigenous ways of knowing (knowledge practices) in and across the learning areas (Life Orientation, Xhosa Literacy, English Literacy and Numeracy) in the Foundation Phase.

For the case study I worked with suitable Learning Outcomes (LO) and Assessment Standards (AS) to integrate indigenous knowledge practices into National Curriculum Statements for Grade 3. In doing so the case experience and data generated a rich context in which I was able to ask my research question and review it in light of the evidence that came out of the 'natural setting' in which I was working.

### **3.3 A Case Study Approach**

Bassey (1990:30) stated that a case study is a "study of a singularity conducted in depth in natural setting". Research conducted by Hanisi (2006) and Kota (2006) revealed that a case study method as an approach deals with first-hand accounts to enable the process of data generation to remain attractive, and in its ordinary form. A case study as suggested by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 323) also can be used to

“develop a new theory or improve or evaluate the existing professional practice”. I used a case study in this study to improve my teaching and learning practices by working with indigenous knowledge practices to contextualise and enhance learning and literacy acquisition in the Foundation Phase curriculum. As a Foundation Phase teacher who teaches all learning areas, a case study as a method gave me the opportunity to work together with the learners in the process of learning and understanding intergenerational ways of knowing which includes gogos (elderly) in the community working with us at school.

Since I wanted to improve my teaching and enhance learning across all learning areas in the Foundation Phase, I was working as ‘teacher as researcher’ as it was stated as early as 1975 by Stenhouse. In 1980s and 1990s action research became popularized by the work of Lewin (1926, cited in Simovska, 2004) in the critical social sciences and, by Stenhouse (1975) in the curriculum where the emphasis was on research in practice such as in my classroom. I started the study using an action research approach and working with other teachers towards cycles of action and reflection, the data generated was very diverse and complex so I shifted the focus to a classroom-based ‘teacher as researcher’ approach using a case study. In the process of changing the study thus became more exploratory, allowing me to generate data as I explored the use of indigenous knowledge practices in everyday teaching environments integrating home and school.

I was a little worried when the approach changed but Stenhouse (1975) opens his discussion on ‘the teacher as researcher’ by noting:

The ideal is that the curricular specification should feed a teacher’s personal research and development programme through which he is progressively increasing his understanding of his own work and hence bettering his teaching (Stenhouse, 1975: 143).

The research design reflects my work with the curriculum documents (Phase 1 below) to inform my contextual research with the gogos and learners (Phase 2) and how this was followed by the case study analysis to understand and better my teaching (Phase 2 & 3). The exploratory case study was conducted in my school Sosebenza Junior Primary school in Ilitha township with my Grade 3 learners. Working with learners in

my classroom enabled me to gain more insight on the research focus and to explore how working with indigenous knowledge might enhance curriculum contextualization in the Foundation Phase.

After an initial action research pilot with colleagues, a three stage exploratory case study research process was developed for the study and reported here as it developed in the following stages:

**Phase 1 (4.2 below)**

- Curriculum analysis to identify learning outcomes related to IK (document analysis unpacking the learning outcomes and assessment standards for Grade 3.
- Focus group interviews on learner prior knowledge and focus group with gogos to scope possible knowledge practices for work with learners.
- A review of focus groups with learners and gogos to ascertain what opportunities are there for IK in the LO and AS specified in the curriculum framework.

This allowed me to work with curriculum policy and to generate data to inform the design of a unit of work Phase 2.

**Phase 2 (4.3 below)**

- Development of a programme based on curriculum framework of NCS with gogos (materials and activities with learning outcomes and assessment standards)
- Implementation of learning activities based on the story line told by gogos (gogo told the story, learners' rewrite the story, dramatize the story, record the story and translate the story in additional language)
- Analyze learners' work and teachers' work to see how the integration happened.

**Phase 3 (4.4 below)**

- Reviewing the two cycles of the learning programme with particular emphasis on evidence of literacy acquisition, contextualization and relevance. (Healthy practices, socio-cultural and sustainable practices).

Reviewing topics selected to ascertain knowledge acquired and represented in learners' (listen to write, write to read and read to learn teaching progression across learning areas).

### **3.4. Research Techniques**

To be able to generate data I first had to gain access by asking permission from the Principal and School Governing Body (SGB) as well as learners parents. I also asked permission from the elders to visit them in their place of work during the day to interview and work with them. Working with learners and gogos (elders) in my classroom made me realize that generating data to answer my research question and research goals was achievable and worthwhile. The following research methods of generating case data paved the way for the study:

- Document analysis
- Focus group interviews
- Observation
- Learners' work
- Teachers' work

#### **3.4.1 Document analysis**

I started by analyzing NCS R-9 policy documents for all learning areas in the Foundation Phase. I wanted to find out what opportunities were in the policy documents that could integrate indigenous knowledge practices in NCS for Grade 3. Yin (2003) mentioned that it is advisable when analyzing data to look deeper for silent prose, relevance and, relation between concepts a researcher is researching, in this case indigenous knowledge and relevance of education in the community. I also looked for LO's and AS that relate to health promotion and environmental health in other learning areas. (See lesson plan and curriculum analysis Appendix I.)

Other locally available materials I looked at are Outcomes Based Education (OBE) textbooks, resource materials developed to cater for health promotion in the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (e.g. Water and Sanitation) and the Eco-School kit that covers themes such as healthy living. Resource materials that also

assisted me came from various NGO's and private companies such as Dettol and Protex.

A preliminary review of the curriculum documents and contextually available materials assisted me to start identifying areas or issues relating to the research purpose and questions that needed to be investigated further in the second data generation phase- the focus group interviews.

### **3.4.2 Focus group interviews**

Immediately after the document analysis and review of materials, I conducted focus group interviews with Grade 3 learners in groups of 6 to ascertain their level of understanding in regard to healthy practice in their daily lives. Data on learner understandings allowed me to map out the introduction of new information about healthy living practices that included the topic of hand washing (Cohen, Manion and Morrison :297) note that “focus group interviews are useful where a group of people are working together for a common purpose”. In this case the interviews allowed me to work from what the learners would bring to the learning and to select a hand washing and health focus that could be built on towards new knowledge.

According to Schurink (1998) a focus group interview is described as a ‘purposeful discussion’ around a specific topic or related topics that takes place between eight and ten individuals with a similar background and common interest. Therefore focus group interview was used as a form of interview that involved an open discussion among community elders and Grade 3 learners in my classroom guiding the development of the learning programme and providing data for later analysis.

On the same note Patton (2000) stated that a focus group is also a way of generating high quality data as participants give their views openly in their own social context. As stated above the purpose of the research was to engage learners in discussion and deliberations about what they already knew in relation to local knowledge and healthy local practices. To be able to gain learners’ full attention I created an environment that was healthy to ensure that discussions and, deliberations enabled me as a teacher researcher to generate data that was of quality. The seating arrangement (surrounding manner) enabled learners to be in a position to face each other and that allowed for

more connection and interaction. From the onset I engaged learners by telling them that each learner would be given an opportunity to voice his/her opinion and every learner's opinion was vital and would be taken into account, therefore respecting each other and giving each other turns to talk was important.

#### **3.4.2.1 Focus group with gogos (elders)**

Another focus group interview I conducted was with 20 elders in their place of work. In the process elders decided two gogos must work directly with me in my classroom. During the focus group interviews with the elders an opportunity was created for all the elders to talk, to ensure I captured different views about the topic. The focus group with elders was not easy as they did not like my initially direct line of questioning. I thus had to have a more open discussion where from time to time I had to bring them back to issues at hand. Archibald (2008: 43) stated that the important thing was to go to them, listen to what they were going to say, and show respect by spending time with them in order to establish a learning relationship.

The use of a tape recorder with focus groups enabled me to member check with them for reliability and validity. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (1994) stated it is wise to probe for more information that might not have been observed from the interviewee during an interview, such as her thoughts when she said that, her perspectives on issues, prejudices, other views about the issues and how she felt during the interview to ensure we were working for the same cause. This deepening was done during the member checking process where I was able to ask these questions as I worked with one member at a time.

#### **3.4.3 Participant observation**

In the process of teaching and learning I used observation as one of the tools to generate data. As a participant observer, my role as a 'teacher-researcher' was known by the group that I worked with. LeCompste and Priessle (1993) mentioned that the advantage of being a participant observer is to be known by the group one is to work with. My involvement that way enabled the research to take shape and I was able to address ethical issues more directly as I had full access to the group.

The first encounter as participant observer was made during indigenous knowledge practices when the gogos (elders) were presenting the story in the classroom for the first time. Rather than using an observation schedule I simply made recordings and took field notes as I worked in the classroom when the elders were working with the learners. During the interactions I encouraged learners to rewrite the story in their own mother tongue. This ensured that the interactions between gogos (elders) and learners were taking place in a creative planned environment that would set up a platform of creative ideas and experiences for the learners to work with me afterwards.

The second participant observation session took place during learners' dramatization of the story in the classroom. Here I also made field notes and the Gogo's (elders) were also invited to observe how the learners managed to incorporate indigenous ways of doing things with school knowledge to ensure there was relevance in their story. As LeCompste and Priessle (1993) mentioned being a participant observer opens up negotiation between the researcher and the participant, that is why during data generation I managed to seek feedback on what is seen and how it is presented. The intention of inviting gogo's (elders) back into the classroom was to gain feedback from them as the story line for dramatization was based on intergenerational process.

Robinson (1993) and Creswell (2003) describe observation as a natural data collection technique that is central in all enquiries. Whereas Lecompte and Priessle (1993) stressed that it is a way of obtaining first-hand knowledge of persons and groups in their natural environment. In the study, participant observation enabled the researcher to verify that individuals were doing what was agreed upon. On the same note, Mandikonza (2006) mentioned that in his encounter as a participant observer he managed to look at how things were done, things that he was involved with and sometimes as people were doing them. In this process, despite a familiarity with the indigenous knowledge practices, he also learned from those practices and experiences. I had the same experience as the participant observation process allowed me to gain deeper understandings and to plan out the learning interactions that I would have with the learners. An important part of a contextual research design was that the more formal data generation processes and the work done by the learners and

marked by me were all part of a deepening process for me as the teacher researcher. This had its strengths in deepening insights but also meant that my insights could not be reported as conclusively as I might have been able to do if I was researching others.

#### **3.4.4 Learners' work**

Numerous activities were performed and learners showed interest and enthusiasm as a result they appear to be performing at a higher standard than before the researcher started the research. A few activities are only mentioned as learners' work as a result of their engagement. Apart from the story presented by elders learners were able to tackle task as well in order to improve their grammatical knowledge of their home language hence the following activities.

- **Mix oral activity:** After listening to the Gogo's story learners retell the story in their own words in groups (dialogue). New letter sounds were read, spelled and learnt. Spelling words were written in their spelling words to be practiced for homework. New words excited them such as *egoqweni*, *ekoyini*, *isikhelelelo*, *ezindongeni*, *isihluzo*, *emthonjeni* etc. Words with same sound were listed together.
- **Spelling, phonic + handwriting activity:** spelling words/ sentences were written on strips and placed on the boards and the emphasis was placed on letter formation. For example, kh, th, qw, hl, nd, nj,. This activity was done to link the sound of the letter to its visual form.
- **Writing activity:** revising spelling, phonics + handwriting in order to write the story in groups.
- **Reporting activity:** the written story was reported by groups for the whole class deliberation.
- **Writing Activity:** writing down the story by the whole classroom on the board. Shared writing time was used. Shared writing procedure was reinforced by asking questions, get few responses, helping learners to construct sentences, encouraging learners to be involved. Individual/independent writing. The whole class was encouraged to write their own story and I helped them to respond to these questions. *What*

*sentence can I write to say that? Where do I begin? Where shall I put the full stop?*

- **Reading activity had sub activities on its own:** shared reading, read for meaning, use word attack skills and reading aloud was used in the classroom. Reading skills were developed such as, discussion of the story, development of comprehension skill (question that followed the read story), read to the end of the sentence, reread the sentence, use the picture to increase vocabulary.

At the end of storytelling I allowed time for interaction that led to data generation as well as reflection of learning outcomes. Learners worked in groups of six where they discussed the story in preparation for the writing process. Thereafter learners reported in groups what they had written. Deliberations of ideas were noted on the chalkboard then recorded to form one story which would be written on a big piece of paper in preparation for one story to be written up from what the learners had experienced.

### **3.4.5 Teacher's work**

I planned the lesson according to the curriculum framework that was selecting Learning Outcome (LO) and Assessment Standards (AS) suitable for my lesson topic: hand washing. My topic was the result of unsanitary conditions learners experienced both at home and at school because of the unhygienic condition of the toilets. New information was given to learners about the importance of washing hands because of communicable diseases such as cholera and the explanation followed.

Cholera is a communicable disease which is linked to the Life Orientation concepts of environmental health and personal hygiene, because the disease is spread through people using polluted water, not taking care when going to the toilet or not washing hands before handling food. So the Life Skills learning programme allows learners to make responsible decisions about their health and the environment.

I selected the Life Orientation learning area as the basis to promote health and to contribute to a healthy environment in school and the community. Within the LO and AS expectations are tabled to ensure environmental health is addressed, for example:

- Learners and their communities can only be healthy if the earth is healthy too.
- People need clean water, fresh air, nutritious food, and safe surroundings.
- Learners need to enjoy the beauty of nature as well as exercise. Learners actively participate by identifying environmental health issues in their homes, school and community.
- Learners explore what they can do to make our world safer and healthier.
- Learners learn to make choices and take action for good health and healthy surroundings. Learners learn about the diversity of plants and animals that they form part of healthy ecosystems like farms, rivers, oceans- which play a vital role in the health of people and planet.

Therefore learners need to learn about the disease, recognise it, and be able to prevent it by being actively involved and making meaning of what they learnt through dialogue (talking, reading, writing, reporting, listening), encountering (doing things, trying things out, making things, investigating); reflecting (thinking, evaluating, reporting on what happened).

The lesson plans and assessment schedule that were produced through the research process became part of the data generated within the study. The lesson plan showed the integration of learning areas across and within LO's and AS was included. In the Life Orientation LO 1 was selected in line with the topic of hand washing.

LO1: health promotion: The learner will be able to make informed decisions regarding personal, community and environmental health

AS 1: Discusses myths surrounding communicable diseases and the causes and preventions of these

Learners' work was marked and feedback was given to learners so that the learners could take the accumulating knowledge further in their literacy work.

### **3.5 Ethics validity and trustworthiness**

I used triangulation as a key method of data validation as I used more than one source of data, most notably the observations and the work done by learners or the lesson plans generated for phase 2 and the evidence of learning in the learners' work. Yin (2003) mentioned that it is a rationale strategy of using multiple sources of evidence. I also member checked my interpretation of generated data with the participants to

ensure validity. This was initially with the gogos but was also important as the various writing, reading and learning tasks developed in the learning unit.

In the process I negotiated permission from the principal to do the research in my classroom in writing (Appendix A). I also obtained permission from the elders by negotiating with them verbally and they gave consent for any evidence to be used including photographs that contribute to the records of the observation in the classroom and in the field.

For learners I had to prepare consent forms for each parent to complete (Appendix B) explaining the reason for that. Negotiating permission from every one I worked with is in line with research ethics. Being honest about the research purpose helped me a lot because participants willingly worked with me. Even the parents of learners signed the consent form and those parents who did not want their children to partake voiced their opinions and their children were not involved and as we had two Grade 3 classrooms while completing the work they moved to another classroom. Respect for democracy and for the person is a must for the researcher (Bassey, 1999). On the same note Cohen, et al (2001) stated that the participants have the right to privacy and self-determination. Use of mother tongue to conduct interviews made participants felt at ease thus enabling more depth and richness of the data in particular the gogo's interviews.

### **3.6. Research Methodology as a whole**

When I realized that an action research process would be too complex to manage and would not give me the depth of insight necessary to address my research question I decided to be teacher as researcher as explained (see 3.3). This allowed me opportunity to generate rich observation data and to take the observations carefully and closely in order to work with learners and to make sure the project developed well in my classroom. Hence I could not be as conclusive in the study as I would like to be, but what I have managed to do with this research design is to open up a strong sense of how important it is for the learners to become literate and to learn with materials and experiences that are contextually relevant to them.

Two rounds of cycles enabled me as a teacher to search for what is relevant to learners and then supported learners to acquire critical literacy skills through the

relevant learning with their ideas and this thus became the main focus of my exploratory case study research.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **AN ACCOUNT OF THE TWO-PHASE RESEARCH PROCESS**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter first represents the data generated during phase 1 of the research process where I set out to identify locally relevant indigenous knowledge practices to include in the Life Orientation (life skills) and Languages (literacy) module to be implemented in phase two.

The phase 1 account (see Section 4.2 below) of the study was generated from the analysis of the curriculum documents to identify opportunities for the inclusion of local and indigenous knowledge. The identification of opportunities included the generation of data through:

- focus group interviews with learners (See Appendix C) and
- interviews with participating elders (Gogos) (See Appendix D).

These two streams of interview evidence are then reported against the opportunities identified for integrating local knowledge in a life skills and literacy integrated lesson plan on Healthy Living (Appendix F), the research output from phase one for implementation in phase two of the study.

The second phase of the research (Section 4.3) is an account of the classroom use of the Healthy Living materials and activities generated in phase one. Here the integrated activities are reported with evidence of learning and outcomes.

Finally, to conclude the chapter, the case evidence as a whole (Phases one and two) is reviewed with the research question in mind to pull out evidence of how curriculum contextualization appears to have contributed to relevance and literacy skills in the Foundation Phase case examined.

#### **4.2. Phase One: Curriculum, Context and Relevant Knowledge**

The first phase of the research involved an analysis of the curriculum and collecting interview data from learners and community elders. The data from each of these sources is briefly outlined to develop the life-skills and literacy module to be worked with in phase two of the study.

#### **4.2.1. An assessment of opportunities for indigenous knowledge in the policy document**

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) policy documents provide guideline information for each learning area by means of definitions and purpose before it outlines features and scope and then learning outcomes (LO'S) and assessment standards (AS'S). My attention was centered on the Life Orientation Curriculum as this has the content knowledge to be used in an integrating way in the Literacy curriculum for both home language and additional language.

In the definition of the Life Orientation curriculum, Life Skills is expected to equip learners for *meaningful and successful living in a rapidly changing and transforming society* (DoE, 2003: 4). This illustrates how education policies in South Africa have taken into consideration the importance of transforming societies through meaningful education and my intention was to work with local knowledge for relevance and literacy.

The analysis of the curriculum documents opened my eyes to the many possibilities that were there for the integration of indigenous knowledge in life skills and language work. I found that my analysis of the documents needed to be guided by the learner and local knowledge so I continued the study by undertaking work with the learners and elders. In order to develop questions for focus group interviews I needed to find out whether IK has a place in the learning of Life Skills in the Foundation Phase schooling and how to work with indigenous knowledge to enhance curriculum contextualization and relevance.

#### **4.2.2. Focus group and questionnaire with learners**

To begin the engagement with learning that is rooted in local knowledge practices, I started work with the learners in my classroom and later worked with elderly women known for their local knowledge.

The first focus group interview was conducted with the learners in my classroom on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2010. From the learners I wanted to find out what knowledge of healthy living practices they had and have an interest in. I explained to learners what I was doing and why I wanted them to be involved in the process. I also explained to learners that I had already asked permission from their parents to work with them throughout the year.

Learners participated in a focus group (Appendix C) to explore their knowledge of healthy practices. Learners were given the opportunity to talk in groups of 6 about healthy practices they knew or observed at home and in the community. I summarized all the responses on the board and later transcribed them (see research record: data). After that each learner was given a worksheet where to answer questions related to the topic. That was done through questionnaire form in which every learner put down his/her ideas ( Appendix E).

After the focus group, I gave the learners the task of conducting interviews with their parents about their ways of doing things to promote healthy living practices (Appendix F). The next day there was a report back on the findings to the class. The teacher recorded the information on the chalkboard. The outcome was a list of healthy practices in school and at home that were discussed in expectation of learning more in the classroom (See chalkboard summary in Appendix G & N)

I found out that learners were enthusiastic to share their local knowledge about the healthy practices they knew. This knowledge was evident from the focus group discussion. My coding of the focus group transcription revealed 15 *indlela zokuphila* (healthy living practices) that were then ordered for possible use in a learning programme

1. *Ukuhlamba izandla* (Washing of hands) Note: Early in the process this was identified as a strong possibility for a learning programme.

2. *Ukukhulisa izityalo ekhaya nasesikolweni* (grow vegetables in school and at home).
3. *Ukucoca indlu ngesepha namanzi* (clean house with water and soap).
4. *Ukungaziphathi izilonda ngezandla ndingazinxibanga igloves* (not to touch wounds without putting gloves on).
5. *Xa ndiphethe isilonda somntu ndihlambe izandla* (must wash hands after touching someone's wound)
6. *Ukuhlamba impahla zethu* (wash our clothes)
7. *Ukuhlamba izandla kukhusela izifo* (washing of hands prevents diseases from spreading)
8. *Ekhaya sifundiswa ukucoca izindlu esikolweni sifundiswa ukufunda, ukubhala, nokubala* (at home we are taught to clean the house and at school we learn to read, write and count).
9. *Esikolweni sifundiswa ukuchola amaphepha, ukutshayela indlu, ukucoca isikolo neyadi* (at school we are taught to collect papers, to sweep floors, to clean the school yard)
10. *Izindlu zendlu zangasese nesikolo zidinga ukucocwa ukuze intsholongwane zingasasazeki kwindawo yonke* (our toilets and school need to be cleaned so that germs do not spread everywhere).
11. *Asinazisinki kwitoilet zethu ukuhlamba izandla zethu* (we need basins in our toilets in order to wash our hands).
12. *Umama undifundisa ukufunda, nokubala, nokubhala isiXhosa ekhaya* (my mother teaches me to write and read isiXhosa at home).
13. *Umama undifundisa ukubaluleka kwemifuno ehluma egadinin kwimpilo yam* (my mother teaches me the importance of fresh grown vegetables in my body).
14. *Ekhaya asilwi* (at home we do not fight)
15. *Ekhaya sifundiswe ukuthandana, nokusebenza kunye singalwi* (at home we are taught not to fight, to love one another, and to work together without fighting)

16. Ekhaya sifundiswa ukuzenzela izinto ngokunokwethu, ukuzenza ngendlela efanelekileyo neqoqekileyo (to do things on our own, in an organized way and the right way)

17. Ekhaya sifundiswe ukuzihlamba izandla phambi kokuphatha ukutya okanye intsholongwane zizakuhlala ezandleni zandise izifo (at home we wash our hands before touching food or germs will multiply into one's hands causing more diseases) (see FGLS for focus group learners summary and mind map in Appendix N).

It was notable that the learners had a good grasp of the oral language necessary to represent these ideas but not the written in all cases. The theme of washing and cleaning was clear in their responses but the scope of their discussion extended to living well together and being able to do things for themselves and for others. This provided a very rich start to our explorations and clearly brought the topic of healthy living forward as something worthwhile to work on. The focus group allowed me to select possible topics and language to work within the lessons that I was planning but I needed to know what the learners were taking away from the focus group 'mind mapping' activity (See Appendix J for an example of a learner summary and J2 for the research summary) By having focus group and including mind mapping I was able to generate research data from the learning activity and then move on to the next activity that was part of the exploration of learner prior knowledge that I needed to develop the learning programme.

In the task learners listed healthy living practices at home and at school (Appendix J). The task revealed different views about their lifestyles and individual understanding. The task allowed me the opportunity to see what healthy living practices were picked up or not covered in detail by all of the learners. In response to the task I realized as expected that views were different, as learners come from different home environments. All the tasks that learners did at this stage assisted me to select a topic for the learning programme. Hence the topic of hand washing was dealt with in a mind map form where all the ideas and discussions were put down (see Appendix G). I needed to know more about this topic from learners' home environments and their experiences hence some of the questions were put forward during home task interview with their parents prior to this summary (Appendix J).

Prior to this mind-mapping learners were very excited about the process of developing questions on the chalkboard so that each learner could have opportunity of interviewing their parents (see Appendix F). The transcription of questions from the board by learners was an important learning activity, as in the process they had to read questions as they wrote them silently or otherwise. The requirement of the task was clear, learners had to read the questions to their parents and wrote the responses down on their own at home. The process was lengthy but the idea behind the process was to build the language and literacy acquisition that was necessary for the module I was planning through this research with the learners.

All the information generated in the focus group, individual questionnaire forms, home task was brought into discussion and noted down as a summary on the chalkboard (Appendix N). This was done as a home language literacy lesson and care was taken that every finding was included and recorded on the chalkboard. The discussion was also recorded on a tape recorder and transcribed for later analysis so that I could verify the summary on the chalkboard. As mentioned above, this research process was both a way of generating data for analysis and working with the learners to inform the starting points for the learning programme. The advantage of generating the information in this way was that the learners had experience of the key words that they would need for the learning activities that were to follow.

During classroom deliberation before learners put down their ideas on the questionnaire, FGL1 voiced that in her home washing dishes immediately after having supper is a lesson learnt by everybody to prevent germs from spreading overnight. At the same time her mother taught her to wake up early and make her bed before preparing for school every day. On the same note FGL2 was amazed with all the chores FGL1 was expected to do before and after school because in her home her mother did all the chores for her.

The above encounter indicates the importance of learners' prior experiences and knowledge learned at home as a foundation for new learning to be learnt at school. Here the prior learning of learners was acknowledged and embraced as it comes from

different home environments where teaching takes place before learners reach school age.

#### **4.2.3 Information on prior knowledge about healthy living practices from learners' oral presentation**

Responses from learners' ideas indicated that some learners knew less about healthy practices and the information about germs spreading diseases was lacking. Some learners' responses indicated that they were not staying with their parents, other learners' responses revealed they did not know as much as others because their parents did everything for them. FGL3 in response to Question 3, how do you make sure you do not spread germs when washing hands in the same basin? Her response was:

*Xa uvasa izandla kufuneka amanzi uwakhelele ngaphandle ukuze ungangcolisi amanzi anagaphakathi kwisitya sokuvasela ukuze nomnye umntu akwazi ukuwasebenzisa lo manzi. Kwakhona umama wam uthi ngalondlela, wonga amanzi ukuze angapheli, kanjalo xa uvasela ngaphandle ufumisa umhlaba ungomi. [It is important to wash your hands by scooping the water from the basin instead of washing inside the basin thus spoiling the water in the basin with your dirty hands. My mother said we must manage water wisely and also when one washes her hands outside the basin, used water wet the soil].*

FGL1 responded that:

*Mna andizivasi izandla esityeni sokuvasela ndikha amanzi ngebhotile ndicele omnye umntwana andigalelele ezandleni. La manzi asetyenziswa ngumntu wonke kwesasitya sokuhlambela ndicinga ukuba abamdaka kakhulu, andiqondi ukuba akanazintsholongwane. [I do not wash my hands in the same basin. I pour water into an empty bottle thereafter ask my friend to help me wash my hands by pouring water into my hands. The water used by everybody in the basin tend to be too dirty, surely germs are in that water].*

This allowed me to see that the learners had many different experiences and ideas that were not always accurate. To address misconceptions I had to design a lesson plan

that is inclusive of Life Orientation and Literacy to clarify these misconceptions through written language and healthy practices. As a result learner experiences were extended through a creative activity where they were asked to draw *intsholongwane* (germs). This activity to draw dirt as imaginary germs generated a lot of excitement and a collection of pictures (See Appendix H1). It was also extended to a worksheet (See Appendix H2). As a teacher-researcher a more explanatory discussion around germs was extended to ensure learners has a more depth and insight around these activities.

#### **4.2.3.1 Information on health living practices from take home tasks**

I categorized learners' responses according to themes as these varied from one learner to another. For example, one learner mentioned that her mother emphasized the importance of boiling water and letting it cool before drinking because she does not trust the chemicals that were used to treat water. She also mentioned clean water only comes from the rain these days because even wells might have underground water from the industrial area especially in a nearby industrial area of Berlin near the school.

The responses from the focus group, questionnaires and take-home task were all summarized on the board, and paved the way for the interview work to be done with gogos (elders). The review of NCS documents also enabled me to identify outcomes that would be taken into the line of debate I would have with the gogos (elders) in the community. I thus went to gogos (elders) with findings from learners' responses about what knowledge of healthy practices did learners already have before the lesson (prior knowledge).

#### **4.2.4 Focus group interviews on healthy living practices with gogos (elders)**

I worked with elders whose knowledge about IK is known in the community (see Chapter 1). I visited them in their place of work, where they teach other people how to sustain their living through sewing, knitting, gardening and cooking indigenous food. Firstly I negotiated access through their spokesperson to allow me the opportunity to talk to the gogos simultaneously. During the visit, like in the olden days we all sat in a circle to allow everybody to see each other when talking. The first thing they did was to open the occasion with a short prayer which was followed by

welcoming me with a cup of tea. We greeted each other by shaking hands whilst everybody was having a cup of tea. The spokesperson introduced me to the elders and gave reasons why I was there. Thereafter the chairwoman welcomed my presence and allowed me the opportunity to talk to the whole group.

Before I talked, I asked permission to use my tape recorder and explained why I had to use it. The tape recorder allowed me the opportunity to listen intensively to their deliberations instead of taking down notes while listening at the same time. Moreover the tape recorder enabled me the opportunity to listen intensively to important sounds and pauses that were crucial for this study. For example from the experience of working with parents, some are not talkative as others, nodding their heads when the other is talking is a sign of agreeing with what is being said. The other nodding goes with the mh!! sound, that means the other elder needed to add value to what has been said at that instant. Then the mh!!mh!! mh!!! sounds mean what is said needs to be emphasized in a particular way to showcase its importance. Therefore the tape recorder helped me to pick up those important conversations and that enabled me to make sense of what was being said.

I next introduced myself as a teacher-researcher, who is concerned about the lack of skills, values attitudes and knowledge in the classroom. A teacher-researcher, who is also interested in linking everyday knowledge learners use in their community, home and places of play (playgrounds) to school knowledge so that school knowledge can be meaningful and make sense to learners. From experience of being a teacher acknowledging that local knowledge enriches and deepens learners' understanding also allows the opportunity for (new knowledge) to make sense, and acknowledges that healthy living practices that exist in the local community are meaningful. As a researcher I was also cautious of not assuming that all local is not new knowledge, what was imperative was to link both school and local knowledge. I also explained the importance of working with gogos (elders) in order to find their perspectives in relation to what they perceived as local healthy practices in the community.

The way they perceive things (indigenous ways of doing things) would allow me the opportunity to understand learners in my classroom better because most learners come from different home environments. Understanding their way of doing things (local

knowledge) that exists in the community would enable me to link the knowledge learnt at school with the local knowledge to strengthen learners' understanding. I also explained that most learners in my classroom were already involved directly with environmental issues such as bad sanitation, water shortage, pollution, climate change, poverty and health issues in their home environments as they head families or come from orphanages.

From the experience of working with parents the past three years prior to the case study (see Chapter1), I knew asking elders (gogos) questions directly would make them shy away, and the richness of their experiences and their way of doing things would be lost as well. I rather invited them to share their knowledge about healthy living practices their own way, in this case (hand washing to avoid the spreading of diseases). From the elders (gogos) I wanted to find out what indigenous knowledge of healthy living practices exist in the local community and what measures they have sustain these healthy practices all these years to promote health issues. Lastly I asked elders what could work in my classroom to promote healthy living practice. And also which strategies still work that could be used that worked well for them all these years when dealing with young children.

As I have mentioned above to conduct the interview using a fixed line of questions did not work. What worked, as I anticipated, was simply to invite them to share their ways of doing things (local knowledge) in relation to healthy living practices. As a result opinions came from different directions to enrich the interview session. The first opinion came from (GFG1) who said that understanding and taking care of the surrounding environment was what her mother taught her and emphasised during her young days. She said:

*Ukukhula kwethu besifundisiwe ukukhathalela indalo ukuze nathi isikhathalele. Besifundiswe ukugcina amakhaya ethu ecocekile ukuze intsholongwane zingasasazeki ukungcola kugqibe ilizwe. Indawo yokuphekela ibigadwe kakhulu kucoceko kunye nendawo yangasese kusithiwa zezona ndawo zigcina ukungcola zandise intsholongwane ngenxa yempukane .[when we grew up we were taught how to take care of our environment in order for the environment to take care of us. We were taught to prevent germs from*

spreading by keeping our homes clean to prevent dirt from spreading throughout. Our parents were strict to ensure our kitchens were kept clean, dishes were washed immediately after each meal. The *indongas* which were used as toilets were mentioned as places that must be far from homes to prevent diseases.]

Almost all elders seconded her, that promoting healthy living practices was not only practiced in their homes but also in the school environment and was regarded as part of the community's responsibility as well. GFG1 said all parents in the community would take turns to clean the schools with:

*ubulongwe beenkomo obudinyaniswe nomhlaba namanzi ukutyabeka izindlu zakugqiba zivetwe ngekalika emhlophe. Isikolo sasijikelezwa ngocingo ukuba likho okanye amahlamvu omnga ukuze ibhokhwe negusha nenkomo zingangeni zizigudle ezindogeni zezindlu ziwe kuba kaloku ezozikolo yayikwazindawo zokudibanela imicimbi yelali. Ezizindlu bezisilingwa ngengca eyomileyo ukuqiniseka ukuba zifudumele ebusika ehlotyeni zipholile. Ngaphakathi bezisindwa ngobulongwe ukuze zihlale zipholile nokugxotha impukane zingahlali.* [cow dung with soil and water combined together was used to cement walls with bare hands and thereafter painted with white kalika (white wash) to beautify the school. The school would be surrounded with barbed wire or *amahlamvu omnga* (*acacia*) to stop cows, animals and goats from entering the schoolyard. Because schools houses were built with *izitena zodaka* (*bricks made from soil*). Parents were cautious of animals who liked to *ukuzigudla* (*scratch*) themselves to these houses, measures would be taken to prevent such incidences. These schools were warmed by using long grass to make ceiling as well as use cow dung to clean the floors and prevent spreading of diseases through dirt].

At this point it was necessary to highlight that modern knowledge should not be left out as bacteria these days are everywhere. Using liquid Dettol soap for example is useful whether you pour it in the same basin that learners used instead of using a bar soap which carries more germs or not using soap at all.

Another interesting healthy living practice that elders shared was the firm relationship their parents forged with school. Schools were regarded as part of the community. What children learnt at school was in collaboration with the needs of the community. For example their parents would voice their opinions about which subject should be included in the school curriculum and the reason for that. Agriculture as a subject was taken seriously in order to produce agricultural officers that would plough back the knowledge at the end of schooling to benefit communities. Other subjects that were valued at school were cooking, sports, sewing, and knitting. Their parents would volunteer to come to school on certain days to share their knowledge. During ploughing and hoeing seasons their parents would assist at school.

I had to intervene from time to time to direct them to healthy living practices that could work nowadays to prevent diseases such as cholera and diarrhoea among others. It was amazing to find out that all gogos (elders) had never heard the word cholera in their time and, few experienced diseases that were said to be caused by unhealthy practices such as cleanliness (washing dishes regularly to avoid dirt that spread diseases). GFG2 emphasized that in their own time they had never experienced an excessive spread of any diseases because promotion of health was stressed. They never had new cleaning detergents such as (jik, powdered soap) like these days but preventing diseases their own ways worked. For example diseases were prevented by undertaking the following measures:

1. To wash dishes after every meal with *intyolantyola* (manmade soap) and rinse them with clean water.
2. Dishes were washed outside the house during the day, and they were not wiped with towel instead they were *qubuda* (placed down to drain water into the ground). This allowed sunlight from the sun to dry them and we now also know that this practice kills any remaining bacteria.
3. *Uthuthu* (wood ash) was used to shine pots to avoid any excess of oil from cooking.
4. Clean teeth were their priority as it was known to spread diseases because there was no toothpaste they used wood ash or fine red brick to clean them.

5. Washing hands was regarded as crucial because there were no utensils such as fork, knives, spoons therefore hands were used to do everything including eating with them.
6. Immediately after one comes from the *indonga's* (a place used as toilets) he had to wash hands before entering the house. The water to wash hands was placed next to *ixaba* (a place next to the garden where fire is kindled).
7. Drinking water fetched from the rivers, wells, was sometimes boiled but normally stored in clay pots so that it was fresh (sweet).

According to elders the above measures enabled them to live a healthy life style thus preventing them from experiencing many spreading diseases like today, such as cholera. Elders revealed that their parents taught them to take care of their surrounding environment including their community.

Elders shared that they were taught to wash hands first thing in the morning before preparing food in the house or after greeting visitors and sharing food. In that way health was promoted and diseases were prevented, there was another teaching that during the night hands were all over the place and uncontrollable. Therefore hands were perceived as carriers of diseases and were dangerous to one's well-being.

On the same note shaking hands was regarded as a sign of respect by elders, as a result children, were taught to wash them regularly to ensure everyone was safe and secured from any disease. The other teaching and learning was that shaking hands by family members in the morning signified a well mannered family, it also symbolizes giving thanks to the Almighty who brought them together in peace the next day. The importance of hand washing from an indigenous point enabled the theme of healthy living to have a place in the Life Orientation Learning Outcome1 health promotion.

This indigenous healthy practice added value to the relationship between cleanliness and well-being was practiced for safety reasons. Another point shared was that water scooped from wells was used for drinking purposes because wells were surrounded with fences to avoid animals from drinking there as well. Nevertheless the fetched water was strained with a white cotton recycled from another use, before it was drunk to avoid small tadpoles and other small insects being swallowed when drinking water. The water scooped from the rivers was used for other uses in the household but

cautiously not for drinking purposes. If river water was to be used for drinking during drought seasons it was boiled, the role of boiling water was to safeguard people from any germs or bacteria that might cause them to get sick. People were cautious of dirt that stayed along the riverbanks especially even after slight rain. The awareness of a healthy lifestyle coupled with the prevention of diseases stood the test of time because they know that river water posed a danger to their well-being. As a result it was a norm in the villages that after heavy rains people must avoid river water, as it was regarded as harmful to their health.

Elders emphasized the importance of healthy living practices to avoid spreading of diseases. Sustainable development was mentioned as a stepping stone that enabled their indigenous ways of doing things to exist all these years, hence according to elders they never experienced *uqhambuko dubulo lwezifo* (*burst of any diseases*). Elders showed an interest when they were asked to share their ways of doing things with learners in my classroom and as a result they decided to select three elders who would work with me directly and thereafter report back to them.

#### **4.2.4.1. Willingness of elders to work with learners in my classroom**

When I asked elders what helped them all these years to sustain their ways of doing things, and their healthy living practices, the response was short and simple:

*sasimamela ngembeko oko sikufundiswayo sigcine oko besikuxelelwe sikwenze ngembeko ngokunokwethu* [we listened with respect to the teachings of the elders, and we practiced what we learnt by doing].

One (GFG3) mentioned that as a young child she enjoyed listening to her grandmother sharing stories, what she liked about these stories was that there was an element of education, information, enjoyment and fun. These stories were told during the night when everybody was relaxed after a long day which was normally filled with household chores. It was the duty of the elders to tell these stories since they were unable to do chores during the day. GFG3 realized that her elders were telling these stories as part of teaching them how things were supposed to be done and how important it was to their parents to know that their way of doing things would be sustained for future generations. They were taught to be feel proud about their own

culture and identity. The stories were told to capture their imagination, thus leaving them with messages of hope and the will to do good things in life.

The whole focus group members shared that these stories were shared among friends the following day thus creating a wealth of undocumented knowledge. In a way these stories created a body of knowledge that ensured children were learning a vast range of ways, from each and every elder in the community because elders mentioned that groups of children were formed in which these stories would be shared creating a wealth of knowledge. As much as I knew how much impact *intsomi* [storytelling] was in capturing learners' curiosity over the past three years telling stories in my classroom, listening to the elders valuing storytelling at their age added value to this amazing strategy.

In the process of interaction with elders it was decided that a storyline which encompassed hand washing as a topic to promote healthy living practices would be formed. The interesting part about the storyline was that it was place-based, inclusive of township, location and farm culture in order to link with what learners are used to do and observe in their home environments. That is how the storyline was formed and it was linked to the curriculum framework (see Appendix M1- isiXhosa & M4 - English)

#### **4.2.5. How the document analysis, focus group of learners and gogos informed the planning of a programme in my classroom**

Following the preliminary document analysis, work with learners and interviews with elders, I gave attention to how the information that I had generated could be used with the curriculum document to design topics on life skills and literacy framework to be used in the second phase of the study. This was undertaken from my analysis of the curriculum document where I drew on the data from the work with learners and elders. This allowed me to open up possibilities and to plan the topics on healthy living practices. In the representation of the process that follows I have outlined the information that came up and aligned this with the curriculum policy by referencing to the key ideas in the curriculum.

In attempting to draw together the first phase of the study I noted that during the focus group interview with elders, one elder mentioned that as much as they relied and respect their old ways of doing things, learning from the young is refreshing and healthy to them. In reality *Gogos* also learnt a lot of new things from the learners as well. *Gogos* realized things around them were no longer the same, nor would ever be the same again. The realization of learning new ways of doing things from the young learners was transforming them as well.

The notion is that in the Life Orientation the central point is the development of learners holistically the same way elders' parents prepared them holistically for the world that was ever changing, the same way the elders were willing to share the knowledge with learners. The willingness shown by elders to come into the classroom is part of cultural capital from their parents. The intention of the elders was not to lose their way of doing things but they were willing to learn new things from learners as an addition to their knowledge.

When the researcher was analysing the curriculum it was evident in the policy document that local knowledge needs to be revisited and included in all the learning programmes. The Life Skill learning concerned itself with social, personal, intellectual, emotional, and physical growth of learners, and the way in which these facts are interrelated. In essence the focus of Life Orientation is the development of self in society South Africa (2004). The interest shown by *gogos* during focus group interviews is the evidence that what learners learnt at school should be linked to local knowledge that consist of everyday knowledge of learners as well as everyday knowledge of elders. *Gogos* (elders) emphasized that their children should be developed in other areas of learning, such as learning to plough, to knit, to sow their uniforms and assist them *gogos* (elders) in their communities. *Gogos* (elders) mentioned that their centre (where they work during the day) should be used as the place of learning so that the next generation (young children) should learn how *gogos* (elders) do things, rather than play the whole afternoon after school.

The purpose of Life Orientation is to develop in learners skills in order for them to relate positively and make a contribution to family, community and society, while

practicing the values embedded in the Constitution. During the learners' focus group, learners voiced their contribution in their families, one learner stated that:

*mna ndiyamncedisa umama ukucoca indlu nokuvasa izitya* (I help my mother to clean the house and wash dishes).

Also Life Orientation enables learners to make informed, morally responsible and accountable decisions about their health and environment (2000: 4), learners were informed about health issues when they mentioned what needed to be done in their toilets in order to avoid spreading of germs as well as to keep their school environment healthy. Learners said:

*kwindawo yethu yangasese sidinga isinki zokuhlamba izandla ukuze singahlambi kwibucket elinye sonke.* [in our toilets we need basins to wash our hands after use so that we do not use the same bucket to wash our hands].

During our discussions about hand washing learner s' responses showed more growth in terms of responsibilities because they knew what needed to be done to promote health practices.

*Akufunekanga sivasele izandla zethu phakathi kwisitya sokuhlambela, kufuneka siwakhe amanzi sivasele izandla zethu ngaphandle ukuze amanzi achithakele emhlabeni ukuze singosulelani ngezifo* [we must not wash our hands inside the bucket rather we must scoop the water and wash our hands outside the basin so that used water should be poured on the soil, also to avoid spreading diseases].

Learners learnt that spreading of germs is not only caused by not washing hands regularly, but to wash dirty hands inside one basin every time one washed her/his hands was detrimental to health practices. Scooping the water out of the basin was the better option for them as do have basin to run water. Another lesson was to use water again to water the garden instead of throwing it out, even if there was no garden scooped water wet the soil and would keep the dust down.

The definition, feature and scope of Life Orientation emphasises the development of self in society. It is stated that learners are empowered to achieve and extend their

personal potential positively to society, and to cope with and respond to the challenges in their world DoE, (2000: 5). Learners in my classroom are faced with many with challenges such as scarcity of water in their homes that resulted in some learners coming to school unwashed. Learners also play the role of parents to their siblings in the absence of their parents and come to school with smiling faces ready to learn and contribute to learning by sharing their experiences with everyone in the classroom (see Chapter 1).

Learning Outcomes (LO) 1 in the Life Orientation curriculum respond to health promotion, social development, personal development and physical development. LO1 states that “sound health practices, and an understanding of the relationship between health and environment, can improve the quality of life and well-being of learners” (DoE, 2003: 5). Working with gogos (elders) made me realized the importance of their contributions to the welfare of the environment. Stories told in the classroom were educational, informative, encouraged intergenerational scope, dealt with environmental education and rooted in mother tongue. These stories allowed opportunities for learners to engage and interact in the storytelling through intent-listening and dialogue. The story was meaningful and made sense to learners because the learning was situated in their context, moreover gogos (elders) included nearby villages as examples, thus engaging them further.

LO 2 emphasizes social relationships, diverse cultures and religions as crucial because individuals are seen as part of the broader community (DoE 2000:18). Therefore learning about their own identities as well as others in harmony strengthened these relationships. The interaction between learners and gogos strengthened their relationship. The enthusiasm shown by both learners and gogos when visiting each other’s sites of learning was amazing. They worked well with each other, learnt from each other and complemented each other. Although ways of doing things in relation to learners and gogos contexts is different, learning from each other was the best thing that happened to both parties. There was evidence of improvement in learners’ performance (read, write, know and count) as a result of intergenerational knowledge. Social relationships were also evident, school learners as a whole voluntarily and willingly visited gogos in their site after school to share what they were doing during the day.

LO 3 sees personal development as central to learning as it equips learners to contribute effectively to community and society (DoE 2000: p. 20). The relationship forged between school and community enabled learners to learn from the elders and vice versa. As stated above learners showed interest by visiting the elders more often and the bond with children was formed as gogos looked forward to learning new things every time. In that way learners were contributing to community and society in a small way and they developed personal relationships. At the same time the notion stated in LO 4 that play, movement, games and sport contribute to physical growth and development was evident during gogos storytelling. Gogos used gestures, and sometimes acted the part thus showing the importance of movement and play in learning.

During gogos storytelling, learners were encouraged to learn through enjoyment, gogos shared experiences such as:

*xa siyokukha amanzi besivuka kusasa sileqe ukufika kuqala, lo nto ke besiyenza ngokushiyselana apha endleleni* (when we went to fetch water we would wake up early trying to reach the well first, that was done by walking fast or running).

Grade 3 LO1 AS 1 “compares healthy and poor dietary habits and describes the effects of such habits on personal health” (DoE, 2000: 5). Gogos take pride in their way of doing things by maintaining healthy habits such as eating healthily grown vegetables and fruits. Exercise is part of their daily routine, hence they encouraged the young ones to walk, play and grow their own vegetables. During interaction gogos questioned the menu of the school as they regard it as not relevant to learners if it does not include indigenous food. One gogo stressed that beans alone gives strength and endurance to young people as well as stamina. *Imifino (wild spinach and mealie-mealie)* protects people from illness as it contains goodness (nutrients and vitamins).

LO1, AS 2 expect learners to be involved in recycling projects and it explains how recycling contributes to environmental health (DoE, 2000: 17). During the

interaction with the elderly, recycling process was mentioned as part of their way of doing things.

*kudala sasingenazo indawo zokugalela inkunkuma yethu, into esasiyenza sasigrumba umngxunya omde sigalele inkunkuma ukuze ifume emva kwexesha sasiyisabenzisa kwakhona ezigadini zethu njengesichumisi.* (in the olden days we did not have buckets for waste disposal. We would dig a huge trench and put the waste there to ferment and used it again after it fermented as fertilizer in our gardens).

Learners also shared how they deal with waste by stating how they put it into different containers at school for recycling and reuse.

LO3, AS 3 discusses myths surrounding communicable diseases and the causes and prevention of these (p. 5). The inclusion of communicable diseases in the Life Orientation programme created a platform for debate and discussion as it paved the way for the topic of hand washing. gogos in the focus group emphasized cleanliness as part of indigenous healthy practices including the care of the environment. The storyline was based on how people in the olden days took care of their environments by owning and ensuring rivers were not polluted. Water fetched from the rivers, and wells, was treated first by boiling it, or pouring in wood ash, jik, *ikalika* to ensure the water was dirt free.

#### **4.2.5.1.Compiling the module for phase 2**

In the Foundation Phase “teachers are encouraged to develop and implement their own Learning Programmes, and this should happen within the policy framework provided in the RNCS” (DoE, 2003: 2). For this study I had to work within the policy framework which specifies Learning Outcomes (LO) and Assessment Standards (AS) as spelt out in the NCS into planned teaching, learning and assessment activities for a phase. The Learning Programmes “spells out what core knowledge and concepts could be used to attain the Learning Outcomes for the phase. It also considers different contexts and local realities, the needs of the community, and school and learners (DoE, 2003: 2).

The analysis of learners and the gogos focus group enabled the study to take shape in selecting LO and AS for this study. As I have mentioned in Chapter 3 I selected Life

Orientation as the basis for other learning areas. My focus was to address on environmental issues in language acquisition (read, write and know). LO1, AS 3 allows the opportunity for learners to make informed decisions and learn more about communicable diseases, what causes these diseases and how to prevent them. Contextualizing curriculum around that opens opportunities for learners to relate better and make sense of what is learnt as it has a connection to the real issues they were familiar with. Hence the gogos when narrating the story gave examples about the places where they live.

LO3 expects the learner “to acquire life skills to achieve and extend personal potential to respond effectively to challenges in his/her world”. In same LO3, AS3 “explains how she or he copes with challenging emotions including dealing with people living with disease and illness” (DoE, 2000: 20-21). LO3 expects learners to share acquired skills and extend personal potential to those in need in school and the community at large.

Because the study also seeks to respond to teaching progression across other learning areas Literacy (home language and additional language) and Numeracy, other LOs and ASs from these learning areas were considered. In Numeracy LO 5 the learner is expected “to collect, summarize, display and critically analyze data in order to draw conclusions and make predictions, and to interpret and determine chance variations” (DoE, 2000: 17.), Whilst AS1 “collects data (alone and / or as a member of a group or team) in the classroom and school environment to answer questions posed by the teacher and class” (DoE, 2000: 17-18). The following questions were formulated to strengthen the content knowledge. How much water does each classroom use per day to wash hands and how much water is left in the bucket after school.

LO5, AS1 in Numeracy created the opportunity for learners to work together or alone to deal with environment issues hands on. As a result learners were actively involved with data handling to make meaning and relate it to their homes and communities. In responding to the expectations of the outcome, learners managed to audit use of water in each classroom and they came up with the idea of suggesting how many litres of water to pour in the bucket for each classroom. They made a graph for each classroom and stated how many litres each classroom used per day. The findings for

this activity depended on how many children were in each classroom on each day, and how many learners in each classroom used water wisely each day. FGL3 mentioned that:

*Into endiyibonileyo mna mam yeyokuba singabantwana besikolo amanzi siyamosha, sigcwalisa isitya sokuhlambela sakugqiba siwachithe amanzi amaninzi naphina. Into ebesinokuyenza bhetele kukuhlambela ngasegadini ukuze lo manzi awele ngakwizityalo bhetele.* [what I have noticed is that as children we waste water, we filled our buckets with water there after threw away a lot of used water everywhere. Yet what we could do is to put our washing buckets next to the garden so that water used could feed our plants in the garden instead of throwing it away.]

LO5, AS 6 expects the learner “to read, interpret and report an information in own and peer’s representations of data”(DoE, 2000: 22-23). It enabled learners to work on their own and encouraged them to enter into dialogue ( talk, read, write, report and listen). Engaging learners in the whole process opened opportunities for them to learn different skills such as to read the data, to interpret it and to report it. Contextualized curriculum enabled learners to increase their skills, knowledge, values and attitudes, thus improving their performance. Hence in the Foundation Phase integration of LO and AS strengthens teaching and learning.

For the sake of space in this study I could not elaborate further on all the LOs and ASs in the learning areas that shaped the study but I had to design the learning programme, content and activities which was followed by the lesson plan as mentioned above. Below is an account of the implementation of the Life Orientation and Literacy module.

#### **4.3. Phase 2: An account of the implementation of Life Orientation and Literacy module**

##### **4.3.1. Story line implemented by gogos**

After I selected suitable LOs and ASs for the module, gogos told learners the story in the classroom based on healthy practices and contextualized knowledge (see Appendix D2). The story line was based on the topic of hand washing as a healthy

practice to prevent illnesses such as cholera and diarrhoea. Since hand washing is an old indigenous practice elders were able to relate the story well to their way of life. They brought tools they were going to use such as *ingqayi* (a wooden small bucket), *iemele* (a small enamel bucket) among other things. Learners were seated in a circle that represents unity and pride. As had happened during my focus group encounter with gogos, they started the teaching with a short prayer and the gogos sat in the centre facing all the children. The story started in its original oral saying *chosi! chosi! ndingaphumi impondo* (let me not grow horns as I'm about to tell the story during the day)

Before they started their way of doing things (storytelling), I was struck by the similarity to the school's way of doing things whereby gogos introduced the story by asking questions to find out their previous knowledge in relation to the topic. FGL1 asked this question *yintoni ucoceko* [what is cleanliness]? Another question was *kutheni kubalulekile ukuzicoca nokucoca amakhaya ethu* [why is it important to clean ourselves and our homes]. After the question and answer session, the story began.

During the storytelling elders would pause and ask questions trying to ensure all the learners were following the storyline. New words and difficult words were explained and learners were also invited to participate by asking questions around the story. gogos would emphasize the points where they wanted learners to make a note. For example the importance of washing hands thoroughly led to elders demonstrating the old way of scooping water from the basin instead of washing them inside the same basin. gogos also explained to learners the importance of placing each classroom basins next to the garden in order to feed the soil with used water and save water in the process. The old way of scooping the water from the basin with your hands, was demonstrated to ensure spilling water fed plants or soil instead of going to waste. The notion of scooping water when washing hands was mentioned by FGL1 (see above) during classroom deliberation as an observed process at home.

The other important note elders added to the story was the importance of washing hands because of its many uses such as shake hands when meeting a visitor or a

stranger. Eating with hands and shaking hands were shared as indigenous practices that need proper care of hand washing.

Water management was also stressed as one of sustainable indigenous practice. Learners were reminded of the long way gogos. I had to go to fetch water using enamel buckets which they had to carry over their heads until there was enough for household use. That means they were trained to use water sparingly and grey water was also used for other purposes, otherwise they had to go back to the river again until it was enough. Because of that water was managed well, no spillage was tolerated nor was wasting water allowed. Drinking water was fetched from the wells in the morning only, as water dripped more slowly during the day than in the morning. The well water was preserved for drinking purposes only.

The story was based around two communities that looked after their environment to ensure that the water in rivers, wells and, dams were kept clean by surrounding them with fences. As elders were narrating the story learners were listening intensively in order to gain momentum of the story as they had to rewrite the story in their home language at a later stage. Explanation of new words by gogos was provided and that enabled learners to listen for meaning and enjoyment. The process also strengthened the link of school knowledge and local knowledge thus contributing to relevant knowledge and contextualized curriculum. They explained the words *gogos* are using at home enabling us to all understand them better and to use them meaningfully in speaking and writing. As noted above the process was preparing learners to write their own version of the story after intergenerational knowledge was presented.

#### **4.3.2. Rewriting of the story by learners**

The decision for learners to discuss the story within groups first, was taken amongst ourselves (teacher and learners) in the classroom to cement the story lines. The next activity was to write the story on their own. That was followed by sharing their writing in groups and, preparing to write one story in each group. That was followed by each group reporting the story to the whole class. After each and every group's report the story was written on the chalkboard as one storyline.

During the writing stages in the classroom I used Zebra Crossing teacher's resource book edited by Yiangou (2007:107). The information generated from the book enabled me to teach learners that:

each piece of writing is like a person, it has a head (beginning), a body (middle), and feet (end/ conclusion). Editing is a very important part of the writing process. When learners completed their writing, get them to read over their work and check it for errors, capital letters, full stops, correct spelling etc

Learners developed many concepts during the rewriting of the story, because the lesson followed guidelines of the curriculum document through LO and AS in the home language learning area (see Appendix N). In reading learners' work I realized that not only had the learners managed to write the story on their own, but they had managed to learn a lot about sustainable practices, relevant knowledge, socio-cultural issues, health practices and a healthy lifestyle. All these themes were related to the research question:

How can curriculum contextualization in an integrated learning in the Foundation Phase contribute to environmental learning with enhanced relevance and literacy?

Below is the assessment of learners' work after they wrote their own stories. Besides acquiring the skill of writing that involved critical thinking, grammatical awareness, legibility and making sense to the reader, environmental issues emerged as a result of intergenerational process. The process enabled contextualized curriculum to make sense to learners by combining 'two bodies of knowledge' into one common understanding and relevance and in that way created a platform for environmental education and learning to have a focal point in the curriculum. Learners not only responded well to the task they also probed for more work to be done in relation to environmental issues that challenged them in real life. Their work showed relevance and meaning to their lives thus work was created in context where learning takes place. For ethical reasons I checked with parents before I mentioned their children's names in this study, they agreed therefore I relate them this way.

#### ***4.3.2.1 Asenomtha's work***

Asenomtha managed to create her own text. She managed to add new words to her vocabulary. Her spelling still needs to be developed. I also noticed the need to work

with her on her language skills in various modes. LO 5 AS 8 in Home Language “expect learners to write with increased legibility and concepts such as handwriting , punctuation marks need to be practiced” (DoE, 2000: 8 ).

*Relevance emerged from Asenomtha’s story.*

*Water taken from the river must be cleaned in order for one to stay healthy.*

*Use of grass or paper instead of toilet paper (**was grass or paper good for the soil**). Water must be scooped from the river in order not to disturb the eco-system in the river as the river is the home aquatic animals. During heavy rains water was not scooped from the river because river banks were also used as sanitation places therefore stools left unattended would be eroded into the river thus making river water unhealthy.*

#### **4.3.2.2 Zintle’s work**

Zintle decided to write her own topic ( *An old story from the gogo’s people*). She managed to expand her vocabulary. Her grammar was well displayed in terms of spelling and sense.

*Relevance emerged from the Zintle’s story*

*Healthy practices is important in everybody’s life. Wash our hands every time after we use them. Clean water came from the wells. Walking was encouraged as it makes people fit and health.*

#### **4.3.2.3 Likhona’s work**

Likhona chose to put her writing in point form, nevertheless she managed to make sense of the story.

*Relevance that emerged from Likhona’s story*

*Hand washing is a healthy practice. Wash hands before and after toilet use.*

*Ash was used as a soap. Wells were surrounded with fence in order for animals not to disturb water. Clinics were scarce and were far away. Water was boiled and poured ash overnight. Importance of scooping water to avoid dirt as well as not to crowd tadpoles in their homestead.*

#### **4.3.2.4 Chulumanco’ work**

He created his own topic- *A Gogos story*. He tried to write in paragraphs, and his vocabulary has advanced.

*Relevance emerged from Chulumanco's story*

*Healthy lifestyle-grow own food. Healthy practices –wash hands, use of indongas far away from homes as toilet. Prevention of diseases –use of clean water, boil water, pour ash overnight, not to fetch water after heavy rains. Sustainability method: use of three legged pot to boil water. Put water in cooled houses smeared with cow's dung. Use of rain water coming from roof tops. Water was cooled in drums by smearing it with cows' dung around and placed under gutters to catch roof rain.*

#### **4.3.2.5 Alulutho' work**

She created her own topic. She managed to write the story with meaningful intact.

*Relevance emerged from Alulutho's story*

*Healthy practices ensures healthy lifestyle e.g. cleanliness-use of clean utensils, wash hands regularly. Socio-cultural –use of ash as a soap, use of far-away places as their toilets. Healthy practices : to fence drinking places to avoid domestic animals to unsettle water for drinking purposes. Relevant information-boil water, pour wood ash, diarrhoea happen as a result of dirty water, use of dirty utensils increase diseases.*

#### **4.3.2.6 Agcobile' work**

Agcobile managed to write legibly and her vocabulary has expanded as a result of this experience.

*Relevance emerged from Agcobile's story*

*healthy practice- cleanliness to avoid spreading of diseases, drinking water was boiled, grass was also used to start fire. Water was cooled by enamel buckets instead of plastic buckets.*

#### **4.3.2.7 Zandile's work**

Zandile's work is clean and clear. Although she did not divide her work in paragraphs her vocabulary and writing skill has expanded.

*Relevance emerged from Zandile's story*

*Cleanliness, responsibility, eat grown vegetables, diseases were prevented before spreading, houses were made of clay soil*

All the learners' work showed that they listened intensively when gogos narrated the story. Their enthusiastic nature was evident as they all took learning from the story. The DoE (2003) policy document (*Teacher's Workbook for Literacy*) explained that Critical Outcome (CO) no 5 which expect learners to communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and /or language skills in various modes will help learners to achieve all six Learning Outcomes (LO) in the Literacy Learning Programme Learning language enable effective communication thus creating space for learners to listen, speak, read, and write effectively. This means being "able to make appropriate responses and being able to interpret the visual, written and spoken communication that learners encounter in their lives" ( DoE, 2003:4). This is what the writing of the story was about and that is why they related to the story and brought their own experiences in the process.

After the story was written by learners (see Appendix K and N for examples) I invited the elders to come and listen to the storyline as it was read by learners in the classroom. During the writing time which lasted for several days I encouraged learners not to forget the new words that elders used in the story. The acquisition of the meaning of words was part of literacy development as well as preparing learners for transferring the knowledge gained into the additional language. New words like *isikhelelelo* (*an enamel dish that was used to scoop water*) *ingqame* or *ixaba* (*a place near the garden where wood fire is placed*), *indonga*, (*bank along to the river*) *ukusinda*, (*to smear the house especially rondavel or hut with cow's dung*).

Based on the storyline, one of the goals of the study was to investigate healthy living practices that exist in the community, the involvement and sharing of knowledge by elders was the result of such investigation. The willingness of elders to be part of the process of 'listening to write' 'write to read' and 'read to learn' added value to culture and intergenerational process.

As mentioned above learners witnessed elders demonstrating washing of hands to emphasize the concept of cleanliness. It was proper therefore to cement the knowledge gained by dramatizing the story. In the Foundation Phase learners learn

better when they are actively involved (hands-on) and drama does that well especially if they own the project.

#### **4.3.3. Dramatisation of the story**

Dramatization was another activity to emphasize what learners learnt through the process. Another point was that during drama preparation I insisted that conversation sentences must also be written in additional language as well. The key point here was that drama time has a way of capturing learners' imagination thus creating a platform for learners to work together in a competitive spirit. Mixing learners (boys and girls) in groups served that purpose well.

On that note, first learners were given opportunity to own the project by working in pairs and choosing their own characters. Characters to be used were written on the board and pairs selected different characters to ensure the story was well covered. That means characters in each pair would consolidate the whole story at the end of drama to form one storyline. After that learners worked together in pairs to prepare conversations between characters of their choice using full sentences. Two or three sentences for each character were enough, then they practiced the conversation and performed for the rest of class including other characters from other pairs.

That was followed by pairs forming groups whereby the same storyline of characters would be in the same group. For example women of the location going to fetch water together would be in one group. Another example was that nurses and health workers would be in the same group when children were taken to the clinic for observation and to prevent further diseases. All the characters selected were based on the story, with my support to ensure new information and local knowledge was linked for meaningful learning.

The next step was the combination of groups into one classroom drama. Learners managed to divide the work among themselves on their own. For example collection of apparatus for use, selection of role players, setting the stage was all done by them.

Observing learners working made me realize the importance of opening opportunities for learners to be part of their education, listening to them and creating space for them

to showcase their abilities to improve relevance in their learning. During their deliberations learners managed to select characters amongst themselves by acknowledging each others' strengths not through friendship or otherwise, and that amazed me again and inspired them as well. FGE2 said this during interview:

*Umntwana kufuneka umfundise ukuziqoqosha esemncinane ngelaxesha akhangela ixesha lokwenza izinto phambi kokuba aye esikolweni. Xa enikwe umsebenzi makayazi ukuba kufuneka enze ntoni kanye kanye lo nto makavuke nayo kusasa* (a child must learn to manage herself well at an early age. She must be able to set time to do things before she goes to school. When given the task she must know what is it she is supposed to do, starting from the morning session).

The purpose in Life Orientation is to “empower learners to use their talents to achieve their full physical, intellectual, personal, emotional and social potential”(DoE, 2003:4). That means learners need to be given opportunities to own tasks in order to showcase their talents, in this case study learners managed to select the best learners for each character according to their abilities.

During drama preparation, I observed learners working where, they sat down and formulated strategies on how to do the drama properly. One of the strategies was to use half the time of their break in order to practice their lines. They did everything to ensure they were ready for the presentation. From time to time they checked with me whether they were still working in the right direction in order to achieve their goals. On the same note the working group approach to environmental education and learning rests on acknowledging learners' prior knowledge and their experiences. Drawing from these two is to enhance stewardship inside and outside the classroom. That is what transpired in the classroom.

From the experience of working with learners over the years the best strategy for good work is appraisal, and every learner in my classroom knows that and that encouraged them to do better.

In addition to the notion above, GFG3 during the focus group interview mentioned that:

*Indlela esasisebenza ngayo emakhaya kodwa sasingeva na lo nto kuba  
saisivuyela ukunconywa xa senze into entle. Umakhulu wayesima emnyango  
xa sivela emlanjeni esenzela ukuba asothule ngokwakwe iemele ukuyingenisa  
ngaphakathi esibonga ngeziduko zethu ukuba sizakuza nenkomo kulomzi.  
Ukungcekelela iemele yayiluphawu lokomelela olo nokukhula nathi ke  
besisizimisela ngakumbi ukuze xa sivela ezindlini sivele sesingcekelele kakade.*  
[we worked hard during our young life but that did not deter us from doing  
household chores because we knew our parents were proud of us. We were  
praised for everything we did, one example when we approached our homes  
balancing enamel buckets on our heads without holding them our  
grandmothers would ululate, praising us by our clan names waiting to take our  
enamels inside the huts. They would say this kraal is going to be full cattle as  
all of you are going to have their own houses in future].

The lesson learnt from this activity is that allowing learners the opportunity to own their work can have amazing results. It gives the learners the opportunity to draw from strategies they use when playing their games without adult supervision. When learners are playing outside they start by organizing themselves in a manner that would be fair to everyone involved. Classroom work (teaching and learning) supposed to acknowledge and draw from these skills and strengthened and utilize them. Opening opportunities for learners to participate in active learning enabled them to respond to environmental issues and risks inside the school and in the community. Dramatizing the story cemented the knowledge gained at the same time informed learners who knew more about the healthy living practices.

#### **4.3.4. Translation of the home language story into additional language.**

As it is stated in the NCS document additional language is as important as the home language, as both languages complement each other. In the NCS document (DoE, 2003:21-22) it is stated that:

The Department of Education's *Language in Education Policy* promotes **additive multilingualism**. This means that learners must learn an Additional Language while at the same time maintaining and developing their Home language. Additive multilingualism makes it possible for learners to acquire

complex skills such as reading and writing in their strongest language. Learners can then transfer these skills to their Additional Language. Home language should be used as the language for teaching, learning and assessment in the Foundation Phase children learn the basics of how to listen, speak, read, write and view, write think and reason. It is during this phase that learners practice the use of sounds, words and language, and create and interpret texts.

The above statement enabled the process of introducing additional language using the home language story rewritten by learners after the gogos intervention through storytelling. Before narrating the steps of what happened during the additional language periods, it is proper to mention that during dramatization a few sentences used for dialogue were also translated into additional language to enhance both languages at the same time. Since the approach of 'listen to write' 'write to read' and 'read to learn' need to be cemented the following steps were taken again.

1. The first step was to read the story written in isiXhosa again to the whole class.
2. Then after learners were split up into small groups the story was read again by learners into groups. During my observation I found out that some learners were struggling to read and I support them by employing the strategy of mixing them with capable readers (learners).
3. Learners read the story for meaning and understanding as it was to be translated into additional language.
4. Learners were encouraged to ask questions for clarification in relation to the storyline.
5. All the questions asked were written on the board, below each question answers were provided with my support.
6. All the responses were written according to the sequence of the story in point form. In their home language isiXhosa learners wrote freely as they remembered the story but for additional language the story was in point form. (See Appendix M1)

To explain further the reasons for additional language to be written in sentences (point form), it should be noted that English is a new language which learners are not yet fluent in. It might have been free writing like in isiXhosa, but the notion was that learners were still struggling to write in their own mother tongue so in the bridging had to build up from words and phrases.

Based on the activities for additional language, and also based on the question the study seeks to respond to, how does curriculum contextualization contribute to relevance and literacy skills in the Foundation Phase? Repetition of reading aloud gave learners the opportunity to gain momentum in what was read. This enabled them to remember what was done in previous activities. For example during explanation of new words from the story, in one of the activities learners were expected to write down all the words they did not understand. A list of new words in isiXhosa was compiled next to it additional language words; *imbiza yesiXhosa* (three legged pot), *ungquphantsi* (rondavel) were written on the board (see Appendix M3).

Learners managed to transfer skills learnt throughout the process and used them in their additional language work thus strengthening language acquisition. Learners were able to write the story in additional language with my little support thus strengthening the language acquisition. For this activity learners displayed appropriate listening behaviour, showed respect for other readers and asked relevant questions. They also practiced reading fluently and reading for understanding, managing to link the information acquired with what is happening around them. The evidence was when they combined new words from gogos and able to make sentences out of them to show their understanding and meaning of words.

The next activity was the illustration of the story by means of drawing. Below each drawing words were written e.g. *ungquphantsi* (hut or rondavel), *imbiza yesixhosa* (three legged pot), *isikhelelelo* (enamel dish to scoop water) (Appendix M3). I explained to learners that although pictures made a story more enticing to read, words paint a picture in one's head to remember.

In one of the activities I listed questions about the story in additional language to ascertain their understanding of the additional language. All the questions and responses were written on the board. One of the questions was about the importance of promoting healthy living practices. I asked learners to make a list of things they could do to promote health at school and at home (Appendix J). As a result of this activity learners managed to use logic and reasoning to draw up a list of healthy practices covering a range of situations.

The storyline for additional language was developed as a result of learners' responses. The line of questioning was developed in such a way that it formed a story. I also insisted that when learners were answering questions they must respond in full sentences. For example, *how did gogos wash their hands in the olden days?* In the olden days gogos washed their hands with clean water and soap or *uthuthu* (wood ash). *Where did they get water from?* The water came from rivers, dams, wells or from rain.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

The end result of this process was the fulfilment of the learning progression of 'listen to read' 'write to read' and 'read to learn' as one of the goals of this study. The completion of the big book which at this stage is written in both sides for home and additional languages is the evidence of what transpired as a result of the content knowledge from Life Orientation which transcends to other learning areas. Indeed washing of hands as a topic for this study enabled learners to learn with understanding, link the school knowledge with local knowledge and also address the environmental issues inside and outside the school.

To look back over the data generated in this study as I undertook the work with the learners, I compiled a summary of my observations, assessments and the concepts covered using the earlier analysis of the curriculum requirements as a reference (See Appendix L). This allowed me to move into the next phase of the study, a classroom-based analysis of the weight of evidence. This is undertaken in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **AN ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

In this chapter I develop, justify and discuss analytical statements that emerged from data presented in Chapter 4. The statements were made from the evidence that might allow me to answer the research question:

*How can curriculum contextualisation in an integrated Foundation Phase programme contribute to environmental learning with enhanced relevance and literacy?*

The two phase study took shape in my school Sosebenza where I worked with Grade 3 learners in my classroom. In phase 1 elderly people known for their indigenous knowledge practices in the community worked with me in my classroom. Both learners and elders showed interest in the intergenerational process, and local issues emerged to inform the integrated learning programme of literacy development in phase 2.

In Phase 2 I presented and tracked the teaching and learning processes working with data generated from the learning interactions and evidence in the learning outputs. In this chapter I analyse all of the evidence to make statements in relation to the research question.

From evidence presented in Chapter 4 it is possible to state:

A contextual approach of engaging elders (gogos) enabled the process of opening up local knowledge to link with learner experience and school knowledge for enhanced *relevance* and meaningful learning across the Grade 3 curriculum (relevance through situated learning links)

1. The lengthy process of literacy acquisition was sustained by increased learner interest and engagement and with an acknowledgement of learner achievement by the teacher and the community (relevance and motivation)
2. Practical environmental work taken up by the learners in local context added to meaningful engagement and related to everyday life.(learning by doing)

3. There is a need for depth of knowledge of the curriculum and local context for teachers to work in ways that foster local relevance for enhance literacy acquisition (reflection)

The evidence generated through the two phases of the research process and the above analytical statements allowed me to conclude that curriculum contextualisation in my Foundation Phase classroom was primarily achieved with elders' input and through closer work with learners' knowledge and their experience in community context. What follows is a discussion of each statement in turn and a synthesising discussion in relation to the research question.

## **5.2. Elders, context and relevance**

**There is evidence that engaging elders (gogos) enabled a process of opening up local knowledge and learner everyday experience to link this with school knowledge (Grade 3 curriculum) so as to foster enhanced relevance and learning.**

Elders who were brought into the classroom contributed situated, local knowledge on healthy living practices and thus brought intergenerational examples that related to what learners knew and experienced in daily life. The isiXhosa stories were contextualising tools that learners were familiar with and covered the subject matter such as (*uthuthu, ubulongwe, ingqayi, ilaphu lokugquma amanzi okanye isithebe, iemele nezinye.*)

The policy document on learning outcomes allowed for local knowledge to have a place in the classroom so as to make the links and to enable a contextualising relevance. When elders narrated stories of healthy living embedded in isiXhosa cultural practices the learners were excited and responded by talking about their own experiences and these interactions provided the start-up for the writing, reading and discussion that followed in the classroom learning (see Section 4.3.1.Chapter 4). One elder noted that listening carefully and doing things herself enabled her to learn meaningful healthy living practices that she was now teaching in her stories (GFG3). By incorporating this reflection in her story she was encouraging learners to 'listen to

do' (act). She noted in particular that when it comes to healthy living practices we have to avoid spreading *ubumdaka* (dirt). Through her narration she prompted others to exercise healthy living practices with everyday common sense so as to avoid disease. For example in Agcobile's writing there is a clear connection of home to school and a retelling that is steering her knowledge. (See Appendix K5). At this point Agcobile knew why drinking water need to be boiled and why cleanliness is important.

This relevance is also evident in learner responses in the dramatising of the story where they put emphasis on key points from the elders and repeated what had been significant to them (see Section 4.3.3 Chapter 4). Here the learners were learning about things that now began to make sense to them and things they work with in everyday life.

This was also evident in the way learners dealt with tools elders brought to the classroom. Although they knew the tools in another environment (home and community environment), seeing them in the classroom as part of the lesson brought a response of excitement and pride that was important for the learners and was reflected in their writing and reading activities. Here the main thing to me was a stronger link between home and school and the mix of knowledge that were taken up as relevant by the learners into their writing and reading.

The above notion suggests that local knowledge linked with school knowledge has a way of inspiring learners to do things on their own, a mark of relevance that was found in learning the ideas and being motivated to finding out more. In this research learners managed to be teachers and created their own literacy work by writing a story both in isiXhosa and English. Elders were also teachers as they taught learners in the classroom. The knowledge used was local and indigenous and the process created space for intergenerational learning processes (Section 4.3.2 Chapter 4) that carried the learners into the literacy activities.

The study conducted by Hogan (2008) revealed that engagement with communities (elderly people in this case) brought to the classroom a vast knowledge of things as well as the knowledge of how things used to be done. The notion is brought forward

by Ballantyne, Connell and Fien (2006: 417) who note how ‘eco-parenting’ and its associated goal of teaching young people about the environment through example presents a fascinating topic for continued research and applications”.

The research revealed that local knowledge brought into the classroom opened curriculum framings of knowledge that have and can exclude the everyday and indigenous ways of doing things. Curriculum contextualisation in this case, evidence enabled a mix of knowledge to be blended with respect and in the process it facilitated meaning making and literacy bringing school and communities together (see Section 4.2.3.1 Chapter 4). That is what the storytelling brought into the classroom with all the educational elements in the topic of hand washing to avoid disease.

The recognition of the elders’ way of doing things at the school strengthened ties and ignited pride within community and home environments. This was evident when elders and parents showed their support in children’s work (storytelling and home work task see Chapter 4). On the same note research conducted by Semali (1999: 307) noted the importance of this relationship when he said:

For Africans, indigenous knowledge is not something elusive, as many modernists would argue, rather it is about what local people know and do, and what local communities have known and done for generations- practices that developed through trial and error and proved flexible enough to cope with change (Warren et al. 1996). The ability to use community knowledge produced from local history, information about flora and fauna, and application of local medicines to humans and animals to cure diseases endemic to the community, form important oral-aural literacy skills are what I have termed in this essay *indigenous literacy*.

In this study indigenous knowledge changed pedagogy thus creating a context of interchange as Hogan (2008) has found out in her research. Here elders were on the same platform as teachers. Here a contextual approach brought recognition of indigenous knowledge and an acknowledgement of learner achievement by the teacher and the community. Learners were able to do oral presentation, gogos brought into the classroom their way of doing things as sustainable practices (hand washing method) and the learners’ way of doing things was also recognised in the classroom. In this way educating learners through the storytelling paved the way for literacy acquisition (listening, viewing, thinking and reasoning, writing and reading).

There was evidence of oral presentation when learners were interacting with elders through listening and speaking during story telling. Recognising indigenous knowledge this way meant the teacher was aware of the notion mentioned by Archibald (2008: 37) that “elders are repositories of cultural and philosophical knowledge and are transmitters of such information”. On the same note the policy document through its LO and AS stated that: “languages are central to our lives. We communicate and understand our world through language. Language thus shapes our identity and knowledge,” (DoE, 2003: 5). A notable thing here was an identity that involved knowing about healthy living and how this spanned and integrated indigenous knowledge practices and modern knowledge practices for healthy living.

Sustainable practices are what elderly people brought into the curriculum. Washing of hands is an old practice that has been sustained over the years to promote health and to avoid spreading diseases. Capra, (1997: 189 ) voiced that “curriculum need to be integrated, emphasising contextual knowledge, in which the various subject areas are perceived as resources in service of a central focus thus facilitating learning experiences that engage students in complex real world projects”. The storytelling by elders and the inclusion of the story content into the achievement of learning outcomes in literacy activities in both languages and the associated activities (LO and AS) reflect how a contextualised curriculum produced greater relevance and literacy acquisition (see Section 4.3.1 Chapter 4).

### **5.3 Environment, meaning and the everyday**

#### **Practical environmental work in a local context added to meaningful engagement with relevance that related to everyday life.**

This was evident when learners regularly visited gogos in the centre to assist in centre’s vegetable garden whilst learning from their way of doing things. The centre provided learners with many indigenous practices such as sowing, knitting, crocheting and cooking wild *imifuno*. The outcome of the interaction was when gogos visited learners at school they showed learners the same wild plants in their garden. This resulted in learners’ parents engaging with the centre and school to experience what their learners were talking about.

Relevance of work done by the elders at school enabled learners to perform better in the classroom. The process opened up the opportunity for learners to ask questions whenever they needed clarity about something that was not common, especially from shy learners in the classroom. This was evident during demonstration lessons where gogos showed learners the importance of scooping water next to the garden. Every learner was excited to be in the line in order to show the others how hand washing should be done and in the meantime asking questions. The way the elders scooped water is not easy as it seems that as they scooped water they were also cautious about not wasting water nor putting dirt into the water thinking about the next person. During interviews gogos were adamant about health practices and health practice that include the washing of hands. They believe it is better to prevent diseases than to cure them and the only way is to take precautions and eat healthily as well as exercise through working hard and walking.

Spork (1993:101) argues that “the health of individual (the personal environment), the health of communities (the social environment) and the health of natural environment are inextricably linked”. The emphasis of this point is evident in the way elders handled health issues. Through deliberation it was clear that health has been a priority and so are their surrounding (see Chapter 4).

All in all learners ended up by becoming change agents for other children in relation to health issues and taking care of the school environment. This was evident when learners requested basins for washing their hands at each classroom instead of using a tap which sometime is left dripping and waiting water. Another practical work of note was ensuring that all wastewater was used to water the garden after school every day. As time went by the work they started was taken on by others as well. That was influenced by the intergenerational process of teaching learners to take action and to sustain the good practices for life. This engagement enabled learners to improve performances in the classroom, as already mentioned, because the school provided space and relationship with their context (school and home). UNESCO (2004) emphasises that stronger links between school and community can help to improve quality education especially in the learning areas of health and literacy (language). The same notion is echoed by Shumba et al (2008) in his study where he mentioned

the need for the school to accommodate the community by engaging elders in school matters including allowing them to teach and share their knowledge.

#### **5.4. Literacy acquisition and relevance**

##### **The lengthy process of literacy acquisition was sustained by learner interest and engagement**

Opening opportunities for learners to participate fully in their learning process enabled them to work hard even when they struggled in some areas. The evidence here is in how learners struggled to find suitable sentences that would fit the characters selected by them in order to make sense of what they were trying to convey both in isiXhosa and English (see Section 4.3.3 Chapter 4). The process was made more difficult by the way learners were grouped (pairs first then groups formed by pairs) to ensure every learner participated fully and did not rely heavily on others for support and assistance.

There was evidence of meaning making by learners as, learners were able to own the rewriting of the story. By the way they listened to elders (gogos) during their telling of the story, it was evident they were keen to make meaning and relate the story to their own lives. Because the elders approached the lesson in a familiar way this gave learners the opportunity to make more meaning (see Section 4.3.1 Chapter 4).

Another reason for learners to make meaning of what they were exposed to was that what they were learning about was relevant to them and their lives (hand washing). Mandikonza (2007: 38) drawing from Rollnick (1998) defined “relevance” as the ability of an education to influence learners’ quality of life. He argued that relevant education should enable learners to make sense of what they are learning, allowing them the opportunity to draw knowledge from their experiences, and give them space to actively participate in the process in order to improve their lives.

When learners feel safe and secure, when there are people who listened to their insecurities, there is a chance for relevant education. Relevant education surfaced when learners were given the opportunity to talk about the different ways they did things in their homes (local cultural knowledge). That means contextualising curriculum contributed to relevance.

During the deliberations learners were aware that their ideas were included in the compiling of a module that created a platform for local relevant knowledge and different ways of doing things, to be recognised (see Section 4.3.3 Chapter 4).

There was evidence of stronger-school-community relationships which enabled teachers in the school, even those who stood at a distance take note. The visits by the elders and learners visiting the gogos' homes encouraged other teachers to involve other grades as well. The willingness shown by parents during the home task activity also revealed the importance of this relationship. On this note Shumba et al (2008:94), said "at community level, greater opportunities for sharing and interaction in a reciprocal way among teachers, the school and the community-i.e. greater school-community interface".

It is evident that when learners are given the opportunity to own their work, the pedagogy changed and the learning became more interactive and related to learner ideas and experience. The process of literacy acquisition might have been a lengthy process but it was worthwhile. Learners were given the opportunity to talk while I listened, and they identified healthy living practices at school and, home and gave recommendations on what needed to be done, that is what indigenous knowledge brought into the classroom towards relevant education while I took note. Learners mentioned what needed to be done and the reason for that (see Section 4.2.4 Chapter 4).

The lengthy process of literacy ('listen to write' 'write to read' and 'read to learn') enabled learners to showcase their potential to their elders during reading sessions. Elders sat and listened to learners, something they were not used to doing in the past. Shumba et al (2008) found similar responses in their research. The interaction between elders, learners and the teacher fostered a way to learn and to act on issues that hinder the quality of life. There were visible changes in learners' performances for example learners corrected each other when new words were used. *Ixaba* and *egoqweni* have similar meaning but are not the same words. Learners would explain the meaning of these words to those who were not sure. The strategy of providing drawings was amazing.

## **5.5 Knowledge of curriculum and context**

**The evidence and experience suggests that there is a need for depth knowledge of curriculum and local context for teachers to work with in ways that foster local relevance for enhanced literacy acquisition.**

In this case study it was evident that schools must actively work with the communities and also engage community members in order to gain insight to what community can offer schools (see Chapter 1: see also Section 4.2.3 Chapter 4). Working this way requires a deep understanding about the community context where the school is situated, the community's way of life, and community perspectives about things that are regarded as authentic. Teachers must be prepared to understand their way of life, to accept things that the community is not prepared to do, and finally those things they are prepared to do willingly. For this case study they shared their historical cultural knowledge through the stories. In fact one of the roles of a teacher according to norms and standards, is to be a community leader. Being involved with the community is one of roles of teachers.

It is evident that unless teachers have a depth of knowledge of what a curriculum constitutes there is little chance for learners to acquire the necessary skills to equip them in life. The importance of curriculum knowledge by the teacher is shown during the compiling of the module in which knowledge generated from two focus group interviews (elders and learners) was integrated into the curriculum framework through Learning Outcome (LO) and Assessment Standards in Life orientation programme (see Section 4.2.5 Chapter 4).

It became evident that the policy document guidelines provided in the curriculum as (LO and AS) for each grade are not clear enough for teachers to engage into meaningful curriculum contextualization. Although AS 3 (see Section 4.2.4 Chapter 4) was used to select the topic of hand washing in the learning programme, it was not easy nor clear enough on how to integrate it into other learning areas. The integration was also challenged by the lack of learning support material to support the process of change.

Overall, it is evident that this case of curriculum contextualisation in my Foundation Phase classroom was primarily achieved with elders through closer work with learner knowledge and experience in community context.

The evidence from the review of the curriculum document indicates that curriculum environmental education and learning is the focal point in all learning areas in the Foundation Phase. Focusing on environmental learning and education when preparing all lesson plans enabled learners to be aware of their immediate environment and community at large. Reviewing the curriculum opened my eyes to more opportunities to engage in, as it is emphasised in Life Orientation, features and scope learning area, that learners need to take responsibility about their health and environment (see Section 4.2.4 Chapter 4). This was evident when learners showed the responsibility of identifying the need for school toilets to be cleaned in order to avoid spreading more germs (see Section 4.2.4 Chapter 4). Where learners initiated or actively took up what could be done to alleviate the problem such as basins in all the toilets, and get rid of the system of using one basin for the whole classroom (see Section 4.2.4 Chapter 4) the knowledge was being deliberated from local context and the curriculum activities to the school context.

Curriculum contextualisation requires an understanding of social process which is inclusive of community, parents' learners' and teachers' ideas. Hence Cornbleth (1990) has seen curriculum as an ongoing social activity that is shaped by various contextual influences within and beyond the classroom and accomplished primarily by teachers and students. Working with indigenous knowledge in a local context enabled curriculum to relate to social issues. The evidence was when learners were able to identify problems of sanitation at school with the notion solving the problem (see Section 4.2.4 Chapter 4)

Looking for indigenous knowledge opportunities in the curriculum required understanding the culture of the education system. For example in South Africa the education system includes structures such as learners, teachers, parents and administrators. According to Cornbleth (1990) all these subcultures need to be taken into consideration if any changes are to be done in situating curriculum into context. The evidence was when I reviewed the curriculum for indigenous knowledge I looked

for opportunities that what would enabled learners to bring their everyday knowledge to the classroom and in so doing learners' expectations would be fulfilled. Again I considered the school standards in relation to expectations of LO and AS for each grade. Lastly I considered elders' expectations when they agreed to share their knowledge with the school (see Section 4.2.3 Chapter 4). These are the areas Cornbleth (1990) mentioned in relation to curriculum contextualisation.

In order for a teacher to improve learning and teaching, teachers must be in the classroom learning from learners as well. Hence Grundy (1987) viewed curriculum as praxis, as a social process that develops through dynamic interactions and reflections. She also regards curriculum as an active process hence there is a need for the consideration of context in curriculum process. Curriculum contextualisation requires all stakeholders (school, home and community) to be practically involved in order to bring change in the education system. In this case study learners were not only involved in the literacy work in the classroom learning about waste management, bad sanitation, healthy living practices but also enabled local knowledge to be brought into the classroom especially indigenous ways of doing things (see Section 4.2.2.2 Chapter 4).

In reading the evidence documented in Chapter 4 it is apparent that prior knowledge was the foundation for an enthusiastic learner engagement (Prior experiences of learners and stories from elders) that were taken up into the unfolding programme of learning to read and write. Although this point seems self evident as it appears in policy and guideline documents, it is notable that the encouragement of teachers to develop their own learning programmes in the Foundation Phase (see Section 4.2.5 Chapter 4) does not adequately provide guidance on why this is important and how to work with the information in the local context. It is thus not surprising that many teachers are not taking up this challenge the, prior experiences of learners and use of local knowledge. My experience in this research, through the implementation of such a process, was that it is very demanding, yet it yields meaningful contribution to quality education and learning and it can improve learner performance over the time. The challenge in this process was to support a cultural and environmental literacy programme that engaged learners in literacy that extends beyond the mechanics of reading and writing about things of apparent interest. The case evidence in interaction

and learner work shows how the learners were very passionate at times (see section 4.3.3 Chapter 4) and that the work in class extended into the playground (see Section 4.3.3 Chapter 4) and the notion was also taken home, although evidence of this is not easy to track beyond the stories that the children brought back to the researcher and what the parents said.

The curriculum contextualization was grounded in complex ways that the evidence reflects. Firstly, the initial mind mapping work with prior knowledge was useful in itself but of little real value until extended into the engagement of the learners in finding out from parents about healthy living practices (see Section 4.2.2 Chapter 4), and the work with elders also added value to curriculum contextualisation (see Section 4.2.3 Chapter 4). Here it was evident that learners were capable of handling new extended Xhosa words that carried an exciting depth of knowledge for healthy living (see Section 4.3.2 Chapter 4).

Secondly it was evident during the work I undertook with learners that prior knowledge was the foundation for new information. Learners managed to draw information from what they already knew, and linked that with new information to make meaning of what they were exposed (learning) to thus enriching their understanding. During the process of deliberation and discussions, learners showed more interest in relation to topics that talked about their surroundings and beyond. Before new information was presented learners managed to identify healthy practices at home, school, and in the community.

Prior knowledge surfaced again when learners managed to fill in a questionnaire about healthy living practices (see Section 4.2.2 Chapter 4). Learners experiences about their local context enabled them to link all the information with school/scientific knowledge and in the process they made meaning of the content in context.

The emphasis on the local context enabled learners to make sense of their immediate environment (school, home and community). This refers to learners initiative in addressing bad sanitation at school in order to change their way of living (see Section 4.2.4 Chapter 4). The initiative was expanded to home and community to ensure a

smooth transition of knowledge from both sides to ensure quality education for quality of life. Here again bringing elders (gogos) into the classroom enabled indigenous ways of doing things to enrich school knowledge and on the same note enabled the process of intergenerational process to take place.

Learners' critically thinking during deliberations about relevant questions to ask their parents was important for relevant responses and to open more opportunities in order to make meaning in their work that was then carried into engagement in the classroom (see Section 4.2.2 Chapter 4).

There was evidence of local context experiences during each session of reporting where, learners showed a great deal of respect for each speaker (learner). During the interview session one elder mentioned that listening and respecting each other result in successful solutions (social learning). This was more evident when differences in home environments were shared amongst learners, (see Section 4.2.2.) where one learner shared the chores she has to do and another learner was surprised as her mother does everything for her. The other evidence was when learners shared different experiences regarding their own lifestyle, and from this dialogue that learners had (see Section 4.2.2.1) it was clear that the experiences they had regarding healthy living practices needed a teacher's intervention. Hence in the Foundation Phase integration is allowed within and across learning areas to ensure misunderstandings are cleared up to ensure meaningful education is received by each learner.

## **5.6. Contextualisation and relevance**

**The evidence suggests that a contextual approach brought recognition of indigenous knowledge and an acknowledgement of learners achievement by the teacher and the community was important**

I noted that the oral presentation which was brought into the classroom as a result of intergenerational knowledge practices enabled shy learners to join in discussions and also encouraged them to want to read and write. This was evident during the rewriting of the story in groups: learners who did not write much as individuals, used

oral language acquisition to share what they still remembered about the story and scribes within groups wrote everything down (see Section 4.3.2 Chapter 4).

The evidence provided above about the importance of allowing learners to bring their own experiences to the classroom is stated and encouraged in the policy document in the Foundation Phase curriculum. The Department of Education (2003: 19) states that:

Foundation Phase learners come to school with an eagerness to learn. They arrive able to understand and/or speak the language used at home. They bring with them their own experiences, interest, strengths, and barriers. Each learner has the need to be recognised and accepted, and for his/her family and culture to be acknowledged and respected. They have the need to feel safe and are easily intimidated by an unpleasant atmosphere, which will prevent them from learning effectively.

Allowing learners to bring their experiences to the classroom strengthens the relationship between home school and community. This notion also enables the voice of the parents to be heard and known in the spheres of education. Cornbleth (1990) in her discussion of curriculum contextualisation states that learning is embedded in culture and language. Therefore allowing learners to bring their own language can encourage learners to perform better and this notion also fosters a good relationship with home and school environment. Parents become more involved and are more willing to help their children with school work when they realise that what the children are learning makes sense and it is of good quality which at the end enables growth and change in learners' minds (see Section 4.2.2 Chapter 4). Education which is inclusive of quality of life has a place and voice in the education which at the end enables each child.

The research conducted by Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) brought the same sentiment when the findings revealed that when children are not given the opportunity to bring their experiences into the classroom their parents feel that their children's background is discarded and devalued. Parents also felt that their children need both modern knowledge and indigenous knowledge to enable them to make sense and not

to lose their identity (background and their way of life). The notion is that when learners come from school with modern knowledge only, there is a possibility the knowledge would be meaningless in the community context.

Allowing learners' experiences in the classroom is another educational strategy that enables the process of change to take place, in particular as the NCS requires teachers to do so. Research done by Hogan (2008) found out that there is a change of pedagogy when both teacher and learner listen to each other talk. In her case study students were more active, more inquiring and did collaborative work in the process. This was evident in this research as well when learners were allowed the opportunity to work in groups, to do more exploration and investigative work thus providing for the social learning described by Vygotsky as cited in Daniels (2004) (see Section 4.2.2 Chapter 4).

I noticed the fairly obvious thing that the learners showed more interest when they were given the opportunity to bring their own experiences into the classroom and this result was evident in their enthusiasm and willingness to do perform better. What the policy document is putting forward is the need for each learner to be recognised and her own culture to be acknowledged and respected. In addition Shumba et al (2008: 94) found out in their research when the community perceived the school as their own there is a will for them to "work towards the improvement of quality and relevance of education and to transform quality of life".

It was notable that even those learners who had barriers such as writing and reading had an opportunity to showcase their ways of doing things (in this case oral presentation) from their home environments and the result was the acquisition of literacy (writing and reading). It was clear acknowledging that learner's experiences in the classroom created the platform for both knowledge (local and school) to work well to the advantage of each learner to improve quality education and learning.

The new initiative from the DoE (2009) policy document encouraged teachers to be more aware of the importance of learners' diverse home environments in order for each learner to receive meaningful education that make sense to her/him at school and at home. The DoE also stressed that teachers must utilise prior knowledge (local

knowledge) brought by the learners and this combine with school knowledge provided by the curriculum ensured quality education.

Prior knowledge is often referred to but seldom actually used but in this I was constantly drawing on the prior knowledge of learners in the classroom. In this way they were more engaged in understanding the curriculum content and moving towards achieving the intended learning outcomes.

That means the recent research conducted by the Primary Mathematics Research Project (PMRP) (2003) is of the same opinion when it revealed indeed that poor teacher content knowledge and the poor localised content was one of the causal factors of poor learner performance. The evidence in the study has shown that drawing from learners' prior knowledge is to bring localised knowledge to the classroom which improved learner performance.

Hence Hart, Jickling and Kool (1999:107) expressed this view:

So, we, as practitioners, have to assume some responsibility for laying out our sense of what might guide quality environmental education. We have to act; we have to create learning opportunities. We also need to help our colleagues, and ourselves as we develop learning activities, implement environmental education programmes, and reflect on our own theories about education. We need articulate that we understand about what constitutes quality in each of these areas, if for no other than to have others articulate their own ideas.

Another argument came from Semali (1999: 306) who noted that:

The transfer of indigenous knowledge from the learners' everyday life to schoolwork is not always valued or encouraged, and indigenous ways of knowing may not be recognized by some teachers. These teachers simply find indigenous knowledge unimportant.

The evidence in this study revealed the importance of work with local knowledge to ensure the improvement of literacy through learners being exposed to intergenerational processes as the elderly and learners' interact. Within a course of the study learners managed to acquire writing, reading and action.

The above evidence is crucial especially now that the government has embarked on a plan of action for 2010 in relation to the improvement of education, learning and skills whereby the focus is to improve the ability of children to read, write and count in the Foundation Phase years. These concerns and worries were highlighted by the progress in International Reading Literacy study PIRLS in 2005 which revealed South African learners when tested in Literacy after four years of schooling among 40 countries, came last (Van Staden, as cited in Rosenberg, 2008: 28).

## **CONCLUSION**

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the study and the findings that came from the work undertaken with Grade 3 learners in my classroom. Since I worked as a teacher-researcher in my classroom, the findings of the study are more exploratory than conclusive. This chapter will thus summarise trends and patterns of case evidence that were of note to me for my continuing work in the context of my classroom and the community environment where the research was conducted.

#### 6.2 Summary of the study in relation to the research focus and question

The study set out to explore how to work with health promoting indigenous knowledge practices (contextualisation) in an integrated Foundation Phase learning programme (Life Skills and Literacy). The main focus of the study was to address the inability of learners to perform at an acceptable level in knowledge and literacy acquisition at the end of the Foundation Phase. This concern developed from my experience of young children not finding relevance in what they were learning at school and it led to the research question:

*How can curriculum contextualization in an integrated learning in the Foundation Phase programme contribute to environmental learning with enhanced relevance and literacy?*

The first phase of the study illustrated that curriculum is complex but it encourages contextualisation. The review of curriculum documents enabled me to gain insight into the design of a contextual and integrated learning unit on hand washing and health. This work developed from the prior knowledge and experience of learners and was undertaken with the gogos providing the intergenerational healthy living practices (contextual knowledge) that were part of the daily life experiences of the learners.

Data was generated on how learners made sense of healthy living practices as they wrote to read and then acted these practices out so as to write the wider story that incorporated modern healthy living (use of soap and detergents nowadays). As this learning and literacy (using new words and understanding wider ideas) developed I noted that there was a bridging of knowledge between home and school in the learning activities undertaken in the integrated learning programme. It was found that working with learners and the gogos in this way encouraged an intergenerational process that strengthened links between school and the community as well as developing the language literacy to work with the ideas of healthy living in drama and in the school toilet use and washing before having food.

### **6.3 Significant case evidence to inform continuing classroom practice**

What is significant about this case study is that all schools are situated in communities, and school learners bring into the classroom different local knowledges and experiences from these communities. Therefore schools need to take into account that learners coming to school have already acquired knowledge that they use in their daily life, acknowledging that everyday knowledge of learners is to take into consideration the context where learners come from. The school then has a duty to blend this knowledge together (local and school) to improve quality education that is relevant. Relevant education enables learners to make sense of their world which is school and community. For new information to have a base it needs a solid foundation of existing knowledge (prior knowledge) that is why Foundation Phase schooling in a learners' life is crucial. Any mishaps during this time is costly to the economy of the country because learners produced by such system could not be beneficial to communities where children come from. This is what Hopkins and Reynolds (1994: 45) are referring to when they argue that:

quality schooling is about the capacity of the individual to enhance and enrich the society of which he or she is being educated to become part-someone who is going to be a giver, enlarger and enhancer as well as an inheritor and recipient. Quality schooling is as much about the future of the society, we see ourselves even if at several generations hence removed: world better and richer than the one we currently inhabit. to such knowledge is to enhance acquisition of knowledge.

It was also of note that when the learners were making sense of what they were learning about hand washing, they were able to relate the learning to their environment and that the ideas were relevant as they were meaningful to them and so they informed healthy living practices.

Here the context of indigenous knowledge practices was taken up into the reading and writing to learn activities in the integrated life skills and literacy programme. There is evidence that this had relevance to them as they were driven to learn new words, to read and to discuss what they were learning. The making sense, expansion of ideas and the literacy acquisition can be seen in relation to the ideas being meaningful as a result of the way in which the learning programme developed as a more contextualised curriculum. The mixing of school knowledge and local knowledge enable teachers and parents to work together to improve relevance of education.

This case study opens up a process of linking local knowledge with school knowledge by allowing elderly people to come and conduct session on oral presentation in the classroom. The engagement of elders and learners created a platform for intergenerational knowledge to work in the classroom.

The engagement of learners enabled them to learn inquiry and investigative skills as they managed to interview their parents and elders, and then report back to the whole classroom.

#### **6.4 Concluding comments and the way forward**

In conclusion curriculum contextualisation was achievable in my classroom, this was evident when elders worked closely with learner knowledge and their experiences in my community context. Learners responded by inviting elders to come and observed the linkage of local and curriculum knowledge in the drama demonstration. Elders were amazed to observe this display of creativity and imagination of learners without losing the focal point of promoting healthy living practices. The focal point was the awareness and promotion of environmental learning whilst acquiring knowledge and skills to improve quality. The engagement of elders and learners also brought up the importance of identity in learners' lives which is a concern to elderly people.

As Semali, (1999) pointed out acknowledging everyday knowledge enables school knowledge to have a solid foundation in learners' mind creating a platform for relevant education. The notion also to promote local engagement between school and community is a way improving quality education because local knowledge combined with school knowledge make sense both to learners and its community. In such a case parents are able to help their children with schoolwork as it was in this case study. Learners in turn were able to talk to their parents about what they learnt at school thus fostering partnership.

The DoE (2003) emphasis on the importance of the immediate environment in the Foundation Phase as a learning resource enabled the study to take its shape in its context. During the interaction learners were able to address environmental issues in their immediate environment and in the process acquire knowledge and skills to improve quality education. The process enabled learners to take responsibility for their performances (school work) which was evident during the drama demonstration. Indeed to emphasize context, is to take into account the social, cultural, political, economic and biophysical factors influencing teaching and learning (NEEP-GET (2004).

Therefore intergenerational interaction was achieved through the situated local knowledge on healthy living practices that was brought by elders to the classroom. Learners managed to add new words and their meaning to their vocabulary for example, *isikhelelo* means a certain dish that was used to scoop water from the river or wells could easily be known as the same thing as *isitya* (an ordinary dish). Elders put an emphasis on the making of this wooden dish for example (the dish that floats on top of the enamel bucket after use). This indigenous knowledge added value to what learners learnt at school as well as added value to their knowing. In this case study learners' pride and dignity encouraged them to learn more about the use of their language thus enhancing grammatically language which include spelling, phonics and sentence structure.

Research undertaken by Ballantyne et al (2006: 415) found that not only the intergenerational process strengthens links between learners environmental learning

and action, it also empower learners in relation to environmental decision making and action in their homes and community.

Because learners were learning about things that were relevant to them and their community they responded well by taking responsibility for their actions. Water used to wash hands during the day was no longer thrown away but put back in the ground (school garden). Taps were no longer left unattended but Grade 3 learners changed other learners by making them aware environmental issues (management of water, cleanliness of toilets, importance of fresh vegetables from the garden).

Learners acted as change agents in this study that made them feel at ease to ask questions or put forward their initiatives. In the process of engagement learners developed the ability to speak out, which means they developed self-esteem and self-confidence among other values. Elders related the same way to debates that followed. The use of mother tongue language opened lines of communication that encouraged interrelationship between school and community. Again the use of home language paved the way for additional language to be spoken and be read inside and outside the classroom. Vygotsky as cited in Daniels (2004) stated that the development of concepts in the mother tongue motivates learners to respond with confidence when learning the other language DoE (2003).

Curriculum contextualisation brought stronger links between home and school and the combination of school and local knowledge brought relevance to learners. The acknowledgement of elders as the first teachers in various communities opened opportunities for them to come into the classroom and share their indigenous knowledge within the school environment. Strong links were created and parents were more involved with school matters which including assisting their children with school work. Concerns that parents had about the performance of their children in particular reading and writing in their own mother tongue were diminishing. Instead parents supported their children by listening and having time for them. Parents got involved by bringing to school resources such as more basins to wash hands and volunteered to assist with homework more.

Learners' performance better and the level of literacy acquisition was of high standard. Learners showed an interest in reading and writing. The time they spent in writing the one story enabled their language use to be of high quality in regard to issues they tackled. Even learners who were still struggling were encouraged by others to voice their ideas orally and were included in the writing process.

The recognition of elders by the school strengthened ties and ignited pride within the community and home environments. This was evident by the interest shown by parents of learners and as result their support was more valuable. Learners also showed interest by asking questions for more understanding and relevance. A good example as Ballantyne et al (2006) put it numerous strategies, programmes and tools were prepared and developed in order for parents to teach learners about environmental responsibilities. The connection that occurred during this interaction enabled learners to teach others and moreover enabled learners to transfer the acquired knowledge and skills to the home environment as Gentry and Benenson as cited in Ballantyne (2006: 417) noted. The report coming from parents as a result of this engagement was amazing. It is the report that Uzell as cited in Ballantyne (2006) is referring to when he stated that "parents of students who had participated in any environmental programme at school were significantly more likely to report increased awareness and concern for a local environmental problem than a control group whose parents had not participated in the programme".

Oral presentation brought by storytelling through gogos enabled learners to communicate ideas better thus contributing to acquisition of knowledge and skills. As said in Chapter 4, even learners who were shy because they were experiencing difficulty in expressing themselves or were confronted by barriers that they were unable to control in their daily lives, oral presentation gave them a platform to talk and discuss things in their own language. Not only did oral presentation open opportunities for learners to talk and listen, it also gave the teacher as a researcher the opportunity to access diverse prior knowledge of learners in order to be linked to school knowledge. Oral presentation also paved the way for curriculum contextualisation through intergenerational process.

Another interesting healthy living practice that elders shared was the firm relationship their parents forged with the schools. According to them schools were regarded as part of the community. Elders related that what children learnt at school was in collaboration with the needs of the community.

As a researcher I shared the experience of working with parents is that some are not talkative as others, nodding their heads when the other is talking is a sign of agreeing with what is being said. So researchers need to take note of the elders' expression when working with them. Others are shy to respond immediately but on one to one interaction a lot can be learned.

## **6.5 Critical reflection on the research design and outcomes**

After starting the study as a process of action research working with colleagues found that the data being generated was not getting to the level of depth that I needed. At the outset, I thus made the decision to undertake the research in my own classroom with the learners and community members involved. On the one hand this severely limited the study as a piece of research but on the other it opened up a depth of evidence and insight that might otherwise not have been achieved.

### **6.5.1. Research Design**

Techniques used helped me to respond to the research question. Reviewing policy document opened up a line of argument for my study in order to explore opportunities for IK integration into the curriculum framework. What I found is that there are opportunities for local knowledge to be integrated but guiding principles in terms of implementing quality lesson plans is still a challenge for teachers. It was evident that the DoE (2009) is minimising the load of work the teachers by providing prepared lesson plans as a guide to be used in various contexts. The complexity of enabling such a notion by schools from rural areas is the infrastructure, which does not allow teachers to perform at an acceptable pace and in a qualitative manner. But it brings continuing challenges to improve quality education through contextualising strategies like those I explored in this exploratory case study.

The focus group (elders and learners) were critical to this study as they informed the LO and AS standards selected. The focus group of learners encouraged me to

mobilize indigenous knowledge further. It was clear how much they had already acquired about the topic I intend to work with. That gave me the reason to pursue the topic of hand washing. The evidence in this case study pointed to how little (teachers and parents) understand learner's thinking and how much we are missing out on if we do not involve them in discussion and debates like it happened in my classroom.

As a participant observer being a teacher-researcher among elders and young learners the principle of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy that Archibald (2008) refers to helped me to get to the meaning of storytelling as it paved way for this study.

When I observed learners' work the improvement and relevance of local knowledge was evident and, that encouraged me to know the small scale of situated learning that occurred has impacted on the lives of learners in my classroom thus improving the quality they receive. On the same note the case study approach enabled me to generate data within context and allowed me the opportunity to probe the contextualizing curriculum in relation to everyday realities and lived experiences. Although this study is not conclusive and recommended for other researchers it managed to respond to the question that prompted me to do it in the first place, that of improving my classroom practice as well as improving learners' abilities to acquire knowledge and skills and the awareness of their immediate environment as a learning context.

The case study also provided a contextual approach to mobilize IK. The case study allowed me the opportunity to work within a small scale (classroom). Change of research design enabled me to work with learners and gogos directly. This was caused by the complexity I experienced in my school which nearly set me back, as I started using action research which was going to entail working with other teachers. The process did not only improve my practice it enabled learners to acquire literacy skills (reading, writing and knowing), and they learnt more about environmental issues and how to address them directly (healthy living practices). The research design selected also informed my contextual work with gogos within in the provided space of work between school and elders.

### **6.5.2. Outcomes**

As mentioned above intergenerational processes occurred as Ballantyne et al (2006) noted that aside from strengthening links and empowering students in this case, it amazingly exposed adults to environmental information and actions that arose from school education interactions. During the focus group with elders I realised that their way of doing things relies more on health promotion and not necessarily on environmental issues and, cultural issues. The first principle of NCS curriculum advocate promoting social justice, a healthy environment, human rights and inclusivity. This principle aims to be sensitive to issues of poverty, inequality, race, gender, age, disability and challenges such as HIV/AIDS (NEEP-GET, 2004: 8).

My teaching and learning has improved as I have managed to consider context more closely now than before undertaking this research study. Trying to respond to the question of relevance and curriculum contextualisation enabled me to take note of community involvement as mentioned above. Feedback as part of assessment in teaching and learning was never more worthwhile than when I engaged elders and learners as co-researchers in this study. The feedback I received during this process contributed immensely to quality teaching and learning thus contributing to quality education which was meaningful to learners and parents. Parents of learners in my classroom would add what needed to be said about particular homework which they were engaged with the previous night with their children, The process opened lines of communication which enhanced quality education. Shumba et al (2008) found that when schools and community do not work together the education offered in such school is regarded as negative and unimportant to its community.

### **6.6. A concluding reflection**

In conclusion this study reflects a blending of two knowledge contexts so as to explore how this might enhance literacy acquisition, learning and the relevance of schooling for my class. It challenged me to bring together community knowledge on healthy living practices and the curriculum knowledge on personal health. This was surprisingly easy as creating connection between healthy living in home language and clarifying the blended knowledge for health in the additional language unfolded naturally. The engagement and clarification here is reflected in the excitement and willingness of the children to learn as they acquired literacy skills within a school-in-

community process of learning together. The argument from Mbingi and Maree as cited in Shumba et al (2008;) that “*Ubuntu* is a valuable concept for environment and education for sustainable development and for survival of African communities”. Of note is that working together cooperatively yielded meaningful results and the importance of contextualising learning within schools in community is meaningful.

Throughout this study I have found myself reflecting on the surprising willingness of communities to participate in an education system that has been failing to deliver a quality education that enhances quality of life. Despite this failure education remains a key drive for a better future, especially amongst the poor. The call from African Renaissance for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge (Higgs, 2008) in the school curriculum is for the benefit of African children and it resonates with this hope. The study concluded that this will provide contextualisation but scientific knowledge should not be discarded. Both these languages can integrate in learners’ lives as they comprehend each other in relevant education that can provide quality learning to change people’s lives.

## **6.7 Limitations of the study**

The data interpreted in this case study was collected over a six-month period in the Ilitha community and in my classroom. The research was undertaken as an exploratory study so it is not possible to make conclusive findings. What has been reported is written through the eyes and experiences of me as a teacher researcher who was working with the elders and the children to promote relevance and literacy. The evidence must thus speak for itself out of this case without conclusive findings beyond the excitement generated and the enthusiasm that the children are bringing to their reading and writing to learn as they move up the school.

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## **APPENDICES:**

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