

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE READING INTERESTS OF ZULU SPEAKING
STANDARD TWO CHILDREN IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND
TRAINING (DET) IN THE PIETERMARITZBURG 1 CIRCUIT.**

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Thulisile Eddista Radebe, declare that the contents of this dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary, are my own work and that the thesis has not been submitted simultaneously or at any other time for another degree.




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ABSTRACT

The reading interests of black Standard Two children in Pietermaritzburg were tested in the study. This was in response to the need, expressed by parents, teachers, information workers, media-teachers and publishers, for information and guidance regarding reading interests of black children in South Africa.

Two opposing trends were identified in the international literature (including South Africa) on the reading interests of children. The literature is reviewed and the two trends are discussed.

A sample of children was selected from a sample of primary schools in the Pietermaritzburg 1 Circuit of the former Department of Education and Training. A sample of children's books was selected and presented to the children to test their interests. Some of the findings were:

The children did not necessarily prefer settings and situations which were familiar to their own circumstances; they did not necessarily prefer books which were written in their vernacular; reading emerged as an individual matter regardless of ethnicity or race; children's preferences had no significant relationship to the ethnic origin of the story.

From the children's preferences of books and from their responses to questions regarding their reading involvement, conclusions are drawn and suggestions are made.

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INTRODUCTION

Some teachers, librarians, information workers, educationists and parents in South Africa have expressed concern about the lack of a reading culture among black children. The researcher realized that very little could be achieved in solving this problem without empirically establishing the actual nature of the reading interests of black children. Researching the reading interests of black children was viewed by the researcher as one way of avoiding the making of unsubstantiated assumptions in this area.

The researcher held discussions with some publishers, authors and librarians on the reading interests of black children and these discussions suggested that there existed a need to conduct research in this area. Suggestions that black children are interested primarily in books that depict settings and contexts familiar to their own situations prompted the researcher to design an instrument to test this hypothesis.

The study is of particular importance at this time in South Africa. Since the opening of Model C schools, some white teachers and media teachers (who were never exposed to black children before) are baffled regarding the reading interests of black children. In informal discussions with some of these teachers and media teachers it became clear that they do not know which books to recommend to black children since some of them have been made to believe that black children have different preferences from those of white children. They were concerned that they might be alienating, confusing or even depriving black children of what really appeals to them. It is for this reason that the

researcher believes that the study is well-timed as the results may help to inform these teachers.

Research for this thesis started in 1992 and the structure of education circuits¹ in Pietermaritzburg changed in July 1993. Nevertheless, the researcher decided to keep the old structure for purposes of this study because even after the general elections of April 27 1994, uncertainty still prevails regarding the implementation of the envisaged changes in the structure of education circuits.

The first chapter describes the problem investigated in the study. The problem is presented in the form of a justification which explains the significance of this study to the field of children and their reading interests. The chapter presents the two opposing trends that the researcher identified in the literature related to reading interests of black children in South Africa.

Chapter Two reviews the international literature surveyed (including South Africa) on the reading interests of children. The term 'reading interest' is defined briefly, followed by a short overview of the value of reading for children. This attempts to establish whether reading has any value for black children. The issue of 'individuality and reading' which follows challenges the notion of 'communal tendencies' of black people which has resulted in the implication (amongst other things) that their reading interests were

¹An education circuit refers to a group of schools, within a geographic zone, which are placed under an inspector of schools.

indistinguishable from each other. The determinants of reading interest are discussed, in particular the socio-economic factors and social context or setting in books.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology employed in the study and supplies reasons to support the choice of methodology. This covers the survey method, the population sample, the sample of books and the interview schedule used in the study.

Chapter Four presents the data collected in the survey, including the description of the areas in which the children surveyed live, as well as the occupations of parents. These are both aimed at determining the socio-economic dynamics of the children's situations. This report is followed by the children's collective profile of their current reading involvement compiled from their responses to questions in the interview schedule. Finally the children's preferences of books are recorded.

In Chapter Five data reported in the preceding chapter is discussed and recommendations are made. The first part of the interpretation of results is in the form of a comparison of the data with the literature reviewed. In this section the determinants of reading interest are not arranged in the same order as in the literature review but in the order of importance determined by the results of the survey. The second part presents recommendations for further research. These recommendations relate to issues that still need to be addressed to define, as appropriately as possible, the reading interests of black children in South Africa.

Chapter Six forms the conclusion which is a comment on whether the researcher achieved what she initially set out to achieve or not.

The researcher considered it appropriate to describe the few acronyms used within the study where they first occur, rather than creating a separate section. For the same reason, definition of terms has been within the body of the study.

Gender stereotyping has been avoided in the study by using 's/he' and his/her to refer to either a boy or a girl.

SEARCH STRATEGY

The search followed a traditional pattern starting with the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg (UNP) Library catalogue. Identification of material was achieved through online and manual searches firstly within the University of Natal Library and then nationally. Library of Congress Subject Headings and relevant keywords were used to access the subject and title parts of the UNP Library catalogue respectively. This led to a number of useful publications in the form of books about children's books and reading, such as *Literature and the reader*, by A. C. Purves and R. Beach, which had a comprehensive bibliography on reading interests. *Through the eyes of the child* by D. E. Norton was very useful in providing a general critical discussion of children's literature and the value of reading. Useful bibliographies on children's books included: *Good reading for poor readers*, by G. D. Spache; *Linguistics, psycholinguistics and the teaching of reading: an annotated bibliography*, by K. S. Goodman and Y. S. Goodman; *Reading and the black English speaking child: an annotated bibliography*, by J. R. Harber and J. N. Beatty; *Research in children's literature: an annotated bibliography*, by D. L. Monson and B. J. Peltola. Works cited within those publications led to further items that were either available in the UNP Library or had to be obtained through Inter-Library Loans.

Numerous searches were conducted on South African Bibliographic Information Network (SABINET) which contains a number of data bases some of which the researcher found to be useful. These data bases are: *The South African Co-operative Data Base*; *Library of*

Congress; South African National Bibliography; Index to South African Periodicals and The Union Catalogue of Theses and Dissertations. These sources uncovered more relevant material which was generally easily available through the Inter-Library Loan network. Material that was unobtainable locally proved too costly to obtain from overseas.

Databases on CD-ROM that were accessed included *Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)*¹ - 1982 to 1991, *Humanities Index* - 1984 to 1993 and *Library Literature* - 1984 to 1993. Years not covered by the CD-ROM databases of *Humanities Index* and *Library Literature* were searched manually at the UNP Library. A number of documents were identified on ERIC as potentially very useful but were not easily obtainable. Although they could be obtained through the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in Pretoria, they had to be ordered from the United States, and were only available on microfiche or alternatively in hard copy, both of which were very expensive. As the researcher had no funding for the thesis such expenses were out of the question. The Department of Second Language Studies, UNP, generously allowed the researcher access to its collection of journals of which *The Reading teacher* was the most valuable.

In terms of year of publication of the literature consulted, the researcher left the time-frame very open. Since there was very little material written specifically on children's reading interests in South Africa, the researcher decided to use international literature, especially from multicultural studies in the United States. This material on cross-cultural

¹The American spelling was not altered since this is a proper name.

issues proved relevant. It is for this reason that the material consulted spans 1960-1994.

The international literature proved most valuable since the researcher was able to establish an analogy between the situation and studies on the inner-city children's interests abroad, for instance in the United States, and those of black children in South Africa. In fact, almost too much had been written on reading interests. The researcher had to limit her search to what was readily available in South Africa because, as mentioned earlier, she had no funding for this project.

CHAPTER ONE

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Various organizations for information workers in South Africa such as READ¹ (Read, Educate and Develop) and LIWO (Library and Information Workers' Organization), as well as publishers, teachers and other concerned individuals have acknowledged the need to embark on programmes geared towards inculcating a reading culture among blacks in South Africa. One of the big impediments to the realization of this dream, is the total lack of information on the reading interests and needs of black children. Discussions with individuals and representatives of the groups mentioned above, reveal a good measure of uncertainty regarding this issue. Two trends or approaches to the issue are apparent in the literature. The existence of these conflicting approaches underlines the need for this study:

1.1. Trend A

Trend A represents a group of information workers, librarians, teachers and parents who believe that South African black children's reading interests, and consequently needs, are unique. This is based on the belief that the different race groups in South Africa are innately different. Some researchers also claim to have confirmed the cognitive and perceptual superiority of other races to that of blacks. For instance, Fick (1939:56) states

¹An independent educational trust involved in the inculcation of a reading culture amongst black children in South Africa.

that "the inferiority of the native in educability... limits considerably the proportion of natives who can benefit by education of the ordinary type beyond the rudimentary". He further remarks that this inferiority is not of a temporary nature. Fick's thesis met with severe criticism, for instance from Biesheuvel (1943,20-21), which was based on his (Fick's) disregard for the various environmental influences which might have a measurable influence on the growth of intelligence. Biesheuvel (1943) expressed his dissatisfaction with the intelligence tests that had been applied by Fick (1939) to prove scientifically the commonly held belief that, on the average, Africans are innately less intelligent than 'Europeans' (a term that was used in the 1940s to refer to whites). Biesheuvel felt that the motive behind these investigations was to discover racial, and therefore genetic differences in order to justify political biases. Arbitrary categorization of people, for instance, as suggested by Nhlanhla (1988), has led to generalizations which in turn have encouraged people to see blacks as a stereotyped category rather than as individuals. A misinterpretation of the concept "culture", as defined by Luthuli (1982), as well as an over-emphasis on **difference** based on ethnicity, have also contributed to this view.

1.1.1 Literature Survey In Support Of Trend A

The following section outlines the arguments upon which support for the unique reading interests of black children is based.

The argument finds its roots in the thesis of "cultural schema" which is reported to impact on the comprehension and interpretation of a particular text.

Luthuli (1982) supports this approach by suggesting that there is a black philosophy of life which is characterised by communalistic tendencies. He describes blacks as "... a unique people with distinct language, customs, traditions and [who] accordingly demand education suited to their unique needs." Mchunu (1988) expresses great frustration at Luthuli's incorporation of the notion of culture into his account of a black-oriented education because he is supporting the view of blacks as a stereotyped group who would be ill-equipped to function in the wider world because of their unique educational needs.

Machet (1989:63) claims that "...readers interact with new information in the text by fitting it into their existing cultural schema". She maintains that comprehension of text is inhibited when "...readers are faced with text foreign to the schema common to their culture". She further generalizes that blacks cannot easily interpret a three-dimensional picture involving depth perceptions because their culture has not taught them how to read this type of picture.

In her study Machet (1989) uses three groups, namely, black, Afrikaans and Jewish Standard Nine pupils. The consistency in her choice of sample subjects is questionable :

a) Of the Jewish group, seven fathers were professionals and two were semi-professionals; five mothers were professionals or semi-professionals whilst four were full-time housewives.

b) Of the Afrikaans group, all the fathers were professionals and eight mothers were professionals or semi-professionals.

c) Of the black group all parents were employed as semi-professional or unskilled workers.

The results of the study might have been different, for instance, had Machet selected some black families from the professional group instead of only semi-professionals and unskilled workers. She should have been able to locate black professional families in 1989. The socio-economic and occupational differences within the various sub-groups of Machet's sample were too diverse - she could have confined her study to one class or represented the different vocational groupings more consistently.

Nhlanhla (1988:162) argues for the production of indigenous black literature (for blacks), an indigenous Afrikaans literature (for Afrikaners), an indigenous Indian literature (for Indians), and so on; all produced by authors living in segregated parts in the same country. She further suggests that "... a black author will write about influx control, migratory labour, cholera, squatting... all of which will be best understood by his own people". In her thesis Nhlanhla (1987:121) states that, in the formative years, children need to be supplied with books which reflect "familiar meaningful activities and experience, and be written in a language easily comprehended by the child".

Machet (1989:178) and Nhlanhla (1988), therefore, focus on the issue of 'familiarity' as a factor that determines reading interests. According to them, readers will be more likely to enjoy and respond positively to books which contain characters or settings familiar to their own ethnic group or culture. In other words, readers are expected to identify with familiar characters and settings, especially if the former are perceived as accurately

representing personality traits or values found in the culture of the reader.

In summary, Trend A supports arguments which favour the thesis that reading interests of children are confined to literature which depicts 'familiar' situations and settings.

Some researchers criticize these views for advocating exclusive categories of subject matter about which blacks want to write and read. It seems highly unlikely that one will find such rigidly demarcated group preferences, especially amongst blacks at this time in South Africa.

1.2 Trend B

Trend B represents a group of librarians, teachers, information workers and parents who counter the foregoing view by arguing that black children's reading interests are not different from those of other children. This group recognizes, among other aspects, the universality of the themes of children's books. The marked differences in interests and needs between the racial groups in South Africa, are due to the Apartheid policy of separate amenities and differences in the environments that people have been forcibly locked into. This is affirmed by Thornton's view of culture (in Boonzaier and Sharp, 1988) as a resource to which everybody should be allowed access. He believes that the differences in people's interests reflect the differing access to cultural resources. Many black people display an interest in a very wide range of materials. This trend tends to recognize the fact that blacks do not necessarily display unvarying needs and interests since many subscribe to the principle of individuality which renders them different

individuals in different places at different times.

1.2.1 Literature Survey In Support Of Trend B

Edman (1967:40) acknowledges the universality of children's interests, when she reports that all studies of the general interests of children from working-class communities show that they do not vary markedly from those of children from affluent communities. She claims that they laugh at humorous situations, they understand tragic and disappointing ones, they can be led to enjoy rhyme and rhythm, stories of adventure, stories of animals and stories of real life. In other words, Edman maintains that these children's interests are as broad as life and as wide as the subjects dealt with in books. In the light of her views one cannot help questioning the unique character that has been ascribed to black children's reading interests.

Leeb (1990:30) tested the general perceptions of children, in Natal Midlands' farm schools, about their lives. These children came from a squatter community, lived without any infrastructure for everyday life and their lives were insecure. Leeb's study involved getting the children to produce drawings which she describes as fascinating: young children drew the houses they lived in but "embellished them with the things they wanted most - TV [Television] aerials and isitepisi (steps)", which they did not have. Older children were reported to have reproduced typical Natal Midlands farm houses of white people, right down to the air bricks. As Leeb (1990:30) puts it, these children "drew their unattainable dreams" and, interestingly, did not reproduce their squatter settlements. This challenges the suggestion that South African black children, especially in rural areas,

want pictures that depict their immediate surroundings only; the settings with which they are alleged to identify.

To support this contention, Brown (1965) informs us that even in the murkiest slums, people have their aspirations and he mentions Harlem in the United States where everybody he knew seemed to have "some kind of dream". Again this should be viewed as advocating books that would create finer dreams by exposing children to the "attractive and fantastic unfamiliar".

Rosenheim (1967:9) has expressed grave concern about the way the principle of familiarity - of comfortable recognition - has been, in his opinion, overworked. What concerns him is the allegation that the child cannot be expected to show an interest in the unfamiliar, and that literature should make no demands that transcend the literal limits of his/her own experience. Rosenheim (1967) regards this principle as a frail one : he reports that most teachers of English composition know that, because a child owns a dog or has visited a farm there is no guarantee that s/he will write readily or enthusiastically about 'my dog' or 'the farm'. As he says, the common place is the most unexciting object to the imagination. This notion should be seen as applying to children as a whole, including black children.

It has been observed in many studies that the reading interests of children are, to a large extent, affected by the family background (ideally this should be applied broadly to include black children). Spache (1978:4), Moon and Wells (1979:55), Beech (1985 :100), Saracho and Dayton (1991:43) assert that the educational level of the parents, the number

of books in the home, the child's position in the family, the accessibility of the school and public library, the size and social position of the family and family interests and hobbies (or their absence) significantly affect children's reading interests. They further corroborate that parents' attitudes toward reading, the extent of their use of reading for personal purposes and their hopes and expectations for their children exert a constant influence upon children. Moon and Wells (1979:55) further states that the chances of an unskilled manual worker's child being a poor reader are six times greater than those of a professional worker's child (regardless of race). This would explain to some extent the finding that black children in South Africa are poor readers. These arguments are supported by the theories of developmental psychologists (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rogoff, 1990) which are relevant to this study. Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Rogoff (1990) state that human beings do not function in a social vacuum - and developmental and related activities, like reading, should be studied in context. He further discusses linkages between settings that influence human behaviour. This simply means that the environment of the individual being studied must be taken into account if the behaviour of the individual is to be interpretable. The dynamics of that environment, it is claimed widely, have a significant influence on behaviour. Rogoff's approach to the concept of mutuality also specifies that the crucial coordination is between the developing individual and his/her (social) environment, and that this coordination is mutual (Rogoff, 1990:32). This leads to the conclusion that the society into which the individuals are born makes them its members by influencing the manner in which they solve the tasks posed by each phase of their development. Spache (1978:5) maintains that children's reading interests are but one manifestation of the individual. As will be discussed in the Literature Review, this principle of individuality is ignored in some literature when reference is made to black

interests. According to Saracho and Dayton (1991:43) it is possible that the results of a study of reading habits and interests are related more to environmental experiences than to ethnicity.

Beech (1985:100) has also posited the view that a working-class environment is acknowledged as having a detrimental effect on a child's reading development. He alleges, however, that not all working-class environments have a retarding effect, but the incidence of poor reading is very much related to class. It is noteworthy that the majority of black families in South Africa are working-class, and many would be unemployed or homeless.

According to Purves and Beach (1972:104) most of the research concludes that lower-, middle-, and upper-class students have relatively similar interests although differences in the amount and range of these interests, due to the IQ (Intelligence Quotient) and reading ability, do appear. They maintain that little difference has been found in the interests of rural, suburban and metropolitan students, although rural children at some stage read less. Differences in interests, though not significant, are due to class "...although students in middle and lower classes tend to read more for recreation than for information or aesthetic purposes". Other studies are reported by Purves and Beach (1972:105) to have concluded that ethnic differences did not significantly affect differences in reading interest. It is probably in this light that Totemeyer (1989) envisages a literature that draws on intercultural diversity and depicts the mixing of the different ethnic groups in South Africa.

Tsebe (1985:125) recognizes the "two-dimensional" character of blacks' reading interests which he attributes to the " Third world - First world" character of their situation. This situation, Tsebe suggests, should form the basis for meeting the needs of black users who seem to display a need for 'information for development', as well as a need for information to help them function effectively in a developed country. This should be seen to have implications for the black children's reading interests as well: why should they wait until adulthood for exposure to 'variety'?

Trend B therefore asserts that reading interests of children are not only confined to literature which depicts familiar situations and settings, but that these interests should be seen to include literature which depicts unfamiliar situations and settings as well.

This exposition of the two opposing trends confirms the need for this study, that is, the exploration of the reading interests of black children in South Africa.

CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A great deal has been reported in the international literature about the reading interests of children and the factors impacting on these interests (Hanna,1965; Harris,1970; Purves and Beach,1972; Norvell,1973; Robinson and Weintraub, 1973; Fasick,1985; Norton,1991). The researcher believes that it is essential to study some of the views expressed with the aim of clarifying issues raised in the elucidation of Trends A and B in Chapter One.

2.1 Definition of reading interest

In defining reading interest some researchers suggest that a mental force or an "active motivation" operates. That force motivates people, in this case children, to prefer particular reading material spontaneously without any outside influence or interference. Robinson and Weintraub, for instance, refer to "...topics which children actively choose to read..." (1973:81-82) whilst Dulin refers to "...voluntary, self-selected reading activities ..." (1978:108).

A correlation has also been established between general life interests and reading interests by researchers such as Harris (1970:21); Bamberger (1975:117) and Dulin (1978:108,119). These researchers explain how children seek what they have experienced and enjoyed before; like to read about things they are curious about, particularly on the

subject of their aspirations and fantasies. The suggestion here is that prediction of reading interest should be based on general interest patterns in life.

2.2 Value of literature for children

Is it necessary for any child to be exposed to literature - to be introduced to the culture of reading? If the response is in the affirmative, what does this experience do for the child? It is imperative in terms of this study to discuss the value of literature for children so as to justify one's concern with the promotion of the reading habit among children and among the group in question in this study, that is South African black children in particular.

There is consensus among researchers (Harris,1970:22; Robinson and Weintraub,1973:100; Bamberger,1975:7-8; Spink,1989:36; Norton,1991:2,18,22,24) that literature and the ability to read are important in the development of children. They agree that, through literature, children develop favourable attitudes to books which result in broad understanding of their cultural heritage as well as that of others. This factor is regarded as necessary for both social and personal development. Carefully selected books are reported (by the same researchers) to lead to an understanding, an acceptance and an appreciation of many cultures culminating in enjoyment and pleasure which, in turn, lead to the development of a positive self-concept and mutual respect (Harris,1970; Robinson and Weintraub,1973; Bamberger,1975; Spink,1989 and Norton,1991).

Personality development is highlighted as another important area in which books play a significant role as, amongst other virtues, they teach children how to cope with feelings of anger and frustration, help them discover their own capabilities and provide them with role models (Harris, 1970:22; Pappas:1970:5 Robinson and Weintraub,1973:82; Spink,1989:37-38; Norton,1991:18; Robertson:1991:59; Brann,1992:12). Harris (1970:22) suggests a mutuality between personality development and books "...reading is influenced by the make-up of the child's personality and in turn has a strong influence on the developing personality". An escape from depressing reality as well as the nurturing of a child's daydream can be encountered in books (Harris,1970; Robinson and Weintraub,1973; Robertson,1991). Many findings have concluded that, all in all, psychological needs, as identified by Maslow¹ in his 'hierarchy of needs', are some of the major determinants of reading interest. Satisfying these needs influences interest, that is, the need to develop a self-concept, intellectual needs, emotional needs, aesthetic as well as the need to relate to social groups (Harris,1970: 22; Purves and Beach, 1972:100; Robinson and Weintraub, 1973:82; Bamberger, 1975:7-8; Spink,1989:31 and Norton, 1991:18).

Diakiw (1990:297) and Norton (1991:2) suggest that through books children enjoy an intriguing voyage as they follow the colonists' experiences crossing the oceans to discover new countries, they relive survival on isolated islands, they speculate and fantasize about the future, they experience getting into relationships with the environment, come to grips

¹There is a debate concerning Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Totemeyer (1992), for instance, has critiqued his theory on the basis of practicality, arguing that one can be a full human being without the skills to read and write as is the case with millions in the world today.

with problems similar to their own and learn to empathize with other people's feelings and emotions as well as develop their intellect and language. Harris (1970:22), Landy (1977:387) and Robertson (1991:57) remark with sadness how many children associate reading only with school work which results in their becoming unenthusiastic readers and urge that these children should be encouraged to attain the ability to read at the highest level as this will enable them to benefit from the learning opportunities at school and beyond.

The value of literature cannot be discussed fully without a reference to the oral tradition and traditional literature. Totemeyer (1989:393), Norton (1991:44,230) and Robertson (1991:57) dispel the misconception prevailing in South Africa that the oral tradition is a black phenomenon by reporting that this tradition is both very old and found worldwide. It is for this reason that traditional literature is renowned for its contribution to the improvement and facilitation of children's general and scientific understanding of the world and of life. For example, the tale of a young girl who ends up with a jealous or evil stepmother when she loses her own mother, is mistreated (but remains gentle and kind), and finally is rewarded for her goodness, is found in folk literature everywhere. Nine hundred versions of the Cinderella tale have been identified worldwide. The themes in all these stories are basically the same even though they have different characters and settings.

Traditional literature teaches children about cultural diffusion, appreciation of world art and drama, languages and dialects, as well as universal inherent human qualities such as goodness, mercy and courage. Diakiw (1990:296) confirms this belief when he mentions

a study, which showed that children aged between 10 and 13 are receptive to learning about people from other countries. He refers to a number of studies of primary school students in social studies programmes with a strong global education focus. These students developed more positive attitudes not only toward themselves but also toward people from other countries. More importantly these students saw more similarities than differences between themselves and others. Of utmost importance to the present study (to affirm the above arguments) is Totemeyer's thesis on African mythology and South African juvenile literature (1989). She prefers a definition of culture which regards culture as a dynamic force which changes constantly to a definition which declares culture a basis of division which remains fairly static. The preferred interpretation is open-ended and sees culture as a cohesive force which is subject to change and which nourishes itself from the coming together of cultures (Totemeyer, 1989:393). Totemeyer proposes a common Southern African cultural vision in juvenile literature which will transcend ethnicity and promote a national or "people's" culture for the country as a whole instead of reinforcing ethnic consciousness which has been used to augment political biases.

The above discussion has established that literature has much to offer growing minds. This leads to the conclusion that black children in South Africa like other children should, of necessity, be accorded the opportunity to have access to literature so that they will be able to develop fully.

2.3 Individuality and reading

The tendency to view black reading needs and interests as uniform has been identified in

Chapter One. It is therefore essential for this study to address the issue of individuality and reading.

A number of researchers (Harris, 1970:24; Purves and Beach, 1972:102; Robinson and Weintraub, 1973:96; Landy, 1977:386; Dulin, 1978:113; Tucker, 1981:3,21; Brann, 1992:12) have stressed the importance of the issue of individuality in reading interest and warnings have been raised against generalizing about individual needs and interests in reading. These researchers have identified great variations in the types of reading material that different individuals, from whatever cultural background, find interesting and fulfilling.

Harris (1970), Robinson and Weintraub (1973) and Landy (1977) further advise that we should be sensitive to the learner with his/her unique pattern of strengths and weaknesses, and they agree that individual differences are so evident that group studies are of little value in helping teachers meet the needs of a particular class. Individual differences may possibly be related to many factors raised in this study, such as gender, reading ability and socio-economic factors. Pappas (1970:7) advises that one way of discovering what the child of today enjoys is to make a careful study of the child him/herself and of the mass media which tend to influence his/her interests. Of crucial relevance to this study is the extent of generalization regarding black needs in South Africa - that in fact the issue of individuality is avoided when addressing black interests. For this reason it is appropriate to examine, in the following section, the factors that are reported to influence reading interest.

2.4 Determinants of reading interest

Several determinants of reading interest have been identified as essential to this study. These factors are addressed in an attempt to establish whether they are operational in the case of black children's reading interests.

The factors are discussed in the section which follows.

2.4.1 Age

Hanna (1965:55), Purves and Beach (1972:92), Norvell (1973:41-46) and Brann (1992:16) have concluded that a correlation exists between reading interests and class or school standard level (which is related to age). It is claimed that the identification at earlier ages is with fantasy figures, usually animals which represent childlike and anthropomorphic experiences. The more realistic stories popular with older elementary children portray peers undergoing adventures. The researcher makes the general observation that many readers, at some stage, experience the automatic outgrowing of certain genres.

2.4.2 Gender

The researcher prefers the term 'gender' to 'sex' (which has been used in most of the literature) since the latter has several physical and biological connotations that are not essential to this study. In his discussion of the two concepts Boonzaier (1988:154)

differentiates between the biological and the social factors, explaining that sexual differences are something we are born with whilst gender roles are socially reinforced and modified by the cultural environment in which we grow up. In this study, gender is used to differentiate between girls and boys.

The literature reports a measure of difference between the reading interests of boys and those of girls, claiming that girls read more and mature earlier in reading ability (at the same time issuing a warning against regarding this as an indication of intelligence levels). Hanna (1965:55), Purves and Beach (1972:93), Norvell (1973:47) and Bamberger (1975:21-22) support this view by regarding gender as one of the most important determinants of differences in reading interests. In the case of older children, girls are reported to favour romantic fiction, home and school life, adventure, domestic animals and pets, sentiment and mystery, for instance, whereas boys are linked to rough and dangerous adventure, science fiction, war stories, and so on.

2.4.3 Intelligence

Many researchers have concluded that a relationship (with exceptions) between a child's intelligence level and the development of reading interest exists. Schonell (1961:190-191), Hanna (1965:56), Purves and Beach (1972:95-96), Norvell (1973:26-31) and Bamberger (1975:19) have investigated this correlation and are agreed that intelligence plays a significant part in children's reading choices. They further suggest that within different social classes, interests of intelligent students will be significantly in advance of others as

well as noticeably diverse. Purves and Beach summarize this assertion as follows:

In general the research indicates that gifted children read higher amounts, mature earlier in their interests, reach the "reading peak" at ages 8-9, rather than 12-13, read over a wide range, read for informational purposes, buy more books, and prefer humour, complex plots and moral dilemmas more than students with average or low intelligence (Purves and Beach, 1972:95-96).

2.4.4 Reading ability

It has been concluded that the relationship between reading ability and the sophistication of reading interest is rather weak. In spite of this finding Schonell (1961:191), Purves and Beach (1972:97) and Bamberger (1975:19) argue that children cannot possibly enjoy reading if they have not been adequately equipped with reading skills.

2.4.5 Socio-economic factors

There is general consensus among researchers, that socio-economic factors are a major influence on children's reading interest. A positive correlation has been drawn between the two variables. **Home background** is highlighted as having the greatest influence on the development of early attitudes towards leisure reading. A negative influence manifests itself in homes where there are negative parental attitudes towards books, combined with a lack of books in the home, (Schonell, 1961:190; Hanna, 1965:57; Smith, Smith and Mikulecky, 1978; Greaney, 1980:340; Mikulecky, Shanklin and Caverly, 1980:11; Tucker, 1981:218, 220, 222; Bettelheim and Zelan, 1982:45; Chall, Jacobs and Baldwin, 1990:1).

Smith (1990:332) believes that if a young child sees a parent (who is his/her most important person in the world) reading regularly, for example, then learning to read becomes important to the child. Parental influences can be negative as when reading of any kind is considered a frivolous occupation, as suggested in the statement, "...put that book down...and do something useful" (Schonell, 1961:190). A negative situation pertains when children never experience hearing stories, are never read to at home, have not been taught nursery rhymes, have not heard favourite folk and fairy tales like *The three bears*, *The billy goats gruff* or *Sleeping beauty* (Hanna, 1965:57; Tucker, 1981:222).

This negative influence on reading could be associated with a family income so meagre that acquiring all the essentials of life, in an overcrowded home, is impossible (Hanna, 1965:57). Reference is made in the literature (from abroad) to children from low-income families as culturally deprived, culturally different, culturally disadvantaged, urban-disadvantaged, children of poor families or children at risk (Hanna, 1965:57; Harris, 1970:23; Robinson and Weintraub, 1973:91; Havighurst, 1976:60; Maria, 1989:296).

Norman-Jackson (1982:356) clearly describes activities evident in the homes of both successful and unsuccessful readers to illustrate the above arguments relating to the impact of home background on reading interests: he concludes that successful readers interacted more often with parents and school-age siblings who probably gave more explanations, taught the ABCs and played "school" and encouraged the children's verbalizations. In the families of unsuccessful readers, he suggests that school-age children's participation added non-significantly to their younger sibling's verbal

stimulation. These youngsters carried their siblings about, tickled them and "rough-housed". Discouragement most frequently took the form of ignoring - in the families of two unsuccessful readers, the preschool child was not observed to initiate a verbal interaction with a parent, but was more likely to tug, reach, touch, or point.

A vicious circle suggested by Mikulecky, Shanklin and Caverly (1980) best illustrates this argument :

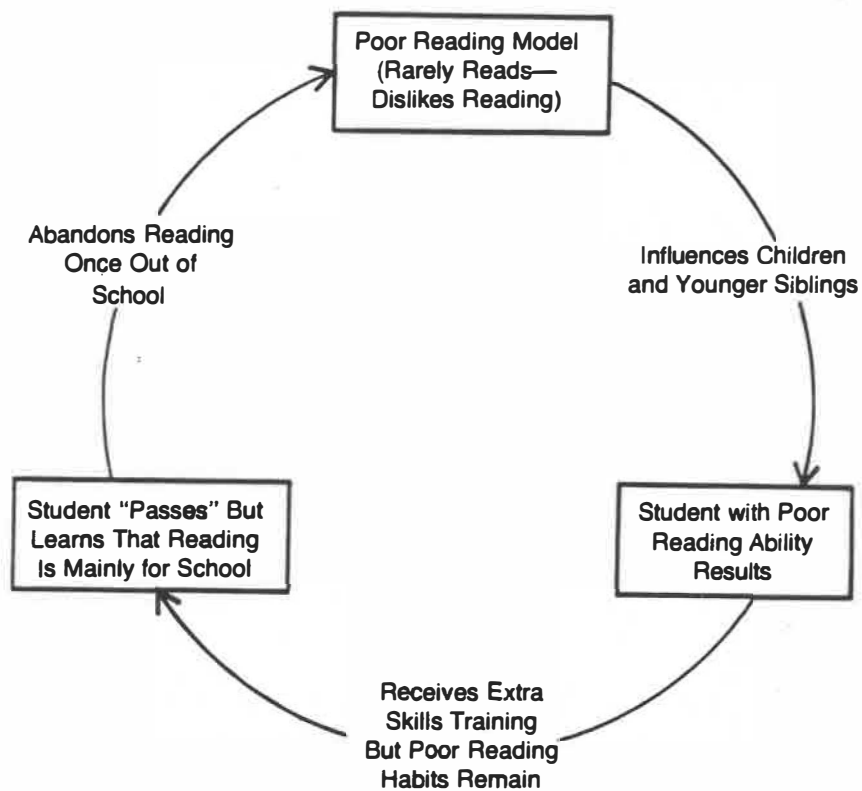


Figure 1. A vicious circle: Nonreaders produce nonreaders.

Social class, which is closely related to home background, is defined by Williams (1988:66) in terms of fundamental economic relationships, which are seen to impact heavily on children's leisure reading. Purves and Beach (1972:104), Tucker (1981:218) and Greaney (1980:340) observed that children from working-class homes did not read very much whilst Havighurst (1976:58) agrees that "...members of different social classes, by virtue of enjoying (or suffering) different conditions of life, came to see the world differently, to develop different aspirations and hopes and fears, different conceptions of the desirable from which, in turn, one can discern their objectives in child-rearing". Through his studies of language usage, Bernstein (1964:66) has also established a correlation between language development and the family's social status.

While the prospects of children from family situations such as that depicted in Figure 1 obviously remain unpromising, some researchers (Purves and Beach, 1972; Landy, 1977; Tucker, 1981) are quick to interpose that the situation is not the same in all working-class homes. Therefore children from such homes are not necessarily backward in their command of the technical skills of reading. The same researchers conclude that socio-economic factors do not significantly affect interest and that lower, middle- and upper-class students have relatively similar interests to rural, suburban and metropolitan students (Purves and Beach, 1972:104; Landy, 1977:387; Tucker, 1981:220,222). They are suggesting a reasonable warning against generalization. Tucker (1981) reports that "avid readers may come from families where there has never been any encouragement for books, while nearly one third of fourteen year old boys with good intelligence and [are] from middle-class homes never read any books for pleasure at all" (Tucker, 1981:218).

In support of this argument Roe (1965:30-31), writing about Australian society, distinguishes between three strands regarding social class and reading activities: he mentions middle-class and upper-middle-class families, both in city and country areas who are preoccupied with money-making, home-beautifying and professional advancement and for whom reading is trivial, and whose children grow into the pattern their parents have set; he further identifies working-class families who are also preoccupied with simply making ends meet, maintaining a home and rearing children and are not physically or psychologically prepared to encompass anything beyond entertainment; then he provides an interesting description of other working-class families who desperately seek to escape their adversity (for themselves and for their children) and who see books and libraries as symbols of advancement.

Simpson and Weiner (1989) define ethnicity as pertaining to a people who are differentiated from the rest of the community on the grounds of common racial, cultural, religious, or linguistic characteristics within a larger system. Although this source also refers to 'heathenism' the researcher prefers the first definition for purposes of this study. Purves and Beach (1972) have focused on the relationship between ethnicity and reading interest, concluding that ethnic differences do not significantly affect differences in interest and suggesting that, in fact, the fluctuations in results might be related to the temper of the times regarding political and social pressures (Purves and Beach (1972:104).

Closely related to ethnicity is the phenomenon of race which is predominant world-wide and highly topical in South Africa where it is used to explain differences in needs and

levels of performance. Simpson and Weiner (1989) define race as any one of the major divisions of humankind, each having distinctive physical characteristics, such as colour, and a common ancestry. Havighurst, one of the leaders in the study of culturally different backgrounds, has reported that the so-called racial differences reported were substantially less among the poor and pointed out that "there are many black and white people whose response patterns are very similar" (1976:60). Purves and Beach (1972) and Havighurst (1976), in their studies, indicate how in several instances, supposedly racial differences diminish with higher income levels and how many in the white poor group conform to the "typical black response pattern." This is an indication that heterogeneity of class exists within both the black and white cultures. It can be inferred that race is not a major determinant of differences in reading interest.

2.4.6 Background/setting in books

The issue of settings in books is crucial to this study as a number of assumptions have been made regarding black children's preferences for settings in books. Organizations such as READ, which are involved in inculcating the culture of reading in black children, especially in rural areas, are continually seeking advice in this area.

Machet (1989), Pritchard (1990) and Morrow (1992:251), have established a correlation between the cultural schemata or background and reading comprehension. This is explained by the claim that when people read they bring background knowledge to a text and that this background knowledge is essential for the comprehension and interpretation of a particular text. It is claimed that unless the reader possesses some cultural

background related to the social setting in the text, s/he will not be able to understand the story.

In reaction to the above view Robinson and Weintraub (1973:90), Tucker (1981:225), Maria (1989:296), Diakiw (1990:297) and Bennett (1991:73), remark that it is indeed very simple-minded to assume that working-class children will necessarily always prefer books set in familiar backgrounds and warn against excessive emphasis on the issue of 'background information' "... just as one cannot assume that a disadvantaged child has an experiential association with a particular concept, one also cannot assume that s/he lacks it" (Maria:1989:297). She continues that even amongst middle-class children with very similar backgrounds, there is the possibility of variation in background knowledge.

Hurst (1993:119) reports, from her study to test the children's responses to stories set within different cultural milieus, that there was no significant difference in the kinds of incidents that the girls and boys and different cultural groups found funny. She concludes that the cultural origin of the story had no relative effect on enjoyment of the story.

Bennett is concerned about the criticisms levelled against some books for being:

too foreign, too different, too strange to be understood, to be successful with this or that child, on this or that kind of child, or age of child, "...I have known children of rich and poor backgrounds whose skins were black, brown or white who have all read the same book and who all identified with the protagonists, who all enjoyed it and to all of whom the events, background and setting were foreign, strange and different - what counted was the perspective and the literary quality " (Bennett, 1991:73).

These authors believe that if the quality of the writing is poor the children will possibly

not be interested. They all agree that what seems to appeal to young readers of all social classes is what is funny and well-written, centring around fantasies and situations that are relevant to every child. Tucker (1981:222) asserts that the social background to the stories has relatively little to do with their popularity with the young readers. He refers to Berg's Nipper Series which depict working-class backgrounds, pointing out that they have been very popular with children from all classes. Tucker (1981:225) further reports many cases where children from deprived backgrounds found stimulation in fiction. To support his theory he compares Berg and Blyton who, although writing from two different social backgrounds (that is, working-class and middle-class respectively) both appeal to a large audience of children to whom they offer something exciting and out of the ordinary. He explains that it is the psychological rather than the surface similarities of fictional characters that eventually appeal most to readers. Support for this view also comes from Tucker's example (1981) of novels about naughty boys in preparatory schools, which sell very well even in France, a country without any tradition of preparatory school education at all. An account from the London County Council junior school in Bethnal Green, some of whose 600 children were very poor, also affirms this view: the headmistress invited four authors (after whom the school's Houses had been named) to a fancy dress Christmas Party, "do come and let the children see and touch you..." It is believed that this had positive results in that the children became more interested in literature (Tucker:1981:225).

Robinson and Weintraub (1973:90), writing in the United States, discuss a study in which 597 subjects included 515 black American people from large and small cities. Again these subjects chose stories and illustrations depicting middle-class characters and backgrounds.

It is true that this finding contrasts with opinions often expressed about inner-city children, and those in South Africa about black children, needing familiar illustrations with which they can identify. Robertson argues that children should be exposed to the 'unfamiliar' if we hope to widen our children's understanding of themselves and their world: "...it is necessary to heighten the tension of experience, so that imagination will add warmth and excitement to the path ahead... obviously direct experience is very limited especially for the primary school pupil, but the child will respond emotionally to the world of fiction and so perceive new truths which he vitally makes his own" (Robertson,1991:60).

Evans (1987:548) affirms that children can deal with a global perspective earlier than we normally present it. The researcher views this as a warning against the tendency to overprotect children from the 'foreign' and 'unfamiliar'. Diakiw, who is a Canadian, praises the African folk tales like *Mufaro's beautiful daughters*, *Anansi the spider* and others for making it possible for foreigners like himself to explore what African cultures have in common with their own, reaffirming that people are more alike than they are different (Diakiw,1990:297-298).

Again, the researcher agrees with Robertson (1991) and Diakiw (1990) who believe that the newly acquired exposure to the unknown, through children's books, provides the child with substance upon which to structure his/her daydreams and give better direction to his/her life.

Tucker (1981:222), Machet (1989:63) and Pritchard (1990:291) accuse some authors of

children's books of concentrating on backgrounds and characters that are alien to a working-class readership in children's books. Maria (1989:296) affirms that the major disadvantage that these children experience with regard to reading comprehension is the absence of experiences common to working-class children. Fortunately some studies have acknowledged a shift, in children's literature, away from the previous concentration upon purely middle-class characters and backgrounds. Dickson and Stilwell (1993) have also acknowledged this shift in the debate around *All the magic in the world* which realistically depicts one of the working-class situations in South Africa. In realistic stories the settings now tend to include both comfortable houses in middle- and upper-class suburbs as well as more modest suburbs and backstreets. The boarding school story which tended to be class based has virtually died (fictional children still go to school, which forms only a part of their daily lives). In historical novels the protagonist is as likely to be a member of a downtrodden class as a young aristocrat.

2.4.7 Availability of books

The factor of the availability/unavailability of books to children is very important in terms of this study. Stadler (1991:16), for instance, clearly indicates the insufficiency of library facilities in black schools in South Africa and imputes this to the unequal distribution of resources between the various education departments. Verbeek (1986:37) stated that it was only in the mid-1980s that the Department of Education and Training began to develop classroom libraries at primary school level and to budget for resource centres for secondary schools. One cannot underestimate the extent of the backlog the authorities are confronted with in attempting to redress this imbalance. In the international literature

Purves and Beach (1972:103) and Greaney (1980:342) have observed a shortfall regarding the reading choices for leisure reading. They question the way in which the research is biased towards reading choices by students and the amount of leisure time spent reading, as opposed to choices they **would** make and the amount of time they **would** spend on reading if more books were available. This supports the observation that students from homes without many books, whose libraries are inadequate, and who are not provided with book options in the classroom may not develop a wide range of interests, although it is true that some readers develop interests regardless of availability (Purves and Beach:1972:103).

2.4.8 Suitability

Various authors (Schonell,1961:191; Harris,1970:22; Bamberger, 1975:25; Pugh,1978:84; Tucker,1981:221) feel strongly about the way the issue of suitability is ignored by many who work with children in reading. Parents who are themselves unused to books and public librarians can offer the wrong sort of encouragement for reading. Pugh (1978) argues that teachers of reading do not pay attention to the study of materials which children enjoy - instead they tend to prescribe what ought to be read without regard for the children's immediate interests and concerns. Schonell (1961) and Harris (1970) believe that if children are provided with books that are suitable in terms of both the level of difficulty and content, many children may be initiated into independent reading. As Bamberger (1975) puts it, the issue is not interest but rather the difficulty which overtaxes the child's reading skills. This relates to an earlier point (made in section number 2.4.4) that children cannot enjoy reading without reading skills (Schonell,1961; Purves and

Beach, 1972; Bamberger, 1975).

Purves and Beach (1972:79), Tucker (1981:224) and Fasick (1985:23) allege that children, and even parents, are attracted to books that are written in simpler styles. They agree that more formal verbal styles, analysis and discussion will put many children off reading. Redundant language, as well as an involved sentence structure, will obviously obscure meaning for some children.

2.4.9 Teachers of reading

There is agreement that the problem of reading development lies with the teachers of reading whose involvement in the child's acquisition of reading plays a significant role in influencing the child's reading development (Purves and Beach, 1972:106; Adams and Pearce, 1974:69; The Bullock Commissioners, 1975:113; Spingies, 1993:70). Reading aloud, in which activity the majority of teachers are reportedly very dull, is viewed as the teachers' biggest contribution throughout the 9-13 age range. The Bullock Commissioners (1975:113) refer to "...the value of the collective class experience" exemplified when all the children are sharing the enjoyment of teachers reading to them; whilst Adams and Pearce (1974:69) appeal to the teachers to make available to the children a range of books rather than hide them neatly in cupboards.

Researchers, such as those cited above, further implore teachers to cultivate a learning environment which is reading supportive, within which they (the teachers) can foster fluent reading and enjoyment through reading successfully. Two questions immediately

spring to mind : how good are these reading teachers at reading? How much in-depth understanding of the complexities of the reading process do they possess? Various authors (Adams and Pearce, 1974:59; Whitehead, Capey and Maddren, 1975:49; Pugh, 1978:9; McKellar, 1993:51-53; Spingies, 1993:56) have expressed a grave concern about the teachers' level of perception of the reading process, the mastering of which many see as "barking at print" rather than a life-long developmental process which should continue throughout a child's school career and beyond it. This corresponds with Walker's appeal for courses in 'higher order skills' (1974:12-13). READ (1993:2) states that the black teachers "are products of an education system in which books were undervalued and underutilized".

Pugh (1978) and Spingies (1993) put the blame on those working at higher levels of education who do not concern themselves much with the teaching of reading, but choose to concern themselves with written evidence of work done. The inspectors of education and subject advisors, or specialists of the former Department of Education and Training in South Africa demonstrate this by placing too much emphasis on written proof of work done when they pay visits to the schools (Radebe, 1994²). McKellar (1993) and Spingies (1993) allege that these authorities are not reading specialists in the first place. The South African Spingies makes the very interesting remark that "some teacher trainers, too, may have failed to keep abreast of recent developments, and may have sent into the world inadequately trained and ill-informed teachers of reading "(1993:56). He appeals to the junior-primary school teachers to appreciate that a child does not complete the process of learning to read in Standard 1. Authors such as Walker (1974), McKellar (1993) and

²Radebe is the school inspector for the Mshwathi Circuit, New Hanover in Natal.

Spingies (1993) are convinced that developing efficient readers will never be achieved unless there is a change of attitude among teachers and teacher-trainers.

The researcher agrees that the situation in South African black schools is depressingly bleak since she has also observed that the majority of teachers are very poor readers themselves. This may be due to a number of reasons some of which are suggested in the foregoing discussion in this section, such as the lack of perception of the reading process emanating from inadequate training. To confirm this READ makes the observation that "the professional training of black teachers has not stressed the importance of reading, or equipped them to involve pupils in the learning process" (1993:2).

CHAPTER THREE

3. METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodology used for the study. It describes the selection of a sample of the school population, the designing of the instrument, the selection of the sample of books, the testing procedure and the data analysis.

3.1 Population Sample

The sample of children was selected from Standard Two classes of the former Department of Education and Training (DET), South Africa, Pietermaritzburg 1 Circuit. Although the structure of the DET circuits changed from July 1993 the researcher chose to work with the original structure for this study because of uncertainty about when the new structures would be implemented after the general election in April 1994. Permission was granted by the Circuit Inspector of the former DET for access to the schools. Letters were subsequently sent to the schools to introduce the subject of the study and to initiate contact. The researcher paid the schools very brief visits to introduce herself personally and to meet the class teachers and explain the nature of the project before the commencement of the survey.

Simple random sampling, recommended by Moser and Kalton (1971:80), Gay (1981:88) and Powell (1991:65) as the best single way of obtaining a truly representative sample, was used to ensure as closely as possible that the sample represented the population from

which it was chosen, and to guard against selection bias. A reliable sampling frame was available in the form of a list of all primary schools in the Pietermaritzburg 1 Circuit. Stielau¹, of the Department of Statistics and Biometry, confirmed that 220 children out of a total of approximately² 1500 would be representative of the whole group. The sample of 220 children was selected from 11 primary schools out of a total of 13 primary schools in the Pietermaritzburg 1 Circuit. From each of the 11 schools, 20 children were selected in the following procedure: in each school the Standard Two class is divided into four sections, each with an average of 35 children. Random sampling was again employed, with the help of the class register as a reliable sampling frame, to select five children from each section to total 20 from each school.

The choice of the Standard Two level was supported by a reading of Piaget (in Rogoff, 1990: 145)³, the developmental psychologist. He refers to this as the stage of operation (from about seven to eleven or twelve years) during which children learn to cooperate and to coordinate points of view. He further suggests that it is during this stage that children develop the capability for discussion, collaboration and arguments that are orderly and understandable. It became apparent from the pretest, conducted by the researcher to test the validity and relevance of the questions in the interview schedule, that at this level the children had already been introduced to the reading process and had mastered their

¹Karl Stielau is lecturer and statistician in the Department of Statistics and Biometry, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

²It is appropriate to approximate since dropping out and re-entering is a common phenomenon in black schools.

³The original publication in the French language was not used because of the high cost of translation fees and the researcher's lack of funding for this study.

independent reading sufficiently to be able to express their views, however advanced or limited, about their reading activities. They could articulate their responses to questions about their reading activities; they could justify their preferences adequately and they could make independent choices.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument used in the study was an interview schedule developed by the researcher. This was necessary because an interview schedule that would be suitable for the purposes of this study in terms of the comprehension level of the group surveyed, as well as the relevance of questions to the content of the study, was required.

3.2.1 The pretest

Moser and Kalton (1971:47) and Powell (1991:100) established the essentiality of administering a pretest prior to the main survey, to test the instrument (such as the interview schedule used in this study) for validity and viability. This is acceptable because there are a number of facts the clarification of which cannot be based on prediction or unfounded trust that the results will be valid. For instance, one cannot easily predict the suitability of the respondents and how they will react to questions and the answers they are likely to give; neither can one predict which questions are worth asking at all. The purpose of the pretest in this study was to test the survey method used for suitability (for the age group in the study) and for adequacy of the interview schedule.

The pretest of the interview schedule was of particular importance to this study since the population sample comprised young children and the possibility of misunderstanding was high. The results of the pretest for this study, which was conducted with six Standard two children, confirmed the viability of the survey method as well as that of the interview schedule. The educational level of the children was appropriate because they could adequately engage with the researcher, for instance, they asked for clarification when the need arose. Also, the questions proved appropriate as they drew responses which were relevant to this study. The results of the pretest suggested that no major changes to the interview schedule were necessary.

3.2.2 Interview schedule

The instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview schedule commended by Gay (1981) because it allows for clarification which was essential for the age group in this study. The questions were kept short and simple, for clarity, because lengthy rambling questions could confuse the young respondents. This was supported by Moser and Kalton (1971:321) and Gay (1981:167) who warn against asking complex questions to avoid ambiguity, vagueness and misinterpretation in general and with children in particular. They preferred a number of simple questions to a single complex question. Open questions were also preferred to closed ones since the range of answers could not be predicted.

Homogeneity as a factor was limited only to the common home language of the children, that is Zulu. The ages of the children ranged from 9-12. This is normal in black schools

where a great variation in age is found within the same standard and where "dropping out" and re-entering school are common.

Questions were divided into three sections as follows:

Section A

The first category of questions was aimed at getting factual background information about each child. It has been argued that reading activities and preferences of the family, family structure and the whole family's social standing and attitudes will affect the child's development of reading interest. The questions in this section help address this argument (See Section A of interview schedule).

Section B

The second category of the interview schedule was aimed at determining the children's language preferences. It also tried to establish whether the physical appearance of a book affects choice in respect of colour and illustrations: are the children attracted to brightly coloured books, both outside and inside in terms of covers and illustrated pages or does that not affect choice at all? The other was the issue of familiarity and unfamiliarity of setting as in the illustrations. The study sought to establish whether the children would prefer settings that depicted their familiar life styles to those that reflected foreign or less familiar life styles (See Section B of the interview schedule).

Section C

The third part of the interview schedule was to establish whether there was a positive correlation between the content of a story and choice. As locality is an important element in a story, this section would also address the issue of the setting of a story being important or unimportant (See Section C of the Interview Schedule).

3.3 Selection of the book sample

Although no standard list was used on which to base the selection of the sample of books for the study, an examination of the literature revealed basic agreement (discussed later in this section) about a core of genres which had appeal for children of this age. A sample collection of books was developed to represent these categories for testing. Christine Stilwell of The Department of Information Studies of the University of Natal, in Pietermaritzburg had, over a number of years, developed a core collection of children's books to support courses, offered by the Department, which addressed the debates represented in Trends A and B described in the problem statement of this study. This collection provided a starting point for the researcher in building up a sample to use in this study. A local publisher also generously donated some appropriate recently published books for the project. Therefore, very few had to be borrowed from libraries, a factor which saved the researcher from many difficulties that could have been incurred through borrowing from a 'circulating' collection in an institution.

In selecting the sample of books that was used to test the reading interests of the children,

the researcher made sure that all the books were simply written with numerous pictures to assist easy comprehension and enjoyment. Some of the books might have been better suited to younger children. The researcher, however, decided to include them because the children in the study came from sections of the population in which reading was reportedly not regarded as a high priority. The researcher used picture-books to provide the necessary visual impact so as to ensure that the 'setting' issue was adequately addressed. The books used in the sample represented a range of local and overseas titles. The researcher has not supplied summaries of the books used in the study because these books are readily available from the bookshops and libraries.

The books used in this study have been categorized according to the core genres identified in the literature: adventure, fantasy, animal stories, realistic stories and family stories. The reason behind the choice of categories follow.

Authorities in the area of children's books and their effects on the growing mind have concentrated on similar genres in their discussions, namely, adventure, fantasy (fairy tales), animal stories, realism as well as family stories. Fisher (1961), Cullinan and Carmichael (1977), Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1977), Heale (1986), Marshall (1988), Norton (1991), le Roux (1992), all refer to the same genres.

Heale (1986), a well-known children's book specialist, presented a course at the University of Cape Town Summer School in 1986 at which his recommendations centred

around these genres. Le Roux (1992), of Iskemus⁴, in her discussion on books and children, has also based her discussion on the same genres. Cullinan and Carmichael (1977:55) provided a list (covering these categories) of 100 best books and authors, their aim being among other things to inform interested people "...about certain books that were perennial favourites with children from many different backgrounds". It would be interesting to establish whether black children fall within this group of children with different backgrounds. In their discussion on 'guiding children's book selection' Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1991) constantly refer to these categories. The developmental psychologists, Maslow⁵ (1964) and Erikson (1974), in establishing the premise that children's psychological needs can be satisfied by providing reading matter, have also referred to these categories.

The researcher agrees with the widely expressed view (Heale, 1986; Sutherland and Arbuthnot, 1991; Norton, 1991; le Roux, 1992) that categorizing these books rigidly is not possible, because their characteristics are not unique to a particular category. Instead there is a good measure of overlap in the characteristics as well as in their supposed effects on the children. Nevertheless, these genres are suited to this study, the objective of which, is to test black children's responses to the literature of these genres.

⁴Inligtingsentrum vir Kinder-en Jeuglektuur en-Media, Universiteit van Stellenbosch/Information centre for children's literature and media, University of Stellenbosch.

⁵There is a debate concerning Maslow's hierarchy. Totemeyer (1992), for instance, has critiqued his theory on the basis of practicality, arguing that one can be a full human being without the skills to read and write as is the case with millions in the world today.

The characteristics of the genres are set out in the following section.

Adventure

The nine to thirteen age group (as in this study) is said to find pleasure in the stories of children having adventures (without their parents' supervision and meddling) solving mysteries, catching criminals, overcoming difficulties, coping in an adult world, that is, in books which liberate the child's own feelings of being restricted by parental and authority control (Marshall, 1988:153; le Roux, 1992:4).

Animal stories

Animal stories vary from fantasies about humanized animals to those that give factual information about animal life. Animals behaving like humans are often a vehicle for a message, for instance, for a moral. As Marshall (1988), Norton (1991) and le Roux (1992) have observed, the stories in which a child forms an affection for an animal are popular with many age groups and are found to be therapeutic for many. These stories are known to provide psychological comfort similar to that which children find in pets.

Family stories

According to le Roux (1992) children identify with books which reflect familiar family relationships and in which they recognize their own personal conflicts. Satisfactory family stories enable children to clarify and understand not only their own problems and

relationships, but also their attitudes to society at large. This relates to the observation by le Roux that it is within the security of the family context the human personality is nurtured.

Fantasy

Many children live in a troubled and complex world from which they need to escape and it is fantasy that can provide an escape. Furthermore, fantasy appeals to the reader's sense of right and wrong, social justice, moral fortitude and the eternal struggle between good and evil (Norton,1991; le Roux,1992:9); it is linked to the child's quest for self identity, self knowledge and self actualization "...to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (Maslow,1964). According to Fisher (1961:132) books on fantasy and magic bring the irrational within the bounds of our own world.

Historical stories

These are stories about people who lived in a bygone era and are thus recommended to help children to a greater understanding of past times. Honesty and accuracy are two major requisites of historical fiction especially as the readers themselves may have very little or no knowledge at all of historical events and may rely solely on the author to depict these events honestly and accurately. Le Roux (1992:11) declares that there must be an engagement between reader and characters, irrespective of such superficial differences like dress, speech or habit. In identifying with these characters the reader will find his/her own identity. Darke (1989:107) claims that she writes for the 'powerless

outsiders' whom she describes as "those people whose lives, through accident of birth or circumstance, have been oppressed by a variety of injustices". Darke's aim was to give these people 'a window into past years'. Children are always curious to know 'what it was like' and this genre can be used successfully to answer some of their questions.

Although children at this age should be exposed to historical fiction (Norton, 1991:13), this genre was not included in the study because the researcher felt that it would have been difficult to test its relevance on this young group and to elicit responses from them. As mentioned earlier, these children came from sections of the population where reading is reportedly not regarded as a high priority. Testing of this genre would have been more suited to older children who would have been more experienced readers and who could be expected to cope better with the demands of critical discussion of different viewpoints. For a balanced assessment of children's responses, South African historical fiction would also have to be represented. In that regard the researcher decided that, since South African history still required reviewing in terms of authenticity, the honesty and accuracy of historical facts, so essential in children's literature, could not be guaranteed.

Realism

According to le Roux (1992:13) realistic stories can range from crude attempts at "honesty" to the finest children's books ever written. The researcher agrees with Norton (1991) and le Roux (1992) that it is important for these stories to be plausible, possible, convincing and true to life especially for this very vulnerable age group (they are still questioning and seeking answers in their growing years). Very often this genre deals with

controversial subjects like racism, death, physical handicaps, rape, sex, abuse, pregnancies, minority groups, religious and political conflicts and war. Glazer (1986:10) advises that caution should be exercised and these books should be evaluated critically to establish how they fulfil the needs of children as well as how they meet the literary and artistic standards for children's literature.

3.4 The interview procedure

During the administration of the testing instrument used in the study, a sample of books was selected and spread out on tables - the children were asked to browse and select one book each. The researcher then interviewed each child (using the questions in the schedule) about why s/he had selected a particular book. For the final question (section C of the interview schedule) the researcher gave verbal summaries of books and then asked the children to make their choices based on the summary of the story.

In each school, except in Bishopstowe and Copesville where space on verandas was provided due to space problems, a class room was made available to the researcher for the implementation of the survey. Tables or desks were made available for displaying the books.

The researcher interacted with the children in groups of five. The first five children would be invited to join the researcher who joked with them to make them relax and to establish trust. The children were allowed to move around to look at the books which they could touch. The researcher, ready to take notes, would then move to another section

of the room and invite any one of the children, casually, to join her for a chat the purpose of which was to administer the first section of the interview schedule. The children vied with each other to be the first to get to the researcher. By this time the child surveyed would either have selected the book s/he liked or not. If s/he had not, s/he could go back to select her book afterwards and come back for more questioning. After the first two sections of the interview had been completed, the researcher would invite all five children to listen to her summaries of the different books, always avoiding revealing the ending to sustain the children's curiosity. By involving the children in the discussion of the books the researcher ensured that they remembered what the books were all about. The children would again be allowed to choose books, this time to test their responses to the last section of the interview schedule. As the interviews were extremely exhausting one school was dealt with in a week.

3.5 Analysis Of The Data

3.5.1 Coding and Collating the results

For collation of results (data), a simple coding sheet was designed to suit the nature of the data in this study.

Two types of data were analyzed: firstly, that generated by the open questions which required in-depth content analysis; and secondly, that generated by the closed questions which tended to be simpler. For the open questions content analysis preceded the categorization and coding of responses. This corresponds with Powell's advice (1991:150)

that it is necessary to place data, collected for a study, in categories in order to organize and analyze it. Categories of answers and their frequency were determined by the responses to questions. All respondents' answers to a particular question were read and each time a new answer was encountered it was recorded, as was the frequency of each answer category. Once categories and their frequencies were known, it was easy to decide how many categories were necessary. Powell (1991:152) warns against the possibility of inaccuracies which "can emerge during the coding process itself due to observations being assigned to the wrong category". All categorization and coding was done by the researcher herself, and an acceptable level of accuracy was ensured by repeated and thorough checking (by the researcher). Each of the eleven schools had a separate coding sheet. Once the sheets were completed the results were transcribed from the collection instrument, the interview schedule, to the coding sheet.

The second category of data, which was simpler, was easy to break down, and tabulate for descriptive analysis after it had been transcribed into percentages or counts. The researcher then simply worked from the coding sheets to input the data into the computer using a Wordperfect software package. Data, once organized into categories, was transferred into tables for analysis and interpretation of the findings.

3.6 Evaluation Of Methodological Procedure Used In Study

3.6.1 Limitations of the methodological procedure

Having to test the responses of such a young group had its own limitations. The

procedure was extremely time-consuming and exhausting. This could have been abated by employing interviewers. Despite the lack of funding for this study, the researcher speculated that the dynamics involved in dealing with young children were too specialized to be transmitted within a short time. The time it would have taken to train the other interviewers was a factor. She believed that a great deal of her personality as well as expertise in dealing with children was very important. Also, the fact that each child had the same person administering the instrument gave more consistency. Gay (1981:167) has expressed that effective communication is critical and that "some time should be spent establishing rapport and putting the interviewee at ease". A measure of exposure in the researcher to educational psychology was necessary to facilitate the understanding of the different verbal responses. For these reasons, the survey was administered by the researcher herself.

A great deal of patience on the part of the researcher was essential since she was dealing with children some of whom needed to be questioned very carefully. Again, inculcating patience and getting consistency in other interviewers could not be guaranteed. The researcher kept the contact with the children very informal to avoid intimidating them.

It was essential to target this particular age group in the study because, as mentioned earlier, they could articulate their responses adequately and were gaining independence in their reading. At the same time, they were young enough to respond to the kind of book (in terms of illustrations and text) that had become central to the discussions on children's reading interests. But, in other ways the age factor was limiting, for instance, the children could not differentiate between reading for homework purposes or for leisure purposes;

they could not easily differentiate between blood relations or any older person who lived with them, be it 'gogo' [grandmother], aunt, domestic worker or somebody who moved in for other reasons; it was not easy to establish what type or category of teacher or nurse some children were referring to in their responses. This is where a great deal of probing was needed.

As suggested in section 3.3 on selection of the book sample, the children in the study came from sectors where reading was reportedly not encouraged. For this reason the books in the sample had to be simpler than for a "normal" Standard Two level to make sure that the children were not intimidated by the level and that they easily understood the content of the books.

3.6.2 Advantages of methodological procedure

Despite the foregoing limitations the researcher was satisfied with the methodology used in the study because, on the whole, the responses elicited from the population sample were relevant to the study and what it set out to achieve. From the results the researcher was able to address the issues she set out to test and was able to draw some authentic and relevant conclusions and, subsequently, to make informed recommendations.

The semi-structured approach of the interview and the open-ended questions are viewed by Gay (1981:159) as advantageous where, among other factors, the opportunity to establish rapport with respondents and to clarify individual items might be necessary. This combination of the semi-structured approach and the open-ended questions ensured a

flexibility in the interview schedule which was necessary in dealing with the young respondents during the questioning. The open-ended questions facilitated explanation and clarification of questions where it was necessary. Another advantage, as confirmed by Gay, was that the researcher could follow up on incomplete or unclear responses by asking the children additional probing questions. Flexibility in the schedule enabled the researcher to reword the questions to ensure that they were understood, and at times it was possible to elicit further information concerning interesting responses which came up in discussion.

The fact that Zulu is the researcher's first language was an advantage for communication in the study because the researcher could address ambiguities easily and elicit clarification from the children where there was a need.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. RESULTS AND PRESENTATION

In this section of the study, both Arabic numerals and words are used interchangeably for easy presentation of numerical data.

The results of the study are discussed with regard to the following: the social background of the children (4.1) which includes the condition of the areas where the children live (4.1.1); the structure and size of families from which the children came (4.1.2), and occupational status of the parents (4.1.3). The report on the reading status of the children presents the profile of the children's reading activities (4.2.1) and the responses of the children to the books (4.2.2).

4.1 Social background of the children

Social background is discussed with reference to the condition of the areas where the children in the sample lived, family structures and parents' occupations. These factors are necessary to establish whether a correlation exists between the social background of the children in the study and reading interests.

A study conducted by Jubber (1994) is relevant to the present study since it touches on a number of issues raised in this section of the present study. For instance, Jubber (1994:137) concludes that wealth enables families, amongst other benefits, to provide books and other

resources, as well as the privacy, quiet and comfort that are necessary for educational success. Jubber (1994) refers to a study which established some association between school performance and family structure. This study concluded that children who lived with their two married parents performed better on average than children in other types of family arrangement, for instance, with a divorced or single parent. Jubber (1994:140) also reports a possibility that large family size has a negative effect on school performance.

4.1.1 Condition of areas where children live

It is essential for the study to give a brief description of the areas where the children in the sample lived, since it has been established that their social conditions have an impact on the reading process (Schonell, 1961; Greaney, 1980; Mikulecky, 1980; Tucker, 1981; Bettelheim and Zelan, 1982).

The children came from slightly differing backgrounds: some came from local urban townships of Ashdown, Imbali and Sobantu while others were from rural Empolweni, a farm school in Bishopstowe and from Copesville, a squatter camp.

Townships: Ashdown, Imbali and Sobantu

These are urban townships which are located about 20 minutes' drive from the city centre. They have basic infrastructure of a poor standard, such as poorly maintained roads as well as bathrooms and water taps which are located some distance from the houses. With the exception of Sobantu Township, these four-roomed and two-roomed houses are built with the

cheapest building material. Some self-employed, business and professional people have improved their houses by extending them, installing electricity and the water system in the houses. Each of these townships has suburb/s which were developed for professional people such as teachers, nurses and police when housing subsidies were first made available to black people.

The family structure in the areas studied varied a great deal with some families leading a so-called "normal" nuclear family life. Some children came from very closely-knit, extended families; others came from loosely structured extended families and in some instances the families were single-parent units. Some families were well-off in the sense that they had amenities such as indoor bathrooms, electricity, and some necessary electrical appliances whereas others lived in abject poverty. It is of importance to this study to report that some of these children were well acquainted with pleasures such as visiting the beach and going shopping in the city with relatives or parents occasionally. This will be relevant to the discussion of the importance of familiar and unfamiliar settings and the impact on reading.

The following section gives a brief description of each of the areas (outside of the townships) from which the children in the sample population came.

Empolweni

This is a poor Lutheran mission with no infrastructure, situated about 30 minutes' drive from the city centre, where people have a quiet, simple life style. Some units are characterised by broken families, whilst others typify "normal" 2 parent families. Some parents tend cattle and their fields, others work in Pietermaritzburg and return home in the evenings; others only

come home at week-ends. Again it is essential to state that some of these children frequent town, others hardly if ever do; some have visits to the beach and others never do.

Bishopstowe

This farm school is about 20 minutes' drive from town. Poverty characterizes this situation since the majority of parents work on the farm. Those that can get away escape to work in the nearby Sobantu township, in Northdale (an Indian township) and in Woodlands (a so-called Coloured township) as gardeners and domestic workers. Their children lead a very grim life which can involve working for the farmer. Again it is essential to include these factors in the discussion of the issue of familiarity.

Copesville

This is a squatter camp about 20 minutes' drive from Pietermaritzburg with no infrastructure or basic facilities and no proper housing. Dirt, shebeens, corruption, theft, drug and alcohol abuse characterize this situation. There is a wide range of family types from closely knit to that in which children live with distant relatives in situations in which there is not enough care.

4.1.2 Structure of families

Number of children in the family See Table 1

Some children lived with their parents and others lived with their parents and varying numbers of relatives.

Twelve children (5.5%) came from one-child families; forty one (18.7%) came from two-children families; fifty five (25%) came from three-children families; thirty two (14.5%) came from four-children families; nineteen (8.6%) came from five-children families; twenty two (10%) came from six-children families; eighteen (8.2%) came from seven-children families; thirteen (5.9%) came from eight-children families; four (1.8%) came from nine-children families; two (.9%) came from eleven-children families; two (.9%) came from twelve-children families.

It is important to discuss the issue of 'number of children within families' which is closely related to the size of the family. The latter has been identified as one of the aspects that have an impact on the success or failure of the reading activity (Spache,1978; Moon,1979; Beech,1985; Saracho and Dayton,1991; Jubber,1994). This becomes apparent from the way the number of children in each family determines the extent to which the parents' attention and the availability of resources (related to wealth referred to earlier) have to be stretched to provide for many children. It has been observed that the greater the number of children in the family, the more difficult it is for parents to provide reading space and individual attention.

It is worth noting that the highest proportion 55 (25%) of the families had three children per family; the second highest 41 (18.7%) had two children each; a substantial number 32 (14.5%) which ranked third highest had four children per family, followed by 22 (10%) of the families having six children per family. For purposes of interpretation, the researcher decided to make the 'five-family-unit' the cut-off point. This enabled her to suggest the '1 to 4 children-per-family' category as the ideal, while the '5 to 12 children-per-family' unit

is categorized as overcrowded. The implications of this categorization will be discussed further in the interpretation of the results.

Composition of families: whom the children lived with See Table 2

The issue of 'composition' of individual families is closely related to the issue of 'family structure' relating to whom the children lived with. This explains the looseness and/or firmness of the structure which is said to impact on contact between parents and children within families, as well as the extent to which the adults (be it parents or guardians) invest resources such as time, money and effort in educating the children. It is appropriate to refer to Jubber's claim (1994) reported earlier in this section, that 'other' family arrangements affect school performance more negatively than does the 'married two parent family'.

Ninety eight children (44.5%) lived with only their parents and siblings; fifty eight children (26.4%) lived with their parents and siblings and with relatives (grandparents, aunts and uncles); forty seven children (21.4%) came from single-parent families with siblings and, in some cases with relatives as well; seventeen (7.7%) lived with relatives (with or without their own children) without parents.

Total number of family members See Table 3

The total number of family members obviously has implications for overcrowding. For purposes of interpretation, the researcher has again created two categories: 3 to 6 members-per-family category and the 7 to 15 members-per-family group. The researcher further

suggests the first category as ideal (for the study) and the second category as overcrowded. Overcrowding has also been identified as having a negative effect on reading in terms of space, time, parental participation and availability of material. This issue comes up in the interpretation of the results.

Ten children (4.5%) came from a family of three members; twenty nine children (13.2%) came from a family of four members; fifty three children (24%) came from a family of five members; thirty two children (14.5%) came from a family of six members; twenty seven children (12.3%) came from a family of seven members; twenty three children (10.5%) came from a family of eight members; eighteen children (8.2%) came from a family of nine members; twelve children (5.5%) came from a family of ten members; eight children (3.6%) came from a family of eleven members; four children (1.8%) came from a family of twelve members; two children (.9%) came from a family of thirteen members; one child (.5%) came from a family of fourteen and one (.5%) came from a family of fifteen members.

In all these situations there is some measure of overcrowding in that large numbers of people share tiny houses. Some children reported that they shared their houses with grandparents (ugogo) and many mention uncles and aunts. It is important to explain that 'ugogo' or the 'aunt' might be the domestic worker - the children are taught to refer to domestic workers as relatives as a sign of respect. This illustrates the difficulty encountered in attempting to describe the family structure in some situations such as those from which the children in the study came.

The complexity of the children's situations illustrates that it is not a straightforward task to describe what is immediately familiar to black children and what is not.

This description of the different situations will be useful in the discussion on the issue of 'setting' in children's books and in relation to the socio-economic issues as they affect the reading interests of children.

Table 1

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FAMILY	NUMBER OF FAMILIES	PERCENTAGE
One	12	5.5
Two	41	18.7
Three	55	25
Four	32	14.5
Five	19	8.6
Six	22	10
Seven	18	8.2
Eight	13	5.9
Nine	4	1.8
Eleven	2	0.9
Twelve	2	0.9
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>220</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 2

Composition of family:
who the children lived with

COMPOSITION	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Parents & siblings	98	44.5
Parents, siblings & relatives	58	26.4
Single parent & sibling/s	47	21.4
Relatives	17	7.7
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>220</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 3

TOTAL NUMBER OF FAMILY MEMBERS

NUMBER OF MEMBERS IN FAMILY	NUMBER OF FAMILIES WITH NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Three	10	4.5
Four	29	13.2
Five	53	24
Six	32	14.5
Seven	27	12.3
Eight	23	10.5
Nine	18	8.2
Ten	12	5.5
Eleven	8	3.6
Twelve	4	1.8
Thirteen	2	0.9
Fourteen	1	0.5
Fifteen	1	0.5
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>220</u>	<u>100</u>

4.1.3 Parents/guardians' occupations See Table 4

One question required the children in the study to provide information relating to the occupations of their parents. The results in this section of the study have been broken into categories of occupations, discussed in the section to follow, for easy tabulation. These categories of occupations in the study are based on Nyquist's (1983) and Nzimande's (1990) categorizations and modified to suit the needs of this study.

This information will be used in the interpretation of results, specifically in the discussion on the socio-economic aspects as they impact on the reading activity within the home.

The relevance of this information is confirmed by Jubber (1994:138) who alleged that highly qualified parents are able to participate in their children's education more than less educated parents (whose children have to rely more on the school for help). The issue of occupations is also related to that of wealth which is reported by Jubber (1994:137) to have implications for the provision of educational resources such as books, as well as space, comfort and quiet.

The modified categories adopted for the purpose of this study are described below:

Professional service See Table 5 for the breakdown of this category.

Teachers

This category includes primary and secondary school teachers, creche teachers and principals.

Of the total of 220 families, 55 families had teachers in the immediate family: 67 teachers (62.62%) out of a total of 107 parents who are in the professional service were identified, 43 of whom were the only teachers in their families and 12 couples, where both parents were teachers.

Nurses and matrons

This group includes nursing assistants, staff nurses, nursing sisters and matrons.

Of the total of 220, 33 families had professional nurses: 36 nurses (33.64% of parents who are in the professional service) were identified, 30 of whom were the only nurses within their own families, plus 3 couples where both parents were nurses.

Police

Only 4 parents (3.74% of parents in the professional service), all in different families, were identified as police or members of correctional services.

B. **Semi-professional service** See Table 6 for breakdown of this category.

Clerical staff

This category includes all the parents who have clerical jobs in schools, hospitals and legal firms, office machinery technicians, till operators, car and insurance sales persons.

Out of the total of 220 families, 38 families had clerks as parents: 40 clerks (36.4% of the total of 110 parents in the clerical service) were identified: 36 were each from a family, plus 2 couples where both parents were in clerical jobs.

Semi-skilled workers

This group includes shop assistants, bus drivers, company drivers, taxi drivers and petrol attendants. Of the total of 220, 60 families had semi-skilled workers as parents: all in all, 70 parents (63.6% of the total of 110 parents in semi-skilled jobs) fell into this group: 50 were identified in different families whereas 10 children had both parents doing semi-skilled work.

C. **Self-employed persons** See Table 7 for breakdown of this category.

Own business

This group includes taxi owners, shop owners, dress makers, 'spaza' shop owners, home-based hair salons, shebeen and tavern owners and private builders. Some of these family members are retired professionals and those that have decided to leave their jobs for reasons not given.

Self-employed parents were recorded to feature in 42 families. Of the total of 78 parents who were identified as self-employed, 62 (79.5%) owned their own business. Of the 42 families which featured self-employed parents, 22 families each had one self-employed parent with the other either deceased, employed elsewhere, or a housewife; the further 20 families were reported to have both parents self-employed either together or separately.

Hawkers

These include people hawking in town (along the streets, side walks, on verandas and any open space), in townships and those who deliver items like eggs, milk and bread from door-to-door.

Only 13 families featured hawkers as parents: of the 16 parents (20.5% of the total of 78 parents who were self employed) identified as hawkers, 12 came each from a family and 4 made 2 couples, where both parents were hawkers.

D. **Unskilled workers** See Table 8 for breakdown of the category.

Labourers

This category includes domestic workers, cleaners in schools, in hospitals, in private companies, offices and tea-makers.

Parents worked as labourers in 31 families: of the total of 38 labourers (53.5% of the total of 71 parents who worked as labourers) 24 came from different families, plus 7 couples

where both parents were labourers.

Farm workers

Parents worked as farm-workers in 20 families: of the total of 33 parents (46.5% of the total of 71 parents who were identified as farm workers) identified as farm workers, 9 parents came from different families and there were 12 couples in which both parents worked on the farm.

E. Unemployed

Unemployed parents were found in 17 families. Of the 19 parents who were identified as unemployed, 15 were each in a different family, plus 2 cases where both parents were unemployed.

NOTE :Adding the number of families in each category gives a total of 313 family counts instead of the original total of 220. The difference of 93 is due to some families featuring twice where both parents were in different occupations.

Instead of a total of 440 parents (220x2) the total is 385 parents. The shortage of 55 is explained by various reasons, namely, desertion, widowhood and single-parenthood.

Table 4 Parents' occupational status

OCCUPATION	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Professional	107	27.8
Semi-professional	110	28.6
Own business	78	20.2
Unskilled	71	18.4
Unemployed	19	5
TOTAL	<u>385</u>	<u>100</u>

Breakdown of occupationsTable 5 Professional service

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Teachers	67	62.62
Nurses & Matrons	36	33.64
Police	4	3.74
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>107</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 6 Semi-professional service

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Clerical	40	36.4
Semi-skilled	70	63.6
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>110</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 7 Self-employed

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Own Business	62	79.5
Hawkers	16	20.5
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 8 Unskilled

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Labourers	38	53.5
Farm Workers	33	46.5
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>71</u>	<u>100</u>

Unemployed

Nineteen parents were unemployed.

4.2 REPORT ON READING STATUS (From responses to questions)

4.2.1 Profile of children's reading activities

The answers which are not tabled in this section of the data are referred to in discussions in other sections of the report. For instance, responses to the first three questions of Section A of the interview schedule are discussed in section 4.1 on social background of the children whereas the answers relating to books are included in the section covering responses to books. This explains why Question 4 is the first to be tabled.

Question 4. see Table 9

With regard to the children's attitude to reading, 190 (86.3%) claimed that they liked reading very much; 29 (13.2%) liked reading moderately whilst only 1 (.5%) was not keen on reading.

Question 5 see Table 10

In terms of the purpose of reading, 22 (10%) read only for homework; none read only for leisure and 198 (90%) read for both homework and leisure.

Question 6 see Table 11

Regarding the frequency of reading, 195 (88.6%) claimed that they read everyday; 5 (2.3%) read once a week whereas 20 (9.1) could not specify - they read whenever they could.

Question 7 see Table 12

About the venue (where they engaged in reading) 7 (3.2%) children reported that they read only at school; 10 (4.5%) read only at home; 196 (89%) claimed that they read both at school and at home; 5 (2.3%) read at school and at a friend's house; 1 (.5%) reported reading at home and at a friend's house; 1 (.5%) read at school, at home and at a friend's house.

Question 8 see Table 13

In terms of sharing reading (that is who the children read with) 51 (23.2%) claimed that they read alone; 3 (1.4%) read with parent/s or guardian/s; 7 (3.2%) read with siblings; 14 (6.4%) read alone and with parents or guardians; 1 (.5%) read with a parent or guardian and with a sibling; 98 (44.5%) read alone and with siblings; 11 (5%) read with friends or with the teacher; 3 (1.3%) read alone, with parents or guardians and with friends or teachers; 32 (14.5%) read alone, with parents or guardians and with siblings.

Question 9 see Table 14

Regarding the type of material the children read, 59 (26.8) read only books; 49 (22.3%) read books and magazines; 11 (5%) read books and newspapers; 99 (45%) read books, newspapers and magazines; 2 (.9%) claimed that they read anything.

Question 10 see Table 15

With regard to the source of material, 71 (32.2%) borrowed from the school or from the library (school or public); 9 (4%) reported that their parents provided the material; 125 (57%) claimed that the parents provided and they also borrowed from the school or library; 2 (.9%) received their material from the parents or guardians, they borrowed from the school or library and also borrowed from friends; 9 (4%) borrowed from the school or from the library and also borrowed from friends; 3 (1.4%) borrowed from the school or library and they also received material from their parents' employers; 1 (.5%) claimed that s/he bought the material her/himself and also borrowed from the school or library.

All these schools fall under the former Department of Education and Training and are involved with READ which has provided them with box collections which serve as class libraries. Sobantu and Ashdown Townships were, under the former South African Government, serviced by the Pietermaritzburg Municipality and were thus served by the Natal Provincial Library Services (NPLS) although to a limited extent. The researcher declares that the services of the NPLS have been limited because the libraries in the townships are neither well-stocked nor run by qualified personnel. Nevertheless, these libraries are presently being upgraded.

Question 11 see Table 16

In terms of language preference, 173 (78.6%) preferred to read books written in English; 2 (.9%) preferred Zulu; 3 (1.4%) preferred Afrikaans; 31 (14.1%) preferred English and Zulu; 7 (3.2%) preferred English and Afrikaans; 2 (.9%) preferred English, Afrikaans

and Zulu; 2 (.9%) preferred anything (as long as it was easy to understand).

Question 12 was related to Question 11 as it required the children to explain why they preferred a particular language. Since this was an open question the children were allowed to supply as many reasons as they wished. Since these reasons overlapped, with some children giving more reasons than others, the researcher decided that it was adequate to give a composite summary of the children's reasons for their preference for English.

The majority, 173 (78.6%) preferred English claiming that they wanted to learn this language for one or more of the reasons that follow. They all wanted to learn English because their parents and teachers told them that it was an important language which would enable them to complete school and to secure a bright future in a profession. Some of them believed that the latter would save them from having to work on farms like their parents. Other reasons were that they would be able to: communicate across the racial lines to be able to attend better schools in the city; communicate with occasional visitors of other races; communicate with other people in the city since most people in the shops speak in English; go overseas and communicate adequately; emulate older siblings and parents or guardians who had mastered the language; move on to other languages since they had mastered Zulu; read the many interesting books and magazines in English; read material in English that parents brought home from work; understand everything on television.

Only two (.9%) children preferred Zulu because it was an easy language and they could

understand it already; three (1.4%) preferred Afrikaans, two because they wanted to learn the language and one because it was easier than English; 31 (14.1%) preferred both English and Zulu for various reasons enumerated above; 7 (3.2%) preferred English and Afrikaans again for reasons already supplied above; 2 (.9%) liked all three languages whilst 2 (.9%) preferred any language as long as they could understand it easily.

The study dwelled more on the reasons for the majority preferring English and the reasons are discussed in the section on interpretation of results (Chapter 5).

Question 13 see Table 17

Regarding the topic of interest, 27 (12.3%) reported that they were interested only in animals; 9 (4%) were interested only in people; 2 (.9%) were interested in children; 45 (20.5%) were interested in both animals and people; 50 (22.7%) were interested in animals and fairy-tales; 58 (26.4%) were interested in animals, fairy-tales and people; 29 (13.2%) were interested in anything (as long as they had something to read).

It is worth noting that, although the fairy tales were very popular, they were in all cases chosen in combination with other categories. It is evident from the table that the fairy tales were chosen 108 times but never on their own.

Before any suggestions can be made and conclusions drawn, it is important to summarize the findings regarding the reading activities of the children in the study . This summary has established that a lot of reading activity was taking place in these areas for various

reasons to be explored further in the interpretation of results. It further established that in some areas the children had sources of reading material, other than schools, whereas in other areas the schools were the only source of reading material. These findings are used in the interpretation of results.

DATA TABLES

Table 9

Question 4 - Attitude to reading

ATTITUDE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Liked reading very much	190	86.3
Liked reading moderately	29	13.2
Not keen on reading	1	.5
TOTAL	<u>220</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 10

Question 5 - Purpose of reading

PURPOSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Homework	22	10
Leisure	0	0
Homework & leisure	198	90
TOTAL	<u>220</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 11

Question 6 - Frequency of reading

FREQUENCY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Everyday	195	88.6
Once a week	5	2.3
Whenever possible	20	9.1
TOTAL	<u>220</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 12

Question 7 - Venue for reading

VENUE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
School	7	3.2
Home	10	4.5
School & home	196	89
School & friend's home	5	2.3
Home & friend's home	1	.5
School, home & friend's home	1	.5
TOTAL	<u>220</u>	<u>100</u>

Table 13

Question 8 - Sharing reading

PARTNER	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Alone	51	23.2
With parent/guardian	3	1.4
With sibling	7	3.2
Alone & with parent/guardian	14	6.4
With parent/guardian & with sibling	1	.5
Alone & with sibling	98	44.5
Alone & with friend/ teacher	11	5
Alone & with parent/guardian & with teacher/friend	3	1.3
Alone, with parent/guardian & with sibling	32	14.5
TOTAL	<u>220</u>	<u>100</u>

