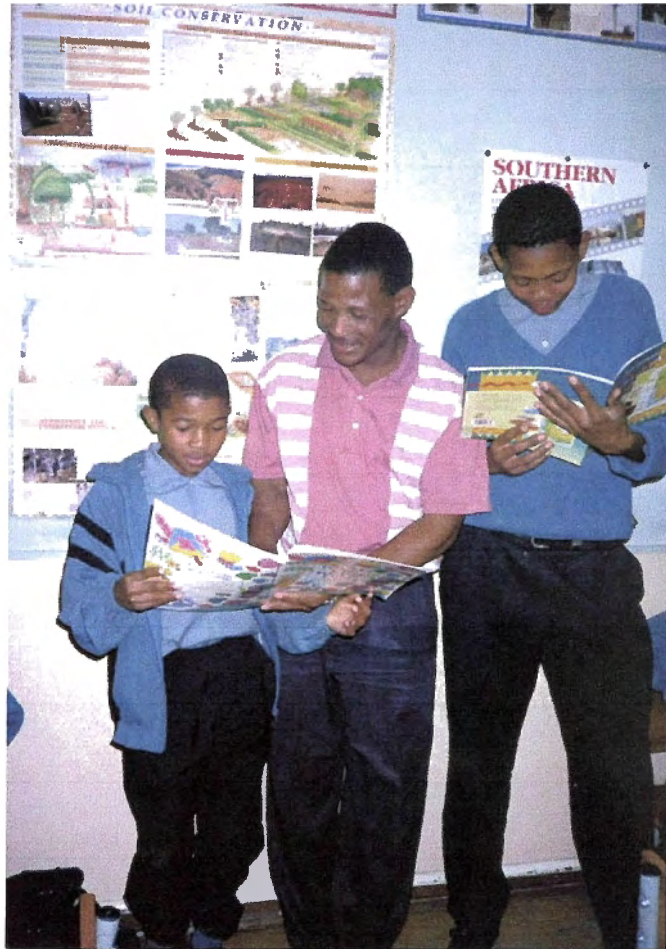


## CHAPTER 8

## CONCLUSION



Reading books and their educative value will remain with us as long as language exists. They can serve as an immensely valuable educative tool to reach the target readers such as teenagers forcefully depending on the success of the book. As Maartens (1988:59) puts it, the good author will assume the role of a psychologist who will meet the developmental stage of the target group who will take into consideration the child's basic need to be loved and accepted, respected and for his sense of belonging, his need to reach certain goals and to achieve and to be rewarded to be fulfilled. Readers are anchored in their families and societies and therefore not only authors but also teachers and parents should try to meet the children's needs by guiding them towards interesting reading books and providing them with material. Parent and teacher involvement in facilitating a positive attitude towards reading is of paramount importance. They must be pro-actively involved in their children's education and promotion of literacy.

As for the criteria for assessing a good book: it must be an aid to help the growing child to resolve all his basic struggles and to reach adulthood and in short will meet the sociolinguistic needs of the child. These sociolinguistic needs, viz. gender preferences, ethnicity, education, socio-economic influences, age and religion all influence readers when choosing reading matter and learners will constantly prefer certain books and materials to others.

The ideal book must present the reader with the challenge of trying to comprehend and interpret the letters and alphabet in the text from the top and slowly adding flesh from the bottom by supplying meaning from the deeper structure building on the reader's understanding of what he is reading. It must thus attract the eyes to the book to make meaning and enjoy what is read when interpreting the text. The text must therefore involve the reader's intellect and emotions, causing response to what is observed by the eyes.

A book that will keep children glued to their seats with eyes focused on the reading book is a book that contains a fascinating content, totally absorbs and captivates the readers' attention, keeping him/her spellbound for the time reading. Sisulu (1999:21) asserts that:

Some of the early 'readers' used to teach children to read are so dull and devoid of imagination that they are enough to put children off reading for life. We need to inject some spark and creativity into the early reading experience of our own children. We can do this by using books in which children can see themselves, books that challenge children to think, laugh, cry and create.

Hopefully there will be authors to provide in the needs of the learners by taking note of market studies. Research done in this thesis has shown that there is indeed a need for imaginative writing and especially romantic stories among readers aged 11-14 males (22,3%) and females (29%). Living in a world centring on HIV-awareness it is obvious that romantic books are a sincerely felt need. In an interview with teenagers, Loubser (2000:153) asked them why they were so aware of sex nowadays and the answer was that there was so much hype about sex and everyone was talking about it. Maybe the warning against HIV has made teenagers even more aware of romantic relationships and therefore there is an even higher rate of popularity for romances than would be expected.

Despite the fact that critics maintain that cultural diversity should not be enforced as it will be met with severe resistance, it is also mentioned by reading experts such as Sisulu (1999:21) that as school systems are attempting to reflect a multicultural society, it is deemed to be a definite need to come up with books that reflect the cultural diversity. Cultural criteria can definitely not be ignored. Data gathered from this research project do reflect this need of Black people to mix with other cultures (52,8% of 30 Black males) and maybe it is high time that the more privileged cultures should take the outstretched hand and accept without having to abandon what is dear to themselves.

Statistics have also proved that cultural roots cannot be denied and that despite the wish for mixed cultures from the side of Black learners, they also enjoy books with an Afro-

centric character more than a book with a different cultural orientation. There is also a need in South Africa for women to take up their rightful position in children's literature and books of a culturally sensitive nature need to be written in order to present all cultural groups in a way that reflects respect and an awareness of the essential dignity of all members of society. Black learners also need heroes and idols in their reading books who are familiar cultural figures.

Criteria concerning gender influences were also investigated in this thesis. Statistics from this project prove that there is a need for female heroes to feature as females are more numerous than males and they still prefer to have female heroes rather than male heroes – in the context of the statistics of this study (68,1% of females participating in this project want to read about females heroes).

Literature should help children to relate to their surroundings and it is also necessary for all cultural groups to preserve their cultural heritage before it is too late. Statistics from this research project show that only 65% of Black parents from Potch Primary read to their children when they were little. Their parents should teach them to read in their mother tongue even before teaching them to read English. Kell (1998:4) reports that literacy will not prosper if kept apart from the learner's identity and context. She also asserts that the sooner the learner is exposed to reading the sooner he/she will become literate. It is regarded as a total "mythunderstanding" that children should not start reading and becoming literate even before attending school. It is strongly encouraged.

Reading material should also help to what Nhlanhla (1988:165) refers to as detoxification of children exposed to dehumanising situations such as seeing people burnt alive and also harassment and eviction. If all these sore-eye problems have been addressed in an appropriate manner, illiteracy, the tip of the iceberg, will be exposed and tackled in a joint effort by taking hands and by working together instead of working against each other.

Authors should be the seismographs of society. With whatever resources they do have, schools and other educational institutions can encourage the culture of reading and open up to students the life-long pleasure and illumination of intellect and spirit that comes from literature, the written word. Reading circles, where students read aloud from books that enthuse them and writers are invited to read their own works; play-reading circles, where the spoken word joins the written word; the encouragement to use municipal libraries and communal libraries, the libraries of consulates, where these exist – these are ways to assemble a reading culture in which writers can germinate.

The powerful medium of the media should continue and even expand projects facilitating literacy. Reading should be dealt with as a separate subject in its own right in schools. Reading as aid to promote literacy is foregrounded in South Africa in the new millennium. Seung-Yoeun (1997:124) asserts that there is no easy way to teach literacy. Children enjoy reading while developing literacy through reading. The more they enjoy reading the more they become literate. There is a correlation between children 's experiencing literature and gaining literacy. Young children also learn their literacy learning through a supportive literature environment. Children's needs should be studied and answered.

Blatchford (1999:33) asserts that children will choose books, potato chips and chocolates in equal measure. If they are deprived of reading books at home, their learning will end up as "less a priority than wall-to-wall television". He is of the opinion that access to books is an even greater problem than literacy problems. The need for reading material and problems with resources have also been identified in this study and it is thus a fact that the need to have jobs in this country be addressed to eradicate poverty so that parents can afford to provide private reading corners, books to encourage and facilitate reading and proper education so that learners can use their eyes for reading too and not only for watching television so that they can develop and blossom to become informed, literate

and respected. Since the influence of television is so pervasive, television should be approached to focus even more on teaching literacy in order to reach even the illiterate through this medium.

Television does serve the purpose of teaching spoken ability, but reading is of the utmost importance and maybe reading books on television, and showing the letters is not a bad idea. Presenters should consider a television programme such as reading with a prominent celebrity or authors such as, for example, Maartens and Nhlanhla presenting a programme reading from a popular reading book and then showing the text on the screen on TV so that the children can learn to spell and speak and literacy can be promoted. Such reading programmes are few.

The low percentage of learners who are interested in writing should be worked at and teachers should design plans of action to nurture a love of writing, for writing is part of literacy too. The medium of advertising should be employed to promote writing books and readers must be exposed to competitions with the free gift reward as attraction to lure prospective writers to participate. Kuzwayo (2000:12) is of the opinion that in a country with a very high unemployment rate, people must become self-employed to create jobs and consequently to serve an important purpose in combating illiteracy. If youngsters could be encouraged to write and read, writing will become a profession more sought after and a means of becoming self-employed, running on a business of writing and getting books published, feeding the market.

Farm schools should be upgraded and provided with at least toilets and electricity. They should not be closed down - where would these learners go? The result will be an even larger number of illiterate youngsters and eventually grown-ups who will have to be helped by means of adult educational programmes that are also expensive. So rather spend money on prevention than even more on cure.

As for criteria predicting the profile of the most popular book for the target group aged 11-14 the following:

- When writing for girls it must be a book with a female hero with lots of scary events that would move their emotions and move them to escape into a world of fantasy.
- It must have romantic elements too.
- The book must have colourful pictures and a reasonable font and other considerations of layout.
- The story must be of a considerable length and when they see it on the shelf, they must be tempted to pick it up. In other words, the cover of a book is extremely important.
- The contents must be of such a nature that the author and her/his character become known all over the globe and everyone must go for this special fantasy like kids are craving after Roald Dahl and Rowling's books.
- The book must have a properly planned plot and proper and appropriate research must be done on certain issues dealt with in the books.
- The book must have a hard cover and a very gifted illustrator.
- It must be a book appealing to all the senses. For boys it must be an adventure with elements of romance, scientific facts and definitely a male major character.
- As for African children it must be a township story with all the previous elements mentioned
- Girls and especially African girls do favour romantic stories.

Areas to be explored in future may be the response to reading books among children not attending schools. Another interesting topic would be to test response to children's literature that is also equally enjoyed by parents such as the Harry Potter books currently making headlines. Even librarians approve of these books whereas some critics rather harshly reject them on a variety of grounds.

Authors should be encouraged to write by showing readers that they can make money by writing. They should read about successful writers and about their bank balances in order to inspire and infuse a whole surge of writers to take to flight. Tresselt (1997) encourages writers to venture to write by stating that:

If you want to write and see your work published, I can't think of a better way to do it than *writing* books and stories for *children* and teenagers. Ideas flow naturally, right out of our own life. And while it's still a challenge, the odds of getting that first unforgettable cheque from a *children's* publisher are better than they are from any other kind of publisher I know.

Your words will never sound as sweet as they do from the lips of a child reading your books and stories. And the joy of creating books and stories that truly reach young people is an experience you won't find anywhere else.

But, that's not all. The financial rewards go far beyond most people's expectations because there's a surprisingly big market out there for writers who are trained to tap it.

Julia Grey (1998:5) concludes:

You can either spend your money on three hamburgers or literacy for every child.

We received eyes to read and be literate, fingers to write books and stories for those who have to grow from flowering seed to adulthood. We have hearts to love and envisage a literate new millennium reading for peace.

**HANDS ARE FOR WRITING.**

