Investigating an asset-based approach to analysing Education For All policy implementation on adult reading literacy in South Africa

by

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Tshepiso Matentjie
South Africa
October 2006

*D*ECLARATION OF *O*RIGINALITY

I, Tshepiso Matentjie, hereby declare that this dissertation titled: *Investigating an asset-based approach to analysing Education For All policy implementation on adult reading literacy in South Africa* is my own work, and as not been submitted for any degree at any University.

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Tshepiso Matentjie   Date

ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FET	Further Education and Training
FPE	Free Primary Education
GET	General Education and Training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Study
PIPSSA	Performance Indicators in Primary School South Africa
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authorities
UNESCO	United Nations Economic Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Education Fund

ABSTRACT

This study puts the spotlight on adult education, focussing specifically on how the EFA ABET policy is being implemented at grassroots level of ABET learning centres. A case study of a South African public ABET learning centre located within the Gauteng Province, and comprising of a multicultural group of ABET Level 2 adult learners with varied age-groups was conducted. Using the bio-ecological model, the study explores the dynamic interrelated and interdependent interactions between the individual adult learner learning to read and the influence of his context; thereby exploring the impact that EFA ABET policy has had on adult learners in South Africa. As part of the micro-system, the learner's academic self-concept in reading literacy is explored as a key factor determining the adult learner's achievement in learning to read. Rather than focus on the deficiencies of the system, this study adopts a solution-focused approach by investigating the assets that exist within the system that enable adult learners to develop a positive academic self-concept and facilitate their acquisition of reading literacy. The findings suggest that there are internal and external assets existing within the ABET learner's ecosystem which when mobilised can be utilised to promote a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy. This potency of the assets in enhancing the academic self-concept was mediated by the locus of control for agency as well as the synergy of focus amongst the assets. Where the locus of control was located externally, it created limited impact because the learners were limited to activate and mobilise those assets to achieve their goal of acquiring reading literacy. Where control was locates internally, the learners were stimulated to persevere in their endeavours to acquire reading literacy despite the challenges they were facing within their eco-system. Where assets were focused on promoting a common goal, they facilitated mobility and focus of energy toward the acquisition of reading literacy. However, where the assets had divergent foci, they created the divergent priorities and undermined effective attainment of the goal of acquiring reading literacy.

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1.1   INTRODUCTION

The South African government has committed itself to meeting UNESCO's education targets as stipulated in the Education for All (EFA) policy and in the subsequent Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The research literature suggests that developing countries are struggling to meet the targets. In particular, the literature[1] indicates that Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) as one of the core EFA goals is not receiving as much attention as the other EFA ambitions, such as access to formal schooling.

This study seeks to understand how ABET-related policies are being implemented at grassroots level in an adult learning centre. Using a bio-ecological model, the study explores the interrelated and interdependent interactions between the individual adult learners learning to read and the influence of the social context on the development of such reading capacity. As part of a micro-system, the learner's academic self-concept in reading literacy is explored as a key factor determining the adult learner's reading aspirations and achievements. Rather than focus on the deficiencies of the system, this study adopts a positive approach (from positive psychology) by investigating the assets that exist within the system that enable adult learners to develop a positive academic self-concept that in turn facilitate their acquisition of reading literacy.

By recognising adult learners as co-constructors of their own learning, the study acknowledges that they have capacities and strengths that can enable them to take up agency in their own lives. The deficiencies and barriers existing within their learning environment do not constitute a holistic and true picture about their potential as learners. Accordingly, when assessing EFA impact on developing countries like South Africa, a needs- or deficiency-based assessment of progress in reading literacy is limiting and has the potential to define adult learners as 'dependent' and 'lacking' rather than as resourceful. Against this background, the purpose of this study is to identify the factors, more specifically

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[1]   See EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002:18; see also my discussion in Chapter 2, section 2.2 and specifically section 2.2.1 which focuses on EFA implementation in developing countries.

the assets, that influence the academic self-concept of adult learners in their endeavours to acquire reading literacy.

1.2   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the assets existing within the ABET learner's ecosystem that promote a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy?
- How are these assets utilised or mobilised to facilitate a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy?

1.3   RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY

My primary interest in this subject is to explain how national states implement adult basic education policies in the context of the EFA targets with a specific focus on adult reading literacy. My secondary interest is to understand how community assets combine to influence the acquisition of reading literacy among adult learners.

In recent years, studies such as the PIRLS and PIPSA research projects were undertaken across the world to evaluate reading literacy amongst learners within the General Education and Training band, with very little attention given to Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) learners. Findings from these studies indicate that reading is a meaningful, integrative and complex metacognitive process, essentially enactive, interactive and creative involving recreation of meaning (Cortazzi & Hunter-Carsch 2000). However these studies serve to highlight the deficiencies existing in developing countries in terms of literacy rates with little attention to asset mobilization.

As Gravett (2001:8) and others have noted, adult learners, bring their accumulated life experiences to the learning context and the nature of these experiences shape and influence their learning. Reading is an intra-active as well as inter-active process (Bouwer 2004:90). As an intra-active process, the reader is constantly cross-referencing their own abilities, knowledge and skills to access texts, and to make semantic sense and personal meaning of it (Pike *et al* 1997 in Bouwer 2004:90). As an inter-active process, the reader is constantly in a dialogue with the text. In the case of adult learners, the breadth and depth of the experience and information brought into this dialogue while making sense of the text are extensive. These serve as lenses that could either enhance or hinder understanding of the information and the perspective presented in the text. This observation is not only limited to reading, it also extends to learning in general. Of course, some of the accumulated life experiences

could be a hindrance to more effective learning. My interest is in identifying the asset-based aspects within the adult learners' context that enhance reading literacy.

1.4 MY VESTED INTERESTS IN THIS TYPE OF STUDY

This study forms part of a larger research project aimed at conducting a systemic evaluation of ABET reading literacy in South Africa. The main research project will be completed in three phases; the pre-pilot; field test and main study. This study will be based on the pre-pilot study using one public ABET learning centre as a case study. The main study serves on the one hand as a move to benchmark the standard of education in this country against international standards, while on the other hand it serves to develop education indicators in order to measure the extent to which policy goals are being met in practice to ensure accountability.

According to Crouch (a.n.) education indicators are a recent phenomenon in South Africa. He argues that previously education indicators were not used for the following reasons: firstly South Africa did not have a public vocation to accountability; secondly education was previously seen as a service rendered based on trust rather than as a co-investment to be co-monitored and co-managed via partnerships; thirdly the purposes of education were too implicit, opaque, differentiated and contested to warrant a unitary system of monitoring and evaluation; fourthly the focus of the previous education system indicators was not on delivering quality-for-money and finally there was a lack of ability to produce raw data to elaborate on the indicators of the previous education system (a.n.:2-3). According to Crouch this is because there is an idea that in a democracy there must be control mechanisms in order to self-regulate and adapt; there is also a need for political accountability and there is a need to include bureaucratic control mechanisms in a democracy. Therefore the education indicators serve as part of a feedback loop that leads to correction. They also aid in detection; they assist in establishing a social control system that is based on a measure of accountability (Crouch a.n.:4).

My interests are in the voices of people that are included in the process of this feedback loop, and especially the voices that are silenced. The case study brings this inquiry to the level of individual adult learners, because for them target setting in a developing country translates to being able to read, getting that job, feeding one's children, and hopefully breaking the cycle of poverty. One's community, learning environment, family systems as well as personal and social factors play an influential role that could either facilitate or hinder the process of becoming literate. These factors may not necessarily be reflected in what government defines as its critical success factors. Therefore in the case study emphasis is shifted to be not

just on national benchmarking or meeting targets only, but to also be about empowerment of individuals. Central to the purpose of this study is a fundamental belief that adult learners possess the capacity, strengths and assets to acquire reading literacy in spite of systemic challenges and deficiencies. The process of research should enable the participants to acquire skills and strategies to conceptualise social phenomena in terms of solutions rather than problems, as well as learn practical ways of how to turn personal human potential into social capital by changing how they perceive reality and how they in turn behave in relation to their perceptions. The asset mapping and mobilisation exercise endeavours to enable them to acquire practical skills to enhance their academic self-concepts in reading literacy thereby enhancing their academic achievement. Lessons learnt from this study will provide effective strategies that can be explored in other academic subjects and life endeavours, while at the same time the goal of benchmarking is being pursued.

1.5   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this study I will use three conceptual frameworks as a basis for my analysis of the data. The first draws on the recent work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998 in Swart & Pettipher 2005:13) in which he uses the bio-ecological model to explain development within the context of the system of relationships that form a learner's environment. The bio-ecological theory is based on the interdependence and relationships between different organisms and their physical environment. Through this model reading achievement can be understood as a result of numerous factors interacting including biological, environmental and socio-economic factors. One of the factors that play a role in how adult learners acquire reading literacy has to do with their own personal make up and how they perceive themselves as learners learning to read in a literate world. Thus the bio-ecological perspective enables us to link this understanding of how policy forms part of the macro-system, which involves dominant social structures as well as beliefs, and values to how individual factors that lie within the learner create a propensity to succeed (or fail) in spite of the social context.

The second part of my conceptual frame discusses the phenomenological approach to the self-concept drawing on the work of Carl Rogers (1951, 1959). This part of the discussion provides the theoretical underpinnings of the self-concept construct and how it has developed through time. This discussion also sharpens the conceptual framework for this study in that it narrows the macro-system to focus on the micro-system by highlighting a possible way of understanding how the self-concept as a factor is linked to academic achievement in the acquisition of reading literacy. The goal is to firstly discuss how self-

concept in addition to being an important outcome variable is also an important mediating constructs that facilitates the attainment of other desirable educational, psychological and behavioural outcomes. Secondly, the goal is to understand what within the learner's environment serve as assets that enable them to develop a positive self-concept in relation to their academic endeavours to acquire reading literacy. This links to the third part of my conceptual framework. In the third and final part of my conceptual framework, I discuss the Asset-based approach, borrowing from the work of Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). This part of the framework will inform my data collection process, particularly in terms of identifying existing internal and external assets.

1.6   RESEARCH DESIGN

The type of study undertaken here can be described as interpretivist research. I seek to understand the impact of EFA policy on adult literacy from the standpoint of the individuals who are end-users of ABET programs. I also wish to challenge how EFA implementation has been conceptualised by narrowly focussing on targets rather than the end-users (see the literature review in Chapter 2). The individual participants' experiences and the meanings they assign to their experience and more significantly their ability to use this understanding to mobilise themselves and rise above their limiting circumstances forms the unit of analysis. In this regard, this study is positioned within the qualitative research paradigm because unlike quantitative research the purpose of this study is not to determine general, universal laws that govern human behaviour (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:19).

Instead, it is aimed at understanding the subjective world of adult learners in their endeavours to take up agency acquiring reading literacy despite the systemic and contextual barriers. Moreover, the conceptual framework that I will use to make sense of the information gathered from the study is an attempt to understand personal agency activated by mapping and mobilising individual assets. This is based on the assumption shared by interpretivist inquirers who work with qualitative data, that people interpret events, contexts and situations, and act on the bases of those events; that there are multiple interpretations of and perspectives on single events and situations; and finally, that events and individuals are unique and are largely non-generalisable (Cohen *et al* 2000:21). I also recognise that my understanding of the individual behaviour is best represented through a frame of reference common to that of the participants being studied (ibid:20). As a result I chose to use a case study as my research design[2].

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[2]   I elaborate on the reasons for this choice in section 3.3.

1.6.1 SELECTION OF THE CASE

One South African public ABET learning centre will be used as a research site. The site will be chosen because it represents a typical public ABET learning centre within the urban areas in South Africa. It comprises of a multicultural group of adult learners with varied age groups[3]. The site is located within the Gauteng Province around the city of Alberton and draws adult learners from the neighbouring township and informal settlements in Alberton.

The centre is selected for convenience as its director has a long-standing relationship as a post-graduate student and researcher with the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment at the University of Pretoria where this study was commissioned. Participation in the study by individual participants is voluntary. It is expected that the ABET learning centre will have at least 31 learners at ABET Level 2, and all the learners with their educator will be included to participate in the focus-group discussions. However the follow-up in-depth interviews will include at least 2 learners. In the end it is expected that 1 educator and approximately 20 learners will participate in the initial stages of the research and later 2 of the learners will participate in in-depth interviews.

1.6.2 SELECTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Permission to conduct the research will be sourced from the director of the ABET learning centre. Using purposive sampling where the researcher deliberately selects particular people because of their relevance to the study and the particular qualities of the participants (Denscombe 1998:15), ABET learners currently attending ABET level-2 programmes and their educator will be identified and requested to participate in the study. The research purpose will be explained to them in terms of the letter of consent, with emphasis placed on confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation.

All the participants will be informed about the purpose of the study and their envisaged role. A consent form laid out in Appendix 1 and 2 will be given to the director of the ABET learning centre and the participants respectively. In addition they will be given a fair explanation about the procedures that will be followed, the description of the attendant discomforts that they can expect to experience (particularly regarding disclosure during the focus-group discussions) as well as a description of the benefits that they can expect from the study.

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[3]   For specific details see section 3.3.2 which describes the participants in detail.

The rationale for specifically selecting ABET Level 2 adult learners will also be explained with regards to their participation forming part of a systemic evaluation of which this study forms a part. They will be informed that this study will generate data which will be used to compare ABET Level 2 reading literacy with that of Grade 4 learners. For the South African context, this comparative analysis will help to determine how the unit standards derived from National Qualifications Framework compares with the learning outcomes for General Education in terms of reading literacy. Below is an account of how the research will be conducted.

1.6.3   DATA COLLECTION

I will *observe* educators during their teaching practice. According to Cohen *et al* (2000:304) observations allow the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations. This enables the researcher to understand the context of programmes, to be open-ended and inductive, to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed and to discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations, to move beyond perception-based data (e.g. opinions in interviews) and to access personal knowledge. This will enable me to determine the role of the educator, in facilitating a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy for the ABET learners *in situ* rather than at second hand. The indicators for assessing the quality of education as suggested by EFA policy will enable me to observe commonly used teaching styles and how they serve to enhance a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy. I will also use visual data in the form of photographs capturing classroom interactions with adult learners; field notes generated during the observations as well as a research diary to indicate my own internal dialogue and decisions made during the research process.

I will hold *informal discussions* with educators to identify assets that they believe are instrumental in facilitating a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy for the adult learners. I will lead a *workshop or focus-group discussions* involving the adult learners and educators where an analysis of environmental or community assets will be recorded in an asset map using established frameworks: gaining awareness of the assets; focusing on the assets and capacities; compiling a map of assets; using the information from the asset map to build strong mutually beneficial partnerships in the immediate system; and finally working collaboratively to support individual enablement and collective action will be followed as suggested by Eloff's (2003:26) pathway of an asset-based approach to intervention. Scales and Leffert's (1999:5) profile of developmental assets will be used as a broad methodology

for categorising developmental assets. The process of data collection will be divided into two phases. The table below provides a summary:

TABLE 1.1   SUMMARY OF THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Action	Purpose	Duration
Phase 1 Meet Centre Director, Supervisors and participants. Conduct initial observations. Facilitate focus group discussion.	Negotiate access; select a research site and establish Rapport. Compile asset map of internal and external assets.	1 week
Phase 2 On site observations on classroom interactions. Collect visual and document data. Conduct interviews with the learners, supervisor and educator.	Identification of assets mobilized during teaching and learning practice. Obtain contextual and policy baseline data. Determine how assets were mobilized in practice.	2 weeks

1.6.4   DATA ANALYSIS

Data gathered through interviews will be transcribed using a data transcriber. Visual data will be used to document the research activities, interaction with participants as well as document the environmental assets. A rigorous process of analysing visual data will not be conducted for purposes of this study. The qualitative data analysis will be done on three levels. The first will identify the emerging themes from the literature on the EFA goals for ABET. This will be used to develop the first level of codes to conduct the first level of analysis. Where additional themes are identified, these will be included in the first level. The second level of analysis will involve combining themes that are related to what Cohen *et al* (2000:148) call a domain analysis. The third level of analysis will involve making linkages between the domains and establishing relationships between them. Speculative inferences will also be made to determine the relationships between the domains. Summaries of each domain will be made, then clustered according to those that collaborated with each other and those that indicated discrepancies. This process will involve testing the conceptual analysis on the bio-ecosystemic, academic self-concept and asset-based approach. The other component will involve generating alternative explanations to the patterns of the themes. A more detailed account of the data analysis process will be elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

1.6.5   MY ROLE AS A RESEARCHER AND ENSURING RESEARCH RIGOUR AND INTEGRITY

This study is conducted in partial fulfilment of my second Masters Degree in Education, therefore I have previous experience in conducting this type of research. However to ensure that my role does not violate the integrity of the research I have explored the role that I will be playing while conducting this research. In the process of research I will hold multiple roles that will change according to the goals of my interactions with the participants. In addressing my first research question I will largely play a role of an outsider looking in. The goal is to develop rapport and establish trust between the participants and myself during the initial interviews and observations with educators and learners. By the time I facilitate the workshop or focus-group discussions I would have gained sufficient information about the context and rapport with the participants in order for me to play the role of facilitator when mapping assets.

My roles will alternate between being a 'passive' listener, interviewer, note taker to more active engagement with participants when asking questions, challenging them to think differently about literacy and how they acquire it and identifying assets. I will need to undertake the more active and interactive role in order to answer my second research question. This will demand that I collaborate with the participants and play the critical inquirer who constantly asks questions that enable them to focus on assets rather than problems, check their own interpretations, develop interrelationships and connections between the different themes as well as formulate explanations of the phenomena. The use of flip-charts while facilitating the workshop will enable me to play the role of data capturer as I will be able to develop a visual representation of assets based on the discussion. This will also enable me to play the role of mediator as what eventually ends up in the asset map has to be negotiated and agreed upon by the group. I will also play a role of a mirror that enables the participants to reflect on what is put on paper as a representation of their ideas and thoughts with the opportunity to change or add to their inputs. This process serves the purpose of increasing the credibility of the data.

To further ensure credibility of the proceedings and findings of the research I will use observations, interviews, visual data, focus-group discussions. All these methods of data collection will help facilitate triangulation as they will help ensure that data generated can be verified and cross-checked by myself and the participants as the process of research unfolds thus enhancing the credibility of the findings. Moreover I will use the focus-group discussions during the asset-mapping exercise to allow the participants to comment, add or change to the data gathered. I will also employ auditing[*] and peer-debriefing processes.

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[*] where a trail of evidence collected through the research process is kept

Through the latter processes a trail of evidence collected through the research process as well as copies of interview transcripts will be reviewed and discussed with senior researchers for further validation purposes. A more detailed account of how validity and reliability will be ensured will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.7.1 INFORMED CONSENT

As mentioned in section 1.6.2 above informed consent will be established at onset of the research regarding the purpose of the study and the participants' envisaged role, the procedures that will be followed, as well as a description of the benefits that they can expect from the study (Cohen *et al* 2000:51).

1.7.2 NEGOTIATING ACCESS

Initial access into the centre will be facilitated through the director of the ABET learning centre based on the strength of his relationship with the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment. The procedures of how the entire research will be conducted will be discussed with him particularly in terms of gaining access to the classroom and other facilities of the centre. In order to gain acceptance by the participants I hope to use data gathering methods and follow a process of research that enables me to slowly build trust with the participants without being too inusive on their personal lives.

1.7.3 ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

In order to protect the identity of the participants I will employ strategies suggested by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992 in Cohen *et al* 2000:63) for ensuring confidentiality. I will delete identifiers such as names and addresses from transcripts and substitute these with pseudo names in the main report. I will also use crude report categories such as giving general rather than specific information.

1.7.4 PROTECTION FROM HARM

In this study harm might entail harming the participant's development; loss of self-esteem and stress (Deiner & Crandall 1978 in Bryman 2001:479). To ensure that participants are protected from harm the process of research will be discussed with a supervisor, the director

of the ABET learning centre and the participants prior to engaging in the study as a preventative measure. This will also help in highlighting incidences that have the potential to cause harm prior to engaging in the activities. During the research process, the participants will be constantly reminded of their right to withdraw from the study should they wish to do so for any reason whatsoever. This will also ensure that the rights of the participants are protected at all times and they remain participants voluntarily. I will also give them my contact details as well as those of my supervisors in case they need to alert us of any issues that may be of concern to them. This will also provide the opportunity for me to address issues that may arise timeously in a supportive way.

1.8   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study draws the line between education policy, academic self-concept and the acquisition of reading literacy among adult learners by exploring how self-concept mediates the attainment of policy outcomes within individual end-users through asset mapping and mobilisation. It asks how assets are activated within the learning environment to strengthen self-concept and improve reading literacy, in turn facilitating the attainment of EFA policy goals for Adult Basic Education in South Africa. It suggests that the limitations of EFA policies lie in part in their deficit model of learning and their distance from the learning environment, and that the asset-based approach could be a significant factor in enabling modest movement towards the ambitions of such policies.

1.9   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The underlying purpose of my study is to inform policy making in relation to Education for All, however, as noted by Merriam (1988:33) the product of case study research might be too involved for busy policy makers and educators to read and use. I intend to overcome this limitation by publishing my findings in peer reviewed journals in and outside the country and using data generated from this study as pilot data for the main study which is concerned with a systemic evaluation on adult literacy. In this way the value of my research will contribute to policy making and will add value to further research and practice. Another limitation of my study could be that I might oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the reader to erroneous conclusions about the actual state of affairs as case studies tend to do according to Guba and Lincoln (1981 in Merriam 1988:33). I intend to use the peer reviewing processes and other strategies that I will later elaborate upon in Chapter 3 to ensure academic rigour in my study. Moreover, case studies are limited in terms of their generalisability (Merriam 1988:34). However, as part of the main study I do not have

intentions of making generalisations from my findings, instead I intend to use this study to provide base line data from which the main study can draw upon.

1.10 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

This study adds to the body of knowledge on this subject by providing a conceptual analysis linking the macro-aspects of policy to the micro-aspects that exist within individual learners. The use of the three conceptual frameworks provides a way of explaining how individual factors within the learner create a propensity to obtain a positive interpretation of policy.

It departs from other policy studies that analyse the gap between policy and practice by focussing on gaps, deficiencies and problems. For developing countries this entrenches the dependence on external, westernised ways of knowing and doing, thus undermining indigenous knowledge systems. Instead by focussing on end-user assets and strengths this study allows a fresh analysis of evaluating the impact of policy through a bottom-up, more nuanced and qualitative approach rather than emphasising policy indicators and targets. In turn this places the power to effect change within end-users. It deepens our understanding of the complexities that challenge, promote and hinder successful policy implementation in education by exploring the academic self-concept as one of the key psychological factors that create a propensity for (un)successful implementation of education policy.

1.11 CHAPTER OUTLINE

This chapter provides a background to the study as well as a theoretical argument and rationale for the study.

CHAPTER 2 will review literature on the EFA policy in different contexts, drawing particularly from developing countries, ending with the South African case. The chapter will mainly highlight what the EFA claims to do in policy terms. It will also document what is known about its effects within education in these countries and the explanations that have been given to explain these effects. The chapter will also elaborate on the conceptual argument introduced in Chapter 1. It will provide the analytical framework of the bio-ecological model, the phenomenological approach to the self-concept and the asset-based approach as a way to explain the role that adult learners play as co-constructers of their own learning and end-users of policy.

CHAPTER 3 will provide a more detailed account of the methodology and methods that I will be using in the study; my original plans and how they changed in the field.

CHAPTER 4 will present an analysis and discussion of the data culled from documents, visual data and data resident in the segments of the transcripts.

CHAPTER 5 will link the theoretical framework with the findings from the data.

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2.1   INTRODUCTION

Foremost the goal of this chapter is to explore, from the macro perspective, how self-concept mediates the attainment of policy outcomes within individual end-users, it also provides the link of policy to adult learners as a cohort and focus of this research. The discussion reviews policy literature that focus on developing reading literacy amongst adults, highlighting the challenges experienced by end-users particularly developing countries in this area. In order to do this, I review literature on the EFA policy in different contexts, drawing particularly from developing countries, ending with the South African case. The first section of the chapter will mainly highlight what the EFA claims to do in policy terms. It will also document what is known about its effects within education in these countries and the explanations that have been given to explain these effects. This section serves to indicate the needs-based approach undertaken by studies in this field as they continue to focus on needs, gaps and challenges within the system rather than being solution-focussed. On the one hand it serves to position my study, defining its rationale and contribution to the body of knowledge within this domain. Hence this chapter will also elaborate on the conceptual argument introduced in Chapter 1. It will provide the analytical framework of the bio-ecological model, the phenomenological approach to the self-concept and the asset-based approach as a way to explain the role that adult learners play as co-constructers of their own learning and end-users of policy. It provides the point of departure from focussing on needs to focussing on assets, which introduces the third concept of my research.

The second section will focus at a micro level, where I will explore literature on the three concepts that serve as the cornerstone of this study: the academic self-concept and its relationship to reading literacy, adult learning and the asset-based approach. The goal is to orientate the reader by means of firstly discussing how self-concept in addition to being an important outcome variable is also an important mediating construct that facilitates the attainment of other desirable educational, psychological and behavioural outcomes.

In order to do this, two theoretical models that have been suggested to explain how academic self-concept influences achievement are discussed. The first, Reciprocal effects, suggests a causal ordering of self-concept and performance accomplishments while the second, Internal/External frame of reference suggests a domain specificity of multiple self-concepts (Marsh & Koller 2003:22). Literature that aims to combine the two will be discussed. In addition a review of research illustrating the link between reading literacy and the academic self-concept will also be conducted as it serves to identify assets associated with the acquisition of reading literacy by enhancing a positive academic self-concept.

Finally, the discussion will explore the asset-based approach as a methodological strategy for this study. It will discuss research that have utilised the asset-based approach as a methodology in research exploring a variety of educational psychological issues and constructs. The goal is to orientate the reader to work that has been conducted on the asset-based approach and to provide a framework for analysing data according to assets identified through research.

2.2 EXPLORING THE CONTEXT OF EFA AND ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ABET)

In his foreword for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, the Director General of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura mentioned that "the quest to achieve Education for All (EFA) is fundamentally about assuring that children, youth and adults gain the knowledge and skills they need to better their lives and to play a role in building more peaceful and equitable societies" (Matsuura 2005:Foreword).

Following the Jomtien World Conference on Education For All in 1990, member states resolved to provide education for all their citizens irrespective of age. Six goals and targets were set with intentions for them to be met by the year 2000. For adult basic education the first goal was to reduce the adult illiteracy rate (the appropriate age group to be determined in each country) by one-half its 1990 level by the year 2000 with sufficient emphasis on female literacy to significantly reduce the current disparity between male and female illiteracy rates. The second goal on adult basic education was to expand provision of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults, with programme effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural change and impact on health, employment and productivity (Global Synthesis, Education For All 2000 Assessment, Unesco, p.13). Although these targets were set to be achieved by the year 2000, when the

time came in 2000 at the Dakar conference they were reset with a deadline for 2015. The Dakar targets for adult basic education were to ensure that learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes; and achieving 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002:13).

The EFA Global Monitoring Report monitors progress towards EFA firstly by recording and interpreting progress at national level against each of the EFA goals. Secondly it also monitors the means to which governments employ to meet the EFA goals through legislation, policies, plans, resources, programmes and levels of international assistance in line with the Dakar commitments (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002:15). The report maps out progress made on EFA, by focusing on three quantitative indices; the primary net enrolment ratio which is the number of pupils in the official school-age group expressed as a percentage of the total population of the age group. The index also measures the levels of adult literacy as well as gender parity in primary school gross enrolment i.e. the total enrolment of pupils in a grade or level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the corresponding eligible age group population in a given school year (ibid:15).

Unlike the EFA goals on achieving Universal Primary Education for all and gender parity, progress towards Adult Basic Education has not received widespread attention and support in terms of funding and research. The report mentions progress in terms of defining the meaning of literacy since the World Conference on EFA in Jomtien in 1990. The conceptual advancement of literacy is heralded, however it 'has not been matched by the priority accorded to it in policy and resource allocation, in part because many governments perceive the expansion of primary education as the main driver for the eradication of illiteracy (ibid:17). A comprehensive picture of what is happening worldwide in terms of the progress towards meeting the goal for meeting the learning needs of all young people and adults is deemed as not yet possible (ibid:18). Reasons given include problems with the conceptual meaning of life skills, the types of programmes, the levels of participation and assessments of learning outcomes are described as limited and usually specific to individual countries (ibid:18).

The report indicates that monitoring progress in this area requires work to analyse the results of topic, target group and country-specific studies (ibid:18). My interests in adult basic education are on how our government responded to the EFA policy with respect to

ABE and how this in turn has impacted on the teaching and learning process for developing adult reading literacy. In terms of process, the EFA policy stipulates indicators that must be used by member states to evaluate their progress in achieving quality education for all (see Box 1). These indicators communicate the conditions under which quality education for all is intended to be achieved. Therefore these are the conditions for success in achieving quality education for all, and it can be expected that they should apply to formal as well as non-formal forms of education. This view acknowledges the dynamic factors that interact within an education system that define the context within which transnational policies can be interpreted and implemented within countries. Focussing on adult basic education, in particular reading literacy, the indicators translate into factors associated with the acquisition of reading literacy in adult learners which form the critical success factors for policy implementation, teaching and learning.

BOX 2.1:   INDICATORS FOR ASSESSING QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Defining better learning, the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 defines better learning as a measure of what makes schools [education] effective. It emphasises the dynamics of the teaching and learning process; how teachers and learners interact in the classroom and how well they use instructional materials (2005:17). The report highlights that policies for better learning should focus on the following indicators:

- **Teachers**: more and better qualified teachers; salaries; training models i.e. the use of school-based pre- and in-service training instead of lengthy, traditional, institutional pre-service training.

- **Learning time**: instruction time. The report provides a benchmark of 850-1000 hours of instruction per year for all pupils.

- **Core subjects**: literacy as a critical tool for the mastery of other subjects and one of the best predictors of longer-term learning achievement. Reading considered a priority area in efforts to improve the quality of basic education, particularly for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- **Pedagogy**: commonly used teaching styles and how they serve learner needs. Many researchers advocate structured teaching with a combination of direct instruction, guided practice and independent learning in a learner-friendly environment.
- **Language**: the choice of the language of instruction used in school initial instruction in the learner's first language improves learning outcomes and reduces subsequent grade repetition and drop out rates.
- **Learning materials**: the quality and availability of learning materials.
- **Facilities**: refurbishing and building of classrooms, clean water, sanitation and access for disabled students.
- **Leadership**: central government – head principals – teachers.

It is implied that all nation states are expected to have in place these conditions in order for them to achieve the EFA goals. On the other hand it also goes without argument that the status within developing countries is not comparable to that of developed countries. Therefore, the EFA policy, rightly advises member states to use these indicators as guidelines rather than prescriptions, and that instead emphasis should be placed on addressing national and contextual factors that are priority for individual countries. The result is that different countries will interpret and implement EFA policies in very different ways according to their needs and capacity. What occurs within ABET learning centres will to a certain extent indicate South Africa's interpretation of EFA ABET policy and how the policy is being implemented on the ground and the type of impact it has on individual adult learners and their communities.

The following section discusses some of the literature on the EFA policy in different contexts, drawing particularly from developing countries in order to highlight what the EFA policy claims to do in policy terms. It also discusses literature documenting what is known about its effects within education in these countries and the explanations that have been given to explain the gap between policy and practice. An introduction of three conceptual arguments that provide the analytical framework of this study is also discussed. The bio-ecological model, the phenomenological approach to the self-concept and the asset-based approach are discussed as a way to explain the role that adult learners play as co-constructers of their own learning and end-users of policy.

2.2.1 EFA IMPLEMENTATION ON ADULT READING LITERACY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

In his report on Uganda to the 2003 EFA Global Monitoring Report, Akim Okuni reports that in comparison to Universal Primary Education, Uganda has accorded adult literacy very low priority in terms of policy and resource allocation. He further cites problems with location of responsibility for adult education within the government structures. He mentions that adult literacy policy formulation and resource allocation was shifted from the Ministry of Education and Sports to the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development which generally receives lower priority in receiving government and donor funding in comparison to the Education Ministry (2003:9). His main concern in this regard is how location of adult literacy within this ministry will impact on the feasibility of assessing and monitoring national trends in adult literacy. He also raises concern that unless the Ugandan government integrates policy formulation, resource allocation and implementation under the Education Ministry, simultaneous assessment and monitoring of the overall progress on EFA will not improve (Okoni 2003:19).

In his report on progress towards achieving EFA in Nigeria, Charles Abani also begins his report based on the indicators set for measuring progress. Abani rightly acknowledges the challenges that face Nigeria as a result of its history of political instability since independence over four decades ago, the effects of years of military misrule, economic mismanagement and lack of public accountability, poverty and the impact of HIV/Aids (2003:1). These challenges are massive and could impede achievement of the EFA goals in Nigeria. Abani (2003:2-3) mentions that the federal system of government in Nigeria has resulted in establishment of a large number of institutions at different levels with often conflicting and duplicating mandates and no clear synergy between them. Such a system has made the sharing of power and responsibility difficult between the federal, state and local government compounds. This has also led to confusion regarding mandates, terms of management, financing and policy. This has also been compounded by a lack of adequate formal legislation and regulation on these issues. Abani mentions that knowledge of EFA and what it implies, capacity for proper planning that is participatory and bottom-up, a dearth of data and poor capacity and infrastructure to collect it systematically at lower levels; and a poor enabling government environment for action continue to plague the effort to deliver EFA goals (Abani 2003:4).

He further mentions that there are capacity gaps in civil society for policy advocacy as well as understanding of the macro-environment context. As a result there is limited critical input made by civil society on EFA and other policy processes in Nigeria. Abani elaborates

on other challenges that further undermine the assumptions made for achieving EFA progress. He indicates that international donors have renegated on their promises of providing funding. The nature of partnerships between civil society institutions, government and international agencies continues to be characterized by top-down approaches, with poor participation, 'rubber-stamping' and tokenist 'last minute consultation', a lack of will to build capacity within partnerships for engagement, and ongoing government and donor suspicion (Abani 2003:5). He argues that there is no clear articulation of the partnership role envisaged between donors and government, the consequence is that this undermines the efforts of civil society coming to the table in any form that recognizes them as having a serious stake in the business of delivering EFA, nor a recognition of the 'power' equation between government, donors and civil society (ibid:5).

Both the Ugandan and Nigerian reports highlight how the eco-system plays a role in undermining efforts to develop reading literacy amongst people and achieving the EFA goals in these countries. However both these studies do not constitute empirical research. More importantly they largely focus on the deficiencies of the system rather than study the assets that exist within the system to overcome or circumvent barriers. Another limitation to the relevance of these reports is that they do not exclusively focus on ABET reading literacy, instead they provide a report on EFA in general and touch very briefly on the challenges and constraints in implementing the policy and achieving the intended EFA goals. In this study I hope to focus exclusively on ABET reading literacy and further determine how end-users in this case ABET learners mobilize assets within their environment to acquire reading literacy despite the challenges facing them.

A study by Chiwaya-Kishindo (2004) provided a possible way forward in this regard. Using a combination of a survey, interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis, Emma Chiwaya-Kishindo studied a sample of Malawian teachers, in and out-of school students, parents and document archives. She investigated whether Education For All served the best interests of people in developing countries. She also investigated the potential of Malawian schools to prepare children for active participation in a global economy. Her findings highlighted the discrepancy between proposed educational practices and the lived experiences of her subjects. The discrepancy was to the extent that the application of a general universal education philosophy such as EFA in some instances stifled the people's resourcefulness in finding solutions to their everyday problems. Despite the methodological limitations in her study that discourage generalisation to other developing countries, her findings have major implications because they suggest that the

humanitarian agenda that is supposed to underlie the EFA policy could be having reverse effects on developing countries and the impoverished people it is supposed to be uplifting.

What is missing in Emma Chiwaya-Kishindo's analysis is some form of explanation on why there is a gap and how could the ideals of the EFA policy, so noble and universal in nature, lead to such unintended consequences. I also found myself wondering how the history and context of Malawi as a developing country trying to achieve the EFA targets could have led to such a result and how could these have been overcome? Her explanation focuses more on the pragmatic issues concerning what is taught in the curriculum. She recommends skills development programmes that focus on leadership skills and creative problem solving skills. In her view an investment in human capital that allows skills development even in the absence of employment would be a more feasible way out. I found that this explanation left out dialectical factors embedded within the EFA policy and the Malawian context that made a direct translation of EFA policy 'as is' difficult. More relevant to this study, Chiwaya-Kishindo's study is also focused on studying the deficiencies in policy implementation rather than being solution-focused.

The study by Nancy O'Gara Kendall (2004) attempted to go further. Also focusing on Malawi as a case study, she asserts that the discourses that frame EFA policies and processes are top-down. She questions the effects and efficacy of top-down policy impact models on which EFA is based. She also questions the policy guidelines on which EFA success and failure is judged. Drawing on ethnographic research on the implementation of Malawi's Free Primary Education (FPE) policy (a policy legitimated and funded through the transnational EFA framework); she studied three school/village complexes in Malawi. Her findings revealed a different set of dynamics surrounding people's interactions and experiences of FPE. In each village she found that a distinct constellation of forces, events, social relations, local contingencies, geographies, histories and material realities shaped the practice of FPE. She found that these dynamics affected people's interactions and experiences with FPE. The constellation of forces affected the practice of policy across sectoral boundaries such as education, governance and health as well as levels of analysis i.e. local, national and international. They rearranged the notions of policy cycles and stakeholders, and called into question current models of policy analysis and judgments of success and failure. Implementation of the FPE policy coincided with the political democratisation process of Malawi, another transnational policy phenomenon. This resulted in three different articulations of FPE policies.

Nancy O'Gara Kendall (2004:v) argues that while the top-down models and measures of FPE's success and failure attend to its technical effects and efficacy as measured by enrolment, retention and repetition rates; these measures fail to capture FPE's most powerful impacts on people's daily lives. Her findings suggest that technically in terms of these indicators FPE in these Malawian villages was deemed a failure. However symbolically it succeeded in transforming the relations of power and authority between the state and the international donor organizations. It resulted [though I think it was unintended] in creating particular relations of dependence by the state on international donor organizations while de-legitimising the state as a caring, accountable, sovereign body to its citizens (ibid). Her research point to a gap in the empirical research on reconceptualising the uni-linear impact model that drives official global policy processes. She calls for re-examining the interrelations and often unintended effects of various global policy efforts. Her findings also suggest the need to re-imagine the role of global policies in shaping relations of power and authority in developing states, markets and societies; and to decenter certain models of policy formation, implementation, and evaluation in predicting, identifying and responding to policy outcomes (ibid).

2.2.2   THE CASE OF SOUTH AFRICAN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ABET)

The ABET Act No.32 of 2000 conceptualises adult basic education and training as subsuming literacy, post-literacy and lifelong learning. In this context adult basic education and training is intended to develop literacy by enabling individuals and groups to become generally functional in their own societies; providing skills development and training with the goal of helping adult learners attain economic functionality to promote income generation and higher productivity as well as foster a culture of lifelong learning and continuous growth (DoE 2000).

The South African ABET policy has as its cornerstone the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The constitution stipulates that "everyone has the right to basic education *including adult basic education*; and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible" (1996:13). While South Africa was not part of the initial 1990 Jomtien World Education Forum Conference held in Thailand on EFA as a result of international isolation, the education policy and programmes developed since the start of the democratic transformation show alignment with the EFA goals and priorities. After the 1994 democratic elections, South Africa embraced and expressed commitment to the EFA goals and participated in monitoring EFA implementation and consequently submitted the status reports for 2000 and 2002. The 2002

Status Report on EFA indicated that South Africa does not have a separate EFA plan, instead its education reform initiatives were integrated into national strategic plans, policies and programmes for education (DoE 2002:4). The report states that monitoring and evaluation of EFA goals were carried out, using information collected within the education system itself, information and data mainly from Statistics South Africa and supplementary information from other research and statistical agencies (ibid). According to the report, adult education and training comprises:

- Adult Basic Education and Training which is equivalent to education activity at NQF Level 1, which is a constitutional right in South Africa;

- Adult Education and Training, which may be NQF Level 2 to 4 and represents activity in the FET band of education and training and;

- Literacy initiatives that enable participation in ABET NQF Level 1 activities as they increase the number of people with basic education in a society and the average number of years of education and training in the population (DoE 2002:45).

The report states that in the provision of constitutionally mandated ABET, the Department of Education will need to ensure the achievement of NQF Level 1 qualifications by all in the population who have not completed at least 9 years of schooling, as well as the involvement in ABET of those who have had no formal school (ibid:45). In 2002, the goals for EFA with regards to ABET in South Africa were about providing the necessary infrastructure that will allow adult learners to participate in lifelong learning. In response to this goal, through the Skills Development Act of 1998 and the Skill Development Levies Act of 1999, the government introduced intermediate institutions consisting of labour market actors called Sector Education and Training Authorities – SETAs and a financing framework to finance training in the labour market (ibid:45). The other goal was to prioritise the development of accredited ABET Level 4 programmes and mobilizing significant non-public resources in the delivery of these programmes in public adult learning centres, businesses, and communities. Expenditure for ABET was increased from the 1998/9 financial year from R200 429 Million to the 2001/2 financial year by 28% to R454 000 Million.

One of the key goals for ABET particularly with regards to adult literacy was in increasing literacy rates amongst close to 7 million adults aged 20 years or more who had not completed the seven grades of primary education (ibid:47). The target with the latter goal was to halve the illiteracy rate by achieving an average increase in the number of people aged 15 and over who are functionally literate by just under 470 000 annually as from 1996. The 2002 Status Report was optimistic that South Africa was on track towards achieving the literacy targets _as long as_ the number of learners graduating from Grade 9 remains at

levels above 470 000 per year. The report goes on to mention that in 2002 the average annual increases of just under 1.2% in the number of adults participating in ABET Levels 1 to 4 programmes must be sustained at levels in line with population growth (which was then just under 2%) to ensure that expansion to adults is sustained. This, according to the report, will enable the EFA targets to be achieved before 2015 for ABET as well as adult education and training (ibid:46).

However one of the key challenges for meeting these targets was the fact that the retention rates of ABET learners in the education system is notoriously problematic, and the report suggested that a social mobilization campaign, once implemented, will encourage participation and completion of ABET programmes (ibid:48). The focus of the campaign will be focused on recruiting and training learners and volunteer educators by 2005; developing language-relevant materials in all curriculum areas as well as developing a management system for literacy programme delivery to ensure sustained quality of delivery, freely available resource material, and appropriate learner assessment and educator support material (ibid:48). This together with the training of ABET officials and provision of Adult Learning and Teaching Support Materials are the interventions that are supposed to facilitate the attainment of the EFA targets in South Africa by 2015.

Therefore what is indicated as conditions for success in achieving EFA targets in South Africa depends largely on external and systemic factors. However what affects learner retention rates in ABET programs is a combination of internal and external factors. This suggests that the internal-micro aspects existing within individual learners are not taken into consideration at the level of policy planning and therefore end-user perspectives are not fully incorporated into a strategy to implement EFA effectively within communities. Moreover, once again the focus is on gaps rather than assets.

The studies reviewed above indicate numerous challenges faced by some developing countries in meeting the EFA targets within the set deadlines. Some authors have focused on the unintended consequences of EFA target-setting for instance Jansen (2005:1) argues that on the part of international agencies, target setting can be seen as a transnational system of surveillance that takes measures of control, measurement and accountability beyond the confines of national borders. Therefore while targets and indicators serve to hold governments accountable and measure progress towards meeting the EFA goals, Jansen argues that this measure of asserting control is not limited or localized within countries. Instead he argues that these targets are set externally and internationally by international bodies and sponsoring agencies such as UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank

(2005:2). Jansen (2005:6) argues that this is not an effective means to measure progress because very often these targets are never reached. Instead he argues that there is a methodological, conceptual and organizational fallacy in target setting (Jansen 2005:7). While this might be a compelling argument, it is however not derived from empirical research. It emphasizes the deficits and problems rather than investigating the conditions that make policy implementation possible if not successful. In fact there seems to be a dearth of empirical research analysing EFA effects on developing countries through asset mapping. More specifically, there is a gap in the literature on research focusing on how end-users work against these challenges by mobilizing assets within their own contexts to achieve reading literacy in spite of the challenges. It is this gap in the body of knowledge that I hope to address through this research.

In attaining Education for All specifically for adult learners, one needs to recognise that the gap between policy and practice is not entirely dependent on systemic and external factors. Internal factors that lie within individual adult learners also serve to explain the gap between policy and practice. In this section I hope to provide the conceptual link between the macro and micro perspective relating to EFA as a transnational policy to adult learners' academic self-concept.

There are different conceptions of policy, and numerous scholars have theorised on this issue with the goal of explaining the gap between policy and practice. In this study I borrow from Sutton & Levinson's (2001) conception of *policy as negotiated meaning*. This view recognizes that policies carry meaning and the meaning can change across contexts and it can take forms which may contradict the meaning defined initially at the conception of policies. It explains why some policies may be interpreted differently in different contexts, which means that implementers take and use what is consistent with their own meaning and is applicable in their own context to implement policies. It indicates that as policy makers one should not have the notion or expectancy that policy will be implemented 'as is'. Instead one should leave room for different interpretations to take hold, and focus on how these meanings take shape and identify the factors that drive certain interpretations to take hold but not others. In this study I take this idea forward by using academic self-concept as one of the key identifying factors that drive a positive interpretation of policy despite systemic challenges and personal barriers, in turn leading to the acquisition of reading literacy amongst adult learners.

One of the limitations of Sutton and Levinson's idea is that it presupposes a rational and linear process between policy and practice. For instance issues about power, silent voices

and hegemonic relationships which legitimise certain interpretations over others are not fully explored. In this study, by focusing on the academic self-concept of learners, one is able to explore fully the impact and interaction of these factors on individual learners. I will also be able to explore how the teaching and learning context, the home environment and other parts of the system influence adult learners' conception of themselves as learners learning to read. In the next section I unpack the conceptual framework that facilitates the exploration of these systems.

2.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this study I will use three conceptual frameworks as a basis for my analysis of the data. The first draws on the recent work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998 in Swart & Pettipher 2005:13) in which he uses the *bio-ecological model* to explain development within the context of the system of relationships that form a learner's environment. The bio-ecological theory is based on the interdependence and relationships between different organisms and their physical environment. These relationships are seen as a whole. Every part is as important as another in sustaining the cycles of birth and death or regeneration and decay, which together ensure the survival of the whole system. It is a version of systems theory regarding complex influences and interactions between individuals and contexts apparent in education, schools and classrooms.

2.3.1 THE BIO-ECOLOGICAL THEORY

Following research on his earlier model, Bronfenbrenner has revised his original work into the bio-ecological model which incorporates features of the earlier version of the model and integrates them with new elements into a more dynamic and complex structure (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998 in Swart & Pettipher 2005:13). The bio-ecological model has the following principles (Swart & Pettipher 2005:13).

- Development occurs in increasingly complex reciprocal interactions (bi-directional influences) between systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, chrono-systems).
- Development is a product of the characteristics of a person i.e. their biological make-up, the environment and the nature of the outcome you are examining.
- That proximal factors (i.e. factors that are much closer to the person such as his immediate family and family environment) are more influential that distal influences.

Bronfenbrenner identified five systems that interact and impact on individuals and within which the individual is embedded (Swart & Pettipher 2005:10-11) namely:

- **Micro-systems** – these are more proximal and are characterised by face-to-face or direct interactions with the individual. An example would be hereditary factors, biological factors, developmental factors and motivational factors.

- **Meso-systems** – these systems link with other micro systems. An example would be father-child interactions, mother-child interactions, interactions with siblings, peers and educators. **Exo-systems** – these link Micro-systems with one system which the individual does not directly function in but has an impact on them. An example would be the ABET learners' support system in the neighbourhood, interactions with the school, church or extended family members.

- **Macro-system** – comprises of larger principles which have a cascading effect throughout the interactions of all the other systems. An example: would be culture, values, customs, laws.

- **Chrono-system** – the dimensions of time as it relates to the individual's environments which can either be internal e.g. developmental milestones of a child as they develop, or external such as the timing of a pregnancy which led the ABET learner to react differently and determine more how change in the learners' environment will influence them.

Systems are patterns of organisation whose identity becomes more than simply the sum of their parts. Each system operates in stable and predictable ways that contribute to its continuity, yet retains the possibility of fluidity and change. Human society / individual person / situation is conceptualised as a system of different interrelated and interdependent levels in constant dynamic interaction, such that change at one level has an inevitable, although not necessarily predictable, effect on other levels. As a result change is understood not as a linear causality but rather as circular and involving the interrelatedness of all aspects of a situation – there is a recognition and acceptance of some degree of unpredictability (Swart & Pettipher 2005:12).

In applying this model to reading literacy, it becomes pertinent that reading achievement should be understood as a result of numerous factors interacting including biological, environmental and socio-economic factors. Therefore addressing the issues around reading literacy cannot be done by focusing on the political environment only, as policy studies on EFA have been doing. It must also involve studying the elements within the individual learner that help or hinder the acquisition of reading literacy. This perspective connects individual psychological development to social context and the systems within it. It also

provides a theoretical framework for understanding why the general challenges of development cannot be separated from the more specific challenges of addressing social issues and barriers to learning (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana 2002:57).

In this regard we begin to understand that although in developing reading literacy we might focus on education policy as part of the social context, according to the biopsychosocial model, in addressing the learning needs of adult learners holistically, one needs to consider their biological (physical, cognitive and communicative); psychological (emotional) as well as the social aspects (Simeonsson & Rosenthal 2001:9). One of the factors that play a role in how adult learners acquire reading literacy has to do with their own personal make up and how they perceive themselves as learners learning to read in a literate world. Thus the bio-ecological perspective enables us to link this understanding of how policy forms part of the macro-system, which involves dominant social structures as well as beliefs, and values to how individual factors within the learner create a propensity to succeed (or fail) in spite of the social context. In order to do this, I draw on the second part of my conceptual framework to discuss the *phenomenological approach to the self-concept* drawing on the work of Carl Rogers (1951, 1959). This part of the discussion provides the theoretical underpinnings of the self-concept construct and how it has developed through time. This discussion also sharpens the conceptual framework for this study in that it narrows the macro-system to focus on the micro-system by highlighting a possible way of understanding how the self-concept as a factor is linked to academic achievement in the acquisition of reading literacy.

2.3.2 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE SELF-CONCEPT

The phenomenological approach to psychology is a perspective which attempts to understand man through the impressions of the subject and not through the eyes of the observer. It seeks to understand how the individual views himself; how his needs, feelings, values, beliefs and unique perception of his environment influence him to behave as he does (Burns 1982:19). In this sense, behaviour is seen as a function of the personal meanings attached to an individual's perception of past and contemporaneous experiences (ibid).

Perception is a central concept in phenomenology and refers to the processes of selecting, organising and interpreting material into a coherent construction of the psychological environment. We are therefore concerned with the personal meanings that exist for any person at any instant and which determine his behaviour (ibid:20). According to Burns (1982:20), Carl Rogers appropriated phenomenology, with the perceived self-concept as its

core, to underpin his developing client-centred approach to psychotherapy. The basic premises of the phenomenological approach as developed by Rogers are that

- Behaviour is the product of one's perceptions.
- These perceptions are phenomenological rather than 'real'.
- Perceptions have to be related to the existing organisation of the field, the pivotal point of which is the self-concept.
- The self-concept is both a percept and a concept round which gather values introjected from the cultural pattern.
- Behaviour is then regulated by the self-concept.
- The self-concept is relatively consistent through time and place and produces relatively consistent behaviour patterns.
- Defence strategies are used to prevent incongruities occurring between experience and the cognised self-concept.
- There is one basic drive, that of self-actualisation.

However, Burns (ibid:30) cautioned that self-concept development was fraught with problems due to the lack of agreement over definitions of the self-concept; inadequate research techniques that were hard to validate and the weakness of self-report techniques that required the subject to respond truthfully and willingly. Historically self-concept measurement, theory, research and application have emphasised a largely atheoretical, global component of self-concept and reviewers have noted the lack of theoretical models of defining and interpreting the construct (see also Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton 1976; Wells & Maxwell 1976; Wylie 1974, 1979).

In an attempt to remedy this situation, Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976 in Marsh & Koller 2003:19) developed a model positing a multidimensional, hierarchical construct of self-concept (see p.32, Table 2.1: The structure of the self-concept). Shavelson *et al* (1976 in Shavelson & Bolus 1982:3) broadly define self-concept as a person's perceptions of him/herself. These perceptions are formed through one's experience with and interpretations of one's environment and are influenced especially by reinforcements, evaluations by significant others, and one's attributions for one's own behaviour (ibid).

Shavelson *et al* (1976) went further to define the construct by seven critical features:

(a)   It is organised or structured, in that people categorise the vast amount of information they have about themselves and relate the categories to one another.

TABLE 2.1:   **STRUCTURE OF THE SELF-CONCEPT**

General Self-concept

Non Academic Self-concept

Academic and Non-Academic Self-Concept

Academic Self-Concept

Social Self-Concept

Emotional Self-Concept

Physical Self-Concept

Subareas of Self-Concept

English   History   Math   Science

Peers   Significant Other

Particular Emotional States

Physical Ability   Physical Appearance

Evaluation of Behaviour in Specific Situations

[Adapted from RJ Shavelson;,JJ Hubner & JC Stanton − Review of Education research, 1976, 46;407−441]

(b)   It is multifaceted, and the particular facets reflect the category system adopted by a particular individual and/or shared by a group.

(c)   It is hierarchical, with perceptions of behaviour at the base moving to inferences about self in sub-areas, then to inferences about self in academic and non-academic, and then to inferences about self in general. In the model (see Table 2.1), the global self-concept is at the apex of the hierarchy and divided into non-academic (e.g. social, physical, emotional) and academic components. The academic self-concept is divided into self-concepts in particular content areas such as math, science, reading etc. and verbal self-concepts (Marsh & Koller 2003:19). The non-academic self-concept was divided into physical {ability and appearance}, social (peer and significant other relations), and emotional self-concepts. Further, self-concept was assumed to have both descriptive and evaluative aspects, and global components of it such as the academic self-concept were more stable than specific components such as reading self-concept (Vispoel 2003:152). The subdivision of these more specific aspects of self-concept were also hypothesised with components of self-concept becoming increasingly targeted to particular behaviours as one descended the hierarchy (ibid).

(d)   General self-concept is stable, but as one descends the hierarchy, self-concept becomes increasingly situation specific and as a consequence less stable

(e)   Self-concept becomes increasingly multifaceted as the individual develops from infancy to adulthood.

(f)   It has both a descriptive and an evaluative dimension such that individuals may describe themselves (I am happy) and evaluate themselves (I do well in school).

(g)   It can be differentiated from other constructs such as academic achievement (Shavelson & Bolus 1982:3).

Of particular reference here is how the academic self-concept influences achievement in the content areas, specifically focussing on reading literacy. The goal here is not to test the theory by Shavelson *et al*, instead through extrapolation from their research findings, I seek to provide a framework for understanding how by enhancing the self-concept of adult learners one can hope to improve their academic achievement in reading literacy. This understanding also provides a platform to effect personal agency in adult learners in order for them to determine, through asset-mapping and mobilisation, factors within their learning environment which could aid their acquisition of reading literacy by enhancing their self-concept. This study is oriented more towards applying the theory by Shavelson *et al* and expanding the scope of self-concept research to non-traditional learner groups like adult learners who are not typically included in research on self-concept.

To the phenomenologist reality exists not in the event itself but in the unique perception of the event by the individuals concerned. In this sense perception is viewed as other than what is physically out there; yet what is perceived is 'reality' to the perceiver, the only reality by which he can guide his behaviour (ibid:20). In this study I seek to understand how adult learner's perceptions of reality in their endeavours to acquire reading literacy facilitate their ability to attain that goal. In learning support, one is concerned with how this perception enhances or undermines the learning process. The understanding is that how you perceive school is a product of how you see yourself as a successful or unsuccessful learner. Therefore depending on the learner's self-concept, learning to read can be viewed as a challenge or something to be avoided. In this study, I am interested in understanding what within the learner's environment serve as assets that enable them to develop a positive self-concept in relation to their academic endeavours to acquire reading literacy. And this links to the third part of my conceptual framework. In the next section I unpack the two theoretical models to explain how academic self-concept influences achievement.

2.3.2.1 The reciprocal effects model

This model suggests that performance accomplishments are dependent on the self-concept. In their review of literature on this model Marsh and Koller (2003:19-21) discuss research that has been conducted on this subject. For instance Marsh (2002:ibid:19) demonstrated that physical self-concept contributed to the prediction of the performances of elite swimmers at international events beyond what could be explained in terms of their previous performances. Parker (1998:ibid:19) summarised research showing that employees who feel more able to perform particular tasks will actually perform better on these tasks, will persist in the face of adversity and will cope more effectively with change. Another study by Judge and Bono (2001:ibid:21) presented a meta-analysis showing that components of a positive self-concept construct were among the best predictors of job performance and job satisfaction.

However Marsh and Koller indicate that research in this area has been mainly concerned in answering the question regarding whether academic self-concept 'causes' academic achievement or vice versa (ibid:20). They posit that this approach of evaluating the causal ordering of self-concept and performance achievement is futile. Instead they argue that a more realistic compromise is a reciprocal effects model in which prior academic self-concept affects subsequent achievement and prior achievement affects subsequent academic self-concepts (ibid:21).

2.3.2.2 The internal/external frame of reference (I/E) model

According to the I/E model, academic self-concept in a particular school subject is formed in relation to two comparison processes or frame of reference. The first is the typical *external* (normative or social comparison) reference in which a student compares their self-perceived performances in a particular school subject with the perceived performances of other students in the same school subject and other external standards of actual achievement levels (ibid:22). In this frame of reference, the learner's academic self-concept in reading literacy is a product of how s/he feels s/he is good or poor relative to his/her peers in reading literacy and according to how the educator assesses him/her. If a learner perceives himself to be able in reading literacy in relation to other learners and indicators of achievement, then the learner should have a high academic self-concept in reading literacy.

The second is an *internal* reference in which the student compares their own performance in one particular school subject with their own performances in other school subjects (ibid:23). In this instance the learner will perceive himself or herself as able in reading literacy if their performance in reading literacy is higher in comparison to their performance in e.g. numeracy, even if they are not particularly good in reading literacy relative to other students and external standards of achievement in reading literacy. The I/E model predicts that such a student would have a better reading literacy self-concept than another student who did equally poorly at reading literacy but who did better in all other schools subjects because reading literacy was his/her worst subject. Similarly a student who is very bright in all school subjects may have an average or even below-average reading literacy self-concept if the student perceived reading literacy to be his or her worst subject (ibid:25).

According to Marsh, Craven and McInerney (2003:3) maximising self-concept is recognised as a critical goal in itself and a means to facilitate other desirable outcomes in a diversity of settings. The desire to feel positively about oneself and the benefits of this feeling on choice, planning, persistence, and subsequent accomplishments transcend traditional disciplinary barriers and are central to goals in many social policy areas (ibid). For adult learners, learning how to read is intimately connected to perceptions about themselves and their capacity to learn and a negative self-concept could be a psychological barrier that could impede educational achievement and learning support programmes. In terms of the psychological factors, self-concept plays a pivotal role in influencing whether adults who cannot read will in the first place consider going back to school to acquire reading literacy and whether they are likely to persevere in the presence of challenges. For adult educators

and learning support practitioners it is essential that there is a fundamental understanding of how psychological factors and in particular self-concept could be enhanced to facilitate academic achievement and resiliency in the journey of lifelong learning amongst adult learners. As noted by Lovell (1980:117) "the individual who has been so conditioned by significant others … that he has developed a self-image which inhibits him from taking risks which are involved in striving towards a full realisation of his potential … will need the most careful help and encouragement so that some of the damage to his self-image may be repaired and he may move towards realising his potential and become more the person he is capable of becoming".

Most of the literature on this subject focuses on younger students and university students. Very little research has focused on ABET learners, however valuable lessons can be learnt and extrapolated to the ABET learners based on these research findings. For instance a review of studies on the development of achievement-related self-system factors in relation to young children's reading acquisition by Chapman and Tunmer (2003:5-24) found that reading self-concept, academic self-concept and reading self-efficacy appear to develop in response to initial experiences in learning to read. Therefore if these early experiences are negative, they tend to increase anxiety related to reading and serve to fuel the development of a negative academic self-concept in reading literacy. The early causal influence of reading performance over reading self-concept is consistent with the skills development view of academic self-concept development. This view holds that achievement-related self-perceptions form in response to emerging patterns of accomplishments or difficulty with learning tasks (Helmke & Van Aken 1995; Skaalvik & Hagtvet 1990). Findings from other studies suggested that academic self-concept may start to influence achievement between Grades 3 and 5. Kurtz-Costes and Schneider (1994) observed a reciprocal relationship between academic self-concept and achievement over a two-year period for children who were eight years old when their study commenced. Helmke and Van Aken (1995) observed reciprocal interactions between self-concept and achievement during Grades 5 and 6. These findings are consistent with the view that because most children experience a range of successes and failures when learning to read, achievement-related self-perceptions take a few years to stabilize and reflect the emerging patterns of achievement (Nicholls & Miller 1984; Stipek 1993).

In considering the effects of reading failure on the child's developing achievement-related self-systems, Chapman and Tunmer (2003:15) argue that remedial reading programs should include two key elements to be successful: the first addresses the fundamental skills needed for developing proficiency in reading and the second focuses on strategies for ameliorating

negative reading and achievement-related self-perceptions that develop in response to difficulties in learning to read. Furthermore attention should be devoted to the negative reading and academic self-perceptions that usually develop from failure in learning to read (ibid:17). One commonly used approach is for teachers to offer praise for success along with general encouragement (Stipek & MacIver 1989; Swann 1996). Teachers often assume that consistent praise will lead to change in attitudes toward academic tasks, which in turn will ensure self-esteem enhancement and improved achievement levels (Swann 1996). Roache and Hunt (1988) found that teachers of students with learning difficulties placed considerable emphasis on using praise to change student's attitudes toward learning, as if student's attitudes were the primary causal factor responsible for poor achievement. Studies indicate that negative attitudes toward different subjects do not appear to be a significant impediment for students with learning disabilities (e.g. Chapman & Boersma 1980; Wilson, Chapman & Tunmer 1995). Rather it is the attitudes about themselves as learners, the perceptions that they lack sufficient competence as learners, and the feelings of learned helplessness that are associated with ongoing failure (Butkowsky & Willows 1980; Chapman 1988; Chapman & Boersma 1980; Licht & Kistner 1986; Pressley 1998). Another strategy often considered to improve achievement levels of students with histories of learning failure is to promote self-esteem. Although self-esteem enhancement approaches may yield some benefits, there is little evidence to support the idea that improving self-perceptions independently of academic tasks will directly lead to improved academic performance (Elbaum & Vaughn 2001; Hattie & Marsh 1996; Swann 1996).

A more fruitful approach to enhancing the development of positive self-systems is likely to result from attribution retraining procedures that are used in conjunction with appropriate skills training. When used alongside skills training, such as the use of rime-based orthographic analogies, or word families, for identifying unfamiliar words, attribution retraining involves specific teacher feedback that is designed to ameliorate children's self-perceptions that the cause of their reading problems is a lack of ability, or that no matter what they do to try to read successfully, proficient reading is an elusive goal. Instead, assurances about a child's adequate ability level are provided by the teacher, and attention focuses on the use of specific skills or strategies as the primary factor in bringing about success in reading (ibid:17).

Craven, Marsh and Debus (1991) provide some useful guidelines for the implementation of feedback strategies for promoting positive student self-perceptions. They suggest that teachers' responses to successful achievement outcomes should make reference to:

▪ The correct use of a task-specific strategy.

- ▪ The effort and perseverance required for completing the task.
- ▪ A confirmation to the student that s/he has sufficient ability to successfully manage such tasks.

The purpose of this type of feedback is to assist the student in developing attributions that emphasise the link between the role of specific strategies and their effortful application in causing successful outcomes (ibid:17-18).

Of note to this study is Marsh and Koller's proposal to unify the Reciprocal effects and the Internal/External Frame of Reference model. They argue that such unification provides an important extension to previous theory and empirical research based on each model separately (2003:26). Putting the two models together highlights potential limitations of each model that are well-established strengths of the other (2003:27). From their investigation they concluded that the causal ordering of self-concept and performance achievement is too simplistic. Instead their study highlighted that although academic skill development may result in short-term gains in academic achievement, these achievement gains are unlikely to be maintained unless there are corresponding gains in academic self-concept. Conversely, although self-concept enhancement programs may have short-term gains in academic self-concept, these effects are unlikely to be maintained unless there are corresponding gains in achievement. Hence the most effective way to have lasting effects on either achievement or academic self-concept is to develop interventions that simultaneously enhance both constructs (ibid:42).

Moreover, their investigation highlighted the fact that teacher's inferences are not nearly so domain specific so that students who are bright in one area tend to be seen as having good academic self-concepts in all areas, whereas students who are not bright in one area are seen as having poor academic self-concept in all areas (Marsh & Koller 2003:43). The implication for educational practice is that giving positive feedback that is credible to students is essential as their performance influences their self-concept which in turn influences their subsequent achievement across different subjects.

The discussion thus far has highlighted how a focus on the micro aspects that affects individual learners pertaining to their self-concept impact on their acquisition of reading literacy. However as argued earlier, literacy development is not just an individual endeavour, it is also a policy issue. In the next section I narrow the discussion to link to adult learners as a cohort and focus of this research. The policy literature reviewed in the previous section on various developing countries that have embarked on programmes

focussed on developing reading literacy amongst the adult learners in their population served to highlight the challenges experienced by end-users in this area. It served to illustrate the needs-based approach undertaken by studies in this field as they continue to focus on needs, gaps and challenges within the system rather being solution-focussed. The next section introduces the third concept of my research by focussing specifically on adult learners in their endeavours to acquire reading literacy.

2.3.2.3 The link to adult learners acquiring literacy

Lawrence (2000:xviii) in his book on Building Self-esteem with Adult Learners, provided the link that contextualised this subject to adult learners. He mentions that the self-esteem construct is recognised today to be a major factor in learning outcomes. Those who feel confident generally achieve more, while those who lack confidence in themselves achieve less. People tend to behave in terms of how they perceive themselves. He concurs with research on younger children and young students that even in the case of adult learners, those who believe that they are capable of succeeding are more likely to do so, because a person's image of themselves largely determines what they do. The development of self-esteem therefore should be just as valuable a goal for educationists as the development of intellectual skills (ibid). In his earlier research, Lawrence (1987 in Lawrence 2000:5) found 'a small but significant correlation between reading attainment and self-esteem' and designed counselling and teaching programmes to counteract 'failure in reading [which] has now generalised to the whole personality'.

Lawrence (2000:5) summarised Maslow's hierarchy of needs to suggest that for adult learners physiological needs which are at the bottom of the hierarchy have to be satisfied first before intellectual and social needs at the top of the hierarchy. He implied that the need to learn how to read is linked to the need to self-actualise, hence the need to enhance their self-esteem (ibid:6). Therefore based on this theory it is only when one's basic needs at the bottom of the hierarchy are met that one will seek attainment of the higher order needs.

However for adults, particularly those from economically disadvantaged communities, learning to read is intricately connected with the fulfilment of one's basic needs. Access to employment is hindered by one's ability to read. My argument is that in the case of adult learners, one's ability to meet the physical, security and social needs is intertwined with one's own ability to read. For people who cannot read, access to resources that facilitate the fulfilment of these basic needs are limited and therefore renders the adult learner dependent on literate people and cut off from rights and privileges enjoyed by literate people. This

fundamentally re-structures the hierarchy as it repositions the need for literacy as a basic human right.

Blake and Blake (2002) write that "the goal of worldwide literacy is probably the most important one we face today. We know that people who cannot read and write may be intelligent and worthy, but if they are not literate in our present-day technological global society, they are at a dismaying disadvantage (p.1). Reasons given to promote literacy are that literacy is good for the individual, although there is no consensus about the language in which it should be developed (ibid:5); literacy is good for economic well-being, particularly in facilitating skills-development; literacy is good for society because of its social consequences in terms of reducing infant mortality and primary health care when literacy programs target illiterate women in developing countries; literacy is good for political stability, particularly it its influence of achieving national solidarity, lowering social welfare costs, and providing greater economic productivity (ibid:6). Literacy is good for the community in that community literacy promotes moral and social cohesion thus providing a sense of community; and finally that literacy is good for the economic development of countries (ibid:7-8).

The context within developing countries is characterised by challenges with service delivery and achieving deep change aimed at poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Literacy has been identified as one of the ways that people and communities can be elevated out of poverty. However, in South Africa, our current system is fraught with problems which can be located within the economic policy framework of the country. The Human Development Report (2003:111) states that the political decision to pursue a conservative economic policy framework as the context for the economic transformation in South Africa has (also) established the political context for the development of social services and infrastructure delivery. With the new economic policy framework, the government has adopted a more circumscribed, and in some cases 'symbolic', approach to providing different services. This has led to a political commitment to meet certain quantitative targets, while overlooking the importance of providing high levels of support to ensure the quality and affordability of new services. Moreover, there is evidence that the policy-making process in these areas is characterised by the diminishing influence of people in the receiving end of these programmes. As a result, an important aspect of the ultimate aim of service delivery – meeting people's needs – has been compromised (Human Development Report 2003:111-112).

Rosa Maria Torres (2000:3) writes that literacy is one of the most basic learning needs of children, young people and adults, and is thus at the very heart of basic education. It is an ageless concept, it is developed both in and out of school, through formal, non-formal and informal learning systems, and is a lifelong process. Literacy is not only an indispensable tool for lifelong education and learning but is also an essential requisite for citizenship and human and social development. The right of every individual to education as recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is strongly rooted in the right to literacy (ibid).

Policies such as Education For All as illustrated earlier in the chapter have served to reposition and establish the recognition of education and therefore literacy as a basic human right. This study is ultimately concerned about education policy and the link between policy and practice, and more specifically how education policy facilitates the attainment of human rights for end-users. The development of reading literacy amongst adult learners is a human rights and development goal.

According to Torres (2000:5) some of the lessons in the world-wide endeavour to increase numbers of children, youth and adults who learnt how to read and write include the following: (a) That organising global and/or regional education initiatives that have remained to a large extent donor-driven, result in insufficient attention paid to countries' and people's needs, decisions and responsible ownership (ibid:5). (b) The link between school and out-of-school education, child and adult literacy has seldom been incorporated in policy design and programme implementation. The tendency thus far has been to view child literacy and youth/adult literacy as an either/or option, competing rather than complementing and reinforcing each other. (c) Literacy has come to be recognised as a highly complex and dynamic concept, a continuum and a lifelong learning process in itself, continuously expanding its domains and applications (ibid:8). Torres (2000:14) suggests that achieving literacy for all implies addressing multiple and very differentiated target groups and contexts, making use of the various learning institutions and systems available, and devising differentiated strategies, contents and mechanisms, appropriate and relevant to each of them both at the local, national, regional and global level.

One wonders how service delivery intended to meet people's needs can be achieved at grass-roots level with a focus on quality and sustainable development rather than quantity. Furthermore, in a context where research, policy making and service delivery focuses largely on younger children and youth, how does one ensure that reading literacy programmes achieve the quality, depth and sustainability required to alleviate poverty amongst the adult population. The value of the research on children and youth reviewed in

the previous section provides empirical evidence to understand how the reading self-concept develops during childhood and by when negative or positive self-beliefs in relation to reading are likely to be established. This highlights the challenge that for adult learners learning to read, the years of experiencing failures in reading and the lifelong experience of limitations that come with not being able to read create an insurmountable barrier that could undermine the efforts intended to develop the reading literacy of adults. If this were to continue then reading literacy programmes for adults would also achieve symbolic change rather than deep, meaningful, sustainable change. Therefore the first part of the literature discussed here emphasises the importance of addressing and enhancing the self-concept of adult learners learning to read while at the same time addressing the andragogical goal of teaching them to read. However at a policy level one needs to consider strategies that particularly developing countries can learn from which can lead to deep systemic change that ultimately benefits individual adult learners on the ground. Once again the goal is to highlight strategies that include adult learners as co-constructers of their own meaning and reality. However the shifting is on focusing on assets already existing within the individual and the system which enable them to thrive despite the challenges. In the third and final part of my conceptual framework, I discuss the Asset-based approach in more detail. The goal is to ultimately present a framework that will inform my data collection process, particularly in terms of identifying existing internal and external assets.

2.3.3   THE ASSET-BASED APPROACH

The third part of my conceptual framework draws on the work of Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) looking at the *asset-based approach*. They provide a guide on rebuilding troubled communities. While their work was not necessarily intended to look at psycho-educational intervention or policy implementation at grassroots level, its relevance is that it makes a shift away from analysing gaps and deficiencies within the system, and determining intervention and implementation of policy based on those gaps. It takes a solution-focused approach to intervention and development, because rather than emphasize the community's needs, deficiencies and problems it emphasizes a commitment to discovering a community's capacities and assets (1993:1).

The authors argue "a needs-based approach determines how problems are to be addressed through deficiency-oriented policies … which are translated into programs that teach people the nature and extent of their problems and the value of services as the answer to their problems" (1993:2). In turn "people begin to see themselves as people with special needs that can only be met by outsiders, they become consumers of services with no incentive to

become producers" (ibid). They argue that some social and business institutions thrive on maintaining a deficiency model, which leave people dependent on outside aid and serve to perpetuate a cycle of dependency. It undermines the community's capacity to recognise that its problems form part of a tightly intertwined system and are merely symptoms of the breakdown of its own problem solving capacity (1993:4). It forces the community to overlook the fact that solutions to its problems can be found within the system rather than from outside experts. In essence the needs-based approach undermines the social capital of its own citizens as well as its indigenous knowledge systems. Furthermore, funding formulated from a need-based approach is often directed at service providers rather than the residents, in turn ensuring that any form of intervention intended to uplift the community is merely for the sake of survival rather than sustainable development.

In studying the impact of the EFA policy on developing countries using the asset-based approach, more specifically how the enhancement of learners' academic self-concept facilitates the acquisition of reading literacy amongst ABET learners, I hope to do much more than what Nagel (1980 in Husen & Postlethwaite 1994:1835) explains as the role of policy studies. He explains that policy studies are concerned with 'the nature, causes and effects of alternative public policies, they aim to empower humans to undertake more effective collective action to solve or reduce significant policy problems". Rather than do this by analysing the gap between policy and practice, I choose to undertake this challenge from the angle of analysing assets within the individual learners as part of their bio-ecological system.

In the next section I discuss the asset-based approach as a methodological strategy for this study. The goal is to move the focus away from a problem-focused narrative that is needs-based, highlighting deficiencies within the system of policy and service delivery at a macro level from a top-down approach, to one that focuses on solutions and assets from a bottoms-up perspective beginning with the adult learners themselves. Here I will discuss research that have utilised the asset-based approach as a methodological strategy to explore a variety of educational psychological issues and constructs. I also hope to critically reflect on some of the challenges and successes experienced by researchers in using this approach in research. Finally I will conclude this chapter by exploring literature on developmental assets as a broad methodology for categorising developmental assets. The purpose of this discussion is to profile a framework that will inform my data gathering process by drawing on literature on the subject.

2.3.3.1 A framework for mapping assets

In their study exploring a rural community's strategy for career education, Ebersöhn and Mbetse (2003) aimed to expand the existing career theory and models of intervention using the Asset-based Approach. Using a qualitative case study, stakeholders' suggestions of community-based resources, career education skills training and networking were discussed. The study concluded that parallels exist between the asset-based approach and indigenous knowledge systems with regard to career education. This study does not focus specifically on reading literacy development and enhancing the academic self-concept of adult learners. However, it serves to illustrate how the asset-based approach can be utilised to empower communities initially deemed 'lacking' and 'poor' in order to discover and unleash their hidden social capital. The case study is situated within a rural community in Limpopo Province. Its population exceeds 850 000 with a high incidence of poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and orphans (Health Systems Development Unit 2000 in Ebersöhn & Mbetse 2003:9). Its relevance to this study is its demonstration of a research methodology aimed at developing a new narrative within impoverished and disenfranchised communities that facilitates a solution-focussed approach to research. The study used focus group interviews in generating new ideas, strategies and hypotheses (ibid:10). The role of the researcher became that of 'helping the community to realise, appreciate and utilise their talent and assets. To supply information not readily available, establish social support and networks and forge linkages to access funding to enable communities (ibid:6-7).

Another study by Kriek and Eloff (2003) explored the use of the asset-based approach to educational psychological early intervention. Using an instrumental case study to investigate what asset-based educational psychological intervention would entail and what the methodological and procedural challenges and opportunities would be. The study found that the asset-based approach entails an intensive investment of time and that a key factor to its success is sustained relationships with all involved. They also found that assets that were closer to the participant could be mobilised more readily than those within the broader system (p.36). The relevance of this study to the context of this discussion is that it problematises the top-down approach to policy development and implementation. The idea is that if assets that are more proximal to the end-user are readily mobilised, then driving policy change with the goal of closing the gap between policy and practice should rather adopt a more bottoms-up approach.

While these studies provide an indication of how the Asset-based approach was utilised as a methodology in research, these studies fail to provide a framework for researching and identifying assets. Such a limitation makes it difficult to determine a profile of assets that

serve as pre-requisites for success in effecting personal agency in learners, particularly with the goal of explaining the link between policy and practice.

Scales and Leffert (1999) profiled developmental assets which they define as the building blocks that all youth need to be healthy, caring, principled and productive. The original framework identified and measured 30 assets using more than 500 000 6th to 12th grade youth in more than 600 communities across the United States (Scales & Leffert 1999:5). This framework was subsequently revised to 40 asset structures grouped into eight categories representing broad domains of influence in young people's lives: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time representing external assets (relationships and opportunities that adults provide); commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity are internal assets (competencies and values that youth develop internally that help them become self-regulating adults) (ibid). This framework provides a broad methodology for categorising developmental assets. The table below summarises these:

TABLE 2.2: THE EIGHT CATEGORIES OF DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

External Assets	
Support	These refer to the ways in which individuals are loved, affirmed and accepted. The support could come from various settings outside the family unit, in school, or religious congregations, amongst extended family, or within other areas of socialisation
Empowerment	Being able to feel safe and valued, the community's perception of adult learners and the opportunities they have to contribute to society in a meaningful way
Boundaries & expectations	Clear and consistent boundaries complement support and empowerment. These may be experienced in the family, school and the community. They provide a set of consistent messages about appropriate behaviour and expectations across learning contexts
Constructive use of time	availability of activities that stimulate positive growth and contribute to the development of other assets

Internal Assets	
Commitment to Learning	Developing an internal intellectual curiosity and the skills to gain new knowledge. This is linked to how motivated learners are to achieve and whether they express their curiosity and work ethic in homework and reading for fun
Positive values	Positive values are important 'internal compasses' that guide learners' priorities and choices
Social competence	These are personal and interpersonal skills learners need to negotiate choices, options and relationships. These skills also lay the foundation for independence and competence
Positive identity	Learners' views of themselves – their own sense of agency, purpose, worth and promise. This determines the learner's sense of powerlessness, initiative and direction

[Adapted from Scales & Leffert 1999, pp.5-6. Developmental assets: A synthesis of the scientific research on adolescent development.]

Scales and Leffert (1999:7) posit that 'research has shown that the more of these assets young people have, the less likely they are to engage in risky behaviour (such as using alcohol or other drugs, or having early unprotected sexual intercourse), and the more likely they are to engage in positive behaviours (such as succeeding in school or helping others). They further argue that the relationships between assets and youth well-being remain fairly consistent for adolescents across differences of race and ethnicity, gender, age, socio-economic background, community size and region (ibid:7)[4].

2.4   CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed how self-concept mediates the attainment of policy and individual learning outcomes within individual end-users. I also explored literature on EFA policy highlighting the challenges experienced by end-users particularly developing countries in this area This served to highlight what the EFA claims to do in policy terms, and what its effects within education in these countries has been as well as the explanations that have been given to explain these effects. This section served to indicate the needs-based approach undertaken by studies in this field, thus positioning my study and defining its rationale and contribution to the body of knowledge within this domain. This chapter also elaborated on the three conceptual arguments serving as the analytical and data collection framework for my study. In essence it positioned adult learners as co-constructers of their own learning and end-users of policy. Finally the chapter served to define the key concepts in my study,

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[4]   For a more comprehensive description of the framework and its conceptual and research origins, see Benson 1997; Benson, Leffert, Scales & Blyth 1998.

namely; academic self-concept, reading literacy, adult learners and asset-based approach. In the next chapter I will provide a more detailed account of the methodology and methods that I used in the study; my original plans and how they changed in the field.

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3.1   INTRODUCTION

In this section I will explain the design and methods employed in conducting my study. I will also justify the decisions that I made that helped shape how I conducted this study as well as how I saw my role as a researcher in this study. My primary interest on this subject is to explain how nation states, particularly developing countries implement adult basic education policies in the context of meeting the EFA targets with a specific focus on adult reading literacy. My secondary interest is to understand how community assets combine to influence the acquisition of reading literacy among adult learners. More specifically my goal was to identify assets existing within the ABET learner's ecosystem that promote a positive academic-self-concept in reading literacy as well as determine how these assets are utilised or mobilised to facilitate a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy. The study draws the line between education policy, academic self-concept and the acquisition of reading literacy among adult learners by exploring how self-concept mediates the attainment of policy outcomes within individual end-users through asset mapping and mobilisation.

I recognised that most of the studies on EFA implementation with regards to ABET in developing countries had focused on explaining the discrepancy between policy and practice by focusing on needs, gaps and challenges within the system rather than being solution-focused (see section 2.2.1). Secondly, the literature on self-esteem enhancement in facilitating academic achievement had focused on children and youth rather than adult learners (see section 2.3.2.2). The studies also fell short of providing a conceptual analysis that would link the macro-aspects of policy to the micro-aspects that exist within individual learners as a way of explaining how individual factors within the learner create a propensity to succeed (or fail) in spite of the social context.

The question therefore remained: how do end-users of policy, in this case adult learners, work against systemic challenges within their own contexts to achieve reading literacy in spite of the challenges? This was the main point of departure for my study and it influenced my decision in choosing a research design. I was looking for well-grounded, rich

descriptions and explanations of processes. I was hoping to determine which assets led to which consequences and thereby derive fruitful explanations.

This study was therefore designed to fill the gap where previous studies had fallen short – capturing the internal and external factors that lie within individual adult learners that represent assets, which when mobilised drive a positive interpretation of policy despite systemic challenges and personal barriers, in turn leading to the acquisition of reading literacy amongst adult learners.

As a result, I chose a qualitative research design. I wanted to gain the perspectives of adult learners as end-users of EFA policy by focusing on their experiences of ABET as learners learning to read and write. I wanted this study to add empirical data to our understanding of the relationship between policy and practice in the context of EFA and ABET. I also wanted to develop a conceptual framework that deepens our understanding of the complexities that challenge, promote and hinder successful policy implementation in education by exploring the academic self-concept as one of the key psychological factors that create a propensity to succeed (or fail) in spite of the social context.

I describe this study as qualitative because unlike quantitative research the purpose of this study was not to determine general, universal laws that govern human behaviour (Cohen *et al* 2000:19). Instead it is aimed at understanding the subjective world of adult learners in their endeavours to acquire reading literacy. The conceptual framework that I used to make sense of the information gathered from the study in an attempt to understand how personal agency is activated by mapping and mobilising individual assets. This is based on the fundamental assumption that I hold, and that is shared by interpretivist inquirers who work with quantitative data, that people interpret events, contexts and situations, and act on the bases of those events; and that there are multiple interpretations of and perspectives on single events and situations; and finally that events and individuals are unique and are generally non-generalisable (ibid:21). I also recognize that my understanding of the individual behaviour is best represented through a frame of reference common to that of the practitioners being studied (ibid:20). Hence my role as a researcher is problematised to show how it enabled me to gain access and develop a deeper understanding of the issues and the people under investigation. I did not seek to separate myself; my understanding of the individual interpretations of the assets came from being part of the ABET learning centre especially what I learnt from the observations and informal conversations with the people involved. Once my role changed from that of being an outsider looking in to one of an insider I became part of the co-construction of assets with the participants. Therefore as an

insider my own understanding is influenced by what Cohen *et al* (2000:20) refer to as insider accounts i.e. my own involvement in the centre. The next section explores these issues in more detail, further justifying the research design and methodology that I undertook in conducting the research.

3.2 CHOOSING AN APPROACH TO EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

The type of study undertaken here can be broadly described as qualitative and falling within the domain of interpretivist research. Bryman (2001:13) notes that interpretivism holds a view that the subject matter of the social sciences i.e. people and their institutions, is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. Interpretivists argue that the study of the social world requires a different logic of research, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans against the natural order. It differs from the positivist approach because it emphasises empathic understanding of human action rather than the forces that are deemed to act on it (Bryman 2001:13).

According to Cohen *et al* (2000:22), interpretivist research is characterised by a concern for the individual and its central endeavour is to understand the subjective world of human experience. This study is concerned with individual participants, their experiences and the meanings they assigned to their experience with acquiring reading literacy as adults. Thus the aim of this study was to understand the subjective world of the end-users' experience. Interpretivist research is concerned with how individuals interpret the world around them. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated interpretivist research focuses on getting inside the person, to understand from within (ibid). To achieve this I chose a case study design because it offers detailed, in-depth study of a bounded phenomenon, in one public ABET learning centre as the setting (Merriam 1988:6). It enabled me to obtain the end-users' perspective on their experiences of acquiring reading literacy and how despite the systemic challenges and barriers they were able to attain their goals of learning to read and write.

However, my goal as an interpretivist researcher is not to simply lay bare the assets existing within their eco-system, I also aimed to understand how these were mobilised to attain reading literacy and place these interpretations that have been elicited into what Bryman (2001:15) calls a social scientific frame. My conceptual framework on bio-ecological theory, self-concept and the asset-based approach, particularly developmental assets serve as a means to provide such a social scientific frame. The result is that there is a double interpretation in process because, as researcher, I am also providing an interpretation of

other's interpretations (ibid). This process is extended further by the conceptual framework to a third level of interpretation where my interpretations are further interpreted in terms of the concepts, theories, and literature of the discipline in education policy (ibid).

It is possible that I could have chosen another research approach, specifically critical research because in essence the asset-based approach is concerned with enablement (Eloff 2003:9). Critical theory is explicitly prescriptive and normative, entailing a view of what behaviour in a social democracy should entail (Fay, 1987; Morrison, 1995 in Cohen *et al* 2000:28). Its intention is not merely to give an account of society and behaviour but to realise a society that is based on equality and democracy for all its members. Its purpose is not merely to understand situations and phenomena as in interpretivist research, but rather to change them. In particular it seeks to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society (Cohen *et al* 2000:28).

As a researcher and practitioner using the asset-based approach, my role could be better defined as a catalyst for change, and one that enables research participants to unlock their human capital. This is because the role of the research participants is more active rather than passive, they become the experts over their own environment, and they are given the space to air their viewpoints and exercise their power by mobilizing their own assets and achieve change. Through asset-mapping and mobilisation I present a conceptualisation of reality that is 'simply a way of knowing that reality' (Bryman 2001:13). In turn this way of knowing offers me and the participants the 'prospect of introducing changes that can emancipate the participants and hopefully empower them to introduce changes that can transform their reality' (ibid). Hence my conceptual frameworks on bio-ecological model, academic self-concept, and asset-based approach drive a positive interpretation of policy in spite of systemic challenges and personal barriers. Moreover, my role as a researcher in this study is problematised to show how it enabled me to move beyond understanding towards having a catalysing effect leading to the participants mobilizing their own assets in order to achieve change in their life world.

I recognised that my interests as a researcher could be described as 'emancipatory' According to Kincheloe (1991:177 in Cohen *et al* 2000:29) emancipatory interests are concerned with *praxis* i.e. action that is informed by reflection with the aim to emancipate. The twin intentions of this interest are to expose the operation of power and to bring about social justice as domination and repression act to prevent the full existential realization of individual and social freedoms (Habermas 1979:14 in Cohen *et al* 2000:29). This is how critical research creates enablement and empowerment. As a result it may be possible for

another researcher to approach this subject from the perspective of critical theory. Such an approach would enable the participants to identify the false or fragmented consciousness that has brought them and their community to relative powerlessness and to question its legitimacy (ibid).

While I acknowledge this, I still choose to define my study as interpretivist because firstly the goal of emancipating the participants lies beyond the scope of my study. For me to be able to lay claim to any form of emancipation on the part of the participants I would have to not only use the research to develop an agenda for altering the situation of the participants as suggested by Habermas (1972:230 and Smyth 1989 in Cohen *et al* 2000:30). But I would also have to evaluate the achievement of the situation in practice. Such an evaluation allows the researcher to reconstruct reality in order to determine how one could do things differently, a process feasible using ideology critique and action research methodologies (see Cohen *et al* 2000:30). As argued by other scholars[5], such a link has to be proven empirically even if these methodologies are used, and this was not the purpose of my research. Hence I did not seek to measure the self-concept of the adult learners at the beginning and end of the study. I can therefore not attest to any change or impact on their self-concept as a result of the asset mapping and mobilisation exercise.

Secondly, I understood that my role as a researcher and that of the participants was limited, especially in terms of political power. I realized that it would have been naïve of me to believe that this study would enable me or them to have some big effect on the workings of the national education system. Furthermore the fact that this is a case study limited to a single setting with very little generalisable effects attests to this. As argued by Bernstein (1970 in Cohen *et al* 2000:32) enabling them to mobilize their assets would not have led to any <u>real</u> change in the <u>locus</u> of power and decision making because the policy-makers remain with this kind of power and control. I was merely hoping to heighten awareness in their perceptions and how they interpret their reality at an individual and personal level. Still, this created a step in the right direction because as part of the main study, this research would initiate the process of critical inquiry into how ABET policy was being implemented and the kind of impact it was achieving. Therefore indirectly and ultimately through the main study, it could be possible to challenge the status quo and drive meaningful change for these learners, however within the current scope of this study, this was not yet possible.

3.3   CHOOSING THE CASE STUDY AS MY RESEARCH DESIGN

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[5]   See Morrison 1995 as well as Wardekker & Madienma 1997 in Cohen *et al* 2000:31.

Mouton (2001:55) describes a research design as a plan of how one intends conducting the research. Merriam (1988:6) explains that a research design is similar to an architectural blueprint. It is a plan for assembling, organizing, and integrating information, and it results in a specific end-product. The selection of a particular design is determined by how the problem is shaped, by the questions it raises, the amount of control desired in the study and by the type of end-product desired (Merriam 1988:9). I will explore these issues in more detail as part of my justification for choosing a case study as my research design.

According to Yin (1984:29) research questions such as "What?" and "How many" are best answered by survey research while questions such as "How?" and "Why" are appropriate for case study, history, and exploratory designs. My research questions were concerned with the latter, more specifically: once, identified or mapped, how are assets utilized or mobilized to facilitate a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy? In line with the purpose of my study and my conceptual framework, an overarching question is: how could we explain the attainment of reading literacy amongst adult learners in spite of the systemic barriers and challenges? ABET in particular had already proven to be one of the key challenges in the implementation of EFA within developing countries, and in earlier chapters I have demonstrated how developing countries were experiencing difficulties with meeting EFA targets for ABET. Because cases can include a study of a single individual, an event, a community or a single organisation (Bryman 2001:47; Merriam 1988:10), I recognised that as an entity the story of public ABET learning centres would be different to that of other role players such as private and corporate-based ABET learning centres.

I recognised that I could also have chosen a survey design to conduct my study. Surveys are more structured and less time consuming. Through a survey I would have been able to gain large-scale data and provided that my sample was representative of the population, I could make generalisations to other public ABET learning centres (Cohen *et al* 2000:78; Bryman 2001). However in this study I was not looking to obtain descriptions and explanations that were devoid of their context (Cohen *at al* 2000:78). Besides the main study was going to be a survey and thus my study had to add a specific value by exploring the detailed and nuanced issues specific to individual adult learners within a specific public ABET learning centre.

A case study, therefore, offers me the opportunity to interpret within a context. By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity, case study research enables the researcher to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of that phenomenon (Merriam 1988:10). According to Yin (1984:33) case studies are particularly suited to situations where

it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context. In my study I have made the argument that the evaluation of EFA implementation has largely been top down with an emphasis on quantifiable targets. It failed to take into consideration the individual contexts of developing countries and individual adult learners in terms of what mediates certain interpretations of policy to take hold over others in spite of systemic challenges, thus reinforcing the perception of lack, deficiency and dependability.

I needed to capture the meanings and perceptions and interpretations of the ABET learners, because ultimately I wanted to understand how their conception of assets enhanced their academic self-concept which in turn facilitated the mobilization of those assets resulting in their acquisition of reading literacy. Therefore I needed to capture their experiences and still indicate what in their contexts led to the acquisition of reading literacy even though they were faced with numerous systemic challenges. I was not intending to make generalisable conclusions that would embrace all developing countries or public ABET learning centres in the process of implementing EFA. I was more interested in a holistic, intensive description and interpretation of a contemporary phenomenon, which could be achieved by a case study research design (Merriam 1988:9). I recognised that developing countries differ in their history and constitution, and the legacy of apartheid in South Africa created a unique context that further added to the nuances that would make EFA policy implementation 'as is' very difficult to achieve. Moreover the context of adult education centres would also differ according to which province and urban or rural area they were located. Therefore I recognized that although the **** public ABET learning centre in Alberton's District 6 represented a 'bounded system' (Smith 1978 in Merriam 1988:9) wherein my problem of interest was located, different public ABET learning centres would tell very different stories and would have very divergent interpretations of the EFA. My final decision was to focus on this one site located within the Gauteng Province around the city of Alberton.

The province has a total of 224 public ABET learning centres with 69 760 ABET learners and 3 029 ABET educators (EMIS Data on Public ABET learning centres 2005). The site was chosen firstly; because it represents a typical public ABET learning centre within the urban areas in South Africa. It comprises of a multicultural group of adult learners with varied age groups. The site draws adult learners from the Katlehong Township and the surrounding informal settlements. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, they were selected for convenience as the director of the learning centres has a long-standing relationship as a post-graduate student and researcher with the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment at the University of Pretoria where this study was commissioned.

The other reason for selecting the Alberton ABET learning centre was because this was convenient for me. I conducted the study during my internship as an Educational Psychologist at the Institute for Child and Adult Guidance at the University of Johannesburg which was in close proximity to Alberton. The centre, as a research site, was easily accessible for me.

3.3.1   DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

I collected my data at the **** Adult Education Centre. The Centre has eight satellites whose breakdown of students is as follows:

TABLE 3.1:   NUMBER OF ABET LEARNERS ACCORDING TO SATELLITES

Satellite[6]	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
The Senior Secondary School	-	-	32	38
Satellite Site 2	30	33	38	37
Satellite Site 3	30	29	34	37
Satellite Site 4	-	-	-	35
The Primary School	-	*31*	*27*	*36*
Satellite Site 6	-	-	19	30
Satellite Site 7	25	25	27	28
Satellite Site 8	-	14	13	21
Total	**85**	**132**	**190**	**262**

[This satellite was the site where my study took place]

The total number of ABET learners enrolled for 2006 at this centre was 669 and the learners are expected to write their exams in November 2006. The **** Adult Education Centre falls under the Alberton District Office which is called District 6. This district also includes public ABET learning centres from Vosloorus, Katlehong, Thembisa, Daveyton, Boksburg and Thokoza. The Centre Director was stationed at the Senior Secondary School, and this is where I would arrive for my visit, and from there he would escort me to the Primary School for the evening.

The lessons begin at 17h00 and end at 20h00 and the academic calendar is similar to that of the General Education and Training Band, however there are no classes on Friday evenings.

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[6] Pseudo-names have been used to protect the identity of the schools and ensure anonymity.

Each of the satellites has a designated supervisor stationed on location. During my initial visit in April I was introduced to the supervisors and L2 English Educators at all the satellites. My first phase of data collection occurred during April, towards the end of the first term. During this phase I facilitated the focus group discussion with all the learners. The second phase took place during August in the middle of the third term mainly out of safety issues for myself[7].

3.3.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

According to the Annual Survey For Public Adult Learning Centres 2006 completed for the Department of Education's EMIS data file by the Supervisor at the Primary School signed on 15 May 2006, there are 14 male and 17 female learners for ABET Level 2. All of the 31 learners are African, their first languages include IsiXhosa (2); IsiZulu (13); Sesotho (3); and Xitsonga (13). What is not indicated in the statistics is that most of the learners are foreigners. According to one of the supervisors stationed at one of the satellites, most of the learners enrolled for the ABET programs are foreigners from Mozambique, and they mainly speak Xitsonga and Portuguese, but because they want employment in South Africa they enrol in the ABET programs in order to learn English. Their age breakdown is as follows:

TABLE 3.2:   NUMBER OF L2 LEARNERS ACCORDING TO AGE

Age	Male	Female
21-25	4	4
26-30	8	7
31-35	2	-
46-50	-	1
51-55	-	4
56+	-	1
Total	**14**	**17**

The statistics also indicate that four learners are repeating the L2 Languages, Literacy and Communication learning area, of which English is a part. However these statistics do not indicate whether these learners are repeating English specifically or another language.

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7   Lessons took place at night, which created difficulties for travelling to the site alone.

3.4 MY ROLE IN THE PROCESS OF RESEARCH AND HOW IT FACILITATED ACCESS

As a fellow student of the University of Pretoria, my relationship with the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment facilitated my access and rapport with the Director of the ABET centres. This relationship facilitated access regarding other logistical issues such as obtaining the contact details of the educator that I interviewed prior to our meeting to set appointments with her; being personally transported by the director to the learning centres as well as being escorted out of the Katlehong Township every night after the site visits. This in turn created the opportunity for me to be accepted and welcomed by the educator and learners at the centre. I recognized that this created a sense of rapport with the participants and helped develop trust amongst us. I mention this because I do not believe that it would have been possible for me to undertake this task in this manner had this relationship with the director not been established already. The other reason that I mention it is because the success of the asset-based approach depends on the existence and maintenance of collaborative networks between people and systems. The establishment of collaborative networks makes it possible for individuals to trust each other, and develop mutually beneficial and sustainable problem solving strategies (Eloff 2003:32).

My role was also influenced by the fact that this study is part of a larger research project aimed at conducting a systemic evaluation of ABET reading literacy in South Africa. As mentioned earlier, the main research project will be completed in three phases; the pre-pilot; field test and main study. This study forms part of the pre-pilot study. The purpose of the main study is to determine the current level of reading literacy amongst adult learners as well as determine how the NQF unit standards for ABET Level 2 compare with the learning outcomes for General Education Grade 4. The latter will help policy makers determine the extent to which the General Education and Training Band is equivalent to the ABET band of the NQF.

Once the participants understood the big picture that this study formed part of, they were open to discuss their experiences with the hope that something might be done to address some of their challenges as adult learners. Therefore this influenced how people responded to my questions and what they were willing to say on the record. Secondly their responses were also influenced by their perceptions of the value that this study as part of the systemic evaluation might enable them to gain. Bryman (ibid) advises that one of the things that researchers can do to retain ongoing access is to play up your credentials in terms of past work and experience; your knowledge of the institution and understanding of their

problems. I found that this advice served as a double-edged sword for my circumstances. My role as an intern educational psychologist and Masters student enabled me to gain the respect of the participants. They perceived me as 'learned' and as a 'helper' or 'counsellor' and this allowed them the safety to disclose personal information during the interviews. However, this also created confusion amongst the participants because they expected that as a 'counsellor' I would be more interested in listening to their problems and challenges rather than their assets. It created a major hurdle which I needed to negotiate and overcome before the focus-group discussions could be undertaken. This is largely because the asset-based approach has a strong emphasis on the strengths and talents of the individuals involved (Eloff 2003:10). However as noted by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993:7) identification of problems is still an integral part of the approach, [however] problem solving focuses on creating and rebuilding relationships between individuals, associations and institutions. In the end I realized that I needed to meet my participants where they were rather than where I wanted them to be. Therefore, my sessions began with an exploration of the types of challenges that they faced as adult learners before moving on to asset-mapping.

There was a break between the times I conducted the focus group interviews and the observations of the lessons followed by interviews with the two learners. As mentioned this was because of safety issues and the availability of learners during winter. It was not my original plan however it allowed me to see other factors that I would have missed had I continued with the data collection process without taking a break. It put me once again in the role of an outsider looking in, because of the extended time frame I could now observe the learners from a 'distance' to see the extent to which what they identified as assets and how they intended to mobilize them in April really took to effect by August. I could also see how the contextual factors compete with the goal for attaining literacy, highlighting the real personal factors that dynamically interact to determine who ultimately attains this goal or drops out.

My role evolved through my interactions with the participants, and very often this was influenced by their needs and context rather than my own interests. My roles alternated between that of being a 'passive' listener, interviewer and note taker to more active engagement with participants when asking questions, challenging them to think differently about their reality and how they manoeuvred this reality to acquire literacy and identify assets. I needed to collaborate with the participants not only to build trust amongst us but also to build confidence within them and trust in the process of asset-mapping. This is essential for facilitating a paradigm shift from a problem-based narrative to one that is solution-focused.

In order to ensure the credibility of the proceedings and findings of the research, I also needed to play the role of quality assurer. I did this by using multiple methods of data collection, which I will elaborate upon in the next section, which included using observations, interviews, visual data and focus-group discussions. This enabled me to verify that information disclosed during interviews was valid and reliable. I used other participants to verify and cross-check information. Due to the language barrier, I used a translator who incidentally was an educator, although there were different educators at different times. This on the one hand reinforced my role as an outsider looking in because of language differences, however on the positive side it meant that I could use the educators to verify the information that I was sharing with the participants and what they were giving to me. This further strengthened my auditing process. It also levelled the power relations between myself, the educators and the adult learners, further strengthening our relationship of trust. I also had informal discussions with the educator, the supervisors at the Primary and the Senior Secondary School as well as the centre director to verify the information. I also used the documents prepared by the L2 English educator in terms of her lesson plans and teaching notes as a way of verifying the data gathered. Merriam (1988:10) states that unlike other research designs such as experiments, surveys or historical research, case study designs do not claim any particular methods of data collection or data analysis. As a result any and all methods of gathering data from testing to interviewing can be used in a case study, although certain techniques are used more than others. This was another advantage of using a case study.

3.5   DATA COLLECTION

The data collection process i.e. when I was actively on site in the Primary School, took place over two phases, the first occurred during April when I met the participants, engaged on initial observations and conducted the focus group discussion. The second phase took place in August over a period of two weeks where I mainly observed learners during instruction times and conducted individual interviews with the two learners. Most of the data collection that involved document analysis took place in between the period from April to August, overlapping with the two phases when I was actively working on site. I used multiple methods of collecting data that included analysis of policy documents, educators' lesson plans[8], observations, interviews with key participants and statistical data culled from the

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[8]   See Appendix 3 for a look at the lesson plans prepared by the educator. A discussion of this document is prepared in Chapter 4.

EMIS Data on Public ABET learning centres for 2005. Below I describe each method in detail and discuss the process followed in gathering data through each method.

Data sources were policy documents on ABET as well as Status Reports on EFA developed by the Department of Education. I used the ABET policy to provide baseline data on the initial policy goals and targets of the EFA policy for adult education in South Africa. The EFA Status Reports provided an indication of progress made and the challenges identified as impediments to South Africa's achievement of EFA targets for ABET[9]. The EMIS Data on Public ABET learning centres as well as data from the Annual Survey for Public Adult Learning Centres 2006 completed for the Department of Education's EMIS data file by the Supervisor at the Primary School signed on 15 May 2006 were also utilized. These provided statistics that enabled me to understand the context of the site and the demographics of the L 2 ABET learners. I could see what was recorded officially and compare that with what I observed during my site visit, for example the fact that 31 learners were registered for L2, over my observation period during the second phase of my data collection period the maximum number of learners who attended were five. If this discrepancy was captured in the official document one would realize how poor and inconsistent attendance really was, however one would not find out why these few individual learners, all female, continued to attend every evening.

The lesson plans that I reviewed were dated for the period 17 January 2005 to 30 May 2005. The educator indicated that she uses her old lesson plans because she has been teaching the same learning area since 2005 and very little has changed in terms of content. The lesson plans were compiled on a weekly basis, and the educator indicated that often she will deal with the same learning outcome for more than one week in order to accommodate the needs and learning pace of individual learners. The lesson plans provided data according to what the EFA indicators require (see Box 1 in Chapter 2). In the lesson plans the educator indicated that she mainly uses oral and written classwork activities for assessment. Her teaching methods included instructing the learners through explanations while writing on the chalk board. The learning materials and aids that she indicated in the plans were chalkboard, books, poster, textbook, papers and pens. Their relevance as data sources is that they indicate in theoretical terms what is planned for implementing ABET by this individual teacher; however what occurs in practice is very different because that was not reflected in the lesson plan. I elaborate on this discussion in Chapter 4 where I discuss the findings.

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[9]   These are discussed as part of my literature review in Chapter 2, see section 2.2.2.

Bryman (2001:369) explains that the term 'documents' covers a very wide range of different kinds of sources including personal letters and photos, official documents, mass media outputs, Internet sources and so forth. The emphasis is placed on the fact that these documents have not been produced at the request of the researcher; instead, they are out there simply waiting to be assembled and analysed (Bryman 2001:370). The advantage of using documents in research is that they are non-reactive, meaning that because they have not been created specifically for the purposes of social research, the possibility of influencing or changing their content can be largely discounted. As a result the validity of the data is protected (Bryman 2001:370).

My second source of data was focus-group discussions. During the focus-group discussions, I had present 14 ABET Level 2 learners, four educators teaching Mathematics, English, Xitsonga and Life Orientation. Except for the English educator, the other educators were present mainly out of interest. I soon felt grateful for their presence because I realized that there was a language barrier and they became helpful as interpreters. I recorded the discussions with a video recorder as well as a flip chart. The Xitsonga educator volunteered to record the proceedings with the video camera.

FIGURE 3.1:   THE RESEARCHER FACILITATING THE FOCUS-GROUP DISCUSSIONS

During these discussions, I led a workshop analysing environmental or community assets recorded in an asset map. Following a process for asset-mapping suggested by Eloff (2003:26) I was able to:

- Raise the awareness of participants on the assets.
- Focus their attention of the assets and capacities.
- Compile a map of assets.

- Use the information from the asset map to build strong mutually beneficial partnerships in the immediate system.

- Use the information from the asset map to build strong, mutually beneficial partnerships outside the immediate system.

- Continue to work collaboratively to support individual enablement and collective action.

The last two stages comprised a process to challenging the participants to think about how they can mobilize their assets and identifying stakeholders who can assist in their endeavours. I found this process for asset-mapping and the developmental assets framework suggested by Scales and Leffert (1999:5-6) useful because they served the purpose of an interview protocol. This framework (see Table 2.2) enabled me to categorise the list of assets that participants were identifying. It also allowed me to probe into the different areas where unidentified assets could be hidden. It provided a clear guide of what I needed to cover, and the process that I would follow in facilitating the focus-group discussions. The process suggested by Eloff (ibid) also provided flexibility for me to ask questions arising from the conversation which were not initially included in the framework. In essence this developmental assets framework served as an interview protocol for me, and the discussion became semi-structured in format. As Cohen *et al* (2000:314) notes, the interview protocol ensures that even when some questions arise from the conversation, by and large all the questions will be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewee to interviewee. The level of flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews also allows for questions that are not directly relevant to a specific interviewee to be reworded or eliminated during the process of the interview. As noted by Eloff (2003:28) the suggestion of stages does not in any way imply a linear recipe for success. Eloff (ibid:29) recognized that the challenges of the context may have the effect of it not being linear; in turn allowing the flexibility and structure that would enable me to interact authentically with the participants without losing my overall sense of direction. As mentioned already, one of the challenges that I faced with the focus group discussion was that the participants were unsettled by my focus on assets rather than on problems. I was grateful for the flexibility of this approach because it meant that I could focus on their problems as a foundation to help increase their awareness of assets.

FIGURE 3.2:   COMPILING THE ASSET MAP DURING THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

FIGURE 3.3:   THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE 14 LEARNERS IN THE GROUP

FIGURE 3.4:   THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE REST OF THE LEARNERS IN THE GROUP

These two pictures illustrate the demographics of the learners, the seating arrangements during the focus group discussion as well as an indication of the location of the teacher's desk in relation to where the learners seat. The picture also indicates the location of the mini-library in the far left-hand corner [Figure 3.3] as well as a flip-chart in the far right-hand corner [Figure 3.4]. The pictures also indicate the setting in the classroom, the size of the chairs meant for grade four children as well as the fact that nothing in the classroom is changed to fit the needs of the ABET learners. The educator is seated at the teacher's desk. The locations of some of the murals on the walls are also indicated.

My third source of data was observations of educators during their teaching practice. I observed over a period of three weeks, during the first and second phase of my data collection process. I observed more intensively during the second phase. This occurred after I had conducted the focus group discussions, and it allowed for me to observe the extent to which the assets mapped during the focus group discussions were actually being mobilized within the teaching practice.

One of the limitations of my study which motivated me to define it as interpretivist rather than critical research, was that I realized early on that my capacity to activate change and effectively mobilize the assets of the individual learners would be limited and I could not empirically measure this change. I therefore needed to plant the seed, suggesting that asset mobilization was feasible and then explore with them the ways in which this mobilisation could be achieved.

The focus group discussions were able to go this far, however I needed to answer my second research question and test how the assets were being utilized or mobilized to facilitate a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy. That is, I wanted to see how assets were being mobilized to effectively encourage the learners to continue learning despite their

individual challenges. My return visits after three months enabled me to see how these assets were mobilized and to what extent they facilitated an enhanced academic self-concept. Notes on my observations are discussed in Chapter 4. According to Cohen *et al* (2000:304) observations allow the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations. This enables the researcher to understand the context of programmes, to be open-ended and inductive, to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed and to discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations, to move beyond perception-based data (e.g. opinions in interviews), and to access personal knowledge. This also enabled me to determine the role of the educator in facilitating a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy for the ABET learners *in situ* rather than at second hand.

My observations were not limited to classroom interactions between the educators and the learners. I also observed the assets within the environment of the school where the ABET class was being delivered. This also enabled me to identify infrastructural and environmental assets, which are also identified in the list of indicators for assessing the quality of education in EFA policy. Therefore I could observe commonly used teaching styles, how these served to enhance a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy, and collect visual data through photographs of environmental assets. The photographs captured classroom interactions with adult learners and were supplemented by the field notes generated during the observations as well as a research diary indicating my own internal dialogue during the research process.

My fourth source of data was initially intended to be face-to-face semi-structured interviews with learners, educators and the centre director, which I was going to record with a tape recorder. I was going to use the Scales and Leffert (1999:5) framework of developmental assets to explore the self-esteem of individual learners. However, during my observations I realized that I could not hope to conduct an effective interview with the learners in a conventional way because of the language barrier. Secondly I could not hope to simply pose questions to the participants and have someone translate for them. Their comprehension levels in English were very low and they struggled to express themselves coherently even in their mother tongue. I also could not use a self-report questionnaire exploring their self-esteem because they cannot read adequately.

I soon realized that I would have to borrow from techniques that I use in therapy when working with clients where language, communication and comprehension barriers exist. I therefore decided to use symbolic expression, where learners could represent how they perceive their sense of self symbolically using drawings to access the information. I

interviewed two of the four learners attending regularly during my observation period. The two participants were chosen because they could explain their drawing of the activity in basic Setswana and Zulu although they could not read or write their responses to the activity. The educator for Zulu translated my questions and their responses, while I took notes on the reverse side of their drawings to capture their answers to my questions. Table 3.1 shows the activity that I completed with the two learners to access how they mobilized their assets:

TABLE 3.3:   TREE OF LIFE[10]

> *Draw a large tree with roots, a trunk, branches, leaves and blossoms.*
> *Each part of the tree represents areas of your life*
>
> **Roots**: aspects of your life that ground you – your personal values, strengths.
>
> **Branches**: the different roles that you play in your life that define what you do in life.
>
> **Leaves on branches**: the events, experiences and areas of your life that significantly contributed to your learning – these will be linked to the branches/roles that you play in life where these lessons have occurred.
>
> **Leaves on the ground**: things you did not complete, fears and dreams that did not come true.
>
> **Buds**: your hopes and goals for the future.
>
> **Fruits**: your accomplishments and achievements in your life.

This activity was mainly directing focus to the participant's awareness of internal and personal assets, and how these were helping them to continue with their goal of acquiring literacy even though other learners were dropping out, and they had other internal and external challenges. The link to the framework by Scales and Leffert (ibid) was fitting with the concepts for internal assets. However the link with the concepts for external assets was not very close, some I had to explore through observations in order to find the relevant responses. Table 3.2 below indicates how I link the concepts of the tree of life with that of the developmental assets:

TABLE 3.4:   LINKING THE EIGHT CATEGORIES OF DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS WITH THE TREE OF LIFE

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[10]   The idea of a Tree of Life is a variation of The Rosebush activity used in Gestalt Play Therapy and developed by Violet Oaklander (1988). Gestalt therapy focuses mainly on the present. It is holistic and assumes that the individual has the solution to a problem within themselves. The goal of therapy is directed towards removing obstacles to finding solutions. The approach to therapy helps people to regain access to neglected aspects of themselves; bring closure to unfinished business; develop more responsibility and realize their own potential. Section 4.2.4 summarises the responses of the two participants that were interviewed. Hard copies of their drawings and responses are entailed under Appendix 3.

External Assets	Meanings	Representation on Tree
Support	These refer to the ways in which individuals are loved, affirmed and accepted. The support could come from various settings outside the family unit, in school, or religious congregations, amongst extended family, or within other areas of socialisation	*Branches*
Empowerment	Being able to feel safe and valued, the community's perception of adult learners and the opportunities they have to contribute to society in a meaningful way.	*Link with observations - new roles acquired since embarking on ABET programme*
Boundaries & expectations	Clear and consistent boundaries complement support and empowerment. These may be experienced in the family, school and the community. They provide a set of consistent messages about appropriate behaviour and expectations across learning contexts.	*Leaves on the ground*
Constructive use of time	availability of activities that stimulate positive growth and contribute to the development of other assets.	*Link with observations - attendance*

Internal Assets		
Commitment to Learning	Developing an internal intellectual curiosity and the skills to gain new knowledge. This is linked to how motivated learners are to achieve and whether they express their curiosity and work ethic in homework and reading for fun.	*Leaves on the branches*
Positive values	Positive values are important 'internal compasses' that guide learners' priorities and choices.	*Roots*
Social competence	These are personal and interpersonal skills learners need to negotiate choices, options and relationships. These skills also lay the foundation for independence and competence.	*Fruits*
Positive identity	Learners' views of themselves – their own sense of agency, purpose, worth and promise. This determines the learner's sense of powerlessness, initiative and direction	*Buds*

[Adapted from Scales & Leffert 1999, pp.5-6. Developmental assets: A synthesis of the scientific research on adolescent development]

I then limited my interviews with the centre director, the ABET educators and the Primary School supervisor to informal discussions. These discussions provided descriptions of the experiences and assets as well as explanations behind the experiences of the end-users. One of the key questions that came up was the issue of attendance. These discussions helped me to understand the context of the learners with more depth because for examples absenteeism

became more nuanced than I would have thought if I had only focused on the number learners present during my visits. Therefore the themes that arose out of my observations, took different meanings as I engaged in discussions with the learners and spent more time on site. According to Cohen *et al* (2000:146) interviews allow the gathering of facts, accessing beliefs about facts, identifying feelings and motives, commenting on the standards of actions [i.e. what could be done about situations], present or previous behaviour and eliciting reasons and explanations from the participants.

3.6   VALIDITY

Cohen *et al* (2000:105) note that earlier versions of validity were essentially based on the view that validity was a demonstration that a particular instrument in fact measures what it purports to measure. They posit that more recently validity has taken many forms, and in qualitative research it can be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher (ibid).

Bryman notes that very often qualitative researchers have tended to employ the terms reliability and validity in very similar ways to quantitative researchers when seeking to develop criteria for assessing research (2001:272). He offers instead alternative criteria suitable for evaluating qualitative research (ibid). Guba and Lincoln (1994 in Bryman 2001:272) raised the concern and made the assertion for developing alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research. They argue that the simple application for quantitative evaluation measures in qualitative research presuppose that a single absolute account of social reality is feasible. Instead they argue that there can be several accounts of social reality (Bryman 2001:272).

Guba and Lincoln (1994 in Bryman 2001:272) propose two primary criteria for assessing qualitative research – trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness is made up of four criteria each of which has an equivalent criterion in quantitative research: credibility, which parallels internal validity; transferability which parallels external validity; dependability which parallels reliability and confirmability which parallels objectivity. I will discuss these in more detail and follow with a description of how I ensured that my study adhered to these criteria.

3.6.1   CREDIBILITY

Credibility is concerned with ensuring that the account that a particular researcher arrives at in their study is acceptable to others. This is ensured by establishing that the research process is carried out according to good practice and that it stands up to scrutiny by scholars in the discipline who will confirm that the researcher has correctly understood the phenomena under study (Bryman 2001:272). Triangulation is recommended as one of the techniques that ensure the credibility of a study (ibid).

Bryman (2001:274) notes that triangulation entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena. In this study I used policy documents, Status Reports and Statistics drawn from the EMIS Data from the Department of Education. I also used visual and video data from the observations as well as interview data from the participants. All these methods of data collection facilitated triangulation as it enabled the use of multiple sources of data. This ensured that the data that was generated could be verified and cross-checked by myself and the participants as the process of research unfolded. This enhanced the credibility of the findings.

Other techniques to ensure credibility recommended by Bryman (2001:272) include participant validation. This technique involves the researcher providing the people on whom she has conducted research with an account of her findings. The aim of the exercise is to seek corroboration, or otherwise, of the account that the researcher has arrived at. In my study I used the focus-group discussions during the asset-mapping exercise to allow the participants to comment, add or change the data as I held-up the asset map on a flip-chart in full view for them to see what I was recording. This provided them with the opportunity to check how I had captured their inputs and whether these reflected an accurate account of their inputs.

I also employed auditing[*] and peer-debriefing processes. Auditing means that the researcher leaves a trail of evidence collected through the research process. This includes entries made into my research journal, notes made following every interview and observation session as well as copies of all the transcripts, audio, visual and video materials. These materials were discussed with some of the key researchers involved in the main study, thus facilitating further validation through peer-debriefing. From using the educators as translators, they were also able to check the credibility of the information recorded and my understanding of the explanations given.

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[*] where a trail of evidence collected through the research process is kept.

3.6.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Qualitative researchers are encouraged to produce what Geertz (1973 in Bryman 2001:272) call thick descriptions – rich accounts of the details of a culture. Guba and Lincoln (1994 in Bryman 2001:272) argue that a thick description provides others with what they refer to as databases for making judgments about the possible transferability of findings to other milieus. By conducting a case study, I was giving in depth accounts of the ABET learning centre that would provide thick descriptions on which other researchers could determine the possible transferability of the findings to other public ABET learning centres.

3.6.3 DEPENDABILITY

To enhance dependability Guba and Lincoln (1994 in Bryman 2001:273) recommend using auditing. In the previous section (see 3.6.1) I have demonstrated how I used this technique to ensure credibility and dependability.

3.6.4 CONFIRMABILITY

Confirmability is concerned with ensuring that the researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith i.e. they have not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research and findings deriving from it. Through auditing and peer reviews, it was possible to ensure that this was minimised in my research. As mentioned in section 3.6.1. I employed the services of the educators in this regard. This enabled the power differences between myself, the educators and the participants to be levelled and ensured that the process was transparent and their inputs could be taken into consideration. My availability during the observations as well as after the active data collection phase ensured that communication channels between myself and the participants remained open. Moreover I openly discussed processes and focus of the research with all the participants involved.

3.6.5 AUTHENTICITY

The criteria to determine authenticity include fairness – i.e. whether the research fairly represents different viewpoints among members of the research setting; ontological authenticity – i.e. whether the research helps members to arrive at a better understanding of their social milieu; educative authenticity – i.e. whether the research helps members to appreciate better the perspectives of other members of their social setting; catalytic

authenticity – i.e. whether the research acted as an impetus to members to engage in action to change their circumstances and lastly tactical authenticity – i.e. whether the research has empowered members to take the steps necessary for engaging in action (Bryman 2001:274). In this study I incorporated the different perspectives of the ABET learners, their educators as well as the ABET Centre Director. The asset mapping and mobilisation exercise raised awareness about assets within their communities and within themselves as well as challenged and hopefully empowered participants to take the necessary steps to engage in action to improve their plight. The workshop setting employed during the asset-mapping and mobilisation exercise enabled participants to engage in focus-group discussions where they could comment, add or change to the data gathered. All this together enhanced authenticity in my study.

3.7   DATA ANALYSIS

Data gathered through interviews were transcribed using a standard transcription machine. The qualitative data analysis was done on three levels. The first identified the emerging themes from the literature on the EFA. Miles and Huberman (1994:58) refer to a start list. This list derives from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas and key variables that the researcher brings to the study. In my study I used the start list to develop the first level of codes, which were used to conduct the first level of analysis. Where additional themes were identified, these were included in the first level.

The second level of analysis involved combining themes that are related together to form what Cohen *et al* (2000:148) call a domain analysis. The third level involved making linkages between the domains and establishing relationships between them. Speculative inferences were also made to determine the relationships between the domains. Summaries of each domain were made, then clustered according to those that collaborated with each other and those that indicated discrepancies. This process involved testing the conceptual analysis on bio-ecological theory by mapping assets to reflect the micro-, meso-, macro- and exo-systems of the learners and learning centres. The assets framework enabled me to determine the categories of assets that were identified and determine how they served to enhance learners' academic self-concept.

3.8   CONCLUSION

The next chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the data gathered through documents and interview transcripts. The analysis is given according to end-user accounts

on how assets identified promoted a positive academic self-concept in the adult learners, as well as how these were mobilized to facilitate a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy.

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4.1   INTRODUCTION

This research distinguished itself from most of the studies on EFA implementation with regards to ABET in developing countries by drawing empirical attention to the end-user perspectives of adult learners and focussing on the assets rather than the problems within their system. In pursuing this focus, the data on assets was collected within a single public ABET learning centre within the Alberton District with a multi-cultural and multilingual profile of adult learners. This chapter presents the findings from the case study and foregrounds the voices and experiences of those adult learners who continued with their endeavour of acquiring reading literacy. It highlights their struggle and perhaps even their foreseeable victory to learn to read advanced by a positive academic self-esteem resulting from an awareness and mobilisation of their internal and external assets.

I will begin by describing the internal and external assets identified using the framework by Scales and Leffert (1999:5-6). Within each category I will indicate what adult learners as a group identified as assets existing within their ecosystem that promote a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy. In turn this will enable me to answer the first research question. I will then describe how these assets were utilised or mobilised, in turn answering the second research question. This part of the discussion will draw heavily from my observations as well as the interviews I held with two participants. The goal is to expose the fact that there are other internal and external forces that either inhibit or enable adult learners to continue with their academic endeavours of learning to read. However despite these challenges the two participants utilised specific assets to overcome these challenges. From this discussion one is able to identify internal factors that lie within individual adult learners that serve to explain the gap between policy and practice. I will then conclude by explaining these responses in the evaluative canvas offered in the conceptual framework adopted for this inquiry.

4.2   PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this section I will present the assets identified from the focus group discussion, the interviews with two participants as well as those from observations which will be presented in the form of visual data.

4.2.1   FINDINGS CULLED FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

The focus group discussion raised awareness to the participants about assets, after which an asset map of their responses was compiled on a flip-chart. The assets are presented in the order in which they were listed in the workshop in response to specific questions. Box 4.1 below is a list of the assets given in response to the question: *What are your reasons for wanting to acquire reading literacy in English?* The bracket entails information on the where the data was sourced, the type of asset as well as the date at which these assets were collected.

BOX 4.1:   REASONS GIVEN BY ABET L2 LEARNERS FOR ACQUIRING READING LITERACY IN ENGLISH WITH CODES

Wants to be able to sign and write her name [focus group; external asset: April 2006]

Knows Afrikaans, wants to learn English in order to read the bible and help her grandchildren with home work [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

To get employment, English is a requirement [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Has career goals to become a scientist [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Never went to school before, he wants to be able to write and read [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Career goals to become a musician, English is a key to achieving this goal [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Easy decision to come back to school is that it is easy for the family to sit down, do their work and read the bible [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Future goals – to empower herself [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Hope (positive attitude) [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

To be able to understand what is happening on television [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

To be able to read the bible [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

To translate Portuguese to English [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Can understand the things but unable to write in English [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Box 4.2 below provides a list of assets that were given in response to the question: *What is it about you that keep you motivated and committed to your goal of learning to read and write in English?* The bracket entails information on the where the data was sourced, the type of asset as well as the date at which these assets were collected.

BOX 4.2: LIST OF INTERNAL ASSETS GIVEN BY ABET L2 LEARNERS WITH CODES

Good role model to my future kids [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Good behaviour – not involved in crime; focussed on education [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Goal of establishing own business [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Dream of working with my hands [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Belief that life goes on [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Playing a mother and father role [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Being independent and self-sufficient [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Being a bread winner and my responsibilities [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Goal of extending my house [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Not wanting to be redundant – sitting without a purpose and goals [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Sense of commitment [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Being able to operate an ATM to withdraw my money [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Being robbed because I couldn't help myself [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Keeping accounts for my small business [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Resisting peer pressure [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Focus on my goals [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

I want to go forward/progress with my life [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

If you're not educated your life won't progress – you work hard [focus group; internal asset; Asset 2006]

Box 4.3 below provides a list of assets given in response to the question: *What in your external environment keeps you motivated and committed to your goal of acquiring reading literacy in English?* The bracket entails information on the where the data was sourced, the type of asset as well as the date at which these assets were collected.

BOX 4.3: LIST OF EXTERNAL ASSETS GIVEN BY ABET L2 LEARNERS WITH CODES

My grandchildren and my congregation encourage me [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

My children [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

A girl in my church [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

My younger sister / my elder sister [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

My faith in God [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

My husband [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

My friend [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

My brother [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

The ministers in my church want to recruit me [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

My mother [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

I go to the library – to find other textbooks and read newspapers [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

I ask for help when I don't understand from the teacher / educator; my co-worker and my neighbours [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

My grandchild assists me [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Box 4.4 lists assets that will be mobilised by the learners in response to the question: *What other activities and partnerships can you establish to help yourself achieve your goal of acquiring reading literacy?* The bracket entails information on the where the data was sourced, the type of asset as well as the date at which these assets were collected.

BOX 4.4:   LIST OF ASSETS THAT WILL BE MOBILISED BY ABET L2 LEARNERS WITH CODES

Practice [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Translations of simple words – dog; window [focus group; internal asset; April 2006]

Use/ask for help from my grandparents [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

Going to the library [focus group; external asset; April 2006]

4.2.2   FINDINGS CULLED FROM THE VISUAL DATA ON ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS

These pictures illustrate the classroom as a resource asset because within it there were various assets that, once mobilised, would enable learners to gain access to resources that would help in their acquisition of reading literacy. These assets were also linked to other external assets such as the support and constructive use of time assets; however this depended on whether the educator and the learners were using these assets actively. From my observations I noticed that the educator did not refer to these assets even during lessons where the concepts she was exploring were entailed in the murals on the walls.

FIGURE 4.1:   MURALS ON PERSONAL HYGIENE [OBSERVATION; EXTERNAL ASSET; AUGUST 2006]

The murals on the walls covered various themes, the ones above were on personal hygiene. The value of the murals to reading literacy is that they gave pictorial representations of concepts related to personal hygiene, this facilitated meaning and reading comprehension visually. This was one of the learning areas of ABET L2 in Life Orientation.

FIGURE 4.2: **THE MURALS FOR TEACHING PHONETIC SPELLING OF THE ALPHABET LETTERS [OBSERVATION; EXTERNAL ASSET; AUGUST 2006]**

These posters were located at the back of the class to the left of the teacher's desk. They illustrated the phonetic spelling of the letters of the alphabet. The two posters gave two different examples for each alphabet. The alphabet sound was accompanied with a picture of an object whose name would facilitate the correct phonic selling of the alphabet.

FIGURE 4.3: **THE CHALK BOARD [OBSERVATION; EXTERNAL ASSET; AUGUST 2006]**

The chalkboard remained the educator's main asset in her teaching practice. She used it regularly to give demonstrations and notes which learners has to copy into their books. She also used the chalk board to give activities that learners had to complete during class time, as well as for home work purposes. However there were two occasions when she could not use the chalk board because the day class-teacher has left the note PDNE (please do not erase) on the chalk board. On these days her facilitation would mainly comprise of verbal instructions, and she also used the opportunity to check whether the learners' notes were up to date.

FIGURE 4.4:   THE FLIP-CHART [OBSERVATION; EXTERNAL ASSET; APRIL 2006]

In Figure 4.4 above a flip-chart is indicated, however even on the two nights when the educator could not use the chalk board, she did not use the flip chart as an alternative. It remained in this corner for the duration of my visits without ever being utilised

Figure 4.5 below illustrates different conceptions of time as it pertains to the days of the week as well as the names of the month in their chronological order in both English and isiZulu. This accommodates the learners who are stronger in isiZulu, the translation also facilitates comprehension. This is essential for spelling and reading instruction. The bottom mural in the picture relates depicts different words on how time is represented in language and how it is measured.

FIGURE 4.5:   MURALS FOR TEACHING THE CONCEPT TIME [OBSERVATION; EXTERNAL ASSET; AUGUST 2006]

FIGURE 4.6   MURALS FOR TEACHING CONCEPTS ON FAMILY [OBSERVATION; EXTERNAL ASSET; AUGUST 2006]

The above mural refers to names of different family members.

FIGURE 4.7:   MURALS ON THE SUN AND CONCEPT AROUND TIME IN LANGUAGE [OBSERVATION; EXTERNAL ASSET; AUGUST 2006]

The mural on the left is a picture indicating concepts around the sun while the mural on the right illustrates time as used in language.

Figure 4.8 below depicts 8 murals labelled 'Word Wall' and they entail different words in English that cover different concepts such as size, height and distance. They appear to be a list of spelling and reading words that learners encounter when reading and learning. Some of the words in the list have been repeated numerous times in other murals around the classroom wall. This may imply that the murals seem to serve as flash-cards of difficult or

perhaps common words, and they are intended to facilitate visual memory and retention and these words.

FIGURE 4.8: **MURALS ON DIFFERENT WORDS IN ENGLISH [OBSERVATION; EXTERNAL ASSET; AUGUST 2006]**

FIGURE 4.9: **THE MINI-LIBRARY [OBSERVATION; EXTERNAL ASSET; AUGUST 2006]**

The mini-library entailed grade four books on different learning areas including literacy, geography etc. The books entails pictorial illustrations of the different concepts covered and they were left in the library each night, meaning that they were accessible to the ABET learners and educator daily for the duration of the entire lesson.

FIGURE 4.10: PEERS AS SUPPORT ASSETS IN GROUP WORK [FOCUS GROUP; EXTERNAL ASSET; APRIL 2006]

Although learners sat in groups as indicated above in Figure 4.9, no group activities were facilitated for the duration of my observations. Learners were mainly given individual activities. However when the educator was not present in the class, they would consult with each other about what was required of them and how to complete the activity. The learners used their peers regularly. They reported that they did not live close to each other which means that the peer-consultations were limited to the classroom setting..

During my observations I found that even though the educator and the learners were aware of these assets, and had explored ways in which these could be mobilised, the assets were not being utilised fully. In the next section I present data collected from the interviews with two participants.

4.2.3   FINDINGS CULLED FROM THE INTERVIEW SESSIONS

The interviews took place during normal classroom time and they lasted for about one hour. The first 20 minutes were spent on drawing the tree of life with all the participants. All the four participants participated in this activity. Following the drawing activity, they were requested to list, on the reverse side of the page their responses to what the different aspects of the tree symbolise. These activities were conducted with one of the teachers as a translator, for all the participants she mainly translated in isiZulu as she was most proficient in this language, and all the participants said they can understand most of what she was saying. From the second activity, I could deduce the literacy levels of the learners. I learnt that two of the participants spoke Portuguese and Xhitsonga, which I was not fluent in. The other two participants spoke isiZulu and Sesotho, and as a result were better able to

complete the second part of the activity. They are the ones that I interviewed. The original copies of the participants' drawings are entailed in Appendix 4. Participant 1 communicated with me without a translator in Sesotho, while Participant 2 communicated in isiZulu and I employed the teacher to translate for us. Table 4.1 below provides a map of assets compiled by both participants. Their responses are already coded according to the Scales and Lefferts' framework of developmental assets. The brackets indicate the source of the data; they type of asset identified as well as the date at which the information was sourced.

TABLE 4.1:   MAP OF ASSETS[11] FROM THE TWO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Asset code	Participant 1	Participant 2
Support - the branches [*Interview; external asset; August 2006*]	*My children.* *My employers at *** Extra.*	*My children.* *The women friends I live with from my neighbourhood.*
Boundaries and expectations – leaves on the ground [*interview; external asset; August 2006*]	*Once requested her children to fill out a form for her because she couldn't read, they did it but told her that next time she must do it herself.* *In her society she is in the committee but can't write – to record/update records of membership.* *The children complain that she is illiterate.* *She works at *** Extra but she cannot write when she is at a meeting [she works as a medicine rep].*	*I could not communicate well with my white employer – she could hear some and not others.* *She could hear but cannot respond.* *She cannot fill out forms.* *She forgets how to use the ATM.*
Commitment to learning – leaves on the branches [*interview; external asset; August 2006*]	*Bible – my faith in church.*	*I wish to progress.* *I see progress forward with my learning.*
Positive values – roots [*interview; internal asset; August 2006*]	*My children's encouragement* *She stays with her grandchild alone who doesn't help her a lot.*	*She wants to be educated.* *To progress in life and succeed.* *To learn English.* *To start her own business.* *To help others who did not get a chance to get educated.*
Social competence – fruits [*interview; internal asset; August 2006*]	*Math literacy, so far she cannot read.*	*To write in IsiZulu a letter to my mother in Natal.* *To read the Bible in church –I read for them.* *I can write sums.*
Positive identity – Buds	*She doesn't know yet what she has gained so far except for math.*	*I can read for others.*

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[11]   Original copies of their drawings and participants' responses are included under Appendix 4.

Asset code	Participant 1	Participant 2
[interview; internal asset; August 2006]	*She wants to learn.* *She can see what's being taught – she understands.*	

4.3   DATA ANALYSIS

The previous section presented the data culled from the various sources and methodologies utilised in the study. In this section I analyse the results using the framework suggested by Scales and Leffert (1999:5-6). The section concludes with a synthesis of the main findings from the study.

4.3.1   DESCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL ASSETS

4.3.1.1 Support

From the framework suggested by Scales and Leffert (ibid), the support assets refer to the ways in which individuals are loved, affirmed and accepted as adult learners learning to read. The support could come from various settings outside the family unit, in school, or religious congregations, amongst extended family, or within other areas of socialisation. From the focus group discussion, the group of learners identified family, their congregation, friends and organisations that they belong to as sources of support. They form part of the exo- and the micro-systems. More specifically the following assets were mentioned:

FIGURE 4.11: A MAP OF SUPPORT ASSETS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION
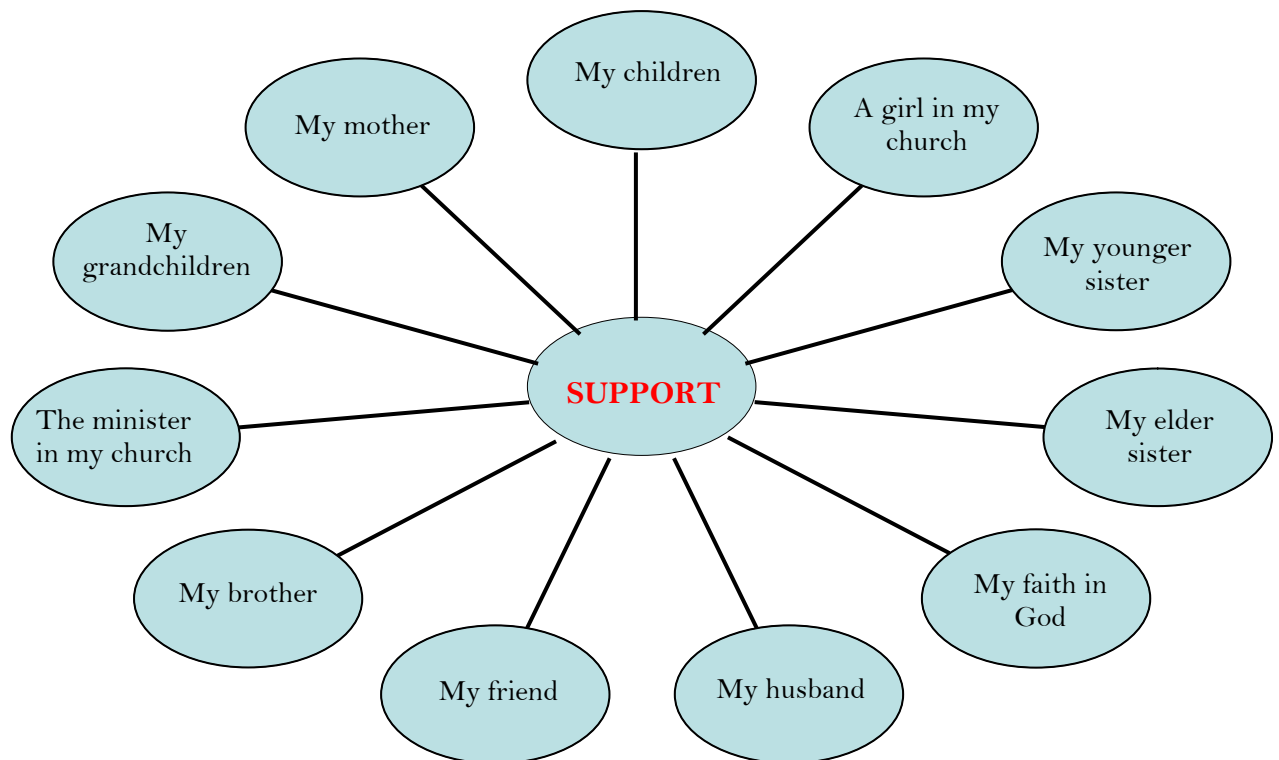
This raises the question whether it is merely the <u>awareness</u> (or lack of it) of the presence of support assets that serves as a motivating factor for change or whether it is <u>how</u> the assets are mobilised that serves as the stimulus for change. The fact that these assets were identified during the first term at the beginning of the academic year suggests that all the adult learners were aware of these assets. From this list one gets the impression that all the participants in the workshop were aware of the positive value that these assets contributed to their academic endeavours. The type of support indicated here implies that there are specific people who encourage the adult learner to continue to pursue their goal of learning to read, and ignore the opposing and competing stimulus that would culminate in them ceasing their academic endeavours. The initial impression given is that these learners seemed to enjoy a lot of support within the family unit and outside it, which would then make their goal of learning to read feasible and attainable. One would expect that if all adult learners were enjoying this kind of support consistently throughout the academic year and ultimately this would increase the opportunity to overcome the personal barriers and challenges associated with not being able to read. In turn this would increase the likelihood for all the adult learners to persevere with their academic endeavours. If this were true that you could conclude that the mere presence and awareness of assets is enough to serve as a catalysing agent for change.

However during my visits three months later, I learnt that only four learners were continuing with their education unabated. During the interviews while exploring the type of support that these learners enjoyed, participant 1 reported that *"her children and employers at *** Extra were encouraging her to continue with school"*. The quality and type of relationship she enjoyed with these people made acquiring literacy an essential part of her relationship. She stated for instance that *"her children complain that she cannot write"* and that *"when attending meetings at *** Extra she cannot take minutes and keep records of what she is selling because she cannot write"*. She also reported that *"she is also a member of a committee in her community society, and as a member she is supposed to record and update membership records, however because she cannot read and write, this makes it difficult for her to perform her duties"*. Therefore the nature of these relationships continues to press for the need for her to acquire literacy.

This suggests an alternative explanation that: once mobilised it is (possibly) the <u>continued value added</u> by these assets to the adult learners' academic self-concept that serves as a stimulus for change. Therefore where assets are identified and mobilised, for them to reinforce the drive for change they have to demonstrate that they are adding value to the person's self-esteem, and this has to be consistent and evident over time. Otherwise, once this stimulus ceases, or creates a competing need, then the pursuit of the original goal may be ceased. According to the participants and the educators present during my visits in August, they reported that *"most of them [the absent learners] were attending mass at the local congregation where most of the community members worship"*. This congregation had a conference going on for the whole month of August and a tent was erected very close to the school and apparently most of the ABET learners worship at this church. As a result, attending school is interpreted as missing church as well as the conference, and this would be against their faith and religious practices. For these learners, their support structures presented an opposing need that was competing with the need for acquiring reading literacy, and in comparison the spiritual and social need seemed to be more urgent than attending night school. As a result attending church became more of a priority than learning to read, and their support structures reinforced this state of affairs.

For the four learners who continued to attend, the support structures and support gained from significant others appeared to reinforce the goals of attaining literacy, thereby creating a synergy between the academic and non-academic self-concept which further propelled the need to attain reading literacy. Therefore the potential gain that is likely to be enjoyed from learning to read now goes beyond personal or internal benefits for the adult learner, because others within the life world of the adult learner also stand to benefit. Responses on the other

assets attest to this for instance on empowerment assets participant 2 reported that *"she wants to be able to read the bible and help her children with homework"*. While participant 1 responded on the boundaries and expectations assets that *"she works at *** Extra but she can't write when she's at meetings … [moreover] in her society, she is in the committee but can't write when she has to update records of membership"*. It is evident from this incept that the academic need of being literate was impacting on the other roles that both participants were playing within their community, family or employment. This magnified the importance and urgency of learning to read. In turn this facilitates a positive conception of self as an adult learner learning to read because the other aspects of the self-concept were in line striving for a common goal which was academic in nature.
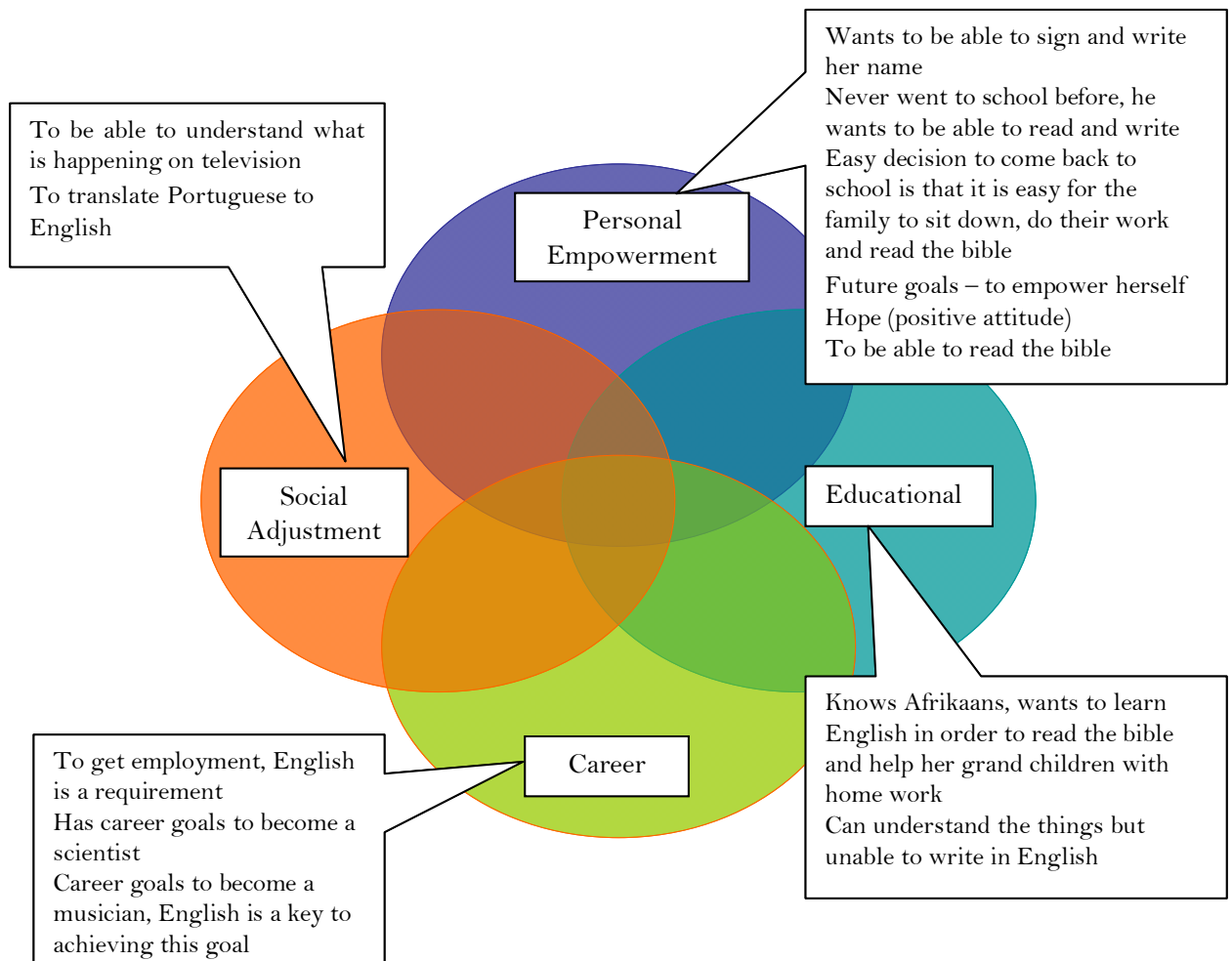
This observation was also evident with the larger group; they indicated different empowerment assets as reasons for acquiring literacy. For instance one participant responded in this way: *"to be able to understand what is happening on television"*, another indicated that he has *"career goals to become a musician. English is a key to achieving this goal"*; yet another one reported that they *"can understand the things but [are] unable to write in English"*. However what sets the four participants apart from the rest of the group is that within the period of my observations, they continued to attend daily, while the rest of the group was absent.

Despite having similar support assets, they were not attending classes, thus not focussing on the academic goal. Therefore at least for the four learners, the type of support given encouraged rather than dissuaded them from the goal of acquiring reading literacy. One could explain the differences in their attendance to be as a result of dissonance in their academic self-concept and non-academic, resulting in a difference in priorities between learning to read and attending church. Hence the four learners were able to continue to pursue the academic goal, thus increasing their chances of succeeding to acquire literacy despite the challenges existing within their system.

4.3.1.2 Empowerment

These assets refer to being able to feel safe and valued, the community's perception of adult learners and the opportunities they have to contribute to society in a meaningful way. From the discussions, these suggested the type of added responsibilities and 'benefits' one enjoyed or hoped to enjoy in the community as a result of their endeavours to learn to read. For most of the learners this was related to obtaining employment; however this was more a future goal for those who were unemployed rather than an existing asset. Therefore the knowledge that learning to read would increase one's chances of getting meaningful employment became a motivating factor to continue to pursue this goal. Other assets identified were the following:

FIGURE 4.12: A MAP OF EMPOWERMENT ASSETS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

To be able to understand what is happening on television
To translate Portuguese to English

Wants to be able to sign and write her name
Never went to school before, he wants to be able to read and write
Easy decision to come back to school is that it is easy for the family to sit down, do their work and read the bible
Future goals – to empower herself
Hope (positive attitude)
To be able to read the bible

Personal Empowerment

Social Adjustment

Educational

To get employment, English is a requirement
Has career goals to become a scientist
Career goals to become a musician, English is a key to achieving this goal

Career

Knows Afrikaans, wants to learn English in order to read the bible and help her grand children with home work
Can understand the things but unable to write in English

From the workshop it was evident that getting employment was only one of the empowerment assets. Other assets were more focused on personal development; educational as well as social adjustment. The empowerment assets on social adjustment were more

applicable to the foreign adult learners in the workshop because for them learning to read and speak English and other South African languages was part of being integrated into the South African community. Given that most of the learners in this group live amongst other immigrants from Mozambique, as well as the fact that in April only one of the four learners attending class during my visits was actually from Mozambique, it problematises the assertion that this was an important catalysing effect for acquiring reading literacy.

The career aspect as an empowerment asset also had the same implication because although it was evident from the group discussion that employment was the main reason behind acquiring literacy, in practice, this seemed not to be the case. The fact that out of the four learners who were attending regularly, three of them were above the age of 50 and only one fell within the 20-25 years age group. This also questions the assertion that hope of employment may serve as a mitigating factor to acquiring reading literacy because apart from the youngest participant who was present during my observations, these women were either already employed or retired. Discussions held with educators suggested that most of the L2 learners were immigrants from Mozambique and because of language barriers they could not find employment around Gauteng. This served to explain why employment was stated as an asset in this theme. Still this did not seem to motivate most of the adult learners to stay consistent to their goal of acquiring literacy.

From the bio-ecological model the empowerment assets are linked with the chrono-system of the adult learner. Therefore what can be identified as an empowerment asset is determined by the dimensions of time as it relates to the adult learner, for instance given their age and developmental level, as a result what constitutes empowerment differed for each participant. Discussions with the four remaining learners from the group indicated that they were continuing to pursue their goal because of educational and personal developmental reasons. For instance participant 2 reported that *"she wants to be able to read the bible and help her children with homework"*. Being able to read the bible was obviously important for her as an adult learner in her retirement age, yearning to grow spiritually and to be more supportive to her grandchildren. According to her response, in her community and family for a woman her age, her value as a person and ability to contribute meaningfully to her society will be enhanced by her ability to read and write. Once again the academic and non-academic self-concept were aligned and therefore reinforced each other, further strengthening the need to continue with the pursuit of acquiring reading literacy.

The question arises about why these two assets would be more potent in facilitating a positive academic self-concept rather than the assets on career and social adjustment. A

possible hypothesis may be that the locus of control for personal agency determines the scope of influence. That is, adult learners who choose assets that lie within their internal locus of control are able to activate these assets to achieve personal agency which in turn facilitates their capability to acquire reading literacy. Whereas being accepted into the local community and getting a job presents the learner with too many variables that are outside his/her locus of control, and therefore these assets lose their potency to serve as motivating factors in achieving meaningful and sustainable change. The context of the macro-system further minimise the type of control and power that the adult learner can hope to achieve once they acquire literacy.

4.3.1.3   Boundaries and expectations

These assets refer to clear and consistent boundaries that complement support and empowerment. These may be experienced in the family, school and the community. They provide a set of consistent messages about appropriate behaviour and expectations across learning contexts. In the discussions as well as the interviews, these were depicted as negative experiences that resulted from not being able to read and write, which further encouraged the participants to pursue their academic endeavours. Participant 1 reported that she "*once requested her children to fill out a form for her because she couldn't read, they did it but then told her that next time she must do it for herself … her children complain that she is illiterate.*" Participant 2 reported that "*she could not communicate well with her white employer because she could hear some words and not others. She could hear but cannot respond … she cannot fill out forms … and she forgets how to use the ATM*".

As indicated earlier in section 2.3.2, perceptions of the self are formed through one's experience with and interpretations of one's environment. But these perceptions are influenced especially by reinforcements, evaluations by significant others and one's attributions for one's own behaviour (see Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton 1976 in Shavelson & Bolus 1982:3). The statements reported by the participants are not only evaluative in purpose; they also serve to reinforce the adult learner. Therefore they become injunctions internalised by both participants, serving to confirm their initial decision to want to learn to read and write. Furthermore because these statements were uttered by people deemed significant to the adult learner in furthering the cause of acquiring literacy, therefore they carry even more power, further enhancing their academic self-concepts as adults learning to read and write. Craven, Marsh and Debus (1991:17-18) give useful guidelines for implementation of feedback strategies for promoting positive student self-perceptions, and although these guidelines refer to teacher feedback meant to confirm to the student that

s/he has sufficient ability to successfully manage tasks (ibid:18), it may be possible in further research to investigate the effect of feedback from significant others on the academic self-concept of adult learners.

4.3.1.4 Constructive use of time

These assets refer to availability of activities that stimulate positive growth and contribute to the development of other assets. In this study I focused on the use of time in activities related to acquiring literacy that include attending classes regularly, studying, and engaging in other activities which encourage literacy acquisition. Upon my return to the site in August, I noted that only 4 learners were present even though in April there had been 14 learners present. I learnt that attendance was seriously affected by the weather. For instance throughout my follow-up visits in August out of the four learners present, three were new students and only one had been in the original class during my first visit in April. Therefore all 13 of the learners that I met in April dropped out of the programme; although it was not clear whether this was a permanent cessation of the programme or only temporary due to the church conference and/or the weather.

On the third night of my visits in August only four learners were once again present however this time only two of the original learners from my first visit in April were present, the other two were new students from the previous two evenings. Out of the two learners one had been absent during my second visit while the other one had been present. I learnt that the reason for this was because the weather was still very cold and on my third visit it was raining. Apparently when it is cold or if it rains, the learners do not attend school. According to the participants and educators who were present this is because when is it raining taxis are usually very scarce, which means that learners have to walk to the centre, and they end up deciding not to come. Although there may be other reasons to explain the lack of consistency in attendance, this indicates the impact of the exo-system on the teaching and learning process. The learners' capacity to use time constructively is limited by more distant factors such as the weather and availability of transport to come to classes. The learner has no control over these factors and therefore has to change their behaviour in order to fit in. In my journal entry on the 16th August I elaborated on this further:

> … I found that the official instruction time remained relatively the same throughout the year, however practically the instruction time would be changed for numerous reasons. During my third visit, school was ended more than an hour early because it was raining. Moreover the inconsistent attendance and the differing levels of learner readiness imply that the pace of instruction is much slower. I

realised that if statistics on attendance rates and instruction time were collected as indicated in the EFA indicators, one would receive a distorted picture and would expect that most of these learners would generally fail and achieve very little progress … [journal entry; external asset; 16 August 06].

Upon request about whether the learners study when they are absent from school, the educator reported that they do not, and as a result, their work and progress lags behind. This was despite the fact that during the focus group discussion, some of the learners indicated that *"they go to the library – to find other textbooks and read newspapers"* or that *"I ask for help when I don't understand from the teacher / educator, my co-worker and my neighbours"*. However not all the learners identified the library as a resource that can help in their acquisition of reading literacy, even though during the asset mobilisation exercise they had indicated how they can benefit from visiting the library. In fact the feedback from the educator was that this was not really accurate because there was no visible progress in their work when they miss school. Responses such as *"I ask for help when I don't understand from the teacher / educator, my co-worker and my neighbours"* and *"keeping accounts for my small business"*, suggest that there may be other ways of using time constructively outside using the educator and class attendance which also help in facilitating the acquisition of reading literacy. In this sense then one gets the impression that the constructive use of time as it pertains to regular attendance of learners was not an asset being fully utilised because attendance was poor. However this would be looking at one side of the coin, the following insert from the journal entry illustrates:

> … However I learnt from the educator that of the 31 learners originally enrolled into the ABET Level 2 programme, seven had been promoted to Level 3 because of their progress. These learners were promoted at the end of the second term in June. I recognised immediately that what was captured in the official documents of the lesson plan depicted a problem-ridden narrative …' [journal entry; external asset; 15 August 2006].

Therefore if one focused on the attendance rates one would expect that learners would struggle to succeed, however these seven learners were promoted to Level 3 despite the challenges of attendance. Therefore if I only limited the constructive use of time to class attendance, like with the EFA indicators, then I would be narrowing my focus and therefore get a distorted picture. Moreover I would not be able to explain why seven of these learners could be promoted despite the challenges in their exo-system.

The engagement in activities that stimulate positive growth provided another avenue of exploring this asset. From here I focused on the teacher's involvement in facilitating this asset because it follows that the quality of learning within the classroom when learners ultimately show up has to be high and deep enough to close the gap created by absenteeism. Therefore I looked for assets existing within the classroom and those being utilised by the teacher that created a stimulus for positive growth. The following journal entry illustrates:

> … During my discussion with her about the assets existing within the class that she uses in her teaching she indicated the following: the murals on the wall and the reading books in the class sitting on the book shelf at a corner in the back of the class. She also used her own personal magazines and books … [journal entry; external asset; 14 August 2006].

In terms of her teaching and assessment strategies this is what I recorded in my journal:

> In the lesson plans the Educator indicated that she mainly uses oral and written classwork activities for assessment. Her teaching methods included teaching the learners through explanations and writing on the chalk board. The learning materials and aids that she indicated in the lesson plans were chalkboard, books, poster, textbook, papers and pens [journal entry; external asset; 15 August 2006] & [analysis of lesson plans see Appendix 5; external asset; 15 August].

Her use of time during instruction also played a factor as this insert illustrates:

> The lesson plans were compiled on a weekly basis, and the educator indicated that often she will deal with the same learning outcome for more than one week in order to accommodate the needs and learning pace of individual learners. The lesson plans that I reviewed were dated for the period 17 January 2005 to 30 May 2005. The educator indicated that she uses her old lesson plans because she has been teaching the same learning area since 2005 and very little has changed in terms of content [journal entry; external asset; 15 August 2006] & [analysis of lesson plans see Appendix 5; external asset; 15 August].

From my observations I noted the following assets:

> Resources used during the lesson:
> - Grade 1 textbooks with pictures – each learner has their own book.
> - Uses the chalk board to write words for them to read; this is for class work purposes.
> - She uses individual work.

- The learners sit in groups during all the lessons and they consult with each other.
- Resources from the day school present in class: charts on the walls and the mini-library in the classroom; flip chart; the murals on the wall [journal entry; external asset; 15 August 2006].

Despite noting this, my documentation of visual data also indicated the presence of a flip-chart and mini-library and chalk-board. The educator relied heavily on using the chalkboard and during my entire visit, not once did I see her use the flip chart and mini-library, even though she was aware of their presence. Of all the external assets, I found the constructive use of time as being poorly mobilised by the learners and the educator. This raised a limitation in my methodology because if my study was structured in such a way that I could track the cumulative effects of the constructive use (or lack) of time then I would have been able to make a better analysis of this variable. I realised that a longer term of observation, a review of attendance registers spanning from the beginning of the year which would enable me to identify the 7 learners who were promoted to L3 would have enabled me to determine the extent to which this variable was influential in the enhancement of the adult learners' academic self-concept. I also realised that spending more time on site would have enabled me to observe the extent to which the educator was actively utilising the assets available in her class. In my journal entry during the first night of my visit I noted the following:

> The class is meant for the Grade 4 class of the Primary School. The chairs and tables are meant for children. They are organised according to groups of eight and 10, meaning that the class seats a total of 36 children … The adult learners do not change the seating arrangements because they are supposed to leave the classroom in the same condition that they found it in … The teacher's desk is against the wall at the back of the class directly opposite the chalk board. The learners do not fill the entire class [journal entry; external asset; 28 March 2006].

This was peculiar because even though the resources available in the classroom were not all suitable for adult learners, they were powerless to change their circumstances because they were merely 'visitors'. In fact Participant 1 complained on numerous times that *"the little chairs were not suitable for her back and she was planning to bring her own chair to school one of these days if her grandchild or one of her children could fetch the chair for her"*. On my last visit at the school I observed the following:

> The educator has given the learners an activity to write all the words that depict the first letters of all the 26 letters of the alphabet. Although she gave an example, the learners were struggling to come up with additional words for the rest of the

letters. Directly behind the teacher's desk were two charts showing the answers to the activity and although she informed them that they could use any of the words posted on the murals to help them, none of them did. She left the class in order to give them time to complete the activity, and still none of them looked around at the murals to find the answers. In the end I suggested that they look at the wall behind me [I always sat at the teacher's table at the back of the class] to find examples of what they were required to do. The class responded with sighs of relief and embarrassed laughter [journal entry; external asset; 17 August 2006].

This insert illustrates that the adult learners were not fully utilising this asset. Their status as adult learners 'housed' in a class for younger children compounded this sense of limitation, and once again the context of the exo-system reinforced this limitation.

4.3.2   DESCRIPTION OF INTERNAL ASSETS

4.3.2.1   Commitment to learning

These assets refer to developing an internal intellectual curiosity and the skills to gain new knowledge. This is linked to how motivated learners are to achieve and whether they express their curiosity and work ethic in homework and reading for fun. Participant 1 reported that *"the bible and her faith in church"* motivates her to achieve and continue striving towards her goal. This suggests that her continued engagement with matters of her faith and religious beliefs create the opportunity for her to improve on her literacy skills as reading the bible serves to improve her reading skills. On the other hand Participant 2 reported that *"her wish to progress and the fact that she sees forward progress with her learning"* keeps her motivated. Although this participant was not yet efficient in her reading and writing skills, the little progress that she has made since attending school encouraged her to continue with her academic goals. In the focus group one of the participants reported that: *"[s/he does] not want[ing] to be redundant – sitting without a purpose and goals"*.

4.3.2.2   Positive values

Positive values are important 'internal compasses' that guide learners' priorities and choices. During the focus group, one participant reported that he exercises: *"good behaviour – [he is] not involved in crime; [he is] focussed on education"*; another reported that he has a *"goal of establishing [his] own business"*; *"dream of working with my hands"* another one has a *"belief that*

life goes on" and yet another one reported that *"if you're not educated your life won't progress – you work hard"*.

Participant 1 identified *"her children's encouragement"* as well as the fact that *"she stays with her grandchild alone who doesn't help her a lot"*. These statements suggest that her grandchild and children give the internal compass that guide what her priorities should be. This echoes what she identified as her support assets. Participant 2 on the other hand focused on specific goals that propel her to prioritise her education. These are listed below:

FIGURE 4.13: PARTICIPANT 2'S MAP OF ASSETS FOR POSITIVE VALUE
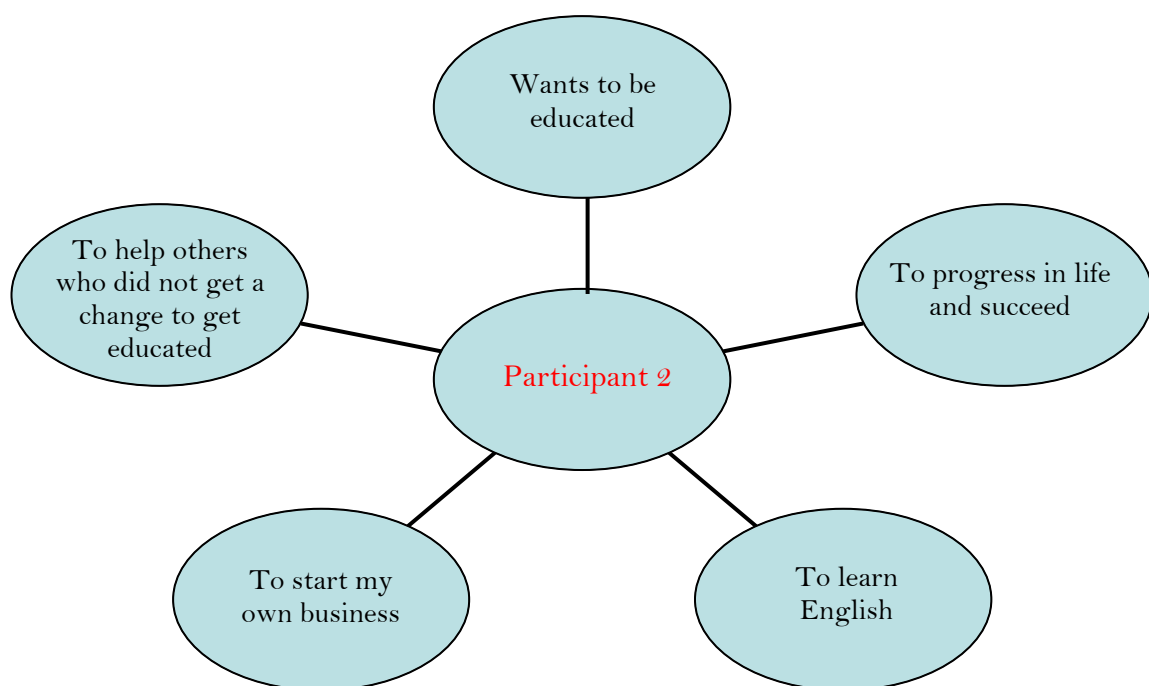
4.3.2.3 Social competence

These are personal and interpersonal skills learners need to negotiate choices, options and relationships. These skills also lay the foundation for independence and competence. Participant 2 reported, *"…to write in isiZulu a letter to her mother in Natal; to read the bible in church – she read for them; and to be able to write sums"*. Participant 1 reported, *"… Math literacy, even though thus far she still can't read"*.

In the focus group discussion the following were mentioned; *'good role model for my future kids'; 'goal of extending my house' 'being able to operate an ATM to withdraw my money'*. These assets also relate to the empowerment assets because by mobilising the empowerment assets, the learners expect to acquire specific skills in order to fulfil specific roles. In the

Scales and Leffert model reference is made only to social competence, however in the context of this study academic competence is also essential especially since numerous scholars have argued, as indicated earlier in Chapter 2, that the acquisition of literacy also enables the acquisition of other social outcomes thereby leading to the alleviation of poverty, unemployment and diseases. In associating this asset to enhancing the academic self-concept, Craven, Marsh and Debus argue that 'a fruitful approach to enhancing the development of positive self-systems is likely to result from attribution retraining procedures that are used in conjunction with appropriate skills training' (1991:17-18). Hence, Marsh and Koller argued for a model that unifies that Reciprocal effects and Internal/External Frame of Reference model because, 'the most effective way to have lasting effects on either achievement and academic self-concept is to develop interventions that simultaneously enhance both constructs' (2003:26-27). This together with the participant's responses suggest that programmes intended to develop reading literacy have to directly add value to the social context of the learner, because their impact, efficiency and sustainability depends largely on how much they lead to an improvement in the learners' socio-economic status.

This argument raises the question whether perceived value added to the social competence of the adult learners translated to real value in terms of personal and interpersonal skills, especially for those learners who ceased to attend classes. Perhaps this might explain the attendance, retention and throughput rates of ABET learners. Once again, the opportunity to explore this further was lost in the exclusion of the seven learners who had progressed to ABET Level 3 since my visit in April. It may be possible through further research to explore with these learners what assets of social competence do they identify and mobilise, and how this influenced their academic self-concept as learners who have progressed in the system. This would truly expand on the solution-focused conceptualisation of this research, and it would explore the factors associated with success, retention and progression of adult learners using asset mapping and mobilisation.

4.3.2.4 Positive identity

Learners' views of themselves – their own sense of agency, purpose, worth and promise. This determines the learner's sense of powerlessness, initiative and direction. Of all the assets, this is the one that is most influential on self-concept and academic self-concept in particular because it indicates how the adult learner perceives themselves as a learner learning to read and write. As noted by Lawrence (2000:6) 'the self-concept is not only

formed through experience, … but once formed it then determines experience − it is a motivator'. From the findings Participant 1 reported that *"she doesn't know yet what she has gained so far, except for Maths; she wants to learn; she can see what's being taught and she understands"*. Participant 2 reported that: *''she can read for others"*. From these inserts it is evident that these participants view themselves positively in spite of the challenges they have faced, and in spite of the minute progress they have made in acquiring literacy. Their level of motivation keeps them positive and focused on the goal, hence their continued attendance of the programme. Their positive perception of themselves is linked to other life roles and other assets within their eco-system, hence the referral to Maths by Participant 1 indicating that her academic self-concept for mathematics helps reinforce her academic self-concept for reading literacy. For Participant 2 the referral to being able to read for others indicates the value that she has attained within her community system, helping to define her purpose and worth amongst her community. This is a more compelling indicator of the synergy between the assets mobilised by these two participants, however it is beyond the scope of this study to determine the strength of this relationship. From the focus group discussion, the participants reported that: *"playing a mother and father role"* *"being a bread winner and [having] my responsibilities"*; *"being independent and self-sufficient"* *"not wanting to be redundant − sitting without a purpose and goals"*; *"sense of commitment"*. These responses also indicate the synergy between the assets and attests to the fact that the adult learners relate positive descriptions of themselves to their reasons for wanting to acquire reading literacy. Perhaps further research could explore the assets involved in sustaining this motivation over time because only four learners remained consistent in the programme, despite all the participants identifying assets related to positive identity.

4.4   SYNTHESIS

According to the bio-ecological model it is proximal factors existing within the micro-system of the individual that are more influential. The mapping of assets according to the framework by Scales and Leffert has enabled us to identify what those factors comprise of. This discussion also enabled the participants to conceptualise these factors as assets rather than problems, and identify how these assets have contributed positively to their endeavours of acquiring literacy. The delineation of internal and external assets has enabled the participants to identify the location of those assets within their bio-ecological system, in terms of assets existing within themselves and those that exist within their immediate environment. The analysis of the findings provides insight into learners' perception of what constitutes assets and what doesn't, therefore the responses indicate how the learner experiences and interprets assets for acquiring literacy, rather than how the macro-system

defines them. On the one hand, this provides a bottom-up rather than top-down view of what constitutes as factors associated with the acquisition of reading literacy. On the other hand, it provides a picture of constructs that define the academic self-concept of adult learners. Particularly with those learners who attended regularly during my visits, their responses provided explanations over why they were able to overcome the challenges of acquiring literacy as adults while others seemed to have succumbed. In this way, at a macro perspective, the findings provide insight into how perception drives a positive interpretation of policy, thereby manifesting in the acquisition of reading literacy in spite of the challenges existing within the macro-system.

The discussion with the two participants illustrated how the mobilisation of assets can help explain some of the reasons why they were persevering. Firstly, all aspects of the self-concept need to operate synergistically towards a single purpose to achieve congruence and thereby facilitate the impetus to persevere towards the goal of acquiring reading literacy. Secondly the influence of internal assets over personal agency is more pronounced than the external assets in line with bio-ecological model. Therefore, while the availability of external resources is essential to facilitate instruction, motivation to learn and perseverance; these alone and in isolation do not determine how the adult learner will internalise and interpret their available assets, or whether this interpretation will be in a positive light and lead to asset mobilisation in order to achieve positive change. As a result, an adult learner requires more than infrastructure and other indices listed on the EFA Indicators. Hence the gap between policy and practice cannot be closed or narrowed by focussing on systemic issues in isolation. Adult learners need their internal and external assets working towards a common goal, and they need their self-concept and skills development to be facilitated in unison. The external assets must carry meaning for individual learners in such a way that their mobilisation reinforces the attainment of a common goal in line with the internal assets. For policy makers and educators, these reinforced findings from other researchers that literacy intervention programmes have to take into consideration the needs of the end-users as a priority. Furthermore, that for these programmes to be sustainable and achieve meaningful change they have to develop the learner's self-concept in a positive way while they endeavour to develop their skills.

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the interrelated and interdependent interactions between individual adult learners learning to read and the influence of their social context on the development of such literacy with the learner's academic self-concept as a key factor determining the acquisition of reading literacy. The study aimed to answer the following research questions: What are the assets existing within the ABET learner's ecosystem that promote a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy? Secondly, how are these assets utilised or mobilised to facilitate a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy?

These research questions were in response to a gap in the literature, which indicated that the perspective of the end-user in terms of the experiences of adult learners, focussing on assets rather than EFA ABET policy indicators and the systemic deficiencies were not exhaustively explored. Conducting the study aimed to add empirical data to our understanding of translating policy into practice by acknowledging human capital and personal agency. Where studies in this area were conducted, they fell short of explaining the gap between policy and practice by linking the macro-aspects of policy to the micro-aspects that exist within individual learners. Therefore this study also served to develop a conceptual framework to provide an understanding about how the individual factors within the learner create a propensity to obtain a positive interpretation of policy. The analytical framework of the bio-ecological model, the phenomenological approach to the self-concept and the asset-based approach was put forward as a way to explain the role that adult learners play as co-constructers of their own learning and end-users of policy. The academic self-concept was put forward as an important outcome variable that facilitates a positive interpretation of policy as well as a key mediating construct that facilitates the attainment of other desirable educational, psychological and behavioural outcomes.

To gain the end-users' perspective, a case study of a public Adult Learning Centre was conducted. Data was culled using focus group discussions with 14 ABET Level 2 learners, document analysis of the educator's lesson plans, journal entries by the researcher, informal discussions with the ABET centre director and supervisor at the school, observations of the educator and learners during instruction time for a period of three weeks as well as a symbolic expression activity to explore internal and external assets of two of the learners attending classes regularly during my visit who could also communicate with me. I also collected visual data documenting the assets and my interactions with the research participants.

The analysis of documents enabled me to gain baseline data on the initial policy goals and targets of the EFA policy for adult education in South Africa, progress made in attaining those targets as well as the challenges that were identified as impediments to South Africa's achievement of EFA targets for ABET. Analysis of the documents on the school's statistics and the Aaron Moeti Learning Centre provided the context of the site and the demographics of the participants. Analysis of the two types of document data highlighted the inconsistencies of tracking progress through indicators against what occurs in practice.

The focus group discussions enabled me to raise awareness about assets, facilitate their identification and discuss ways of mobilising them. The observations which took place three months later enabled me to gauge the extent to which the assets were actively mobilised and how they were enhancing the academic self-concept of the adult learners in their endeavours to acquire reading literacy. This also enabled me to identify environmental and infrastructural assets existing within the ecosystem. The one-on-one discussions with the two participants enabled me to gain insight into how they mobilised their assets and how in turn this enabled them to overcome the challenges of learning to read and write as adult learners.

The main findings from this study are that firstly assets identified and mobilised within the learners' bio-ecological system need to work synergistically towards a common goal of acquiring literacy in order ensure sustainability of effort and focus. For those learners whose assets prioritised divergent goals pursued different priorities apart from that of acquiring literacy and had difficulty remaining focussed on the initial literacy goal. Secondly assets existing within the internal micro-system within the learner allowed the ABET learners greater influence and control for them to exercise personal agency. The first I call the synergy of focus and the latter I call the locus of control for agency.

In the next section I will link the findings from the data with the theoretical framework, thereby taking the observations made from a micro-perspective to an analysis of the macro-perspective. The goal will be to show how the academic self-concept and asset mobilisation facilitates a particular interpretation of policy. It will also be to explain how adult learners interpreted and internalised their position as end-users of EFA ABET policy through the assets that they mobilised to create a propensity to succeed or fail in their acquisition of reading literacy in spite of the social context. Firstly, the discrepancy in the responses of ABET learners about where they located the locus of control for agency will be explored. Secondly, I will discuss the discrepancy in the synergy of focus (or lack of it) amongst the different assets mobilised by the ABET learners. The chapter will end with conclusions and implications for further research as well as limitations of the study.

5.2   THE LOCUS OF CONTROL FOR AGENCY

The EFA policy stipulates indicators that must be used by member states to evaluate their progress in achieving quality education for all. I have argued earlier that these indicators communicate the conditions under which quality education for all is intended to be achieved. I have also indicated that there have been problems world wide with attaining a comprehensive picture of what is happening in terms of the progress towards meeting the EFA goal on young people and adults (see section 2.2 p.14-16) and these were specified in the discussion earlier specifically in the context of developing countries (see section 2.2.1).

In my analysis of the data I sought to find out what the ABET Level 2 learners were identifying as assets in spite of these challenges. So I compiled a map of their assets and after three months came to document how they had actively mobilised those assets. I found that the learners who had continued with the programme were stating assets that empowered them directly and personally, and these served as further encouragement for them to continue with their academic endeavours. In contrast the learners who had 'dropped out'[12] of the programme had identified assets that located the power for change and action externally rather than internally. For instance the empowerment assets that were focused on career development and social adjustment were not identified as key motivating factors to want to persevere with the studies. Instead, the personal and educational assets, once achieved even with minute progress, served as a strong mitigating factor for these learners

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[12]   I say 'dropped out of the programme' because they were not attending classes during my visits on site even though officially these learners had not been officially deregistered and their absence could have been temporary. I have noted this limitation in my methodology because had I spend more time on site it is possible that they would have returned to class.

to want to persevere, thus explaining their identification of positive identity assets which relate to academic self-concept.

The internal assets were not describing pragmatic issues affecting teaching and learning such as infrastructure, learning resources, support from the teacher, teaching methods etc. This raised the question: if this is the focus of EFA policy and EFA policy targets, does it mean that the EFA policy goals are not linked to individual learners' needs? Is that why there is a gap between policy and practice?

Research on EFA implementation in developing countries with regards to ABET focused on the pragmatic issues, such as political instability, lack of leadership, resources and capacity. For instance Emma Chiwaya-Kinshindo (2004) recommended skills development programmes that focus on leadership skills and creative problem solving skills, for her this would enable an investment in human capital. While Charles Abani (2003:5) pointed to the capacity gap in civil society for policy advocacy as well as a lack of understanding of the macro-environment context. Nancy O'Gara Kendall recommended instead a bottoms-up approach that reconceptualises the uni-linear impact model that currently drives official global policy processes. My findings concur with O'Gara Kendall's findings because the adult learners who were able to identify assets that existed within their internal locus of control were able to mobilise these assets effectively to ensure that it facilitated attainment of their goals. However these pragmatic issues were also important because clearly they affected performance and attendance in the ABET programme, hence of the 31 officially enrolled ABET learners, seven were promoted to ABET level 3 while only four were persisting with the programme.

As noted by Jansen and other writers on EFA targets, the focus on targets negates the fact that there is not a linear cause and effect model driving change. The bottom-up approach, a focus on assets and individual factors acknowledges the nuances and dynamic nature between policy and practice as defined by end-users rather than policy makers and indicators. This explains why different end-users would respond differently though living under similar context and systems, because their individual behaviour is informed by their individual and very unique perceptions.

What sets apart the response of the learners who continued with the programme despite the weather, season and other challenges is that the attainment of their goal to acquire reading literacy at a micro level, which translates to the attainment of the EFA goals for this cohort at a macro level, had to be internalised and interpreted as something that benefits the

individual and their immediate life world. As argued by Bronfenbrenner, it is the factors that are much closer to the person such as his immediate personal and psychological well-being, immediate family and family environment that are more influential than distal factors.

For as long as EFA implementation and programmes intended to develop ABET learners focus on national targets while disregarding contextual, personal and individual factors, and therefore psychological, biological and social aspects affecting end-users, then deep, meaningful and sustainable change will not be realised. Furthermore, because development is a product of the characteristics of a person as argued in the bio-ecological model, behaviour is the product of one's perception and is therefore regulated (even if not entirely) by the self-concept as argued by Carl Rogers (in Burns 1982:90). Therefore a sustainable development of human capital invested in addressing EFA goals for youth and adults has to focus on enhancing the self-concept of adult learners in its totality, and therefore, interventions should develop the social self-concept in conjunction with the emotional, physical and academic aspects of the self-concept. In turn this will facilitate the attainment of national targets on EFA.

5.3   THE SYNERGY OF FOCUS

What is most notable about two of the four learners who persisted with their programme is that most of the assets that they identified reinforced each other and focussed towards a common goal. The support that they enjoyed, the negative messages and experiences that they received from significant others, their values and constructive use of time served to reinforce the urge to carry on with the goal of acquiring literacy. It is this synergy across the different assets that sustained them and motivated them during times when others had given up or taken a break. At a micro-level this is necessary because it means that the individual learner does not experience burn-out because of going against the current. Their focus is potent because they were not spreading themselves too thin by pursuing divergent goals. The lack of synergy diverted attention from the goal of acquiring reading literacy for 20 of the L2 learners, even if this may not have been permanent or prolonged.

At the macro level the same argument can be made. When policy goals promote competing and often opposing needs to individual priorities, then the lack of synergy will undermine its effective implementation. O'Gara Kendall's (2004) study illustrates this very well because split-loyalties and multiple foci in the end lead people to interpret and implement policy differently to what was initially intended by policy makers. Hence I concur with Sutton and Levinson's (2001) conception of policy as negotiated meaning because it is the internal and

individual factors that make policy to carry different meanings which can change across different contexts which may contradict the meaning defined initially at its conception.

In education the quality of assets determines the quality of value they can deliver once mobilised. For instance, the fact that the educator was recycling old lesson plans is a factor that can be highlighted as a problem rather than an asset. This is because this prevented her from updating her teaching focus and effective use of assets existing within the classroom like the murals on the walls in order to respond to the emerging, changing and dynamic needs and strengths of the learners. While she was able to recognise that the murals were assets and that she could mobilise them to enhance her teaching methods, she failed to incorporate the use of these assets in her lesson plans. She also failed to review how effective these assets were in enhancing her teaching methods, and as a result she limited the potency of these assets. More importantly the assets were not utilised to enhance the academic self-concept of learners, as noted by Craven, Marsh and Debus (1991:17-18) in terms of using them to demonstrate a task-specific strategy and giving learners feedback to assist them in developing attributions that emphasise the link between the role of specific strategies (such as using the mural to learn the alphabet) and their effortful application in causing successful outcomes (which is acquiring reading literacy).

On the one hand this exposes the fact that the asset mapping and mobilisation exercise remained superficial because it failed to challenge how teaching and learning was being facilitated within the classroom. Ultimately the goal of enhancing the academic self-concept through asset mapping and mobilisation in the process of <u>teaching</u> reading literacy by the adult educator was overlooked, and a deeper process of critical reflection within the educator needed to be activated to achieve this change. On the other hand this suggests that assumptions were (wrongfully?) made that all the asset systems existing within the learner's eco-system were necessarily primed for <u>deep</u> asset mobilisation and change. The opportunity to achieve depth in mobilising distal assets requires an in-depth process of analysis replicated not just at an individual, internal micro-level but at all the different levels of the system involving all the key stakeholders. For instance it could be argued that the learners who had assets that were promoting alternative foci therefore had competing priorities and were basically set up for failure because this compromised their consistency and commitment to the programme. Furthermore, the group of learners whose academic goal competed with their spiritual or religious goals were pulled in opposite directions and as a result the academic goal was put on hold. Hence the argument can also be made that a teacher who underutilises (or fails to mobilise) assets that could enhance the teaching and learning process thereby enhancing the academic self-concept of adult learners and their learning

development could also compromise the quality of the programme as well as the motivation and commitment of the learners to the programme. As noted by Lawrence "students will not make permanent progress unless tutors take into account the need to help them change their self-concepts as well as teaching them new skills. Without a change in how they perceive themselves they will go through the motions of learning but they will not retain the material in the long term. Once they feel different they are more likely to practice their new found skill" (2000:7).

My argument is that within the individual learner, one had to deconstruct the 'problem-based' narrative in order to introduce the asset based approach. Such a deconstruction enables the learner to appreciate assets within their system, as well as judge how they are working synergistically towards a common goal. Such synergy could be seen to facilitate change and enhance self-esteem. Therefore the same process of deconstruction has to be replicated at the different levels of the system in conjunction with all the key stakeholders. In her process of using the asset-based approach to intervention, Eloff (2003:27-28) indicates that information from the asset map needs to be used to build strong, mutually beneficial partnerships…in turn this facilitates intrinsic enablement and creativity which ultimately ensures sustainability within the immediate system of the learner. Furthermore she indicates that the key to change is the creation of collaborative networks between identified assets (ibid). To me this speaks to creating deep synergy and collaboration within the different asset systems of the learner. While Eloff identifies the professional as the key driver behind this process, and locates these steps in the latter stages of asset mobilisation, I beg to differ. I believe that adult learners and end-users of policy can and should be empowered to be the drivers of this process, especially because in developing countries there is a shortage of professionals and capacity. Moreover the process of deconstruction is a life-long process of learning and unlearning, one which is driven internally within individuals located at the different levels of the system.

This finding is consistent with Marsh and Koller's (2002:42) proposal to unify the Reciprocal Effects and the Internal/External Frame of Reference model. To reiterate, their study found that although academic skills development may result in short-term gains in academic achievement, these gains are unlikely to be maintained unless there are corresponding gains in academic self-concept. Conversely, although self-concept enhancement programs may have short-term gains in academic self-concept, these effects are unlikely to be maintained unless there are corresponding gains in achievement. Hence the most effective way to have lasting effects on either achievement or academic self-concept is to develop interventions that simultaneously enhance both constructs. Which implies

therefore that if the quality of teaching which impacts on achievement is poor, then no amount of self-concept enhancement could lead to deep, meaningful and sustainable achievement. The scarcity of resources demands efficient delivery, and the rates of non-attendance and drop-out by adult learners deems public ABET programmes inefficient, therefore achieving synergy between macro- and micro level interventions is necessary for sustainable change.

5.4   CONCLUSION

The case of the Alberton Public Learning Centre reveal that there are internal and external assets existing within the ABET learner's ecosystem which when mobilised can be utilised to promote a positive academic self-concept in reading literacy. This potency of the assets in enhancing the academic self-concept was mediated by the locus of control for agency as well as the synergy of focus amongst the assets. Where the locus of control was located externally, it created limited impact because the learners were limited to activate and mobilise those assets to achieve their goal of acquiring reading literacy. Where control was locates internally, the learners were stimulated to persevere in their endeavours to acquire reading literacy despite the challenges they were facing within their eco-system.

Where assets were focused on promoting a common goal, they facilitated mobility and focus of energy toward the acquisition of reading literacy. However where the assets had divergent foci, they created the divergent priorities and undermined effective attainment of the goal of acquiring reading literacy.

5.5   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A longer time on site would have enabled me to explore the effects of asset-mobilisation for all the learners in more detail as well as explore how self-concept and asset-mobilisation affects throughput, retention and attrition of adult learners. The fact that my visits were limited to a specific time privileged one group of the learners against those who were not present during my visits. Moreover this affected the level of depth in asset mobilisation that I could observe particularly in relation to the role of the educator and other key stakeholders. Further research could include a more diverse profile of participants located within the various levels of the learner's ecosystem. This will ensure the authenticity of the data so that it represents all the viewpoints among members of the research setting. Moreover a longer period on site would have enabled me to gain a more comprehensive

picture of the phenomena, which could have possibly led to very different conclusions to the ones I made here.

A deeper analysis of how assets mapping and mobilisation impact on the academic self-concept could have been possible had my methodology included a pre and post assessment of adult learners' self-concept. Such an analysis would help determine whether assets mapping and mobilisation facilitate positive change in behaviour, as well as a positive interpretation of policy.

5.6   STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

This study utilised various methods of data collection to document the experiences of the participants in situ, as well as explore the complexity and nuances of participants that cannot be captured in statistics. The use of visual data and observation facilitated the triangulation process and allowed for me to find alternative explanations to what was initially reported in official documents.

The study evolved in such a way that it catered to the complexity of the participants. For instance the fact some of the participants could not read or write allowed for me to continue with the interview through symbolic expression using drawings. This was more accessible to the adult learners and it provided a non-threatening way of expressing their views without feeling incompetent or illiterate.

This study expands on the traditional scope of self-concept research to include non-traditional learner groups. This opens the opportunity for more research focused on adult learners, especially because funding for ABET programmes is under threat because throughout the world, a comprehensive picture of measuring progress on this EFA goal is not yet possible as individual programmes differ and are specific to individual countries (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002:18). Such a focus would allow in-depth analysis of the impact of ABET programmes on individual ABET learners but with a unifying concept that can be measured across different contexts and programmes irrespective of skills that are being developed within a specific programme.

The study also expands on the scope of research on the asset-based approach to include policy research. It uses it as a methodological strategy to explain the gap between policy and practice from the perspective of the end-user focussing on strengths rather than gaps and weaknesses, which is characteristic of most policy studies.

5.7   RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, as mentioned already this study forms part of a larger research project aimed at a systemic evaluation to determine how the unit standards derived from the NQF compare with the learning outcomes for General Education and Training in reading literacy. Recommendations derived from this study, although limited in its focus, could help in the refinement of the study in terms of undertaking more longitudinal case studies of individual South African public ABET learning centres to determine the differences in the contexts and realities of learners. For instance, do specific teaching methods enhance self-concept and achievement better than others, and which strategies are effective when working with multi-lingual and multi-cultural groups of learners? The findings of this study suggests that a mere focus on achievement scores on reading literacy will not explain why ABET learners perform as they do. In turn policy alignment will be limited if such a narrow focus in the systemic evaluation is undertaken without documenting the nuances in the contexts and individuals concerned. The relationship between the three constructs; academic self-concept, academic achievement and asset mapping and mobilisation need to be explored further to determine how these constructs influence each other at a micro-perspective. This study fell short of measuring the nature and strength of this relationship. Further research could also provide direction on practical strategies that educators and other key stakeholders can employ in terms of mobilising specific assets to enhance the academic self-concept of learners as well as their academic achievement. For adult educators this is pivotal as it may help address problems with retention, throughput and attrition rates in the public ABET sector.

Secondly, this study joins the voices of other scholars cautioning the focus on EFA targets within developing countries without taking into consideration the contextual realities of nation states and individual end-users world-wide. Instead, a more dynamic, bottoms-up approach that makes a link between individual micro-level perspectives and macro-level policy issues is highlighted. Recommendations for further research could include conducting longitudinal, comparative case studies within developing countries with relatively similar geographic, economic and political contexts in order to compare how developing countries interpret EFA policies with the goal of making focused recommendations on how attainment on EFA goals should be measured more fairly and dynamically.

Thirdly, the influence of internal individual factors can enhance or hinder the acquisition of various educational, social or economical outcomes. The influence of the educator on the

academic self-concept of learners, particularly adult learners has to be explored more intensely if there is hope for any movement in the achievement of the EFA goal for youth and adults in facilitating their reading acquisition. It is increasingly becoming evident that the impact of ABET programmes and interventions need to be influenced positively by turning around the low throughput and retention rates which in turn affect the quality of the teaching and learning process. Further research could conduct tracer studies to track the lives of ABET learners who persevere with the programmes to completion, those who drop-out permanently, as well as those who 'take breaks' temporarily from the programmes only to return later. If combined with ethnographic case studies of a selected number of students from each of these cohorts, such a study would provide the detail and explanations behind what factors facilitate retention and throughput within the ABET learner's eco-system. Otherwise progress in terms of quality assurance and control within the ABET sector will remain illusive and resource allocation and policy development will continue to undermine the needs of adult learners.

As noted by Scales and Leffert (1999:7) in their work with youth, *"research has shown that the more of these assets young people have, the less likely they are to engage in risky behaviour such as using alcohol or other drugs, or having early unprotected sexual intercourse, and the more likely they are to engage in positive behaviours such as succeeding in school or helping others"*. Since the ABET sector includes youth, young adults and adults, and in the context of lifelong learning and sustainable development, it therefore follows that mapping and mobilising assets existing with the adult learners' eco-system redefines them as producers rather than consumers. This is because it raises their awareness that they possess the building blocks that they need to be healthy, caring, principled and productive individuals. The challenge is for policy makers and other helping professionals to serve as catalysts for change unlocking human potential rather than obstacles impeding growth and independence.

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