



A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACCELERATING EMERGENT LITERACY SKILLS OF DISADVANTAGED PRE-SCHOOLERS

BY

EZETTE DU PLESSIS

B. PRIM ED B.ED (PSIG) M.ED (PSYCH.)

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

**PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR:
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

IN THE

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

SUPERVISOR: **PROF. J. VILJOEN**

**PRETORIA
DECEMBER 2001**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was made possible through the assistance and motivation of significant others:

- God, who provides me with health of body and mind, without whom this study would not be possible.
- My wonderful parents, Mornay and Bee, who taught me to persist.
- The expert guidance, motivation and patience of my supervisor, Professor Johan Viljoen.
- Vellie, Brendon, Craven, Anne, Zane, Nina, Bradley, Megan and all the other children who roamed the streets of Eersterus.
- The personnel and teaching staff at Mesada for offering their premises and learners for the purposes of conducting the research.
- Rina Owen for assistance with the statistical analysis and interpretation.
- Clarise Venter (Academic Information Services) for literature related assistance.

This research is dedicated to
Jan
who makes it worth the while.



AFFIDAVIT

I, Professor J.W.M. Pretorius (PhD) hereby declare that I have edited the PhD dissertation of Ezette du Plessis, titled: “A Conceptual Framework for Accelerating Emergent Literacy Skills of Disadvantaged Pre-Schoolers”.

Signature J.W.M. Pretorius

Date 16 | 5 | 02



A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACCELERATING EMERGENT LITERACY SKILLS OF DISADVANTAGED PRE-SCHOOLERS

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL ORIENTATION, PROBLEM FORMULATION, RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PLAN OF STUDY

1.1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.2	THE QUEST FOR EARLY INTERVENTION	1
1.3	SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS	3
1.3.1	The tradition and definition of the term 'special educational needs'	3
1.3.2	A different perspective on 'special needs' in the South African context	7
1.4	PROVISION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY	8
1.5	RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH	11
1.5.1	Reform of the educational system	11
1.6	RESEARCH PROBLEM	13
1.7	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	15
1.7.1	Deducing the hypothesis	15
1.7.2	Testing a hypothesis	16
1.8	CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS	17
1.8.1	Mediation	17
1.8.2	Informal and Emerging Literacy Skills	18
1.8.3	Acceleration	21
1.8.4	Early Childhood Development	23
1.8.5	Special Educational Needs and Barriers to Learning	23
1.8.6	Contextual Disadvantage and Special Needs	25
1.9	PROGRAMME OF STUDY	27

CHAPTER 2

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

2.1	INTRODUCTION	28
2.2	DEFINING THE TERM ‘SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS’	29
2.3	THE CONTEXT OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS	33
2.3.1	Individual disabilities and difficulties as barriers to learning	36
2.3.2	Social, interpersonal and behavioural barriers to learning	37
2.3.3	Educational deprivation as a barrier to learning	39
2.4	THE ORIGINS OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS	40
2.4.1	Intrinsically generated special educational needs	42
2.4.2	Extrinsically generated special educational needs	43
2.4.3	Special educational need as a reciprocal interaction of intrinsic and extrinsic factors	45
2.5	RETHINKING SPECIAL NEEDS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT	48
2.5.1	Poverty, Health and Disability	49
2.5.2	Contextual disadvantage and Educational deprivation	52
2.6	PROVISION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN SOUTH AFRICA	
2.6.1	The history of provision for special educational needs in South Africa	53
2.6.2	New perspectives on the provision for special educational needs	61
2.7	SUMMARY	63

CHAPTER 3

MEDIATION AND LITERACY ACQUISITION IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CULTURE

3.1	INTRODUCTION	65
-----	---------------------	----



3.2	MEDIATION	68
3.3	LITERACY AS A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ACT	69
3.3.1	Cultural and contextual disadvantage - the origin of special needs?	70
3.3.2	Literacy in a dual culture	73
3.3.3	Mediation in a disadvantaged culture	76
3.4	'CULTURAL LITERACY' - WHY IT HAS TO CHANGE	81
3.5	EARLY EDUCATION AND LITERACY ACQUISITION	82
3.5.1	The quest for early intervention	82
3.5.2	South Africa: The current situation	83
3.6	MEDIATING LITERACY ACQUISITION	85
3.6.1	Literacy mediation at home	86
3.6.2	Literacy mediation at school	87
3.6.2.1	Conventional mediating practices	89
3.6.2.2	'Modern' mediating practices	91
3.6.2.3	Differences between home and school mediation	94
3.7	SUMMARY	96

CHAPTER 4

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF ILLITERACY THROUGH ACCELERATING THE ACQUISITION OF INFORMAL LITERACY SKILLS IN DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS AT RISK OF HAVING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS.

4.1	INTRODUCTION	98
4.2	BREAKING THE CYCLE OF ILLITERACY	100
4.2.1	Early intervention and the prevention of school failure	100
4.2.2	The importance of reading efficiency for academic success	104
4.3	READING ACQUISITION	105
4.3.1	A reading readiness perspective	106
4.3.2	An emergent literacy perspective	107
4.4	THE VYGOTSKIAN PERSPECTIVE ON LITERACY ACQUISITION	109



4.4.1	Development	110
4.4.2	Literacy mediation and instruction	111
4.4.3	The zone of proximal development	112
4.4.4	Literacy acquisition	113
4.5	EFFECTIVE EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES FOR LEARNERS AT RISK	115
4.5.1	Kindergarten Integrated Thematic Experiences	118
4.5.2	Early Prevention of School Failure	118
4.5.3	Writing to Read	119
4.5.4	Story telling and retelling	119
4.5.5	Success for all	120
4.5.6	The Winston-Salem project	121
4.5.7	The Boulder project	122
4.5.8	Reading Recovery	122
4.5.9	Weikart	123
4.6	INSIGHTS GAINED FROM PROGRAMMES	124
4.7	SUMMARY	126

CHAPTER 5

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH, DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF INTERVENTION

5.1	INTRODUCTION	127
5.2	THE RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION	129
5.2.1	The research setting	129
5.2.2	Selection of participants	131
5.2.3	Aim of the research	132
5.2.4	Measuring instruments	134
5.2.4.1	Socio-Economic Deprivation Questionnaire	134
5.2.4.2	Group Test for Five- and Six-Year Olds	135
5.2.4.3	Informal reading and writing readiness checklist	139
5.2.5	Gathering of information	141
5.3	INFORMATION GAINED FROM THE ASSESSMENTS	142
5.3.1	Socio-economic status	142
5.3.2	Mental ages	146
5.3.3	Informal literacy knowledge	146



5.4	DESCRIPTION OF INTERVENTION	149
5.4.1	Materials used and types of text	149
5.4.2	Duration of intervention	150
5.4.3	Lesson content	151
5.4.4	Instructional activities	151
5.5	INFORMATION GAINED FROM POST-TESTING	154
5.5.1	Mental ages	154
5.5.2	Informal literacy knowledge	155
5.5.3	Correlative information	159
5.6	A PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTERVENTION	160
5.6.1	Objective of the proposed framework	162
5.6.2	Components of the framework	164
5.6.2.1	Role of the educator	166
5.6.2.2	Emergent literacy skills as a zone of proximal development	169
5.6.2.3	Learner participation	170
5.7	SUMMARY	173

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1	INTRODUCTION	175
6.2	SUMMARIES	177
6.3	CONTRIBUTING CONCLUSIONS	184
6.4	RECOMMENDATIONS	185
6.4.1	Recommendations for policy makers	185
6.4.2	Recommendations for educators and educational practices	187
6.4.2.1	The role of the parent	188
6.4.2.2	The role of the teacher	189
6.4.2.3	Specialised educational personnel	191
6.4.2.4	Curriculum design and early educational practices	192
6.4.3	Recommendations for further research	194
6.5	CONCLUSION	195



BIBLIOGRAPHY	197
LIST OF FIGURES	216
LIST OF TABLES	217
LIST OF DIAGRAMS	217
LIST OF APPENDIXES	217

SUMMARY

The history of education for learners with special needs and of educational support services in South Africa, like much of the history of our country, reflects massive deprivation and lack of educational provision for the majority of learners. In South Africa a large number of learners are unable to benefit from 'normal' instruction, because of handicapping conditions that precede formal instruction. These conditions are referred to as 'barriers to learning' and are in the way of learning success.

Although it is acknowledged that factors such as physical, intellectual and emotional handicaps imply 'special educational needs', a large number of learners experience barriers to learning as a result of contextual factors. In South Africa factors such as poverty, contextual disadvantage and educational deprivation hinder cognitive development and lead to the development of special needs.

The most significant impediment to learners' cognitive development is the absence of mediated learning experiences at an early age. Mediators (parents and teachers) need to arrange content and guide the learners towards effective learning. An important aspect of early childhood development is exposure to and guidance towards the literacy efficiency that is needed to excel in a world filled with print. Many parents in South Africa are, however, ill-equipped to provide the necessary early guidance for their children. Due to cultural differences and contextual disadvantages many South African children lack emergent literacy skills and enter the school system on an unequal footing with their non-

disadvantaged peers. The existence of special educational needs due to these factors does not pertain to a small number of children. Such contexts and learners therefore need to be identified so that pre-school support programmes can be provided and special needs can be prevented.

It was established in this research that despite educational deprivation it is possible to accelerate the acquisition of emergent literacy skills. A conceptual framework in this regard is provided that stipulates the role of the educator, the role of the learner, the instructional procedures and the relevant literacy skills that would enable literacy acceleration. An important argument in this research, however, states that the absence of a 'prerequisite level of readiness', such as the skills tested by traditional school readiness tests, does not imply that opportunities for the presentation and acquisition of emergent literacy skills should be delayed. Rather, contextual settings that promote the development of special educational needs, need to be identified so that emergent literacy support can be provided.

KEYWORDS

Emergent Literacy Skills

Disadvantaged Pre-Schoolers

Early Childhood Development

Barriers to learning

Educational Deprivation

Special Educational Needs

Prevention of School Failure

Mediation

Contextual disadvantage

Acceleration