

**NATURAL LEARNING IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT: A CRITICAL
ANALYSIS**

by

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THESIS

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to:

MY PARENTS

VENODCHANDRA AND SUKKIAH RAMROOP

THE ANCHORS IN MY LIFE

and

MY BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN

ANOKHA RAMROOP VAN MANEN

RAHUL RAMROOP VAN MANEN

THE WIND IN MY SAILS

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DECLARATION

I, Renuka Suekiah Ramroop, declare that "Natural Learning in the South African Context: A Critical Analysis", is my thesis submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum Studies and has not previously been submitted by me for the degree at this or any other university, that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Date: 17 September 2019

Signed: RS Ramroop

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "RS Ramroop".

ABSTRACT

The Natural Learning Approach (NLA), commonly referred to as ‘unschooling’, is deeply embedded in the belief that children have an innate desire to learn. Therefore, the notion of autonomy and freedom of the learner in the learning and living process is highly valued and the cornerstone of this approach. The home and the child’s broader environment become the authentic space for the unfolding and implementation of the NLA, where learning and living is a seamless experience. This study examined how the individual and the family go about creating their unique ‘curriculum’, how learning happens, and how families negotiate the challenges of this approach. Using a mixed methods research design, a questionnaire was used to collate quantitative data, and a sample of ten families (parents and children) and seven young adults contributed to the qualitative data; documents were also used as part of the qualitative strand. Content, thematic and critical analysis were used to analyse the data to gain and provide a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. The research evidence of this study evinced that diverse, vibrant, holistic and joyful learning is taking place in the NLA homes. Families shared how authentic learning took place when children directed their own learning process and where the diversity of each unique human individual is valued and empowered. Furthermore, the study attested the key role of the parents in the child’s development and wellbeing. Possibilities of how this approach can be extended to broader society under the notion of a learning society is also proposed. Recommendations and further research suggestions are outlined so that possibilities of the NLA becoming the key learning approach to birth a vibrant learning society in South Africa is realised.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NL	Natural Learning
NLA	Natural Learning Approach
SDLC	Self-directed Learning Centres
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Not all those who wander are lost. JRR Tolkien 1993

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Compulsory schooling has become an accepted and key component of modern society, with the vast majority of people embracing the idea that achieving success in adult life rests on having first achieved academic success within the school system (Dewey 2015; Holt 2004). Nevertheless, from early in the 20th century, concerns about the impact of compulsory schooling on the individual and society began to surface (Dewey 2015; Holt 2004; Miller 1997; Lewellyn 1998). For instance, in 1938, John Dewey (2015:27) posed this thought-provoking question: "Why do children associate learning with boredom and drudgery?" Today, almost a century later, the schooling system continues to follow an educational model derived from the 17th century model (Gray 2013; Abbott 1997). In recent years, it has become common to hear people express their disillusionment with the huge amount of homework, rigid schedules, humiliating punishments, heavy academic schedules and various social ills that children confront at school (Gatto 2016; Young 2016; Ginsberg 2007; Groves 2009). Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that schools, as they are presently structured, are not able to cater for the needs and different learning styles of all learners (Hartshorne 2016; McGrath 2010; Griffith 1998) and have become less and less individualised, tending towards a one-size-fits-all culture (Davies & Aurini 2003). These circumstances have led to the relevance of traditional, compulsory schooling as well its capacity to meet the needs of modern society being questioned (Kirschner 2008). This dissatisfaction combined with concern for the wellbeing of their children have resulted in increasing numbers of parents seeking alternatives to a government-managed schooling system for their children's education. Home education has become one of the alternatives.

1.2 WHAT IS NATURAL LEARNING?

Home education is when parents undertake to manage their children's learning rather than send their children to school (Ray 2000; Griffith 1999). However, within the home-education movement, there is also a significant group of people who choose not to direct their children's learning. They have the fundamental belief that children learn primarily through everyday experiences and are therefore able to direct and manage their own learning process (Holt 1989; McGrath 2010; Ramroop 2011; Gray 2013). In their view, the responsibility of the parent is to provide an enriching home environment and other opportunities to help optimise the learning interests, styles, abilities and natural development of their children by creating a home environment of 'cooperative partnership'. Children are given the space and opportunity to direct their own learning with support and encouragement from the parents. This type of education is most commonly labelled 'unschooling', a term created by John Holt (1977), who is considered the modern leader of the unschooling approach. Other terms like self-directed learning, interest-driven learning, autonomous learning, natural learning and life learning are also used to describe the unschooling approach. In this study the term 'natural learning' (NL) is favoured as it best encapsulates the essence of this approach to education.

In the early 1960s, a teacher named John Holt proposed that children are extremely good at learning when they are very interested in what they are learning. Subsequently, he claimed that children have a natural passion to learn from everything around them by observing, thinking, testing, experimenting, speculating and theorising about their world all the time (Holt 1989:152). However, when there is an attempt to direct, interfere with or change children's learning styles and timing, they are almost always slowed or stopped in their learning process (Holt 1983).

In a NL environment, children live a life of seamless learning. Since learning is not separated from life, learning is authentic, enjoyable and long lasting. The children generate meaning on both cultural and personal levels (Bertozzi 2006). They learn not to prepare for a test or to win someone else's approval but to satisfy their needs and curiosity. Lewellyn (1998) states that curiosity thrives on freedom to explore and therefore cannot flourish in schools, which, in its very structure, denies freedom. To nurture this quality of curiosity, parents take care to create an environment that creates

a context for stimulating the NL process. Parents also ensure that the environment supports the wellbeing of the child and that there are plenty of space and opportunity to enjoy life. For instance, they may drive children to a place of interest, ensure a good supply of resources, or facilitate access to resources and relevant people. In this way, the children through active participation and interaction in a reciprocal way form their own unique understanding of the world around them (Medlin 2000). It should be noted that NL does not exclude either ‘traditional’ subjects or tuition: It is included if appropriate for the learning interest at a given time and directed by the child. In addition, it should be made clear that NL does not lead to isolationism (Hill 2000), in fact, families come together to collaborate for a wide variety of reasons, from sport to recitals to camps.

Another consideration is the fact that NL actually predates more recent traditional schooling. In hunter-gatherer societies, children learnt all the knowledge, skills and wisdom needed for their survival by interacting with their families and their communities. They taught themselves through self-directed play and exploration and created a lifestyle that was sustainable and spanned thousands of years (Gray 2013; Hewlett, Fouts, Boyette, & Hewlett 2011). The agricultural period took away the freedom children had as hunter-gatherers because they had to work on the farms, it was the advent of traditional compulsory schooling, in accordance with the 17th century Prussian model, that put an end to NL and brought with it a separation between learning and living (Gray 2013). By the 19th century, most governments had adopted this model and introduced compulsory schooling, entrenching the idea that learning can only take place at a school with a qualified teacher (Gray 2013). Elders, the custodians of ancient life skills and wisdom, were relegated to the category of ‘uneducated’ and therefore no longer valued (Semali 1999).

There have been several attempts to bring about change in the traditional schooling system, with alternatives proposed like free schools (Miller 2007), small ‘cottage’ schools (McQuillan 1997), homeschooling and now the Natural Learning Approach (NLA). However, institutions are resistant to change, and the situation of schooling cannot be changed without changing the system (McQuillan 1997). Moreover, if societies are to function in accordance with democratic principles, why are children schooled in an autocratic manner? In schooling institutions, children are required to be both “subordinate as well as passive recipients, and not the active, responsible

citizens that a democracy needs to thrive" (McQuillan 1997:638). As Darling-Hammond observes (in McQuillan 1997:648), "education should not be just *for* democracy but *as* democracy", where children participate fully in a democratic pluralistic society.

It is possible to imagine a society where children and parents are solely responsible for their education and the state supports this by providing all the necessary resources to help facilitate this learning process. In the same way that parents in an NLA home provide a stimulating environment, governments and communities would have a shared responsibility for creating environments that support the learning and development of every member of society. Ivan Illich in his book *Deschooling Society* (2002:75) states that "a good educational system should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives". In this way, the NLA with all its benefits would become the way a society learns and develops. By implication, this study also argues for a new framework for education in South Africa.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

As discussed, over the last century people have begun to question the role of traditional schooling in learning (Gray 2013; Holt 1983,1989; Dewey 2015; Dewey & Dewey 1962), as it seems to be stifling both children's development and the learning process. It is this awareness that motivates many parents to choose to manage their children's learning by providing tuition, curriculum, tests and exams in their home environment. HSLDA, a webpage dedicated to homeschooling in South Africa, estimates that there are about 75 000 homeschoolers in the country and that this number is growing by 20% each year (2016). On another website, the number is now conservatively estimated as over a hundred thousand children, indicating that the number of homeschoolers are growing quite steadily, including the number of Black homeschoolers (Van der Eems 2018).

Meanwhile, in contemporary democratic societies, there is a discernible shift in consciousness towards a more wholesome, organic, 'attachment parenting' lifestyle (McGrath 2010:9). This emerging dynamic has spurred further questions in relation to learning and education, thereby creating space for another movement in education. In this context, within the homeschooling group there are NL families who believe that neither traditional schooling nor traditional homeschooling provide optimal learning

and living that empowers their children and encourages a love for learning and that the institution of learning becomes more important than the individual as children are provided with a curriculum and accompanying time frames as well as a structure, with very little freedom for their own needs and interests (Holt 1983, 1989, 2004; Gray & Riley 2013). This has paved the way for the NLA, an approach that is being embraced by a significant number of families in South Africa. While it is difficult to obtain the exact numbers of those who are using this approach, it is possible to estimate from visits to social media forums that just over 3 800 families are interested in the NLA. According to Geach (2019), there are over a thousand families implementing this approach. However, this is a cautionary estimate as not all the NLA families are on social media forums and not all who are interested in the NLA are implementing it.

There is very little research, if any, on the NLA in South Africa and it is not known why families choose to follow this approach, how families manage the process, how learning happens within this approach, and the success measures. This study endeavours to fill this gap and contribute by providing an in-depth understanding and critical analysis of how this approach is being implemented in various homes across South Africa. The NLA is worthy of investigation because if children educated as natural learners are happier, love learning and are more successful as adults (Gray 2013; Sorey & Duggan 2008), then insights from the NLA cannot be ignored. In fact, these insights can generate new knowledge that could be applied to learning more broadly.

1.4 ROLE OF THEORY

NLA is broadly embedded in the constructivist approach to learning in that it values the autonomy of learners in their own active and unique learning process (Ormrod 2016). Constructivism advocates that learners actively organise and make sense of their own learning in unique and idiosyncratic ways. Ultanir (2012:196) also states that in terms of constructivism, ‘development of understanding requires the learner to actively engage in meaning-making’. Von Glaserfeld (1984:1) with his radical constructivism approach, further iterates that “for constructivists, all communication and all understanding are a matter of interpretive construction on the part of the experiencing subject”. Therefore, some radical constructivists support the idea of total control by the learner and believe that teachers should not have much influence over

how children learn. In other words, the constructivists “place the reins for directing learning squarely in the hands of the learner” (Ormrod 2016:174).

The NLA further echoes the idea of social constructivism in that sometimes children together with their parents, siblings or friends work together to create knowledge (Lock & Strong 2010). Holt (1977), in promoting NL, echoes the neo-Piagetian theory that “children acquire new knowledge by through both unintentional and intentional learning processes” (Ormrod 2016:308). In an NLA household, learning takes place all the time and often in an unconscious way as learning happens as life is lived. This ‘discovery learning’ is a child-initiated and child-directed effort and accepts that children can learn more by exploring an object/idea/phenomenon without adult intervention (Holt 1989; Ormrod 2016).

Synergy with some principles of Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory are also evident in NL, most particularly, in relation to the concept of play and how play allows children to cognitively ‘stretch’ themselves and explore behaviours and learning that must conform to their own society and culture. According to Vygotsky (1978), play is not a waste of time.

The NLA finds a home in constructionism that focusses on “learning by making” (Papert & Harel 1991). Here, the art of learning or “learning to learn, looks at how tools, media and contexts boost self-directed learning” (Ackermann 2001:1) in different situations (Papert & Harel 1991:9). The NLA agrees with Ackermann (2001:1) that “integrating both Piaget’s constructivist and Papert’s constructionism provides rich understanding of the learning process”.

Lastly, the NLA embraces the theory of anarchism in that the learning is situated within the autonomy and individual freedom of the learner (Todd 2012). In the NLA home, “children are enabled to take charge of their autonomy, practice self-management and live the values of equality, justice, solidarity, freedom and happiness” (Fremeaux & Jordan 2012:108–109). This is very different to the institutionalised form of authority over the nature of education that schools create.

Most of the learning theories explored are still within the boundaries of an institution and suggest ways in which the institution of schooling can be reformed to support the theories. This study of the NLA is of particular importance because it distances itself from the institutional learning paradigm and views the child’s natural environment as

the most important factor in supporting an optimal life of learning and living. This is what distinguishes this study as a unique endeavour into critically examining the NLA in South Africa.

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Aim

To investigate the Natural Learning Approach in the South African context through a critical lens.

1.5.2 Objectives

- To explore the trajectory of the NLA and analyse the NLA learning process.
- To examine how the NLA is practised in South Africa.
- To explore the current practice of the NLA internationally.
- To inform educational policy on the NLA in South Africa and explore possibilities for a new education system.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed methods research methodology that combines both the quantitative and qualitative strands. Because of the lack of information on the NLA in South Africa, it was decided that both data strands would provide a complete understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher used a questionnaire that contained both quantitative and qualitative questions. Interviews, both individual and focus group, and document analysis provided rich information on the NLA in South Africa. Thematic, content and critical analysis was mainly used to analyse the data. In Chapter 3, the research methodology is described and discussed in detail.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As literature in this area of education is scarce, this pioneering study will have a definite impact on the understanding of NL in South Africa and the potential positive influence it could have on education in general. The notion of learning being placed in the domain of the individual within the responsibility of the family and communities

changes the traditional understanding of education and the idea of compulsion. In other words, the research examines a “modern domestic revolution that situates the locus of familial control and accountability in the home” (Grunzke 2010:179). Moreover, it brings to the fore past research and educational theories that advocated for more freedom for children to direct their own learning trajectory. By presenting the evidence on how easily these learning theories and ideas unfold in the NLA home, how easily joyful and authentic learning takes place, this study highlights its great potential in becoming the preferred approach to learning and living. Furthermore, it reveals an understanding of what is inherent within the present schooling system that makes the schools unable to support optimal learning and development in children and society.

By understanding how NL functions at the micro-level of families, leaning towards a more egalitarian ethos, it raises implications for family and societal studies. This study also looked at how the fundamentals of NL can be extended to the national schooling system. It will broaden the understanding that through the NLA, societies can transform itself to have a vibrant learning culture that extends to all members of the community. It will also impact on the discussions of how to authentically include indigenous knowledge systems and bring back community involvement into the education arena so that education becomes a seamless part of living rather than alienated from the community and its culture.

This study includes recommendations for a framework for a different education system that have the potential to empower individuals, families and communities to manage their own growth and development more effectively, and therefore, contribute positively to the growth and development of the country. This study also has the potential to contribute to the deepening of learning theories.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Natural Learning (NL): Commonly referred to as unschooling, natural learning is range of life philosophies that centres around the notion that children have an innate desire to learn and are able to direct that desire, and therefore, manage their own learning growth. Children learn through life experiences as families live together and explore the world around them. Children learn through play, personal experiences, household responsibilities, work experiences and

natural social interaction rather than through a traditional compulsory school system. Children are given the freedom and autonomy to follow their learning interests with the parents/adults facilitating the process if and when necessary. Their hands-on, spontaneous and real-world experiences become valuable learning activities. There is a strong belief that children who follow their own learning interests in a natural environment are more equipped to handle their lives and the challenges that come with it (Gray 2013; Greve & Thomsen 2016; Holt 1989).

- Natural Learning Approach (NLA): This is when families adopt the tenets of NL as their fundamental philosophy of learning and living. In other words, NL is their preferred approach to raising their children.
- Learning Society: A learning society is a society that de-institutionalises learning; in other words, learning does not take place through compulsion in an institution but is an integral part of society where alternative institutions and community resources become key to learning. Learning is not confined to a certain age or time period. Rather, in a learning society, learning becomes a continuum as long as life (Illich 2002). In a learning society, individuals have freedom to find their own path to learning and living. There is also a belief that the potential to teach and learn resides in everyone (Levinger 2001). Faure (1972) focusses on expanding freedom at the individual level and on equal respect being given to all avenues of learning. According to Otieno-Hongo and Ochien'g, "Learning societies promote deep learning processes of reflection, dialogue and action to create futures that are in harmony with notions of justice, love and interdependence" (2001:31). Learning, according to Hartwell (2016), transforms our social identity and therefore boosts our capacity to contribute to society.
- Egalitarianism: The dictionary states that egalitarianism is the doctrine that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities. Therefore, in this research the prioritising of equality for all people is seen in the way learning is approached, how children are given freedom and respect and how families organise their general family life. (Gray 2013; Online Dictionary 2019).

- Home Education: It is an umbrella term for all home-based learning and includes homeschooling and NL. In other words, both formal or informal learning that takes place in the home as opposed to a school or any other institution external to the family (Griffith 1999).
- Homeschooling: A type of home education where children receive formalized educational elements in a manner that resembles a school in both curriculum and/or pedagogy (Grunzke 2010).

It is important to note that NL is often housed within the research, discussions and statistics of home education and homeschooling. Therefore, in this research these terms are sometimes used to detail information in the absence of specific reference to NL and the NLA. For example, most research on socialisation use the terms homeschooling or home education but the data is also relevant for NL.

1.9 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 provided the background and motivation of the study and an explanation of the term NL. It briefly outlined the theories that underpin NL and put forward the aims and objectives of the study.

Chapter 2 provides the literature review and goes into details explaining various terms and pertinent topics that relate to and enhance this study. For example, ‘what is learning’ is detailed. A critique on the present schooling system is presented and reasons for families choosing the NLA is explained. Discussions and debates on whether NLA can be implemented in all families and societies are also included.

Chapter 3 explains and details the methodology used in the research. It explains how the research unfolded, describes the design, the research collection instruments and details how the analysis was done for each instrument.

Chapter 4 presents the data that was collated from the various instruments. The quantitative and qualitative findings are discussed and inferences drawn from the findings are outlined.

Chapter 5 presents the summary of the research and demonstrates how the objectives of the study was met. Using the collated data and the analysis, it further explains how the new learning framework can be used to create a new way of learning for society. It provides recommendations and other areas for possible further research

1.10 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

This chapter provided the background and motivation of this study. It outlined some of the general reasons why some families have opted to follow the NLA. Some basic explanations of what the NLA is and how it is implemented in homes were also provided. The basic theories that underpin the NLA were outlined in a brief discussion. The brief mention of the research methodology and design ensured a good overview of the study in this chapter. A detailed discussion on the research methodology and design is included in Chapter 3. The discussion on the research problem paved the way for the purpose, aims and objectives of the study. Definitions for some of the general terms used in the study was provided.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

You may say I'm a dreamer but I'm not the only one. J Lennon (1988).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

To understand the NLA and how it is practised by families in South Africa, it is important that it is placed both within the context of compulsory schooling in general as well as how and why people arrive at the decision to embark on NL. Therefore, this chapter is arranged in two sections: Firstly, a theoretical framework where the various preceding learning theories that underpin NL are explored, and secondly, a literature review where the basic tenets of NL are discussed. To place NL within the broader learning context, a brief history of schooling is given and the general critique of schools in the present day is deliberated on. This chapter also addresses some additional, related pertinent questions like what is learning, what constitutes socialisation and what is the role of parents. In addition, the chapter explores the possibility of a new national framework where NL within communities can become the key learning approach and birth a vibrant learning society.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Dewey (2015), theories of education most often rest on two opposing ideas. One idea is that education is an internal developmental process based on the student's natural talent. The other is the notion that education is an external development process, independent of abilities or natural talent. Of these two opposing ideas, the second one seems to have gained the biggest focus on education over the ages. However, according to Panasuk and Lewis (2012), the complex process of learning cannot be explained exclusively through any single theory. Rather, various theories have something to offer. Therefore, a combination of differing perspectives might better explain learning and perhaps give rise to a new paradigm in education that could possibly influence the development of new theories.

Most theories are built on the work of preceding thinkers. NL, with its eclectic nature, encompasses many ideas and theories of preceding thinkers and innovators to inform

its own way forward. From thinkers and innovators like Piaget, Tagore, Papert, Dewey, Freire, Ferrer and others, as well as from common sense about children and families, one can put together the guiding principles of the NLA. However, to understand the essence of NL, a discussion of some of the different theories that underpin it follows below.

2.2.1 Constructivism

Constructivism began when Piaget's keen observation of his own children and their development led to him theorising about how children construct knowledge. He proposed that humans cannot be given information, but rather that humans construct their own knowledge from their general interaction with the world around them (Ormrod 2016). He found that children assimilate new knowledge into their own schemas and are also able to change their schemas when they must accommodate new information. He recognised that children go through various stages of development at their own pace in their learning process as they interact with the world. As an epistemology, constructivism is not a theory about teaching but a theory about knowledge and learning as it provides an explanation of the nature of knowledge and how humans learn and claims that real understanding is only gained through previous knowledge and experience (Jenkins 2000; Ultanir 2012). In other words, the foundation of constructivism is that individuals interpret and relate to the same object/experience in different and uniquely personal ways. Constructivism can be seen as a scientific and a meta theory because it attempts to define possibilities and limitations through reality as observed in daily life. Although there are different theorists, like Dewey, Vygotsky and Von Glaserfeld, who developed various philosophical ideas in different contexts, the common thread is that constructivism focusses on the nature of knowing and the active role of the learner (Jones & Brader-Araje 2002).

In fact, the key focus of constructivism is on knowing as a process, rather than on knowledge as a product. This means that the development of understanding and meaning-making requires active engagement on the part of the learner (Jenkins 2000; Ultanir 2012). Understood in this way, knowledge is not found but rather constructed. This carries implications for the role of educators to provide learners with opportunities and incentives to construct their own learning and meaning-making rather than merely dispensing information (Von Glaserfeld 2016).

Ultanir (2012:197) concludes that constructivism is a “theory of knowledge and learning in which the individual generates his or her own knowledge, constructs knowledge in the process of tackling problems” and acknowledges that knowledge as a process is a product of knowing. Thus, the relationship between reality (which can only be known in a personal and subjective way) and knowledge is an outcome of individual and social experiences. Furthermore, the construction of knowledge takes place when new knowledge is actively incorporated into existing knowledge even while the understanding of this reality is being revised and re-constructed through new experiences and time.

However, even though meaning-making is personal, it does not mean that knowledge can be anything. Dewey (2015) states that even though real education is achieved via experience, some experiences can be counterproductive and can limit the possibility of acquiring new richer experiences. On the other hand, Panasuk and Lewis (2012), in agreement with Holt (2008), state that there is no experience from which nothing is learnt and no learning is passive. In other words, learning can occur when the learner is merely listening or when the experience is coerced, bribed, bullied and even negative. For example, a person spending meaningless hours on a dull repetitious task learns to hate the task, learns about the depth of his resentment, and perhaps, learns about oppression because he had no choice in the matter. However, in this negative experience, learning, even though not rich and nourishing for the learner, is still occurring.

Von Glaserfeld (2016) draws inspiration from re-interpreting Piaget’s theory and developed a theory known as radical constructivism. According to radical constructivism, learning is a result of mental constructs in an individual’s mind that materializes from an individual’s interpretation of new experiences by drawing from the individual’s past experiences (that is, prior knowledge). A learner therefore uses old knowledge and experiences in the process of constructing new knowledge.

Another key person who contributed to the constructivist approach is Maria Montessori, who advocated self-directed, individual and cooperative group learning. Her main argument is that children have a crucial learning period for particular learning content at different sensitive phases (Montessori 2002). She advocates a stimulating learning environment that can sustain a continuous learning process for the child. The child is to be independent and free to choose what to engage in and for how long. She

believes that having this freedom allows the child to develop inner discipline and encourages creative problem solving, critical thinking and independence. This echoes the statement of Ultanir (2012) that making the child the centre of learning should be the task of the teacher. The key points of the constructivist paradigm are that learners are the key individuals in the learning process, where they gain knowledge and skills by interacting with their environment, constructing their own learning and finding their own solutions to problems encountered along their learning journey. The learner is autonomous and independent, and their education is optimal when facilitated in the ‘real’ world, rather than in the confines of an institution, especially ones that do not uphold democratic principles (Ultanir 2012).

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the NLA is broadly embedded in the constructivist approach to learning in that it values the autonomy of the learner in their own active and unique learning process (Ormrod 2016). Constructivism proposes that learners actively organise and make sense of their own learning in unique and idiosyncratic ways, and this is the key idea in NL. Constructivists also assert that development of understanding requires the learner to be actively engaged in meaning-making. Von Glaserfeld (1984:1), with his radical constructivism approach, further iterates that “for constructivists, all communication and all understanding are a matter of interpretive construction on the part of the experiencing subject”. Therefore, some radical constructivists support the idea of total control by the learner and believe that teachers should not have much influence over how children learn. In other words, the constructivists “place the reins for directing learning squarely in the hands of the learner” (Ormrod 2016:174). This is a belief that is cemented in the philosophy of the NLA.

2.2.2 Social Constructivism

NL further echoes the idea of social constructivism in that sometimes children work together with their parents, siblings or friends to create knowledge (Lock & Strong 2010). Holt (1977), in promoting NL, is in agreement with the neo-Piagetian theory (Ormrod 2016) that children acquire new knowledge by hands-on experiences through both intentional and unintentional learning processes. In a NL household, learning takes place at all times and often in an unconscious way as learning happens as life is lived. This ‘discovery learning’ is a child-initiated and child-directed effort and

accepts that children can learn more by exploring an object/idea/phenomenon without adult intervention (Holt 1989; Ormrod 2016).

Synergy with some principles of Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory are also evident in the NLA. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory affirms learning as a social process and that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition (Lock & Strong 2010). Vygotsky believes learning takes place on two levels (Lock & Strong 2010):

- Learning takes place first through interaction with others (social level) before it is integrated into the learner's cognition (individual level).
- An adult or more experienced peer is necessary and important to further support the child's further cognitive development, evolving understanding of knowledge and development of complex skills.

Wertsch (1985) reiterates that according to Vygotsky children acquire knowledge through contacts and interactions and then later assimilate and internalise the knowledge, adding their personal value to it. Williams and Burden (1997) assert that sociocultural theory advocates that education should be concerned with the following: Learning to learn, developing skills and strategies to continue to learn, making learning experiences meaningful and relevant to the individual, and developing and growing the 'whole' person.

The concept of play within Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is also evident in the NLA, in particular, how play allows children to cognitively stretch themselves and explore behaviours and learning in their own society and culture. According to Vygotsky (1978), play is not a waste of time. The value of play and socialisation as well as learning is further discussed in Section 2.3.9 to show how this aspect of sociocultural theory underpins the NLA.

2.2.3 Constructionism

As mentioned in Chapter 1, NL embraces the constructionists notion of "learning by making" (Papert & Harel 1991:1), where the art of learning looks at how self-directed learning is boosted by tools, media and contexts (Ackermann 2001) in a multitude of learning situations (Papert & Harel 1991). Constructionism houses the idea that knowledge remains grounded in contexts or is situated and shaped by the way it is

used. Therefore, knowledge is not a commodity that must be transmitted, nor should it be removed or detached from the situations in which it is constructed and actualised. Rather, knowledge is constructed out of both a contextual and personal experience (Ackermann 2001). In summary, constructionism emphasises that connectedness rather than separation is a powerful means of gaining understanding and therefore learning. This immersion into the topic of learning as the key to learning is completely embraced by the NLA. Children using the NLA have the freedom to choose their area of interest and to become totally immersed in it. This immersion is facilitated by the parents and other adults in the children's context. However, the NLA families do demonstrate that integrating both Piaget's constructivist and Papert's constructionism provides a rich understanding of the learning process (Ackerman 2016).

2.2.4 Anarchism

Lastly, the NLA embraces the theory of anarchism in that the learning is situated within the autonomy and individual freedom of the learner (Todd 2012). The word 'anarchy' is often baulked at and misunderstood. Anarchy does not mean chaos, nor should it be dismissed with crude stereotypes of lawlessness. Anarchism is a cluster of ideologies and theories that share commonalities with each other (Mueller 2012). In the case of anarchy in education, it is the situation of opposing government control in all aspects of education, especially the hierarchical power relationships advocated by compulsory schooling, and thereby ensuring autonomy in communities, families and most importantly in individuals (Haworth 2012).

The bandying of globalisation of education as the route to success has dominated educational discourse and enabled huge international movements to standardise curriculum and commodify knowledge. Furthermore, the dominance of the present neoliberal reforms has brought with it the privatisation of public institutions, where schools and universities rely on funding from corporations and where the general ethos remains hierarchical and oppressive (Haworth 2012). However, anarchism in education has remained rather fluid, as it changes according to the needs and will of people, with different people putting forth various ideas, albeit within the same themes of being critical of power dynamics and the question of autonomy. For example, Rocker (2004) sees anarchy as that which exists beyond a fixed and self-enclosed social system. Freire (1973) highlights the need to understand the authoritarian power

dynamics of educational systems and the importance of respecting the autonomy of the learner.

However, for a definite understanding of how anarchism finds its place in the NLA, Emma Goldman's definition provides a sound argument as she states that anarchism stands for liberation from the shackles and restraint of government (Goldman 2000). She further states that anarchism stands for a social order that is based on the free grouping of individuals, respecting their own unique idiosyncratic needs. This sentiment is echoed in the idea of developing communities of practice within communities (see Section 2.3.14.2). Fundamentally, states Mueller (2012:15), "anarchist theory operates under the notion that people can and should determine the direction of their own lives, and that social arrangements should be constructed with this aim in mind". The NLA also embraces the notion within anarchist theory that education is about emancipation and cultivation where the aim is to develop free and critical minds that in turn will cultivate the values of liberty, equality and solidarity in society.

As with our ancient ancestors' (hunter-gatherers) value of freedom, the anarchists too explain that freedom is for everybody, with the only limit being the equal freedom of others. Thus, freedom of the individual is about the development of one's authentic potential and where the person pursues his life in cooperation with others (Mueller 2012). In the NLA home, children are enabled to take charge of their autonomy, practice self-management and live the values of equality, justice, solidarity, freedom and happiness (Fremeaux & Jordan 2012). This is very different to the institutionalised form of authority that schools create (Todd 2012).

The theories outlined above that underpin the NLA reinforce the notion that learning is not about merely acquiring information nor about submitting to other people's ideas/values. Rather, it is about giving space and opportunities to children to discover their own world, their own interests and strengths and their own voice, and to live an authentic life within their communities. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the learning theories discussed here are still institution-based and suggestions on how these theories can be supported within the institutions are explored. Whereas this study distances itself from the institutional learning paradigm and views children's natural home and community environment as key in supporting an optimal life of learning and living.

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.3.1 Brief History of Schooling

Schooling has been part of ancient societies, albeit mostly within the religious and cultural spheres of life. For example, in ancient India, Takshashila or Taxila was established as an important centre of learning for the Vedic/Hindu and Buddhists from the 6th century BC to the 5th century A.D. (Burdak 2018; New World Encyclopedia 2015). It also attracted scholars from Greece, Babylonia, Syria, Arabia and China and offered a wide range of subjects. It is believed that it housed 10 600 scholars. The ancient Greeks sent their sons to one of the many schools that existed, studying a variety of subjects from mathematics to gymnastics. By the middle of the 4th century, the Romans were also educating their girls and boys in various subjects. Like the Greeks, the Romans too paid for the education of their children. The Roman Catholic Church's dominance in Europe between 500 A.D. and 1 500 A.D. kept learning in the churches, monasteries and in their schooling systems where the priests transmitted knowledge to the people (Darling-Hammond, Austin, Orcutt, & Rosso 2001). Dewey (2011) concludes that the development of writing and complex societies resulted in the perceived need for some form of official learning.

The modern compulsory schooling model started in the 17th century in the Prussian state of Germany. Like most other schooling movements, religion played a key role in that the church felt that children needed to learn to read the Bible and know the Protestant work ethic. The primary method was rote memorisation (Gray 2013). According to various studies (Gray 2013; Gatto 2010), our modern schools are modelled on the schools that were started in Prussia by Hermann Francke. He developed a curriculum, a strict schedule, and strict disciplinary methods that included corporal punishment. He advocated the use of constant monitoring and supervision to “break, and then reform, children’s will” (Gray 2013:59). He believed that children are not capable of regulating their lives, and if left to themselves, they would be idle and sinful. Francke went further and developed a standardised curriculum and came up with the idea of certified trained teachers. He ensured that everyone followed a ‘timetable’ for learning. During the early 19th century, state-run compulsory schooling began to be entrenched in various countries and this 17th century thinking still oils the present schooling environment.

However, by the 18th century, the function of the schools changed from allegiance to the church to the need to contain peasants and turn them into loyal well-behaved citizens. Schools thus became the domain of the state and not the church. By the late 1830s, compulsory schooling was enforced in other states of Germany and then other countries followed suit, making schooling an essential function for the national security of the state (for example, Napoleon saw school as the first step to the military) and its economy. By 1852, the United States (US) began with earnest attempts to get compulsory schooling into all states. In 1870, the English Parliament passed the Education Act, also supported by the reformers who pushed for the wellbeing of the children who were being exploited in factories. They felt, among other things, that getting children into schools would help break the cycle of poverty and give them opportunities for advancement (Gray 2013). This model was then exported to the colonies, making compulsory schooling the global phenomenon it is today.

According to Christie (1994), in South Africa, in 1658 Jan Van Riebeeck established the first school in the Cape; it was for slaves and intended to teach them Christian values. In 1663, the second school was opened for all children. The non-segregated schools basically taught religion and basic reading, writing and arithmetic. However, after 1815, the British took over control of the Cape with the intention of making it a more permanent settlement, and by 1839, had set up a Department of Education (Christie 1994). The state provided some schools and provided aid to other schools. Many mission schools were also scattered throughout South Africa. Schooling was not compulsory until 1902. However, this rule was only for White children and Black education was still in the hands of the church mission schools, with the government providing some financial aid. In 1953, Hendrik Verwoerd began the era of apartheid education. Free and compulsory education for Black children was only made law in 1980 after the De Lange Report, which was compiled after the upheaval of the 1976 Soweto student uprising (South African History Online 2017).

However, worldwide, the main reason for mass schooling was because of the shortage of skilled workers as businesses and governments felt that the education system had to meet the needs of the growing economies (Gray 2013). With governments in control of education, all children were expected to adhere to the ethos of that state, for example, if the government is fascist, the children will be taught fascism, and if it is capitalist, it will teach capitalism (Bhave 2008). Therefore, it is believed that in most

countries, since their inception, public schools have been instruments to disseminate capitalist ideology (Hyslop-Margison & Ramirez 2018). Schools still emulate the factory system of the industrial era: There are whistles to indicate time, strict time schedules and structures, authoritarian personnel, and alongside this, the general regimentation of every aspect of the system has become characteristic of schools all over. In other words, schools seem to have been invented to ensure that the population is well trained to fit into the army and into the factories (Gray 2013; Gatto 2010; Freire 2016). Yet, at the same time, state schools, by categorising people into potential jobs, further divide society through separating learning from labour and intellectual work from manual work to form separate social classes (Bhave 2008).

From this brief account of the history of schooling, it seems that schools were designed for another era and its purpose was for that context. Unfortunately, little has changed in a typical school today where schooling is still a project of massification (Despres 2008; Petrovic & Rolstad 2016). Influenced mainly by the behaviourist learning theories, schools then and today display highly sequenced and structured curriculums, programmed instructional approaches, workbooks, rote learning through reinforcement and practice as well as a punishment/reward system. According to Abbott (1997), this can work if we still want 95% of society to be good only at conformity and only 5% to be creative, thinking people.

2.3.2 A Critique on Schooling

What does a traditional school look like? Among other features, one will find buildings that resemble a factory or prison, children almost always sitting in neat rows, working quietly or listening to the teachers within a general atmosphere of fear and suspicion (Gatto 2010; Kumar 2008). Furthermore, in general, traditional schools are based on three fundamentals: The school transfers skills and knowledge of the subject to the children; the purpose of moral education is to develop habits that conform to the standards and rules of behaviour of the school and state; and the general school organisation ensures that rules established around the relationship between teachers and students, curriculums, examinations and advancement are maintained. The traditional goal of education is to prepare children for life by giving them the knowledge and skills required and ensuring that they are well-behaved, respectful and obedient (Dewey 2015; Kuntz & Petrovic 2018; Black 2018b). Illich captured similar views when

he defined schools as an “age specific, teacher-related process requiring full-time attendance at an obligatory curriculum” (2002:25).

It is becoming increasingly apparent that schools as institutions no longer support the needs of the modern 21st century society (Despres 2008. According to Ng, Staton and Scane (1995), since the 1980s, the debate over the meaning and purpose of education has occupied the centre of political and social life in the US. More people are becoming aware of the negative impact of modern schooling with its militaristic character that puts a huge restriction on the intellectual freedom of children (Dewey 2015) and intrudes on children's free and family time (Gray 2016). There are many authors who provide strong research evidence that concludes that traditional schooling pursues the wrong goals, is less effective, and is an outdated educational paradigm. It is Hern's (2008) contention that schools are driven by institutional needs rather than the needs of the learners. Furthermore, it creates widespread collateral damage because the coercive approach that is the characteristic of factory schooling is counterproductive (Wheatley 1999). After all, the uniformity emphasised at schools is artificial and is only achieved through the enforcement of attention, decorum and obedience (Dewey 2015). Often, healthy students who discern the manipulation of the schooling system, rebel and receive a negative label. Yet it is the schooling system that guarantees social regression because it demands that children and their parents transfer responsibility from the self to the institution, resulting in infringement on family values and a general feeling of disempowerment (Illich 2002; McCabe 2009). Moreover, all schools have one fundamental approach, that is, the idea that one person's judgement determines what and when another person must learn (Illich 2002).

Since the invention of schools, young people have been made to believe that everything in the world can be measured, including their imaginations (Illich 2002). Furthermore, schools have assumed the role of the sole experts and providers of education. In the past, people had limited access to information and traditional educational resources. However, with the freedom of access to information offered by the plethora of online opportunities, education no longer needs to be a place-based activity handed down by only a few knowledgeable and expert people (Anthony 2015). With easy access to the vast information on the Internet, Google is the magical portal to all kinds of information, tutorials, courses and so much more. Learning in schools is about the acquisition of specific aspects of knowledge and skills, singled out by a few

'experts' and made into a curriculum. This knowledge is in relation to standardised tests, which becomes the measurement of the learning achievement (Hartwell 2016). This focus is too narrow in purpose to help the child grow in the wider sense. This emphasis on standardised tests in schools gives no room for any creativity, innovation or individuality (Black 2018b). Or maybe it is the case of standardised tests ensuring standardised minds (Huang 2014). According to Hartwell (2016), standardised testing houses two presuppositions: The children are ranked against each other and into categories of dull, average and bright, and in testing, for one child to be doing better the other needs to do worse. This context pits children against each other and the structure and ethos of schools can promote a very competitive and Darwinian survival of the fittest environment (Hartwell 2016). This is in stark contrast to Tagore's thinking (Singh & Rawat 2013) that the pursuit of knowledge should be supplemented by living and loving and that education is not about enriching ourselves but about building relationships. His statement, "We have become learned but ceased to be human" (Singh & Rawat 2013:206), is perhaps an apt description of the relentless competition inculcated in the compulsory schooling context. The competitive nature of schools is also in direct contrast to the traditional communitarian way of thinking in traditional African culture where a person of a community has a natural proclivity to relate to others and participate in community life (Ndofirepi 2011). In other words, what is commonly referred to in South Africa as 'Ubuntu' or "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 1970, in Higgs 2003:12). The competitive and individualistic nature of schools is the antithesis of this communitarian way of living.

Despres (2008) found that no matter what method was used in the traditional school framework, children's interest waned and they seem unprepared for the transition to life. Grolnick and Ryan (1987) found that the subjects of their study who were directed to learn in a more controlled manner showed a greater deterioration in rote recall. This suggests that material force-fed and learnt under strong external pressures can result in poorly integrated learning and is less likely to be maintained. It is possible that the grading system in traditional schools also serves as an external motivator, controller and gatekeeper of the child's progress through school. Ricci and Hill (2007) maintain that forcing a uniform curriculum on children ensures conformity, which in turn offers compliant and predictable people in the workforce. The hidden curriculum of schooling is that of submission (Despres 2008).

Dewey (2015) found, as do countless children in schools all over the world, that formal instruction easily becomes boring and dead, abstract, bookish and isolated from life experiences. Tagore too firmly rejects book-based formal instruction learning (Singh & Rawat 2013) and believes it can kill creativity and the natural learning instinct in people. Dewey (2015) equates compulsory schooling to animal training rather than education because of the focus on fixing habits in children. He outlines further failures by schools (Dewey & Dewey 1962; Dewey 2011):

- Not considering the instinctive powers of the young.
- Not developing initiative in coping with novel situations.
- Placing undue emphasis on drill and other devices that secure automatic skill at the expense of personal perception.
- Disregarding natural instincts or seeing these as obnoxious traits that must be suppressed as conformity is the aim.

According to Hartwell (2016), however liberal a school might want to be, it maintains a relationship of power and authority and therefore stifles natural learning and discourages critical reflection and analysis. A school's primary purpose is obedience, with teachers establishing themselves as the authority figures. Consequently, the real nature of children cannot flourish in a typical regimented school room because the strict hierarchy demands the two fundamental hallmarks of schooling: Quiet and obedience (Huang 2014). Moreover, when children are placed in schools, they are to some extent depersonalised when they are taken from the comfort of their homes and placed in group care where they must compete for the attention of one adult (Moore & Moore 1975).

These results leads one to agree with Gatto (2010) that mainstream education cannot be improved in any meaningful way because the fundamental problem is that institutionalised schooling creates a context that makes learning, especially joyful learning, difficult or impossible. Furthermore, it teaches children that they cannot be trusted with their own learning (Gatto 2010). John Holt expressed his feelings about school as follows:

Education, with its supporting system of compulsory and competitive schooling, all its carrots and sticks, it grades, diplomas, and credentials, now seems to me

perhaps the most authoritarian and dangerous of all the social inventions of mankind. It is the deepest foundation of the modern and worldwide slave state, in which most people feel themselves to be nothing but producers, consumers, spectators, and fans, driven more and more, in all parts of their lives, by greed, envy, and fear. (2004:4).

2.3.3 Natural Learning, Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonisation

Colonialism is a system of domination, exploitation and underdevelopment of one society by another (Suja 2015). Throughout history, countries the world over were invaded by stronger countries/tribes and the people subjugated and forced to accept the values and religions of the powerful invaders. In the ancient world, these invasions took place on various scales, for example, Ghengis Khan, Alexander, and the Roman, Arab, Persian and Ottoman empires marched through vast swathes of land and subjugated people to their rule, often in extremely harsh punitive ways. Oppressed people absorbed the values and traditions from the oppressor group to the point where, over time, the lines between oppressor and the oppressed culture became non-existent because the enforced ‘new way’ evolved into the mainstream culture (Semali & Stambuch 1997).

In Africa, movement of people across the continent brought about changes, for example, the hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the indigenous people of the south was replaced over time by the agricultural traditions of the more powerful tribes and the colonisation by Arab and Western traders and settlers resulted in the organised subjugation of the cultural, scientific and economic life of Africans (South African History Online 2017). Thus, indigenous knowledge systems were not only ignored but devalued (Semali 1999), and African identity was driven more towards the colonial powers. In the instance of the Arab invasions, this devaluation of African identity was seen mainly via religion and through schooling that was enforced with the establishment of *madrasahs* or *kottabs* (AbdelRahim 2014). In Western colonisation, the economy was the key driving force for the devaluation of African culture and identity, so schools were established to advance the economy. It is AbdelRahim’s (2014) assertion that education was the most effective method used by both the Arab and European colonisers to acculturate and dominate the people of Africa.

Thus, the implementation of schooling, whether missionary-driven or via compulsory schooling, meant that African children learnt more about colonial culture and religion while indigenous knowledge and culture were neither included nor encouraged (Ramosé 2002). This was the pattern of colonial control and rule. According to Naofusa (1999), in a broad sense, traditional culture encapsulates all human activities in a given community that has been preserved, learnt and successfully passed on over a long period of time. This includes, but is not limited to, religion, philosophy, moral standards, laws, politics, economics, social arrangements, history, literature, and art. As this knowledge was not written down, there was a risk of forgetting it, and a general replacement with colonial culture became easy (Semali & Stambach 1997).

In general, Western colonisation saw the indigenous knowledge systems of Africans as primitive, because in their view, it lacked the sophistication to which they were accustomed. The result, mainly through the influence of religion and schooling, was to bring about drastic changes in many traditional societies and cultures. Lomax (1972) concurs that national education, together with big governments and the worldwide economic systems, kill off unique cultures that do not conform to dominant power. Norberg-Hodge (Black 2018a) furthers this sentiment by stating that Western schooling is responsible for introducing a human monoculture across the world where the same curriculum is being taught and where people are trained for scarce jobs in an urban consumer culture. In this way, both the diversity of cultures and the diversity of unique human individuals are being destroyed. The documentary *Schooling the World*, produced by Carol Black (2018a), boldly states that compulsory schooling can change/destroy traditions and cultures within one generation. It must also be remembered that this mass erosion of cultures and traditions was previously experienced by modern Western countries themselves (AbdelRahim 2014), who then experienced further erosion through the advent of compulsory schooling. In short, compulsory schooling did not spare any culture/tradition in its destructive path towards a dominant mono-cultural system.

It can be argued that not all the changes are necessarily negative as there are many cultural practices that changed for the better, especially in terms of women's rights and superstitious belief systems that contradict other rights (like the current issue of rhino poaching to access the horn as a powerful medicine). Furthermore, as stated by Alfred (2014), all cultural ways are not static but continuously changing due to cultural

and technological influences and diffusion. However, in terms of schooling, Booth (1997) describes the school as a transported alien institution designed to change people and therefore create a disjuncture between traditional cultures and the expectations of modernity. The reason why modernity wins is that for employment in the modern economic sector, the values of schooling prevail over the traditions. This has been one of the strongest reasons for the erosion and neglect of traditional cultures (Semali 1999). This emphasis on employable skills can be seen in myriads of ways, like in the industrial ethos of schools and in the way the young treat the old as ignorant people who cannot teach them anything of value (Semali 1999). On an anecdotal level, this can also be seen in the common sentiment expressed by parents that their children listen more to the teachers than to the parents. This disparaging sentiment has stripped elders and parents of the respect and authority they would traditionally hold and renders an entire generation of society as useless. It is therefore not difficult to agree with Semali and Stambach (1997:12) that the “transfer of authority from elders to teachers is arguably the single most erosive feature of schooling”. Yet Plotkin (2014), after spending many years in the Amazon forest, passionately states that the elders are the libraries of these communities and every time a shaman dies it is as if a library has burned down.

Another factor that has ensured the erosion of culture is colonial languages replacing indigenous languages. Through compulsory schooling, generations of children were forced to learn in a language other than their mother tongue, creating a further divide and loss of indigenous culture. Furthermore, parents often choose to adopt the colonial language as their home language rather than speaking their mother tongue in the belief that this will benefit their own and their children’s employment possibilities and social integration (The Economist 2011). This belief together with the imposition of colonial languages as the medium of instruction at schools have resulted in languages becoming extinct and generations of people becoming alienated from their indigenous cultures (Rogers & Campbell 2015). In South Africa, we see a unique situation where one colonial language (English) is accepted as a symbol of advancement and prestige and the other (Afrikaans—colonial derived) is vilified as the language of apartheid and oppression (The Economist 2011).

Coupled with the discussions on indigenous knowledge, cultures and tradition is the idea of decolonisation of education. In recent times, this issue has become

pronounced in the South African educational context with protests that saw colonial symbols defaced and destroyed by university students, and through the controversy, robust debates on the topic have been sparked (Evans 2016). Decolonisation projects seek to reimagine and rearticulate power, especially within communities that have been historically oppressed. However, it is believed that indigenous knowledge should be the power base of the decolonisation process, because without it, decolonisation becomes a domesticated industry of ideas (Sium, Desai & Ritskes 2012). Furthermore, the danger brought on by political parties hijacking the term decolonisation for their own political agendas is that it can lead to the collapse of economies and the recolonisation of South Africa by international monetary bodies or emerging markets (Gumede 2018). This means that the decolonisation debate in the political arena is not the same debate as in the education sector. The decolonisation political debate may prove to be short-sighted and counter development. Perhaps the real decolonisation must happen in the minds and hearts of the people, and therefore, a good starting point would be to value African life, culture and traditions (Semali 1999). In this way, the education ethos would embrace the African worldview and root the educational discourse in an indigenous sociocultural paradigm (Higgs 2003), without the exclusion of other cultural groups that form the broader society. Higgs (2003) goes on to argue that failure to embrace the African worldview has resulted in education becoming alien, oppressive and irrelevant.

Over the years there have been attempts to include indigenous knowledge, which is mainly undocumented, into mainstream schooling in South Africa. During the implementation of the new Outcomes Based Education curriculum, it was acknowledged that a lot of indigenous knowledge has been lost in the preceding 300 years of colonial rule, and its inclusion into the mainstream curriculum would promote justice and equity, and therefore bring about social change (Jacobs 2015). A literature search done by Egan (2013), found that there is an emphasis on protecting indigenous knowledge through legislation, but in practice, support for communities to retain their traditions is lacking. An example cited by Egan (2013) is the influence of schooling, media and modernity (lifestyles and diets) on the traditional practice of eating edible insects, which is dying out in communities in the Limpopo province. Yet at the same time, there is the exploitation by collectors, who are often outsiders to the community and have no regard for the environmental degradation caused by their sale of these

insects to finance the needs of their own modern lifestyles. Furthermore, crucial indigenous knowledge developed over generations about the edible insects is being lost because of the rejection of traditions and traditional knowledge (Egan 2013). Furthermore, the natural loss of elders compounded by the general rejection of the value of elders in knowledge making adds to the erosion of indigenous knowledge (Semali 1999). Ironically, while many societies are adopting modern lifestyles and are repulsed by the idea of eating insects, scientists from the Netherlands are promoting the health and environmental benefits of eating insects (House 2018).

Ryan (2017) undertook a study on the impact of an environmental and indigenous knowledge project, commonly known as the Eco-Schools Project, that was implemented in various communities in South Africa. He found that the authoritarian culture of schools in South Africa country did not lend itself to the philosophy of learner-centredness that was demanded by the Eco-Schools Project. Furthermore, the focus of the Eco-Schools programme is on the management and the mitigation of environmental programmes with a strong leaning towards scientific rather than indigenous knowledge. Jacobs (2015) found that although the new curriculum (2005/OBE) provided for universal skills development, it still did not include and acknowledge local knowledge in different communities, and therefore, it contributed to the alienation and loss of local cultures. Unfortunately, postcolonial education in many African countries continue to ignore and disregard the intrinsic value of African culture, traditions and practices (Ndofirepi 2011; Ezeanya-Esiobu 2017). AbdelRahim (2014) quite eloquently states that compulsory schooling indoctrinates people into adopting a mono-cultural perspective and coerces communities into participating in the colonisation of the environment itself.

However, going into further detail about the politics and discourse around indigenous knowledge is beyond the scope of this research. Meanwhile, the example of the Eco-Schools Project is merely one example of how including indigenous knowledge into the formal schooling system, although well intentioned, can add to the alienation and erosion of indigenous knowledge. Transformation in education, according to Ndofirepi (2011), is one of the greatest challenges because both the colonial and the traditional legacy of African society is deeply entrenched. Therefore, the validation of scientific knowledge over traditional knowledge, teachers over elders, and authoritarian power over autonomy of learning are not good practices for communities to reclaim and affirm

their traditional roots. The inclusion of indigenous knowledge into the present schooling system makes it yet another subject in a curriculum designed and imposed by the government, to be standardised and tested. In other words, the inclusion of indigenous knowledge into the compulsory schooling system comes with all the negatives of schooling discussed in this chapter.

Again, the many researchers and advocates for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge into school systems are still bound by the notion that learning can only happen in schools. Therefore, a total overhaul of the learning system needs to be advocated so that indigenous knowledge systems are not just an ‘add-on’ to the important main curriculum. Rather it should become an integral part, with indigenous knowledge being acknowledged and validated through being mainstreamed authentically within communities. This authentication may be achieved if the NLA were to become accepted as the main approach to learning and living.

It is the contention of the researcher that the NLA could be a solution through ensuring development and prosperity of a nation, while at the same time ensuring that cultural traditions and indigenous knowledge that are important for the wellbeing of individuals and the community in general can be maintained and celebrated. Going beyond the romanticising of the old traditional past, the NLA will need to unpack the power differentials that exist within traditional communities that may enhance and/or impede the process of the NLA, acknowledge that communities already live straddled between the Western and traditional cultures, and find authentic ways to harness and empower all people to become part of an effective learning society where the values of egalitarianism are upheld.

The decolonisation debate cannot be complete without mentioning the digital colonisation that has swept through the world. In the past, the colonisers came in boats, but now, through one click, we have technology empires that seek to dominate the world, not through arms but through attractive and seductive influences packaged in an array of mediums such as Google, to countless games to Netflix (Suja 2015). The electronic colonialism theory explains how mass media creates a new concept of empire that is based on controlling the mind and therefore threatens cultural diversity, local cultures and languages, similar to that of the mercantile colonisation of the 19th century (Suja 2015). The challenge is how to harness the positive contribution of technology and mass media without compromising individuals and cultures.

2.3.4 Schools of Today

Various present-day researchers (Giroux 2017; Ng et al 1995; Karaba 2016) see schooling in the 21st century being further redefined through a corporate ideology, dominated by the neoliberal ethos of our time (Petrovic & Rolstad 2016). A principal feature of neoliberal thinking is the “assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade” (Harvey 2005:7). Harvey further explains that neoliberalism houses the idea that individual entrepreneurial freedom within the context of private property rights, free markets and trade advance human wellbeing (2005). Moreover, Giroux (2017) believes that worldwide the forces of neoliberalism are dismantling the social provisions of the welfare state and defining profit-making and market freedoms as the essence of democracy. The danger of this thinking is that there is an illusion of being free because when governments hand power to global corporations, the reconfiguration of schools and universities to produce highly individualised yet tightly governed docile subjects follows (Davies & Bansel 2007).

Thus, in both public and private schools, the focus on competition, standardisation and individualism add to the notion that education is transformed into a product that can be bought and sold. The question to ask is how do the markets shape students into becoming the individual consumers it desires and how do teachers transform children into believing they are free and yet are more governed? (Davies & Bansel 2007). Furthermore, schools place undue emphasis on disciplinary structures and individual achievement as the primary unit of value (Ng et al 1995). Can this extreme competition and individualism reduce the social responsibility of society and governments? The values and assumptions of neoliberalism within the educational institutions become havens for bureaucracy and therefore reduces any possibility for education to fulfil an activating function for a democratic future (Kutnz & Petrovic 2018). One of the criticisms of the unschooling and home-educating philosophies is that although these philosophies position themselves as opposite to the values of public schooling, they still embrace neoliberal policies because they value individual autonomy and see education as a private good and are therefore forming an educational elite (Wilson 2017). Another concern raised in the US is that the isolation and individualisation of home education would not create good citizens because they do not engage in any political and social issues that promote the best interest of society (Romanowski

2006). However, a study conducted by Ray (2003:6) and referred to by Romanowski (2006), surveyed more than 7 300 adults who were home educated (5 000 for at least 7 years) and refuted this concern because it found that home education “produces successful adults who are actively involved in their communities and continue to value education for themselves and their children”. The study also revealed that only 4.2% of home-educated adults, compared to 35% of schooled adults, consider politics and government too complicated to understand. Further important points illustrated by Ray (2003:2–6) on home-educated graduates in the US include:

- 71% of home-educated graduates, compared to 37% of their schooled peers, participate in a community service activity.
- 88% of home-educated graduates, compared to 50% of their schooled peers, are members of an organisation (community, church, professional association).
- 76% of home-educated graduates voted in a national or state election, compared to only 29% of schooled peers.

Romanowski (2006) aptly questions who should be scrutinised for their contribution to citizenship development: Home education or the public schooling system?

However, although studies like this dispel the myth that home-educated children are isolated and withdrawn from civic responsibilities, it is still a challenge for many home-educating families to understand that neoliberalism has become hegemonic and pervasive, and therefore, being critical of its impact on home education and the NLA in particular would be proactive. For example, it is common for the home-educating sector in South Africa to be lambasted for increasing race segregation by opting out of traditional schooling as it is believed that White middle-class families who are the majority homeschoilers want to remain within their own social group (HSLDA 2018). Wilson (2017) posits that radical educational philosophies, like NL, reinforce neoliberal rationality because their emphasis on autonomy and individualism is developed by being disconnected from broader society. Although the issue of race cannot be discounted as a possible reason for choosing home education for some families, the issue of isolation often conferred on the home-education sector is steadily losing ground.

The pervasiveness of neoliberal ideology is more pronounced in present governments, their management approach to education and the daily competitive, graded and

conforming system that school-going children are expected to abide by. It is children in schools who do not participate in broader society as they are isolated from society for 12 years because of schooling (Gatto 2010). Thus Wilson's (2017) contention that home-education and NL houses the neoliberal ethos of present society is based on the misconception that home education equals isolation and is therefore anti-community. In defence of NL and other home-educating alternatives, the constant threat of governments and educational departments using their state powers to disallow home education adds to the home-educating community's need to remain somewhat under the radar of government. Furthermore, the notion that the NL/home-education emphasis on individual freedom, autonomy and responsibility is seen as a White middle-class value is also not congruent with the philosophy of NL. The value of individual freedom is not without the respect for the freedom of others. As Neill (1992) states: The freedom of the individual cannot impinge on the freedom of others. However, it remains a challenge to NL families to constantly reflect on and be critical of their position in society and how they implement NL in their homes, to ensure that the neoliberal ideology does not become hegemonic within the philosophy of NL. Further discussions on the issue of isolation are under Section 2.3.8.

2.3.5 What Is Learning?

Learning is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that pervades the lifespan and impacts on human life across multiple fields of interest (Visser 2001). Over the ages, theorists have debated about learning and how people learn. Plato, for example, believed that learning can be discovered through self-reflection, while Aristotle developed a scientific method of gathering data as he found learning to be outside of himself. During the Renaissance, freedom of thought and human values was emphasised and therefore the idea of individual inquiry and discovery was reinforced. Rousseau (1979) believes childhood was to be celebrated and children should be allowed to develop naturally, learning through life experiences. More recently, Piaget and others have taken forward theories of cognition (Darling-Hammond et al 2001).

However, to understand NL it is pertinent to briefly explore the present thoughts, theories and understanding of what is learning? The questions asked about learning are generally: What is learning? Is learning only a product of teaching? When does learning start?

Babies, from the moment they are born, are on a learning trajectory that will span their entire lifetime. They need to learn to walk and talk and pick up all that they need to function in their family and community. Various people over the ages postulated that all humans have a natural desire to learn (Dewey 2015; Rogers & Freiberg 1994; Holt 1989; Hartwell 2016). There appear to be two types of learning: Cognitive, which is the facts and information a child acquires, and experiential learning, which is when this information is applied in a personally-involved, self-initiated way and the effects are both personal and pervasive (Hundzel & Hansen 2015). It is this experiential aspect of learning that prompted Holt (1989:xvi) to define learning as “making more sense of the world around us”. Ormrod (2016) states that through experience learning brings about a change in one’s external behaviour and at the same time learning can sometimes be a very passive process because it is internal. Visser (2001) supports this by stating that the common meaning of learning is the gaining of knowledge or understanding or the acquisition of a skill or behaviour through study, instruction or experience. Solomon asks, “Is learning a relatively stable change in knowledge or skills as a result of experience, or can it be given a wider meaning?” (2000:4). When children are very young, their need to model their behaviour on someone they hold in some esteem is very common. Learning by modelling and observation is the focus of social cognitive theory where Vygotsky emphasises the importance of adults or experts encouraging learners to produce their own understanding of a situation or an example by providing real-life situations for the learner (Ormrod 2016). There is thus a dynamic process between expert and learner that contributes to knowledge formation and creativity (Hundzel & Hansen 2015). Experiential learning theory states that from experience knowledge is created, and therefore, learning is an active and individual process that happens when learners are personally and actively engaged in their learning (Ormrod 2016). Thus, the experiential learning theorists affirm the notion that creativity, situated cognition and experiential learning are bound together (Hundzel & Hansen 2015). Therefore, experience is the best teacher because true learning is finally complete when practice and internalisation takes place. Meyers (in Simpson 1976:7) puts it rather succinctly when he says that learning has occurred when “meaning-making becomes an inside phenomenon”. Rogers and Freiberg (1994) assert that all humans have a natural drive to learn and that significant learning takes place when the subject matter is relevant to the student. Thus, free, creative environments engage people, improve achievement, encourage cross fertilisation of

ideas and thoughts and therefore encourage critical thinking. This all promotes self-initiated learning, that is, children's natural way of engaging with the world (Hundzel & Hansen 2015). The role of others in the process of learning is that of support and encouragement. However, for the individual, learning should be personal and a process of emancipation.

In the present education system, school-based learning is the dominant if not exclusive focus of how learning takes place, and here knowledge is something that needs to be acquired through instruction (Solomon 2000). School-based learning rides on the assumption that human intervention and learning in the world are linear processes. Yet, learning is transdisciplinary and integrative and knowledge is actively constructed through experience (Solomon 2000; Visser 2001). In other words, learning should not only develop cognition but should also stimulate the learner through active learning to promote deep meaningful learning. Martin (2007) asserts that there are three domains of learning that reflect the whole learner: Cognitive, affective and psychomotor. These distinct aspects produce a wider understanding of the learning process as it goes beyond the mainstream school scenario where the cognitive is the acute focus (Solomon 2000).

Confluent education is a holistic learning approach that is rooted in Dewey's (2015) idea of collateral learning, where learning is holistic and aims to activate and engage all the senses of the learner. The assumptions in the confluent education approach state that the process of learning is an active search and learners incorporate what they have learnt into their own world and therefore they are in control of their own life and value their own competence (Simpson 1976). Emotions, rationality and will are all legitimate and inseparable aspects of humanness and all are engaged as learning occurs: "Children who are fearful, anxious, depressed or distracted cannot focus to process information" (Darling-Hammond et al 2001:12). Another key feature of confluent education is immersion in discipline-based enquiry, which also relates to situated learning (Solomon 2000). The essence of this approach is that learning takes place in authentic environments and is a reflective practice. Another pedagogical practice that promotes personalised learning is that of cooperative learning, which is child-centred and active. It changes the role from recipients of information to seekers, analysers and synthesisers of information. It transforms children from listeners to talkers and doers and eventually into participant citizens (McQuillan 1997). According

to Visser (2001) there are four requirements for learning: Instruction should coincide with the learners' desire to learn; the learner should be involved through exploration; instruction should be delivered on demand; and lastly, failure is positively recognised as a driving force for learning.

2.3.6 What Is Natural Learning?

NL is not a new phenomenon. Home-based education dates further back than education at schools (Blok 2004). Before the advent of compulsory schooling, people practised NL in that people lived their lives where children and adults alike were continually learning in and about their societies and environments. Older people passed on their knowledge, skills and culture to younger people in a natural and empowering way, and in this way, the home and family played a key role throughout the history of all societies (Ray 2000).

Peter Gray (2013), in his research on hunter-gatherer societies, outlines how in hunter-gatherer societies the young educated themselves in all that was necessary for their daily life and survival. In general, children in most hunter-gatherer societies are left to play and discover their immediate world with very little adult interference (Gray 2013; Hewlett 2016). The play groups are always mixed-aged and gender groups. If there is any 'teaching', it is not controlled by any specific person (Hewlett 2016). Learning is the most natural activity that went on throughout life—the original concept of lifelong learners.

Key features of the hunter-gatherer pedagogic systems include pretend play, humour, music, demonstrations, imitations, peer learning, direct instruction, observation and storytelling. Curiosity is the most effective pedagogical motivator together with the need to be with peers (Hewlett 2016). Through this natural learning of the young, the community sustains itself through continuous self-renewal over thousands of years, developing a very intimate knowledge base of their environments that ensures their survival (Gray 2013; Hewlett 2016; Black 2018a). Moreover, equality and respect for all is an integral value, and therefore, even children are not coerced into doing anything (Hewlett 2016). They believe that everyone's needs are important, no one has more possessions than the others and no one is superior to another (Gray 2013). Both Gray (2013) and Hewlett (2016) concludes that the hunter-gatherers are a true egalitarian society whose concept of egalitarianism goes beyond just the notion of equal

opportunities. They also place a strong value on giving and sharing. Furthermore, they place a very strong value on autonomy, that is, personal freedom, and therefore everyone is free to make their own choices on condition it did not interfere with the freedom of others and the wellbeing of the group. They are the first and original natural learners of this world. However, after the hunter-gatherer lifestyle was largely replaced by farming communities, schooling and academic learning remained a small part of the children's everyday learning. Children still acquired skills from the family and broader community members of all ages. It was only through the introduction and implementation of compulsory schooling that education was placed in the hands of specialists and school personnel (Ray 2000).

After many decades of compulsory schooling, families in contemporary society who choose NL are not in the same position as their hunter-gatherer ancestors. However, the core values of autonomy and freedom as practised by the hunter-gatherers remain the cornerstone of this approach (Gray 2013; Hewlett 2016). Autonomy has been defined in a variety of similar ways but the idea of seeing oneself as sovereign, capable of action and self-reflection seems common (Petrovic & Rolstad 2016). Autonomy can be developed through education and at the same time it can be used to restrict people and society. In a society where autonomy is the founding value, people live flourishing lives, both personally and as a collective society (Petrovic & Rolstad 2016). However, this freedom also acknowledges that one's choice should "not interfere with the freedom of others to pursue their options" (Petrovic & Rolstad 2016:3). In other words, echoing the idea of collectivist freedom, NL uses this idea of freedom where children at the individual level are given the space to pursue the things that interest them. This develops their capacity for autonomy and their ability to make and choose their own life plan in accordance with their interests, their concern for others, and their own rational deliberation among competing conceptions of good. Anyon (2011) states that this individual level of autonomy can also spur action for civic activism as the need to improve conditions for self and others gains importance. In other words, how the children engage with themselves and their society demonstrates their sense of autonomy.

Therefore, in an NL home, children are free from obstruction and coercion to pursue their interests. The purpose of learning is freedom, states Bhave (2008). The NL child therefore becomes self-regulating (Neill 1992), and in so doing, the child "becomes

the author of his or her own curriculum" (Taylor 2014:8), and in so doing, the learning takes care of itself. After all, until the institution of learning was invented it hardly occurred to people that learning had to be institutionalised and that what was good for children was any different from what was good for everyone else (Holt & Farenga 2003).

NL echoes the idea that children can be trusted to learn about their world with far less adult interference than is commonly believed (Meighan 2002). Holt states that

Every time we try to manage the lives of the young people, we give up the chance to see how they might have managed their lives on their own and to learn what we might have learned from them doing it. (Holt 1972:35)

As part of the growing concern about the future of human civilisation, many parents share the view of other philosophers and theorists that creativity is one of the main factors needed to drive our civilisation forward: "Creativity is an elusive concept, but a fundamental human quality" (Hundzel & Hansen 2015:185). Creativity reflects our ability to adapt to changing circumstances and our effective cognitive abilities to combine and improve upon ideas to which we are exposed and therefore is a "key element of the skills needed for success in the 21st century" (Hundzel & Hansen 2015:185). Several studies have shown that creativity improves reasoning, memory and problem solving and this all leads to personal success (Hundzel & Hansen 2015).

Moreover, NL families also place emphasis on children as people, and therefore, reason and emotion are combined. Children are perceived as active thinking and feeling participants in their learning. As with confluent education, the parents undertake to foster the intellectual and emotional growth of their children, or in other words, it is about educating the whole child (Hubbard 2018). NL parents concur with the developmental learning theorists in that they organise the environment, connect to the children's knowledge and experiences and use the social and natural environments as opportunities for further learning. Illich (2002) posits that the quality of the environment and the relationship a person has with that environment will determine how much incidental learning happens. Furthermore, culture, traditions, beliefs and values are selectively retained, reshaped and modified to ensure a very personalised learning experience (Simpson 1976).

Another important factor for successful learning is motivation. According to Ormrod (2016), motivation is an internal state that spurs a person into action in a desired direction and keeps the person engaged in certain activities. Levin-Gutierrez (2015) also believes that motivation is linked to emotional intelligence. Over the years, most educators and developmentalists agree that learning is an active process and occurs at its optimum when the learner is internally motivated (Grolnick & Ryan 1987). NL allows the concept of motivation to reach fruition as children have the freedom to decide on their learning interest and to pursue it for as long as the motivation exists. Furthermore, the NL philosophy generally emphasises the notion that the purpose of learning cannot be imposed because it is a very individual process.

Since learning is an innate part of living, people learn best when the motivation is endogenous and not due to external incentives (Huang 2014). Most children, and adults too, are generally engaged in their task until they feel satisfied that they have reached the goals they set for themselves. In NL there is generally no “differentiation between play and work or learning and fun” (Huang 2014:36). According to Levin-Gutierrez (2015:37), “mastery as a link to intrinsic motivation is having the desire to surpass in excellence at performing a task”. Often, children will gain impressive expertise on their subject and their intrinsic motivation also drives their self-evaluative process. This then develops their reflective and critical skills. It therefore becomes evident that one of the keys to successful learning is the presence of intrinsic motivation. In NL, individual choices and interests are nurtured and respected and therefore intrinsic motivation is maintained. Although there are external motivation has some benefits, it has been noted that when external rewards are used to increase motivation they are more harmful and may lower intrinsic motivation. In contrast, NL is driven by an emphasis on freedom and self-decision-making and puts the desire, drive, motivation and responsibility for life in the hands of the learners (Petrovic & Rolstad 2016). An interesting finding of Apostoleris (2000) is that motivation declined with age in the average school child, but it remained consistent and even increased in home-educated children.

Families who are opting for NL are questioning and are sceptical about establishmentarian modes of thinking and the current mainstream educational model (Rolstad & Kesson 2013). The question is more about what education is rather than what it is for. Is education for some end qualification or is education for life? In

traditional education, the exit examination or some certification or qualification is of vital importance, whereas in NL what matters most is the fulfilment and inner happiness of the person (Neill 1992). In other words, education is about the person and not the certification or the economy. Taylor (2014) states that real growth and learning is the inevitable consequence of living if the learners are the curriculum and they are free, vigorous and happily immersed in their own projects. Priesnitz (2009), who used the term 'life learning', states that families who choose NL do not believe in separating learning or children from society at large. Therefore, they do not approve of the need to institutionalise children and learning. Furthermore, since learning is a natural activity that goes on throughout life, one cannot stipulate outcomes. Learning is about making more sense in the world and being able to do more things in it (Meighan 2002).

Another crucial aspect to NL is knowing that children can and should be trusted to know what interests them, to develop the skills they need, to pursue their interests and to ask for the help they need from others (Rolstad & Kesson 2013). Rousseau (1979) writes that children possess an inner compass to guide them on their learning journey and that genuine learning must be grounded in rich and meaningful experiences. In the East, Indian national, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), who went on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, also greatly emphasised freedom in education. After rejecting a few schools, he gained his education by being immersed in his extended family and all the knowledge and skills they possessed in both science and the arts. He describes his learning experience as being brought up in an atmosphere of freedom and of aspiration for the expansion of the human spirit. This very experience provided him with a lifelong conviction that learning can only happen with freedom in an intimate relationship with one's cultural and natural environment (Singh & Rawat 2013). It is with these views of learning, coupled with deep love and empathy for children, that some families make the decision to embrace the ever-dynamic world of NL.

As different people begin to move away from traditional learning and find their own voices and paths in redefining education for their children, various terminologies are being used to describe NL. The following terms could also include the essence of NL: Holistic education, self-directed learning, unschooling, autonomous learning, delight-driven learning, experience-based learning, independent learning, natural living, and

life learning. And perhaps there are even more terms being created as more families create their own learning living spaces. Mitra, Dangwal, Chatterjee, Jha, Bisht, and Kapur (2005) coined the term minimally invasive education and defines it as a pedagogic method that uses the learning environment to generate an adequate level of motivation to induce learning in groups of children, with minimal, or no intervention by a teacher. Self-directed learning, according to Knowles (1975), is a process in which individuals take the lead in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating their learning goals, identifying and sourcing the material resources required, implementing chosen strategies, and evaluating the learning outcomes and process. Dewey (2015) states that the learners' experience and worldview, developed through active participation and self-direction, are critical to problem-solving education and an imperative for 21st century education. Maria Montessori's educational model was chiefly self-directed learning too (Montessori 2002). However, it does seem that the term unschooling coined by John Holt is most widely used and recognised.

The use of the term NL for this study is purposeful as it aims to emphasise that learning is the most natural phenomenon of life. The term 'natural learner' refers to the inherent characteristic of the child. In other words, the child is naturally curious, motivated and a unique individual, and therefore, learning should be natural, self-directed, independent and an individual personal process (Pattison 2013). Institutional schooling took away this natural learning to the point where the masses are lulled into believing that compulsory schooling is the most natural aspect of society. Families therefore force/manipulate/indoctrinate their young children to go to school in the belief that they can only learn in a school. Furthermore, society has been falsely led to believe that learning can only be taught by specialists. Without the institution and the specialist, a person is deemed 'uneducated' and marginalised. Thus, in resonance with Pattison (2013), the term NL not only reclaims learning as a natural act, it is also a protest in this era of mass schooling and asserts its place in the educational debate, making a bold statement about children, learning and society.

However, within all this terminology and differences lie the core belief that children do not need to go to school to learn because most learning occurs naturally in everyday life and that activities undertaken for learning should be the choice of the learner rather than an imposition (Gray & Riley 2013). Dewey (2011) states that the very process of living together educates and is different from the deliberate education of children

because the learning one gets from living with others is incidental, natural and important. Tagore's success lay in that he did not try to control the ideas, feelings and values of his children but created an environment that encouraged activities (both planned and unplanned, intentional and incidental) and experiences that evoked the desired responses (Singh & Rawat 2013). Children need an environment that nurtures learning because authentic learning is a continuum rather than compartmentalised into fragmented bits (Ekoko 2007). NL or self-regulated learning teaches students to take responsibility for their own learning, to set goals, to monitor and evaluate their learning and the learning process, and to activate and sustain their learning interests, emotions, and behaviours needed to attain their learning goals (Kuntz & Petrovic 2018).

John Holt brought into focus the notion of natural autonomous learning or unschooling after his stint as a teacher made him aware of all the shortcomings of institutional schooling. In his observations, he concludes that children are very good at learning: "They don't learn at an even rate. They learn in spurts and the more interested they are in what they are learning, the faster these spurts are likely to be" (Holt 1983:155). Children learn from everything and they create and co-create knowledge. They observe, think, test, experiment, speculate and theorise all the time (Holt 1989). In summary, Holt believes that children learn naturally, without fear, guilt, shame, failure or rejection. They grow in knowledge, in their love for learning and in their learning abilities. They learn throughout their lives and every experience makes their reality more complete and truer. They will therefore be able to deal, in a realistic, imaginative and constructive manner, with all the new experiences life brings to them throughout their lives (Holt 1964,1983,1989). He further states that the notion that children's needs be based on age, be made into a curriculum and taught in a standardised schedule is misguided at its core (Holt 1989).

Various researchers have discussed their definitions of unschooling/NL. For example, Gray and Riley (2015a) define unschooling/NL as the educational practice of not sending children to school to learn as most learning occurs naturally in everyday life and that activities for learning should be chosen by the learners and not imposed on them. Meighan (2002) echoes Holt by stating that children can be trusted to learn about their world with far less adult interference. Rothermel (2011) points out that the central tenet of NL is that it is child-directed. Children, with encouragement and access to a wide range of resources, follow their interests—the process of learning through

life. Children learn at their own pace with no imposed age-related targets and children pursue areas that interest them. Gray and Riley (2015b) state that self-direction is the essence of natural learning and therefore, NL promotes both the child and the parents' self-efficacy, and "through the acquisition of self-regulation skills, people increasingly take charge of their own learning and behaviour" (Ormrod 2016:130). Illich (2002) states that most learning is not the result of instruction but the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting. Neill (1992) believes that learning would take care of itself if children have enough freedom to become self-regulating and is able to follow their own interests.

Hartwell (2016) states that the belief that all children are natural learners is based on a different perspective of learning: "We learn through the process of personal transformation in relationship with others, and what we learn increases our capacity to participate in and contribute to society" (Hartwell 2016:1). Simpson (1976) concludes that learning is the pursuit of whole-body intelligence practised in the context of family, community and freedom. Petrovic and Rolstad (2016) believe that freedom and autonomy are required for the development of children as people who are intellectually independent and capable of living and conducting themselves in harmony with others. Freedom and autonomy also allow one to lead a flourishing life while caring for the flourishing of others. Rolstad and Kesson (2013) add that NL families seek an alternative lifestyle where learning is valued as part of living satisfying lives, where the intellectual development is not more highly valued than family relationships, where academic studies do not take precedence over artistic studies and where children's development is seen as natural rather than as a process requiring intervention. Gatto (2010) believes that self-knowledge is the only basis of true knowledge. However, key to achieving this self-knowledge, among others, are time, trust, independence and self-reliance. After all, children learn what they live. A child growing up in the Amazon jungle has different learning needs compared to a child living in New York City. Therefore, making meaning and purpose for the self is the main ingredient of authentic learning.

NL also benefits children with special needs. Parents (Yardley 2013; Martin 2017) blogging their thoughts on and experiences of NL with their special needs children, show that it works very well because the parents are able to identify the unique needs of the children and provide resources accordingly. Within the loving safety and

freedom of the NLA, children are allowed to excel in their own areas and feel competent in their own way. The individual attention to the needs and the wellbeing of a child encourages children to focus on their strengths, make progress according to their own inner timeline and development, and therefore, develop positive feelings towards learning and living.

2.3.7 Parenting and the Implementation of Natural Learning in the Home

NL is not monolithic and therefore it is practised in a myriad of ways as each family will bring in their own unique way as they create their own learning spaces, explore the world together and live their life philosophies (Mazama 2016; Pattison 2013). Although each family has its own interest and unique intellectual strengths and weaknesses, they all share a commitment to the same themes and concerns. Dewey (2011) states that the very process of living together educates, enlightens experience, stimulates and enriches imagination. Therefore, there is no typical NL home. However, again the core assumption is that the learners will direct their own learning and that learning will happen by making sense of the environment and of the stimuli around them (Darling-Hammond et al 2001). In other words, the learners will have autonomy over their learning: "Autonomy is acting with a sense of volition and having the experience of choice" (Gagne & Deci 2005:333). To ensure autonomy, children need to have personal independence. Thus, parents provide an environment that helps the children pursue their personal interests and where each individual family member is respected and valued.

Parents, in general, are by nature outstanding at coaching their children and stimulating their interests and being transmitters of culture (Meighan 2002; Levin-Gutierrez 2015). However, parents in a NL home help ensure that the home, as a learning environment, is tailored to respect and integrate the knowledge, interests and subjective experiences of the learners with the goal of positive social development (Hundzel & Hansen 2015). This echoes the ideas of Thorndike, who believes in active learning and therefore structured the environment to ensure that learning would happen (Darling-Hammond et al 2001). More than making appropriate resources available, parents have an in-depth understanding of the children's needs, share emotional experiences and bring a balance to both the intellectual and experiential aspects of learning (Hundzel & Hansen 2015).

Furthermore, according to Leidums (2016), children at home are embedded in the daily social fabric of family and community life and they interact across ages and generations. Heyes (2016) found that when adults go about their normal business, the effect of their actions promotes and contributes to cultural learning. Children have a strong need to be included in adult life and through their interactions with various multi-aged people and through everyday activities, children's learning is relational, contextual, negotiated and nurtured (Leidums 2016). According to Dewey (2011), there is a difference between the education one gets from living with others and from deliberate teaching. As mentioned previously, when educated by living with others, the education is incidental, natural and important. In other words, Dewey agrees with Rousseau that education should not be separate from life itself (Darling-Hammond et al 2001).

In a the NLA home, "complementing the child who is a natural, individual and motivated learner is the parent who offers flexible and individual companionship" (Pattisson 2013:264). Children are encouraged and supported by parents to explore their interests within the belief that learning will happen automatically and organically. Parents provide an environment rich in learning opportunities, with access to resources, and gives assistance when the children requests assistance or is open to assistance (Holt 1989; Laricchia 2012). This could mean driving to a tutor or sport coach, travelling, joining clubs, accessing information/courses online and many other creative ways to help guide, further the interests and enhance the learning. In a NL home, children will engage in an activity until they are satisfied internally, achieve mastery and then move on to some other interest (Levin-Gutierrez 2015). Parents can respond flexibly to the needs and desires that children express as children ask endless questions and discuss at length their favourite topics or things that come to mind (Blok 2004).

Although, Gray and Riley (2015a) caution the emotional and mental wellbeing of the parent in unschooling, parenting within the NLA or the general home-education system takes on a different meaning. Parents and children who home educate have strong self-efficacy in the education process while at the same time asserting and enjoying their human relationship to one another. At home, children are people with all the complexities that come with being human and the "education is based on human relationships which promotes ideas of individuality" (Pattisson 2013:20). The parents'

role is a more personal one rather than just a functional one of being an extension of the school and the homework ‘master’. According to Ray (2000), home-educated parents do not see their lives as separate from their children’s lives, rather the family lives together in a continuous, seamless intertwining of learning and living. On a deeper note, NL demands an egalitarian relationship between parents and children, rather than an authoritarian one, where the family organises itself to accommodate the radical curiosity of the child even when it challenges parental authority (Lyn-Piluso & Lyn-Piluso 2008). Therefore, according to Lyn-Piluso and Lyn-Piluso (2008), parenting in the NLA (which they term ‘deschooling’) becomes a revolutionary activity.

2.3.8 Natural Learning and Socialisation

Human beings have a predisposition towards socialisation and are great collaborators because it was crucial for survival (Gray 2013). In general terms, socialisation is the process by which human beings acquire the knowledge, skills, behaviour, systems of belief and character traits that enable them to participate as effective members of their group and society (Romanowski 2006). This process, which begins at birth, is both dynamic and reciprocal. It is quite common to see children interacting on the playground, sorting out their games and solving their problems without any adult interference. This predisposition to being able to get along and work together comes from our hunter-gatherer ancestors. It is believed that if these collaborative skills are not allowed to develop in a natural way, then children’s brains will develop in a different way (Abbott 1997). In other words, the brain can rewire itself because these skills are not being used. Abbott (1997) concludes that this is the reason why employers have such trouble teaching teamwork and collaboration/cooperation to workers in their early twenties as they seem to experience difficulties in understanding the concept of collaboration/cooperation and working in a community. This begs the question: Is the violence and aggression we are seeing a consequence of children not having been allowed opportunities to collaborate in socially constructive ways? Has the competitive individualistic nature of schools helped rewire the brain pathways of the children of today? (Abbott 1997).

The issue of socialisation in home education is perhaps the most widely held misconception (Romanowski 2006). It has become a common myth that if children are not at school they will be isolated, will not receive adequate socialisation experiences

and will therefore become misfits in society (Romanowski 2006). Some believe home-educated children only receive a one-sided view of the world (Moore & Moore 1994) because parents are their key adults who shelter them from the real world. Therefore, a widely held belief in society is that to learn how to be in society children need to go to school, where it is assumed that children will be exposed to a wider society (the real world), which will lead to their socialisation. However, home-educating families completely reject the notion of isolation, inadequate social skills and the belief that children can only be socialised in a school. They embrace the notion that “the process of socialisation usually occurs in a child’s daily activities as he or she interacts with individuals, the community, and the culture at large” (Romanowski 2006:126). Moreover, they firmly believe that it is the home and not schools that enable the kind of socialisation they want for their children.

Since schools operate on a rigid framework that teaches children to obey and conform, it can result in children being dependent, insecure and antisocial. Furthermore, peer groups at schools where society assumes children learn good social skills are hostile and/or manipulative and can be very damaging to children’s social wellbeing (Guterman & Neumann 2016). For example, Springer (2016) states that schooling amputates, among other things, the child’s capacity for empathy because of the competition for grades and attention. Various studies (Gray 2013; Romanowski 2006; Lewellyn 1998; Ray 2017) have shown that home-educated children have a more positive self-concept and fewer behavioural problems than children who go to school. Studies have also shown that in comparison to schooled children, home-educated children adapt better in higher education, both emotionally and socially (Ray 2000; Blok 2004; Gatto 2010; Gray 2013). The reasons cited for this better social development is that children in home-educated families socialise naturally with family and participate in various sport, cultural and other community activities (Ray 2000). This was also confirmed by Basham, Merrifield and Hepburn (2007) and Rolstad and Kesson (2013) who found that home-educated children participate in numerous activities outside the home that aid their positive natural socialisation. Parents create networks to provide their children with ample opportunities to maximise their social interaction with their communities. As many of the children are not burdened by school hours or after school homework, their time can be flexible to accommodate a variety of excursions and projects. Furthermore, through technology and social networking,

NL children participate in multiple groups based on a wide array of interests. One home-educating parent, reflecting on her homeschooling group, noted that it included numerous different religions as well as atheists, and several different minorities, that is, a community far more diverse than the school her children had attended (Rilstad & Kesson 2013). This example strengthens the argument that home-educated children are frequently exposed to a wider variety of people and situations than in a traditional classroom environment where social exposure is limited to about 35 people of similar age and socio-economic background (Romanowski 2006). Furthermore, since home-educated children are not peer socialised, they socialise naturally with a variety of people. For example, 68% of respondents in Gray and Riley's study mentioned having a wide range of mixed-aged friends as an advantage of NL (2015a). This helps them become more socially mature and flexible.

Romanowski (2006) brings an important point to the discussion when he states that a child's self-concept and socialisation are closely related. According to Romanowski (2006), various studies using the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept scale with home-educated children found that home-educated children scored significantly higher than public school children, which indicates that home-educated children in the study had a higher and more positive self-concept than their school-going peers; their scores were above the national average. The important conclusion drawn by these studies is that in terms of self-concept reflecting socialisation, home-educated children are neither socially deprived nor inferior when it comes to socialisation (Romanowski 2006). Furthermore, comparisons of the evaluation of communication skills, socialisation and daily living skills of home-educated and school-going children found that the former were significantly better socialised and more mature (Ray 2000). It is this social maturity that also holds home-educated children in good stead when entering higher education institutions. Furthermore, home-educated students are actively recruited by universities in the US because they recognise that home-educated students are well adapted for the demands of higher education regardless of their non-traditional education (Romanowski 2006). They are also open to new experiences and are socially involved (Medlin 2013)

This leads to the questions: Is modern schooling hostile to human values and democratic ideals? Is the very notion that children need to be divided into age categories and mainly interact within that category anti-community and anti-

development? A family and broader community will have people of all ages seamlessly living and sharing with each other. Furthermore, containing 25–30 children of the same age into one classroom or school to learn in the competitive school environment can be seen as the captivity of childhood, because children are severed from participating in the fullness of life in their prime years and their spirits tamed in the need to produce obedient and conforming citizens. This has “profound emotional consequences on how we relate to each other and the planet” (Springer 2016:14).

Illich (2002) states that the implementation of obligatory schooling gives schools the power to divide society into two realms, the academic and the other. Gatto (2010; 2016) also puts forward the view that schools take away the vitality of communities because they alienate children from society and from each other. In this way, they deny children the reciprocal participation with all members of their community that is so crucial for their socialisation and the wellbeing of the community. In schooling terms, society is seen as something children will get into when they complete school rather than society being a natural and integral part of everyday life. It is a well-known notion that families form the basic unit of all communities and societies. Therefore, the wellbeing of families and communities is essential for the growth, development and wellbeing of broader society. After all, “life and learning do not occur in a vacuum; they occur in the context of a cultural environment” (Gray & Riley 2013:7). Furthermore, in schools children are alienated from their own human interests because of the conformity expected within the rigid structure of schools. Meanwhile, Lewellyn (1998), in agreement with Holt (1983), states that curiosity is the engine of achievement, and therefore, in everyday living, learning is self-initiated by curiosity and experience; and this learning should be guided by intensity and introspection and the ability to learn from mistakes. None of this is possible in an institutional setting.

Tolstoy (Springer 2016) saw that children received education from their families, from playing with their friends and in the community, and therefore, believed that compulsory schooling was injurious to the body and soul. Apostoleris (2000) found that a typical home-educated child is more mature, friendly, happy, thoughtful, competent and better socialised. Is it because home-educated children develop feelings of security and self-confidence because they have the freedom to have a mixture of personal time, which allows them to get to know themselves, and shared time, which they can enter at their own choosing? Priesnitz (2009), who observed

thousands of home-educated children over 35 years, concluded that the main contributor to a child's positive self-concept is the interaction with warm and loving parents, rather than continued random social contact. It is in the context of the above findings and discussions that one can agree with the many researchers that contrary to popular opinion, home-educated children have a higher level of social skills than children at school (Ray 2000). Perhaps, taking cognisance of the above research, society should be more concerned about the poor socialisation of school-going children and the impact of this on broader society.

2.3.9 Play and Learning

It is rather common in a the NLA home to see children of all ages playing for most of the day if that is what they wish to do. Like Vygotsky (1978), the NLA does not see play as a waste of time. Rather play is encouraged and supported among children of all ages. However, in general, adults do not see play as important but as a distraction for children when they have nothing serious to do. They see it as frivolous activity with no real importance for the child. However, various research (Huizinga 2014; Gray 2013; Brown 2010; Louv 2010) points to the contrary; that play is, in essence, as important to children and their development as nutrition. Over the years, academics and interest groups have begun to pay more attention to children's play and why it might be important for the healthy development of the child (Ginsberg 2007; Daubert, Ramani & Rubin 2018). Even some mainstream schools have cottoned onto the idea that play is not a frivolous distraction but an important aspect of development (Aronstam & Braund 2016). In a NL environment, the notion that "play is universal and critical for healthy social development" (Daubert et al 2018:1) has certainly become the mantra. Play is considered most crucial for children and seen as the best medium for learning. According to various researchers (Ginsberg 2007; Gray 2014; Greve & Thomsen 2016; Aronstam & Braund 2016), play provides a space for children to learn a myriad of skills that are critical for their future lives. Through play, children learn about their world, other people and to master new competencies and conquer their fears. Muthukrishna & Sokoya (2014) found that during play children display higher order thinking because they solve problems using divergent thinking skills. Furthermore, they share, negotiate, resolve conflicts and learn self-advocacy skills (Ginsberg 2007). Greve and Thomsen (2016) found a significant positive correlation

between free play during childhood and adult social success. According to Gomes, Maia and Varga (2018), play prepares children to face the challenges to adulthood. Moreover, children who had ample time to engage in free play, demonstrated high self-esteem and flexibility in goal adjustment. Neill (1992) says that children are only able to learn what they need when they have emotional wholeness and personal strength. They can only inculcate these traits when they have unlimited freedom and autonomy to play in an atmosphere of approval and love. It must be noted though, that he distinguished between freedom to play and licence. He pointed out that the children in his school, Summerhill, were given freedom but not licence in that they were free to do as they pleased on condition it did not bother or infringe on the rights and freedom of anyone else.

Gray (2013) defines self-directed, or unstructured play or free play, as games that children choose to do, often spontaneously, without a set regime of purpose. Importantly it is also done without any adult interference or rules. It is important to understand the difference between free or self-directed play and that which is structured, that is, where the rules are predetermined and directed by adults. Play is distinguished from games with rules because it has no rules and it is not goal orientated (Daubert et al 2018). Rules are made up within the play by the players and not imposed by any outsiders. Free or self-directed play is intrinsically motivated (Gray 2013; Brown 2010; Daubert et al 2018), and it is removed from real life as it is highly imaginative. Therefore, for children play is a very pleasurable activity where imagination is heightened, new ideas explored, and relationships cemented. Tagore (Singh & Rawat 2013) in his learning centre/Ashram, Santiniketan, advocated free spontaneous play in nature because he believed that by playing in nature children would obtain “the nourishment of the body, happiness of mind, and the satisfaction of the natural impulses of children” (Singh & Rawat 2013:206).

In a NL home, children flow smoothly between social play, solitary play and work play (mimic adults at work, for instance cooking, driving and so on). Furthermore, parents ensure that they are nearby and therefore available for social interaction and learning. According to Kurt, Kurt and Medaille (2010), when children are in a free play space, they feel safe to explore, experiment and be creative and are open to new ideas and possibilities. Gray (2013), in agreement with Greve and Thomsen (2016), suggests that children not only acquire particular social and physical skills during play, they also

develop individual flexibility and adaptivity in that they can re-shape their competencies within the demands and challenges of a changing environment. He goes on to state that social success in adulthood hinges on the amount of time and the diversity of experiences children gain during their childhood play. Simply put, free play is a predictor for social success.

In the NL space, families once again are inspired by the wisdom of the hunter-gatherer philosophy and just plain common sense and empathy to provide their children with ample space, freedom and opportunity to play, explore and educate themselves through self-directed play (Gray 2013). The vast and intimate knowledge of the environment/nature and the skills base that hunter-gatherer societies accumulated over generations is often marvelled at by present societies (Boyette & Hewlett 2017; Gray 2011). It is important to acknowledge that this large variety of knowledge and skills was passed down from generation to generation through informal learning in the spirit of play, observation and freedom. Researchers, noting how easy it was for children in hunter-gatherer societies to acquire the knowledge and skills they needed without any explicit teaching and where nobody failed, used the term 'osmosis' to refer to this way of learning (Hewlett et al 2011). Boyette & Hewlett (2017) also concludes that because of their egalitarian ethos, explicit teaching does not exist in hunter-gatherer communities. However, some researchers points out that there are some instances where teaching does takes place and that perhaps not all skills can be passed on by observation and imitation, that some sort of pedagogical experience needs to take place (Hewlett 2016). Nevertheless, the important point to labour here is that there is no explicit teaching and learning within these communities, no learning institution and yet they are able to educate themselves in a remarkable manner and sustain their lifestyle for generations.

NL families embracing the idea of free play, autonomy and learning by osmosis have also found that when children are left to play, they learn in abundance. Their natural curiosity guides them into all avenues of whatever topic interests them. Play and curiosity complement each other because curiosity motivates children to seek new knowledge and playfulness motivates them to practice their new skills and use it appropriately and creatively (Gray 2013). This fits in with the findings of Rieber (1996) who states that children's play is both an engaging and a deliberate activity chosen by the child. Furthermore, children devote a lot of effort, time and commitment to it. Thus,

the learning that they gain from their interested involvement becomes deep and meaningful for the child. For learning to happen joyfully, a child must have freedom, respect and the opportunity to play.

In general, creativity is nurtured by freedom. Any attempts by adults to supervise and monitor children or to pressure children into conformity will lead to learning becoming a chore and therefore not joyful. NL also values the social development that comes with play because through play children learn socially appropriate behaviour, for example, they learn to cooperate, to follow social rules, cope with stress, regulate their emotions, show empathy to other playmates, regulate their physical abilities and much more. This is all done in a safe and engaging context (Daubert et al 2018). In NL children are not segregated into age categories, rather, children of all ages can be seen playing together and in this way they learn by observing both older and younger children. Gray (2013) and Gatto (2010) contend that from a historical perspective, segregation by age is a tragic oddity and anti-community. The idea of age segregation came with the massification of schooling. Yet 'free-age' mixing is important for children's development because in collaboration children can do many activities that they would not be able to do on their own. Among natural learners it is common to see older/skilled children helping younger children when they are playing a game or participating in a shared activity (Gray 2013). For example, teenagers adjust their playing to allow younger children to be part of the game. The younger children improve their skill level and the older children learn empathy, consideration and to nurture by sharing the game with children. Furthermore, when older children teach younger children they reinforce their own skills and understanding.

Over the years, practitioners have attempted to include the characteristics of play into their school curriculum. Some have found that game-based teaching and learning can be stimulating and motivating for children (Joshi 2014). However, these games are still directed by the teacher who outlines the rules of the game, facilitates discussions and basically manipulates the play experience into a predetermined educative goal. No doubt these measures are a lot more exciting than the general bookish learning at school, but the learning gained from this experience is very different from that gained when children are involved in free play within a community or by themselves. A study done by Hyndman, Benson, Ullah and Telford (2014) found that merely removing play equipment from the school grounds and encouraging free play halved sedentary

behaviour, improved creativity and boosted social problem-solving skills. A study done by Mitra et al (2005) also demonstrated that through play children are capable of learning very advanced skills by being curious and therefore motivated to learn and that interacting with different people, both young and old, helps them in their learning process. This indicates that in the absence of authority, curiosity and natural interaction with others become an effective pedagogical motivator.

2.3.10 Natural Learning and Reading

According to international standards, the literacy of a nation is a yardstick of their development and considered crucial to their participation in global affairs. The primary definition of literacy is the ability of an individual and thus society to read and write on some basic level. Entwined with this is the notion that this basic ability will enable the person/society to manage this information and be able to gather and transmit information (Pattisson 2013). Stainthorpe and Hughes (1999) posit that since reading and writing are a manufactured system and not a natural instinctive function, it needs to be taught. This is the general assumption of our society and therefore vast amounts of resources go into teaching reading (Gray 2010). Literacy is therefore institutionalised in schools with this technological view and the assumption is that it will lead to success. It is with this belief that reading then takes on a two-fold process at schools: Teaching and measurement. Thus, literacy teaching has to be standardised, tested and measured (Pattisson 2013). Schools have experimented with a myriad of methods to teach reading, some believing in the teaching of phonics and some in other innovative approaches (Gray 2010). Pattison contends that currently the phonics method seems to be the ‘best’ because it fits “nicely into the progressive stages that make standardised instruction and measurement an easy matter” (2013:44).

When a child enters formal school, the foremost goal is to get the child to become an independent reader because being a good reader is considered the cornerstone of success. This is because institutional education relies totally on reading and writing abilities to demonstrate and communicate how and what learning is taking place in the child (Pattisson 2013). Thus, reading becomes a much-focussed activity with both teachers and parents doing everything possible to get the child to read. A huge industry providing weird and wonderful methods to make reading easier has

developed and is well marketed. This process of learning to read can be easy for some children; however, for many children, it becomes one of the reasons for their ‘poor learner’ label. In the schooling system, if the child cannot read/write according to the predetermined level, the child has failed and their ticket to the good life is removed by the school (Pattisson 2013).

In contrast to this pressure of school reading, the NLA quietly and confidently claims that a child does not need to be taught to read at all. Various studies confirm that as long as children grow up in a literate society, surrounded by people who read, they will also learn to read when they are ready to learn (Gray 2010; Pattison 2013; Ramroop 2011).

Within the NLA, the concept of emergent literacy is firmly embedded in the process of learning to read. The central tenet of emergent literacy is that literacy does not start from the first day of school but from birth (Brassell 2004). Children learn to speak by being immersed in a functional conversational environment. Connor, Morrison and Slominski (2006) found evidence that vocabulary appears to be a consistent factor and the strongest predictor of reading success. In the same way, children through living in a functional literate environment gain literacy skills (Ramroop 2011; Holt 1989). The early institutionalising of children disturbs the process of natural language and literacy development because for optimal brain development, children need the individual care of their own special person, which even the best run nurseries and schools cannot offer (Biddulph 2005). Although there are no perfect homes, it does become clear that for emergent literacy learning to take place, parents and children need to spend time together. An early study by Sylvia Bell (Moore & Moore 1975) evidenced that the closer and better the quality of the parent-child relationship, the greater the child’s ability to learn. Ramroop (2011:257) aptly states that “in terms of the rules of engagement from the emergent literacy perspective, there can be no quality time with quantity time”. Stainthorpe and Hughes (1999) also hypothesise that children who teach themselves to read at a very early age show higher phonological levels than those who are not yet able to read.

Therefore, school as an institution that places a premium on quietness does not allow for robust conversations that takes place between parents and other family members, which therefore hampers the literacy development of the child (Dewey 2011). Furthermore, schools have come up with various methodologies to teach reading

regardless of whether children are keen or ready to read. Moore and Moore (1975) found that when there is an attempt to direct or interfere with children's learning timetables, children are slowed or stopped in their learning process. Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff and Eyer (2003) concluded that any pressured efforts to get children to read is not only a waste of time but can be a serious impediment to their very learning process. Moore and Moore (1975), all those years ago, were already cautioning that if children are forced to develop academic skills before showing interest in it, and therefore before their brains are ready for it, they may become anxiety-ridden, frustrated and even possibly develop many problems associated with learning failure.

Gray (2010), in his studies of children in a Sudbury school, a free learning environment, found that the age that children become competent readers can vary from as young as 4 to as old as 14. Some children learn to read quicker than others. Often children who teach themselves to read will go from non-reading to fluent reading as quickly as within a few weeks. Children differed in how they learn: Some would go the phonics route and others just figured it out as they read. According to Holt (1989) and Freire (1973), children and adults need about 30 hours to learn to read. They do not need to be taught but to be encouraged by a book-loving environment. Reading to children not only improves their reading skills; it also strengthens the parent-child bond. Gentry (2010) found that reading aloud to children provides repeated exposure to words, increases the number of words they hear and introduces three times as many 'rare' words into their vocabulary.

Reading in a NL home can take the following pattern, as described by Griffith (1998:78–79):

First, they are interested in letters, logos and other symbols and the realisation that they have meaning. Gradually the child recognises and reads such words and symbols and to associate them with their meanings. The child asks about the letter sounds and word pronunciations and listens attentively, often following along with the text to stories read to her. She will want her favourite stories read over and over and in this time may memorise the text well enough to 'act as if' she is reading. Then one day she will be truly reading. Once she reaches this stage, her reading speed and comprehension progresses rapidly and usually within a few weeks or months, she can read almost any text.

Although this pattern can be seen with many NL children, learning to read is actually an intensely personal process with no single approach and every child's learning is unique.

Holt (1983) describes a school in Denmark where children are not subjected to any formal instruction and can read if and when they wanted, and they have free choice as to what they can read as a variety of reading material is available. They can go to teacher and ask to be read to or to read to the teacher. The teacher does not teach, point out or correct but just listens and only corrects if invited by the child. It is believed that children are very capable of realising their own mistakes and correcting them. This process has its own natural flow and time.

By comparison, a child learning to read at school is often expected to read out aloud and any mistake is met with either a quick correction from the teacher or definite signals from the other children that they know more or better through giggling, sniggering, dramatic facial expressions and putting up their hands to show their knowledge (Ramroop 2011). Unfortunately, the imposed model in schools causes children to lose confidence in their abilities to self-correct and creates pressure and anxiety, which then interrupts this natural flow of learning (Criss 2008).

A parent reading aloud to a child is generally considered most important in encouraging literacy. Wells (1986) states that through the experience of listening to stories, children begin to discover the symbolic potential of language and its power in creativity. Other benefits of reading aloud include:

- Children begin to participate more in the literate life of the home
- Emotional bonding deepens as reading is experienced as parental attention

As mentioned above, conversations between adults and children are also important for literacy development. Clark (in McGill-Franzen 2011) believes that parents answering their children's questions is critical for reading development. As Patisson (2013:253) explains:

Children will be motivated by their own interest to ask questions and because they are all individual learners, likely to be learning in their own idiosyncratic ways, following their questions will lead to more effective learning than attempting to lead them in a particular direction.

The interesting point to note is that contrary to the view of Stainthorpe and Hughes (1999) that children reading without being taught is an extraordinary and exceptional phenomenon, NL families see this as a very normal and ordinary occurrence. Gray (2010) outlines some principles that highlight learning to read in a NL home:

- There is no critical period or best age for learning. In school, children have to read according to a set time schedule and failure to do so means the child is labelled a failure. Pattisson (2013) states that the primacy of reading abilities for success in schooling life is evident in that if a child cannot satisfactorily read and/write then the child is labelled a failure.
- As mentioned above, a good reader will be successful in school mainly because learning in schools is bookish. A study in Finland (Aerila & Merisuo-Storm 2017) found that children who are deemed poor learners in preschool retain this status in later school years and often display behaviour problems. Children in a NL home on the other hand, may read at any time with no negative consequences. Children in NL homes tend to have positive attitudes towards reading and learning. Children who learn to read by themselves also feel very confident in their learning ability.
- Motivated children can go from non-reading to fluent reading very quickly. At this point there is no study available on any evidence as to how and why this happens. However, some parents attribute this rapid reading progress to the sudden gain in confidence that children feel when they realise they can read.
- Attempts to push reading may backfire. According to Moore and Moore (1975), as mentioned previously, when there is an attempt to interfere or change learning styles and timetables, it slows or stops the learning process. Some parents have noticed that when children feel pressure to read, they begin to resent reading (Holt 1983).
- Children learn to read when reading is a means to some valued end. Children become interested in reading when they see good reason for it. Some children learn to read by themselves because they are impatient to reach the end of the story or they want to do a something that requires reading. Different families relate different reasons as to why their children decide to learn to read by themselves.

- Reading is learnt through shared social participation. This echoes the sentiments of Vygotsky who believe that children develop new skills first through joint participation with more skilled people and then begin to use their new skills for their own purpose. For example, it is quite common in NL homes that children's reading interest is piqued because of shared reading, games that families play, especially board games where the game cards need to be read, watching movies and playing computer games; these can all spur children into wanting to become a competent reader.
- Reading and writing often go together. However, some children prefer to write before they read. Their need to communicate using words, spurs them on to learn to read.
- There is no predictable method through which children learn to read. Every child is unique and is the only one who can determine how and when they will read. The role of the adult is to be available, listen and help when help is requested. Adults need to be observers and enjoy the process as it unfolds.
- It is often thought that children who are exposed to screen time will not be able to read. In many NL homes, where screen time is accepted, many families find that this aids their children's reading. Many of the games played on screens actually demand considerable reading ability. According to Rolstad and Kesson (2013), it has been documented that children who have not succeeded in developing their reading skills through instruction, have still acquired high levels of literacy through video gaming. Mitra et al (2005) demonstrates this in his 'hole in the wall experiment'. He placed a computer, which children were free to use, in a slum in Delhi, India. This exercise showed how the world's poorest children helped each other to develop their literacy skills and learn a myriad of other complex concepts by being able to play with the computer embedded in the wall in collaboration with each other. This experiment cements the idea that "learning to read, as with all other learning, is an intense personal process and therefore there cannot be only one single way of approach" (Pattison 2013:50).

2.3.11 The Impact of Traditional Schooling on Democracy

Sarason (in Bernard 2009:16) states, "Powerlessness frequently breeds reduced interest and motivation, at best a kind of passionless conformity and at worst, a rejection of learning". With democracy being touted as the 'civilised' ideology for the governments of today, where respect for people, freedom and diversities is the cornerstone, it is important to examine the role of schools within the concept and promotion of democracy. For a democratic society, democratic behaviour is required. The theory is that schools play a fundamental role in preparing children for a democratic system. Glaeser, Ponzetto and Shleifer (2007) state that education and democracy are highly correlated and that schooling teaches children to interact with others, which then raises their civic participation which is a fundamental value of democracy. However, it is McQuillan's (1997) contention that schools are unsuccessful in developing the social and other critical skills that are essential for meaningful participation in a democratic society. The structure of schools with its hierarchy, strict schedules, rules and regulations does not lend itself to democracy as it does not provide children with opportunities to be actively and naturally involved in democratic processes.

According to Prud'Homme (2014), this paradox of children being taught democracy in an undemocratic setting should be addressed. Can people become democratic in their thoughts and behaviour, where they embrace the fundamental principles of democracy, just because someone tells them to do so? After 12 years of schooling where obedience, silence, acquiescence and conformity are the dominant traits, school leavers are expected to function in a democratic manner when they emerge and engage in the 'real world'. Again, as with the issue of socialisation mentioned earlier, schools falsely assume that their role is to prepare children for their participation in some future democratic society even while completely overlooking children's autocratic experience of everyday school life.

It is the opinion of various researchers that traditional schooling is the antithesis of democracy (Prud'Homme 2014; Pitt 2011; McQuillan 1997; Dewey 2011). One cannot prepare children for democratic citizenship while depriving them of democratic opportunities and responsibilities as they are growing up because it makes no educational sense to do so. Democracy, like any other important social value, needs

to be lived. For critical citizenship engagement, a person must feel empowered and believe that they have the space and freedom to share their concerns and voice their opinions. Therefore, the appropriate learning system in a democracy would have to be democratic and non-autocratic, with rules and rights for the individuals. The learning should empower people to be critical, autonomous, happy and satisfied. In traditional schooling, children generally have no voice in how the school is managed nor in how and what they should learn. McQuillan (1997:648) puts it rather succinctly:

In terms of formal power and responsibility, students are institutional nonentities. The daily practice of school is one of suppression and intimidation and any notion that all people should have equal opportunity to succeed in life is also thwarted in schools as the pass/fail paradigm according to a strict pre-planned path is hard-wired into the schooling system.

According to Gatto (2010), all the characteristics of traditional schooling, that is grading, competition, rules and regimentation, are paraphernalia of servitude and not true learning and freedom.

The question that needs to be addressed rather urgently is: If we want a vibrant and diverse society with responsible, active and creative citizens, why do we continue with traditional schooling and its emphasis on competition, control, conformity and suppression of the child? There is a need to promote not only education for democracy but education as democracy, where children participate in a pluralistic community and therefore have direct access to the social understanding of democracy (McQuillan 1997).

Fahey (2014) outlines the essentials of a democratic education:

- Recognising that children are natural learners with different abilities that have equal value for society. Children learn in their own way and in their own time.
- Recognising and affirming children's emotional readiness for learning a task. Giving children the space and opportunity to feel safe in their unique learning instincts to know when to embark on a learning process. For example, in a democratic environment, children's freedom to play is valued.
- "Maximising choice while minimising or eliminating coercive structural relationships" (Fahey 2014:21). Children are keen observers and learn through

a process of inquiry and intuition and they often formulate theories, which they test themselves until they feel confident in their knowing (Holt 1983, 1989).

- Emphasising learning skills rather than content mastery. The skills needed for 21st century life lie not in rote learning but in questioning, identifying, locating, analysing relevant information, creating new knowledge and critical thinking. These skills can only be gained if children's natural curiosity drive their learning.
- Community self-governance where children and adults have equal rights to determine their own learning process within their own learning spaces. Freedom is crucial for children to learn and to own the learning process. However, this freedom must be partnered with the concept of autonomy as well as mutual respect (Petrovic & Rolstad 2016).

In a NL environment, the following characteristics, as outlined by Gray (2013), optimise children's abilities and understanding of democracy.

- Time and space to play and explore;
- Free-age mixing among children and adolescents;
- Access to knowledgeable and caring adults;
- Access to resources and the freedom to play/use them;
- Free exchange of ideas;
- Freedom from bullying and other antisocial behaviour; and
- Immersion in a democratic community.

However, other questions also need to be explored: Are all NL homes democratic? Does the notion of freedom and autonomy in the child's learning path automatically relate to democracy in all aspects of the family? Lyn-Piluso and Lyn-Piluso (2008) state that many home-education families reject the schooling system because of its inherent authoritarian nature and yet maintain authoritarian family structures. How do cultural and religious practices impact on the children's freedom and autonomy in the home? Can families assert their democratic ideals on the children's learning trajectory, or should it encompass all of family life? These questions lead to another important consideration: Adultism/childism. This is an interesting and necessary area for

research and discussion because its findings will be crucial for the understanding of family dynamics and children, and their place in an ideal democratic society.

Aspects of NL and democratic education can flourish in an institutional setting. Throughout modern history there are examples scattered through the ages and in different countries. For example, the Escuela Moderna or Modern School in Spain, founded by Francisco Ferrer, was based on the fundamentals of anarchism. Therefore, children had freedom and time for spontaneity, personal reflection, exploration and individual inquiry, among others. In comparison to the dominant Catholic schools of the era, the children attending this school were given freedom and space for individual learning and reflection because Ferrer firmly believed that the school should “develop the potentiality of their whole being” (Mueller 2012:25). Neill’s Summerhill School, founded in 1921 and still in existence, where children’s freedom, equality and individual autonomy are fundamental ideals, is another example of a ‘free school’ that has successfully incorporated the essence of NL into an institution. The Sudbury Valley School in the US is similar to Summerhill and not only is it still in existence, it has grown significantly as numerous schools have been set up in the Sudbury model all over the world.

Many researchers have gone into these environments to fine-comb through the structure, the ethos, the learning and the children. At Summerhill and the Sudbury schools there are no grades, no ratings, no tests or evaluations, no hierarchy and no people of authority. Students and staff have an equal voice and an equal vote. There is no curriculum to follow. Children are given the space and opportunity to flourish and learn as they see fit. They decide for themselves how they prefer to spend their time and are also responsible for their learning interests, methods, their learning environment and their evaluation. Simply put, they are in control of their lives and their learning. The schools provide a myriad of courses, be it pottery or astronomy, if that is what the child wants to learn. The schools ensure a fear-free environment where there is no competition and where participatory democracy as a strong value is maintained. Furthermore, a supportive community of all ages is nurtured (Gray 2013; Neill 1992). Tagore’s Santiniketan Ashram, a lesser known democratic school that was opened at the turn of the 20th century in India, also championed freedom as the key to learning. His learning centre was founded on aims that show synergy with the NLA and other democratic learning institutions, for example:

- Intellectual development in which he included the development of imagination, creative free thinking, constant curiosity. The children were free to develop their own way of learning.
- Nature was the children's best 'teacher'. The children did not experience any pressure to learn anything. Nature was the most important guiding force that helped inculcate the spirit of learning.
- Freedom: Children had free choice in what they wanted to learn and when they wanted to learn. Children could play freely and joyously in natural surroundings of the Ashram. For Tagore, education should be after the heart of man (Singh & Rawat 2013).

There are many other examples of free or democratic schools all over the world from Paideia (Fremeaux & Jordan 2012) to Sudbury in the US (Gray 2013), to Riverstone Village Self-Directed Education Community in South Africa (2018), which demonstrate that it is possible to establish learning centres that can provide children with a space that is natural, safe and nurturing for their learning development. However, once again, with all its beautiful philosophies, it remains a special space where learning needs to happen, in other words, place-based learning that is governed by some structure and functional institutional guidelines. The concern is that the functioning of the institution may become more important than the individual and that learning remains within an institution. Therefore, the challenge for centres of this nature would be about widening the community of learning and ensuring that the children's freedom and autonomy are still highly valued.

2.3.12 Natural Learning in the International World

Home education is a fast-growing educational phenomenon across the globe (O'Brien 2014). In the US, the number of children went from 13 000 in the 1970s an incredible, conservative estimate of 2.2 million in 2015—taking away its fringe status and placing it firmly within the broader educational debate as a viable option (Ray 2017). Home education in Australia in a two year period, 2011-2012, has grown by an 8% average (Chapman 2015), and according to Jeffreys (2015), in a period of 6 years there has been a 65% increase of children who are registered as home educated in the UK. Within these numbers lie the figures for the number of people using natural

learning/unschooling because it is difficult to separate these into the different categories of alternative learning. According to Riley (2018) 12 % of the total number of homeschoolers can be considered natural learners. This conflation of NL and homeschooling makes it difficult to determine the actual extent of the NL movement (Petrovic & Rolstad 2016). In Germany where home education is not allowed, there are about 700–1 000 (again a cautious estimate) children who are being homeschooled despite the stringent law prohibiting it. Some parents cite religious reasons while others cite an anti-authoritarian philosophy (Spiegler 2009). Spiegler further claims that families who were threatened with legal action chose to relocate to Austria in their hundreds, where home education is legal. In India too, the number of people homeschooling includes the number of people NL because NL has rarely been documented and quantified. However, a study done by De Wit and Regeer (2017) revealed that the NLA is growing mainly because of parents wanting to opt out of the extreme pressure and anxieties experienced by children in the formal schooling sector. According to Riley (2016), unschooling in Hong Kong exists but is very rare (six families at the time of the study) as home education is not encouraged in Hong Kong.

The common reason that most of the families give for this renascence of the age-old practice of home education is that they would like to regain control of their lives and this includes what and how they learn. Like in South Africa, racism is often cited as a reason for home education in the US. However, the rising number of Black and other minority groups like Indians, Asians, Hispanics, American Indians, secular humanists changes this narrow view on why people are opting for home education (Ray 2000). Mazama (2016) state that in 1999 only 10% of the homeschoolers were Black but between 1999–2007 the number of Black homeschoolers in the USA tripled.

It seems that worldwide people are beginning to see that schools are punitive and are sites of alienation, unpleasantness and oppression. Therefore, more people are beginning to resist and find suitable alternatives for their children. Families in Korea and China too are objecting to the obsession with test-driven education and the damage it inflicts on children and want to pursue quality education that fosters creativity (Wheatley 2013). According to Sheng (2017), in China most parents' primary reasons for home educating is the total emphasis on academic achievement in schools, and like with O'Brien's (2014) study in Ireland, the large classroom size creates a lot of dissatisfaction among parents. In Kenya, parents are criminalised if

they home educate their children as it is not recognised as a legitimate and credible option (Gathure 2015). Yet, in an Australian study conducted in the Victoria region in 2012, the number homeschoolers rose from 859 in 2008 to 1 257 in 2009 because of the growing acceptance of home education as a viable, legal and attractive option in the community (English 2012). According to a parent in Spain, “school doesn’t seem to be the ideal place for kids to learn by themselves, to pursue knowledge, to get involved with the environment, to understand life” (Gaultney 2016).

2.3.13 Legalities of Home Education in South Africa

During the apartheid era, home education was illegal and parents who did not comply by sending their children to school faced imprisonment. However, after 1994, both the new Constitution and the South African Schools Act of 1996 legalised home education in alignment with Article 26 (3) of the Universal declaration of Human Rights, which states: “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”. In 2005, the Children’s Act further cemented the right of parents to choose the education they deem best for their child by acknowledging that parents have the duty and right to guide, direct and secure the education that is in the best interest of the child (Children’s Act 2005). However, it must be noted that within this legalisation there were many conditions that do not sit well with the home-education community. Nevertheless, in 1996 there were 50 families on record as homeschoolers and by 2017 it was estimated that over 100 thousand children were home educated (again a very conservative estimate as it does not include the families who do not declare themselves as home educators). Ironically, in 2017, the Department of Basic Education tabled the draft BELA Bill that created further unhappiness and distrust among home-educating parents. Firstly, the home-education community saw the government’s approach as ‘sneaky’ because it was not well-publicised and the public was given only one month to send in their written objections (Pestalozzi Trust 2018). Secondly, the Draft Bill introduced a jail time for parents who do not comply (Draft BELA Bill 2017:3.6). This reinforced fear and distrust that resulted in more home educators going ‘under the radar’. Unfortunately, this also impacted on this research because a significant number of families, citing reasons of fear of being discovered and punished by the government, chose not to participate in the study. Other aspects in the Draft Bill that home educators consider fundamental problems are:

- Registration: According to the Draft Bill, parents must register the child with the Department of Basic Education. In general home-educating parents do not agree that they should get permission from the government to home educate their children.
- Curriculum: The Bill seeks to compel the home education community to use educational programmes that match the national Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) that is currently used in government schools and to write the National Senior Certificate (NSC). This prohibits parents and children from choosing a curriculum that suits their needs.
- Assessment: It is stipulated that parents must have each child assessed annually by a competent assessor. This is seen as hugely expensive and unnecessary exercise especially since the educational purpose of this assessment is debatable. This is seen as another way of trying to enforce the national curriculum onto the home-education community.
- Matric qualification: Children are no longer allowed to complete alternative matric qualifications. They must do the South African general matric. This seriously limits the right of families to choose the most suitable matric.
- Government has the right to cancel the registration: Parents object to this as they feel that this infringes on their right to make decisions for their families.

Parents and various home-education organisations placed their objections to the Draft Bill and by the completion of this thesis, the Department of Basic Education was still busy with it and no definite decisions had been made. During the course of this research, this Bill was featured on *Carte Blanche*, a well-known television programme that featured home-educating families and a Department of Basic Education representative informing the viewers of this new Bill and what the Department of Basic Education expects of the home-education community. This has created even more ill-ease in the home-education community, and everyone is waiting with trepidation for the government's next move on home-education.

2.3.14 Towards a Learning Society

Falbel (2008) states that our society has lost the ability to imagine how life could be in a world free of pedagogical manipulation because we are addicted to the concept of

education as it is presented in today's compulsory schooling system. Society's values have been institutionalised in planned and engineered processes to define their values and what they believe they need for a good life (Illich 2002). In other words, institutional learning has colonised one's natural tendencies and distanced one from the immediate environment and from the self. This makes it easy for people to forget that schools are man-made and therefore can be changed (Otieno-Hongo & Ochien'g 2001). Illich (2002) reiterates that the absurdity of modern institutions is that institutional learning has taken such a strong hold on the psyche of modern society that any notion of a deschooled society is difficult to envisage. Taking into consideration the discussion thus far on NL and its potential to transform learning and therefore society, all education systems can learn from the NLA and view parents and communities as equal partners in education. With no support from governments and the general community, NL parents have shown that they have the ability to assume the core function of successfully educating their children (Anthony 2015). Using this as a measure, it can be assumed that a lot more can be achieved with the support of the government and the broader community.

As discussed in this chapter, the NLA in essence ensures that responsibility and autonomy for learning remains largely in the domain of the individual, family and the community. Discussions need to take place in terms of how this approach, albeit practised in the microcosm of the home, can become the national approach to education in South Africa. In other words, a learning system that encompasses the tenets of NL need to be developed and implemented. To understand the possibilities of this approach, one has to look at the writings and reflections of people who have been proposing a change in the education system that encompasses the values, philosophies and essence of NL in a broader context.

2.3.14.1 Learning Societies

The notion of a learning society is not new as it is predominantly how communities functioned before institutionalised learning. However, the concept of a learning society in today's modern sense first gained prominence more than 30 years ago with the initial writings of Robert Hutchins, *The Learning Society* (1968), and Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (2002). Both these authors eloquently outline why the present compulsory model is outdated and counter development. Hutchins, for example,

argues that education should not be confined to schooling times and for a limited portion of a person's life. He also states that any planned programme of learning for children cannot prepare them for their adult future lives because of the rapid changes experienced in society (Miller 2001).

Illich (2002) also calls for the liberation of learning from institutional control. He believes that this control creates intellectual dependency and trains people to be uncritical. He therefore advocates the mutual sharing of learning based strongly on the learners' own self-identified interests. This is indeed the basis of NL. Faure (1972), in his report to UNESCO, *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*, also makes known his distaste for institutional self-importance. He believes that the educational system should include alternative institutions and community resources and that education should no longer be limited to a certain time period in one's life. Rather it should be a continuum as long as life. What should matter is individuals' learning and the freedom for people to find their own path along the way. Learning community members struggle against role rigidity because they know that the potential to teach and learn resides in everyone (Levinger 2001). Faure (1972) focusses on expanding freedom at the individual level and on equal respect being given to all avenues of learning. According to Otieno-Hongo & Ochien'g, "Learning societies promote deep learning processes of reflection, dialogue and action to create futures that are in harmony with notions of justice, love and interdependence" (2001:31). Learning, according to Hartwell (2016), transforms our social identity and therefore boosts our capacity to contribute to society. Therefore, compulsory schooling as presently practised does not develop learning and community wellbeing because it continues to maintain relationships of power and authority, insists on delivering compulsory syllabi and knowledge that suppress natural self-directed learning, and therefore, actively discourages critical reflection, analysis, synthesis or valuing (Hartwell 2016).

According to Miller (2001) the term 'learning society' has multiple, tangled and divergent meanings. However, Levinger (2001:109) offers this definition:

The term describes a group of individuals who have built a community around values and behaviours that promote query and personal growth as lifelong pursuits for all citizens. Members of a learning society live inquisitively and question structures of authority. They routinely engage in empirical discovery

and prefer direct personal experience to the mediated insertion of decontextualized knowledge, facts, and data into their heads. Theirs is a community where learning is active, participatory, open-ended, collaborative and dialogic.

Popescu (2011:4) offers this definition:

The learning society is a society that enhances learning for all. It addresses individual development, as well as social cohesion, through promoting lifelong learning for all its members, irrespective of age, gender, social status or work status.

In general, the following are characteristics of a learning society:

- The emphasis is on lifelong learning.
- There is no fixed entry or exit points for learning.
- Learning is seen as an activity and not place-based.
- Recognition that learning should be for all and that no one should be excluded.
- There are sufficient resources to satisfy the learning needs of the individual and community. These resources need to be multilevel, diverse and widely available.
- All individuals, groups and institutions are engaged in learning activities.
- The learning society comprises different learning environments: Informal, non-formal and formal learning.
- Learning is decentralised and deregulated.

In a nutshell, learning societies are societies that enable individuals to learn throughout their lifespan and it is believed that this form of education is the future of learning. However, an absolute requirement for the functioning of a learning society is the availability of learning resources.

2.3.14.2 *Community of Practice*

This term was brought to the fore by anthropologists Wenger and Lave (Wenger 2018) and chiefly houses the idea that communities can be the living curriculum for all within the community. Again, it is not a new phenomenon as humans have been in communal

learning together since the beginning of time, but the term does provide an understanding of how learning within a dynamic community in a shared domain engages everyone in a process of collective learning (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner 2015). Therefore, communities of practice have their own place in the overall ecology of learning.

The three characteristics of a community of practice are outlined as follows by Wenger and Wenger-Trayner (2015:1–2):

- The Domain: There must be an identity that shows a shared domain of interest where members value their collective competence and learn from each other.
- The Community: To pursue their interest within their shared domain, members engage in shared activities to help and share information with each other. The key here is that there must be interaction and learning together.
- The Practitioners: Members of a community of practice are practitioners who through sharing and interactions develop a shared repertoire for their practice.

A combination of these characteristics makes up a community of practice and all three characteristics need to be developed in parallel to create a true community of practice. Therefore, a school may have a lot in common, but it does not necessarily form a community of practice. Members of a community of practice do not have to be together on a daily basis, because it is their interactions and their shared vision that binds them together.

The concept of a learning society and a community of practice offers a very different yet powerful philosophy of learning and living. The advocates of these concepts believe that a change in learning theory to embrace these philosophies can transform the current society. This study proposes that these two systems of knowledge can be brought together for the transformation of the current education system. Communities of practice in various fields exist within a learning society. If communities of practice are formed within the learning society, it will take away the privilege that schools have as the locus of learning. Students do not acquire knowledge to be applied in the outside world by being in a self-contained closed classroom. The class or lesson is not the main learning event, rather life is the main learning event. However, in a learning society, learning and training sessions in a classroom situation will still have a role to play but it will be in relation to the learning that is happening in the world, within the

interest expressed by the individuals and members of the community of practice. As Hartwell (2016) opines, the purpose of education is to give birth to joy in learning. Therefore, facilitating the space for the creation of many communities of practice within a learning society will show a society committed to diverse forms of learning. Illich (2002:72) proposes that the alternative to schooling is not the public resources for some new device to make people learn but a “creation of a new style of educational relationship between man and his environment”. For learning in this shared space, styles, attitudes towards growing up and resources available for learning will need to be fostered. Moreover, individuals, through their interaction with others, will experience personal transformation (Hartwell 2016). This will further their capacity to participate in and contribute to society in a meaningful way.

However, it seems that the term learning society and community of practice have been hijacked by the neoliberal sector in that many people refer to lifelong learning mainly in the context of information and communication technologies and information technology platforms, believing that the information and communication technologies sector plays the major role in a learning society. Both these concepts are sometimes used by corporates to strengthen and maintain the needs of the business sector. For example, Popescu (2011) discusses the importance of a learning society with the aim of meeting the needs created by the dictates of the corporate world. There is a focus on the acquisition of needed skills and competencies so that the work force is more adaptable and flexible. In other words, the notion of the learning society as envisaged by people like Illich (2002) and others has been changed to suit the narrow market-related goals with the notion of globalisation and what constitutes a successful society. The corporate images associated with a learning society seem to be about a laptop and cellular phones, rather than children playing and other scenarios of learning. Furthermore, there is a bigger emphasis on learning institutions and the private sector working together to bridge the gap between these two sectors so that the private sector benefits from having a more capable workforce.

Miller (2001) poses this important question: Should learning be about people changing the world to make it a better, beautiful, more habitable and equitable place or is learning about changing people to make them fit for the global economy? The fundamental shift in what is deemed a learning society by people like Illich (2002) and others is that learning should be more about developing the unique nature of

individuals and therefore their own communities, and not only about producing the perfect employee for the economic sector. Joshi (2001) found that in everyday activities, people in village societies find rich spaces for learning and growing. Contrary to globalisation, local people are not deprived or backward because in their village society they have opportunities to identify, challenge and provide solutions that are relevant to their own local context. Moreover, these learnings are consistent with their values of interdependence, diversity, cooperation and collective participation. These are fundamental and precious values that have been eroded by modernity in many other societies. Joshi (2001) states further that the major defect of global educational initiatives, for example Education for All, is that it fails to recognise and respect the diversity of values, belief systems and contexts of the different communities. According to the driving agenda of modernity, progress and wellbeing are only based on a capitalist framework that reduces people and the purpose of life to serving the state and the global market. Sadly, all human values and relationships are made subservient to the goals of profit and efficiency (Joshi 2001). This sentiment is also expressed by Hartwell (2016), who states that because educational systems are top-down approaches, the planning process does not engage the people it is meant to serve as full human beings. It does not acknowledge that communities have their own creative intelligence and their own capacity for self-determination within their deep and valued cultural life.

Therefore, in order to transform society into a learning society comprised of many communities of practice it is necessary to build relationships, the essence of transformation, between the state and the people. This relationship must have respect, appreciation and power practised between all parties. Furthermore, the state must support the self-organised learning of the communities rather than enforce a coercive schooling model developed by the state. There needs to be a rethinking of educational processes, of how to seriously build human capacity, not just for developing workers for the economy but for building authentic communities. As Hartwell (2016) states, this process will be a complex one and will require honesty and humility. These are qualities that are not easily seen among national leaders. This process should be a public discourse and critical reflection on the purpose and relevance of education and on the responsibility of individuals, families and communities. This type of discourse

will need a high degree of openness and encouragement for critical reflection. Hartwell (2016:7–8) outlines five elements of a social change process:

- Understanding: In this stage there should be an understanding that the education system as we know it is not working for society, that one should let go of current beliefs and assumptions and be willing and open to creating a new understanding of how this process should unfold, who are the partners in this process and how the bonds of caring and mutual wellbeing can be strengthened. These discussions should confront the disconnect of the economic and educational systems that promote individual competition for material wellbeing as opposed to traditional economic and learning activities that promote community wellbeing.
- Vision: This is when the state and the communities find a way to a collective vision of how they see their education system working.
- Expectations: Here the beliefs inherent in the vision are translated into an organisational plan. This is a critical stage because all stakeholder voices are heard and honoured. It is a consultation process still within the values of caring and respect.
- Empowerment: In this stage, it is agreed that learning should be based on the mutual capabilities of learners to self-organise within a supportive community. In other words, supportive systems will be in place so that learners are able to self-organise to maximise their learning potential.
- Support: The state would need to support communities in terms of resources that support and take forward their learning ideas and needs. Furthermore, the state would need to partner with various stakeholders to support the communities and their learning endeavours with public financing. In every neighbourhood, networks of learning centres need to be established together with community projects, libraries, youth centres, parks, pools, gyms, playgrounds, museums and any other resources that a community may need. These resources need to be commonly held and democratically controlled by the people from the community (Hern 2008).

2.3.14.3 *How Would a Learning Society Function in the South African Context?*

According to Illich (2002), the two essentials for an educational revolution are the development of a new understanding of the educational style of an emerging counterculture and a new orientation for research. Thus, the first step towards establishing a learning society in South Africa would be to conceptualise how learning in a deschooled society might unfold and which learning institutions could be made available to support this approach to learning in that society (Illich 2002). Thereafter, the deeper transformation of changing learning theories from those that govern education presently to those that embrace theories of natural learning and learning societies can follow.

South Africa is a complex society, with huge differences in household income, culture, language and geography. Furthermore, the country is still in its infancy in terms of emerging from the shackles of its colonial and apartheid history. Since 1994, the government, in an attempt to discard the ills of apartheid education, has tried many approaches that have produced ambivalent results. Unfortunately, the government has not had the political will to radically change the education system. Rather, change was implemented within the existing broad framework of compulsory education, based on the traditional Western model favoured by most countries. Even though the education sector receives the major portion of the country's budget, the disparity in resources and results (Matric and the Annual National Assessments) between previously advantaged and previously disadvantaged schools remain evident. For example, there are many schools and communities that do not have a library and many others without proper infrastructure (toilets, windows, furniture). Over the years, the poor Annual National Assessments results have shocked the nation with the dismal report on lack of knowledge, especially literacy, among school-going children. Yet the government and general society continue with traditional schooling, year after year, hoping and expecting a different result. Perhaps it is time to embrace another system, one that is backed by research that proves its ability to transform individuals, and therefore, create a thriving learning society where every individual contributes towards the wellbeing of broader society. Wenger (2018:4) proposes changing the education sector in three dimensions, all of which can easily be translated into the NLA:

- Internally: How to organise communities/society so that learning is grounded in practice through participation in communities around the interests of learning.
- Externally: How to connect children to broader society for participation and application of knowledge/interest.
- Lifespan of a student: How to serve the lifelong learning needs of members of the community as well as how to organise communities of practice to focus on topics of continuing interest.

If these dimensions are implemented, the community becomes the locus of learning with the government offering the support and resources for that learning to happen. Learning, therefore, becomes part of a broader plan focussed on topics of continuing interest to students for lifelong learning as life becomes the main learning event.

As Illich (2002) asserts, the alternative to school is the creation of a new understanding and approach to an educational relationship between individuals and their environment and not merely a manipulation of current institutions and devices to make people learn. To ensure and develop this mode, attitudes towards growing up, the resources available for learning and the quality and structure of daily life will have to change concurrently. Illich (2002:72–104) outlines three purposes for an educational system that could ensure a thriving learning society: The first purpose is to provide all who want to learn with access to all available resources at any time in their lives. Apart from ensuring that the general physical environment be made accessible, the physical learning resources that have been reduced to teaching aids become generally available for self-directed learning. In South Africa, this would mean providing basic resources to all communities. The resources provided should be as diverse as the communities that use them and need to encompass the following:

- Resources need to be multilevel so that different age groups can be part of the learning experience.
- Resources need to be diversified to accommodate the individual needs and learning styles of the learners.
- A multitude of learning providers and spaces need to be available.
- A variety and a multitude of delivery styles must be available.

- All organisations and individuals in the society would become both learners and teachers to others.
- Formal educational institutions should be multipurpose and available to all. For example, libraries would be open to all, at all times, to accommodate all members of the community. Laboratories and museums would be open and available to all (adapted from Popescu 2011).

The second purpose is to focus on empowering all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them. In other words, consider including an apprenticeship model that facilitates young people being absorbed in the ‘real’ world of work. Furthermore, create spaces in communities where young and old and all other ages can come together to pursue activities and learn from each other, rather than separating people in different institutions. Illich (2002) recommends establishing a ‘skill exchange’ where people with skills offer to teach anyone who wants to learn and that they be allowed to contact each other and pursue that learning activity. In this context, the person with more knowledge has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner with respect to a task/process/concept and is willing to share this knowledge/skill. This person can be a parent, teacher, coach, older adult, peers, a younger person and now, even a computer could be considered to play this role. Furthermore, Illich (2002) advocates that skilled teachers/people should be listed and contacted through a network or a ‘learning web’ that provides a wide range of services. There can also be ‘peer matching’ for activities and learning that can take place within the same peer group. In this way, there can be a return to neighbourhood life as the primary centre of learning and creative expression (Illich 2002).

Illich’s third purpose of a good educational system is to furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known. Botkin (2001) concurs that finding ways to conduct dialogues among all parties is a critical dimension of positive societal learning. This openness to people’s opinion creates a wise society where alternative values and value for diversity is upheld. With open dialogues, learning becomes more respectful for alternative ways of living, more open to difference and less attached to preserving the ways of life that dominate other people.

Another essential highlighted by Botkin (2001) for the transformation of society is the importance of parenting, especially during children's foundation years. In the present day, parenting is not considered a serious task and it can be easily outsourced. The general sentiment expressed by people is that they 'can't sit at home and do nothing' when it comes to choosing full-time work over full-time parenting. Any work outside the home is valued more than being a stay-at-home parent. This is also dictated by the economic ideals and the notion of success in a capitalist economy. In general, people spend a lot of time learning many skills, for example acquiring a driver's licence or learning to apply make-up, but the active learning to gain skills/knowledge for 'better' parenting is rare. Yet parenting is one of the most important tasks to ensure a good society (Botkin 2001). After all, families are the basic unit of the general fabric of society. Therefore, governments need to find ways to structure society so that parenting is supported as a fundamental occupation. A good example is the Netherlands, where parents are allowed to negotiate the amount of time they spend at work. So, a typical scenario is that both parents alternate working outside the home for a percentage of their time. This means that they can share parenting their children. In New Zealand, homeschooling parents receive a government allowance (HSNZ 2018). Finland attributes some of their success in learning to both parents spending a lot of time with their children in the foundation years (0–3years) and the parent staying at home during this time receives a homecare allowance (Hancock 2011).

South Africa, however, does not have the same demographics as European countries, nor does it have the financial resources to implement anything similar. Therefore, governments and all stakeholders in society need to come together to design other ways to support families and bring back the importance of parenting in society. Government also needs to adopt cost-effective planning strategies and creative ways to re-distribute budgets to support families and their various learning endeavours. Another important issue to consider is the impact corruption of state monies has on a society. It is a scourge that must be eradicated for society to realise its full learning and living potential.

As Botkin (2001) states, a country needs to develop a society where learning is the process and wisdom is the outcome. To do this, governments need to dismantle the bureaucracies that are so unresponsive and callous to people's needs. For education or learning, this means creating as many alternatives as there are people and learning

styles. Moreover, to ensure that alternative learning, and in this instance NL, does not become “another brick in the wall of white privilege” (Hern 2008:116), there should be a concerted effort for all sectors of society to take common responsibility for making alternative education and resources available and governable by all. This might make it possible to create a learning society that holds self-directed or NL (instead of schools) as its key characteristic. Perhaps a true learning society would be housed in Gandhi’s idea of a decentralised local self-governance and a decentralised economy (Joshi 2001).

2.3.15 Natural Learning in Poor Families/Communities

The question of how home education, and by implication how NL, can be implemented in families and communities categorised as poor is often a concern. This is because a common assumption is that home education can only work for middle-class families. However, findings contradict the many studies linking social class to low attainment (Feinstein 2003). Rothermel (2004) also found that social class was not an indicator for children’s attainment. Rather it appears that the most important factors for children’s development are a flexible approach to education; high level of parental attention; and commitment from parents. Rothermel’s (2004) studies of home-educated children in the United Kingdom found that children from lower socio-economic families scored significantly higher than their middle-class peers. The reason cited for this result is perhaps because the children are free from the stigma of being poor because they are not in an environment where affluence and labelling are an issue and a potentially dividing social factor. The point to labour here is that various studies (Feinstein 2003; Sullivan, Ketende & Joshi 2013) show that parental attention and involvement are the key to children’s success.

However, it must be noted that these findings are from studies conducted in the United Kingdom and it can be argued that these results may not necessarily relate to South Africa. According to the Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute’s (SPII) 2007 report, poverty, on an international level, is growing and inequality is dividing communities, countries and regions at an ever-increasing rate. Therefore, poverty is defined, measured and experienced differently in different countries and in different proportions of the population who are also qualitatively different from each other (SPII 2007). In general, poverty can be equated to the lack of resources for basic survival or to the

broader view that sees poverty as multidimensional and that wellbeing means having access to a wider pool of resources for optimum social participation and cohesion than those for just basic survival (SPII 2007). This also alludes to the right to human dignity. In South Africa, there is the added complexity of the apartheid history, and therefore, studies in poverty should include the impact of race and racism.

However, an in-depth understanding of poverty and its impact on home education and NL is a moot point because there has been no known research to date in this area to provide any data or draw any conclusions, and it is beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, looking at studies conducted in different countries can provide an understanding of how people categorised as poor are still able to be creative in their resources to enable them to implement their choice of home education. Moreover, their success despite their socio-economic status is a very important phenomenon to understand and explore further. In South Africa, the common myth that schooling transcends the life of the poor and helps them escape their socio-economic status cannot be more untrue. There are far too many schools in the historically Black communities and rural areas that show a serious lack of basic infrastructure, despite 25 years of democracy (Amsterdam 2010). Mazama (2016), in her studies in the US, also found that the schools in the historically Black and working-class communities are under-funded and overcrowded and have under-qualified teachers. How can children experiencing this serious lack transcend their status quo when their daily struggle with poverty is amplified in their school environment? Therefore, it can be stated that in South Africa, schooling as it is presently implemented, perpetuates poverty and the socio-economic status because of the serious lack of resources for the majority of the historically disadvantaged Black rural populations. Mazama's (2016:41) view that "schools are a reflection and critical agencies of a social system that has historically been bent against people of African descent", also rings true for South Africa. She goes on to state that schools continue to play a social and a racial sorting role.

It therefore seems sensible to propose that embracing the NLA as a national framework for education in South Africa would remove the stigma of both race and socio-economic status. Perhaps it can be assumed that if all communities had equal and open access to funding and resources, socio-economic status and race would not be a limiting factor for optimal learning, growth and development.

2.3.16 Criticism of the NL Approach

In as much as there are so many advantages to NL, there are some disadvantages and criticisms that need to be outlined. One of the most widely expressed views is that NL children are isolated from society. In particular reference to the NLA or unschooling, Kuntz and Petrovic (2018) echoes the view of Wilson (2017), as discussed in Section 2.3.4, that unschooling inadvertently subscribes to the neoliberal ideology of hyper-individualism and hyper-surveillance because it cuts off key possibilities of humans flourishing within educational environments. NL is also seen as not radically democratic because the broader material conditions and socio-political milieu that reinforces the neoliberal ethos is underestimated. According to Kuntz and Petrovic (2018), even Illich admits to building a bridge to nowhere in his ideas of a deschooled society because the society for his ideas to work does not exist. However, if this thinking prevails then there would be no change in society, and society would remain static. No matter how small a movement or a voice can be, it needs to be heard so that it can make an impact on broader society.

Kuntz and Petrovic (2018) argue that even though schools reproduce the dominant social order, they have the potential to challenge the order, and by implication, that because NL occurs outside these institutions, it may be excluded from these challenges. The question then begs: Should one sacrifice one's values, beliefs and children in the hope that the schooling institution would change to accommodate the philosophy of NL? Vassalo (2013) also states that NL with its emphasis on self-regulated learning aligns with the neoliberal logic to produce adaptable, self-interested individuals who can operate within environments that are characterised by choice, competition and personalised learning. Once again, whether this argument holds true or not is a moot point as more research in this area needs to be conducted to promulgate a more informed conclusion.

Just as Kuntz and Petrovic (2018) state that the society for Illich's ideas to flourish does not exist, there is a similar concern that the home and the parenting that is essential for the NLA is not common. As discussed in Section 2.3.7, an authoritarian parenting style might be counterproductive to the philosophy and demands of the NLA. However, more than being providers and role models, parents also need to embrace a deschooling process for themselves so that they challenge their own schooling and

unlearn the teachings of institutional learning to be able to best support and encourage their children on a deeper level in the NLA. Traditional parenting is based on control and domination and in order to create an atmosphere that supports the NLA this myth of good parenting needs to be challenged and unlearnt (Graham Brett 2011; Lyn-Piluso & Lyn-Piluso 2008). Mutual respect, trust and freedom are key aspects of a NL parent-child relationship.

In the study done by Gray and Riley (2015a), natural learner participants were asked about the disadvantages that they experienced. Many said that the disadvantages were very small and manageable. Twenty-one percent mentioned the common disadvantage of loneliness as the friend and peer pool is rather small within the NL community because most school-going children have very little time to socialise after school hours due to their heavy workload and extra-curricular activities (Gray & Riley 2013). For some participants the main disadvantage was not having a fellow natural learner living in close proximity. Parents too might feel this loneliness as there is not a wide group of people for interaction and support and some expressed a degree of annoyance and stress as they were expected to constantly explain their learning choices and philosophy to random people.

Another key criticism of NL is that there is no way to measure what and how learning is taking place and the competency level of the child. This concern can be alleviated by knowing and understanding that there are several ways to address this issue, for example, using qualitative research methodologies. Perhaps as more research is conducted in this field, other disadvantages and criticisms will emerge.

2.4 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

In a nutshell, learning is an activity as natural as breathing, because our brains are programmed to learn, and our humanness make socialisation a natural learning process too. Learning is not some special activity but a result of living. The ability to learn does not need to be improved or moulded because we are born to learn and all that is needed to support this learning “is an interesting, accessible and intelligible world, and a chance to play a meaningful part in it” (Falbel 2008:62). This chapter explored the basic tenets of the NLA within the context of some leading educational theories. It addressed concerns like reading and socialisation and it offered a critical discussion on why schools are no longer a viable institution for authentic learning. The

NLA requires the trust, respect and understanding that education is not an externally imposed recipe, but is something that comes from within, and most powerfully, it is something we do all the time (Holt 1989). As Holt asserts, the best and proper place for children to learn is in the world itself, in the mainstream of adult life.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A person's a person, no matter how small. Dr Seuss 2004

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research methodology applied in this study. As there is no known comprehensive research data on the NLA available in South Africa, it was important to try and gain all types of data so that a complete understanding of the NLA in South Africa is achieved. The mixed methods research design was used to investigate the NLA in South Africa. This study used both quantitative and qualitative information to provide deeper insight into the number of families implementing NL and the impact of this learning approach on learning in general.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sometimes, a research phenomenon might present itself where neither the quantitative nor qualitative research methodology can provide enough or a complete understanding of the problem. This is when the use of the mixed methods research approach becomes appropriate. Creswell (2015:15) aptly advises that "it is appropriate to use mixed methods when quantitative and qualitative research alone is insufficient for gaining an understanding of the problem". Mixed methods research is currently seen as the third major research approach or model of research in social and behavioural sciences (Ponce & Pagan-Muldonado 2015; Whitehead & Schneider 2016). In a nutshell, a mixed methods research methodology is when the researcher gathers and analyses both quantitative and qualitative data. The findings are then integrated, and inferences are drawn using the combined strengths of both sets of data (quantitative and qualitative) to understand the research problem in a single study (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

In this study, the collection and integration of both the quantitative and qualitative data and the combined strengths of both sets of data presented the researcher with a better and deeper understanding of the research problem. Due to the lack of statistical information regarding the NLA in South Africa, it was useful to obtain and compile

some quantitative data. However, to have an in-depth understanding of how the NLA is implemented in South Africa and how learning is taking place in this approach, qualitative research with its variety of data collection instruments was appropriate

McMillan and Schumacher (1993:14) state that quantitative research "presents statistical results represented with numbers". For a deeper understanding of the NLA in South Africa, it was imperative that the researcher obtained some statistical information to understand the scope of this approach in South Africa. Qualitative research, on the other hand, "examines human behaviour in the social, cultural and political contexts in which they occur" (Salkind 2012:13). Accordingly, this study required a qualitative approach as it needed to uncover the natural flow of events and processes and the lived experiences of the participants (Van Manen 1990). It was important to understand why families chose this approach and how they implemented it in their homes. The NLA, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a unique approach in modern terms and therefore each family approaches and implements the NLA within their own unique family situations. This made it a naturalistic inquiry and therefore qualitative data collection strategies were used to collect data. However, non-interfering data collection strategies were also employed to assist in data collection (McMillan & Schumacher 1993).

The aim of the research was to collate statistical data of the families implementing the NLA and to collate the descriptions and analysis of the participants' beliefs, thoughts, perceptions, observations and actions in an attempt to understand individuals' lived experiences. In qualitative research, evidence is not predetermined; rather an understanding is acquired by analysing the contexts and by narrating meanings for these situations and events (Kumar 2011). Therefore, to gain a complete understanding of the NLA in South Africa, a mixed methods research methodology was the most appropriate. According to Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2011), in a mixed methods study either the quantitative or the qualitative strands can be given priority or equal opportunity. In this study, it must be noted that the focus of data collection was on the qualitative aspect of the research.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Kumar (2011:94) states that "a research design is a plan, structure and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions or problems".

The research design is related to two main functions: The development of procedures and logistical arrangements and the importance of quality in these procedures. According to Creswell (2015), there are three basic mixed methods designs:

- Convergent Design: Here the quantitative and qualitative, which provide different insights, are merged so that the results are merged to provide a more complete understanding “than what would have been provided by each data base alone” (Creswell & Creswell 2018:15).
- Explanatory sequential design: In this design, the problem is first studied quantitatively and then qualitative research is conducted to explain the quantitative results.
- Exploratory Sequential Design: The intent here is to first use qualitative data collection methods and analysis and then follow up with a quantitative process to improve the results that is grounded in the actual experiences of the participants.

In this study the convergent design was used. With the NLA phenomenon being a recent development within the modern era of mass schooling, and with there being no known evidence of any study on the NLA in South Africa, it made sense to use this design so that valuable quantitative and qualitative data can be obtained to validate one set of data with the other and provide a full and complete understanding of the NLA in the South African context. The researcher implemented the convergent design in this study in the following way:

To avoid survey fatigue (Lavrakas 2008), especially since the NLA population in South Africa is rather small, the researcher designed one questionnaire that had both quantitative and qualitative questions. Several questions were able to provide both quantitative and qualitative data as a comment section was included, for example, the questions (1.8.2 & 2.7.1) on race and the questions on mentorship (19.1–21.2). Both sets of data were analysed and then the results of the two sets of data presented. As advised by Creswell (2015), the quantitative results were reported first, followed by the qualitative results and discussions. The combination of both data sets provided different insights from different perspectives and angles and it therefore provided a complete understanding of the phenomenon of NL in South Africa (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

From a quantitative perspective, the results yielded general trends and relationships, and in terms of qualitative data, the results provided an in-depth, multi-layered, personal perspective of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher 1993). The challenge, as cautioned by Creswell (2018), was that the researcher needed to know how to merge the two databases. However, the researcher was able to use both sets of data to get an understanding of the NLA in South Africa. For example, the quantitative result on the demographics revealed that most of the respondents were from the White category (78% of Parent 1 and 70% of Parent 2). This confirmed the general expectation/perception but at the same time it also revealed that a significant number of Black, Indian and Bi-racial families were also implementing the NLA. In the qualitative discussion the researcher was able to use this information to confirm that the perception that the NLA or home education was only done by White people was not true. Furthermore, from the qualitative aspect of the questionnaire and the other data collection methods used, the researcher was also able to comment that contrary to the perception that the reason for home education is due to religion or racism, the families showed that neither was the key reason for their choice. Many of the families cited a very cosmopolitan worldview with respect for diversity.

In the quantitative aspect of the research design, the researcher obtained measures from subjects to describe something that has occurred (McMillan & Schumacher 1993). The researcher described the existing phenomenon of the NLA by using numbers to characterise the respondents and to assess the nature of existing conditions. (McMillan & Schumacher 1993). The researcher, where possible, was able to present the quantitative data on either a pie chart or a graph to give a visual understanding of the numerical data. Alternatively, qualitative research design outlines the structure, plan and strategy of the investigation that assists the researcher to obtain answers to the research questions and problems (Kumar 2011:94). Thus, the qualitative aspect of this study categorised South Africa as a case study of the phenomenon of the NLA, which the researcher aimed to understand in depth. According to Kumar (2011:126–127), the case the researcher selects “becomes the basis of a thorough, holistic and in-depth exploration of the aspect(s)”, which in this instance is the NLA in South Africa. Since the researcher wanted to find out the ‘why’ and ‘how’ the NLA is implemented within each family, the case study design had a distinct advantage because it provided the researcher with a framework to mine data

from a variety of sources that also contributed to the corroboration of data (Kumar 2011). Furthermore, the case study was the appropriate choice because it was impossible to plan as the data and variables were embedded in the situation that unfolded when the researcher interacted with the participants. For example, the original strategy of random sampling for the quantitative aspect of the research, as advised by Creswell (2015), had to be changed to a non-probability sampling because of privacy issues. It turned out to be a better choice because even when the questionnaire was posted on the Unschoolers' Facebook page (which would have lent itself to random sampling), there was no significant response. Therefore, the non-probability sampling was advantageous for this study.

For the interviews, the researcher's aim was to include ten families that reflected the diversity of the South African population and the provinces. Unfortunately, some families who the researcher believed would have added to the depth of the data chose to decline, citing reasons of fear and distrust and other personal reasons. Furthermore, well into the study four participants chose to discontinue their participation after their interviews because of time constraints. Therefore, the researcher had to be flexible and creative in managing these changes without compromising on the data collection.

Kitchenham (2010:562) states that "case study research lends itself particularly well to mixed methods research, as myriad approaches to research design, analysis, and interpretation are possible". He goes on to state that this research methodology allows the researcher to take rich empirical data to *quantitize* qualitative data and *qualititize* quantitative data in the analysis and interpretation. For example, from the responses regarding the certification that natural learners have obtained (Question 18), one can deduce that a significant percentage of natural learners do not opt for traditional school subject certification; this is quantitizing qualitative information. An example of where quantitative data was qualititized is seen in questions 14.1, where the percentage of responses led to an understanding of how the NLA families describe their approach and what structures support this description in 12.1.

Furthermore, the different purposes for mixed methods research and the related design characteristics need to be outlined as it adds to the understanding of the mixed methods research methodology in this study. The researcher found synergy in this study with the purposes of mixed methods research in that the researcher used triangulation to merge results from different methods. In this instance, the

questionnaire, interviews, documents (reflective journals and a parent observation record) were used to ensure triangulation. The researcher also included the purpose of complementarity where the researcher looked for overlapping and differences in aspects of the phenomenon. The next purpose of complementary that the researcher ensured was in the development of the instruments, where one instrument was used to develop another to further enhance the findings of the research. In this instance, the quantitative instrument (questionnaire) was used to develop another instrument (interview schedule), where some of the questions were repeated (with additional probing from the researcher) with the intention of ensuring data endorsement. The purpose of initiation was also adhered to in that the results from one method was re-examined to find paradoxes and contradictions or looked at the data through a new lens. An example of this was the question on race, as explained above. The purpose of expansion was also incorporated as the researcher extended the range of inquiry by using different methods (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017). This was done by including different data instruments using the same participants in the qualitative methods. For example, in the ten families chosen, the parent and the children were interviewed, and the parents were also asked to record a reflective journal. The parent observation was done with one child who was not part of the ten families who were interviewed. These different instruments were used to ensure that the evidence can confirm the end results. Furthermore, the inclusion of the focus group interview of the young adults ensured a different perspective of how learning in the NLA impacts on natural learners.

In a nutshell, the focus of this research was on how the families experienced and interpreted the NLA, the depth of the learning that took place, and how this experience transformed and continues to transform their lives. The aim of this study was to deepen and enhance the understanding of the NLA in South Africa and to use the information gained to make a positive contribution to the education sector in South Africa.

3.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Kumar (2011:193) states that sampling is the “process of selecting a few (a sample) from a bigger group (the sampling population).” In mixed methods research the question of size and the kind of respondents and participants are also pertinent and the population of the study needs to be understood. In this study, the parents and

children who are implementing the NLA in South Africa was the population. It was difficult to obtain exact numbers of the families who have embraced the NLA as there is no official data base where natural learners register themselves. Furthermore, with the ever-present threat from the South African government to clamp down on home education and with the recent proposed policy on home education (BELA Bill) looming (as discussed in Chapter 1), and other possible reasons, it was difficult to get the NLA families to participate in this study. However, the social media forums indicate that there are over 3 800 people who show an interest in the NLA. A recent article by Geach (2019) estimates a thousand people who are following the NLA in South Africa. It must be noted that both these figures are a cautionary estimate as not all natural learners are on social media forums and not all who are on social media forums are implementing the NLA. As mentioned previously, Riley (2018) roughly estimates that 12% of homeschoolers can be considered natural learners.

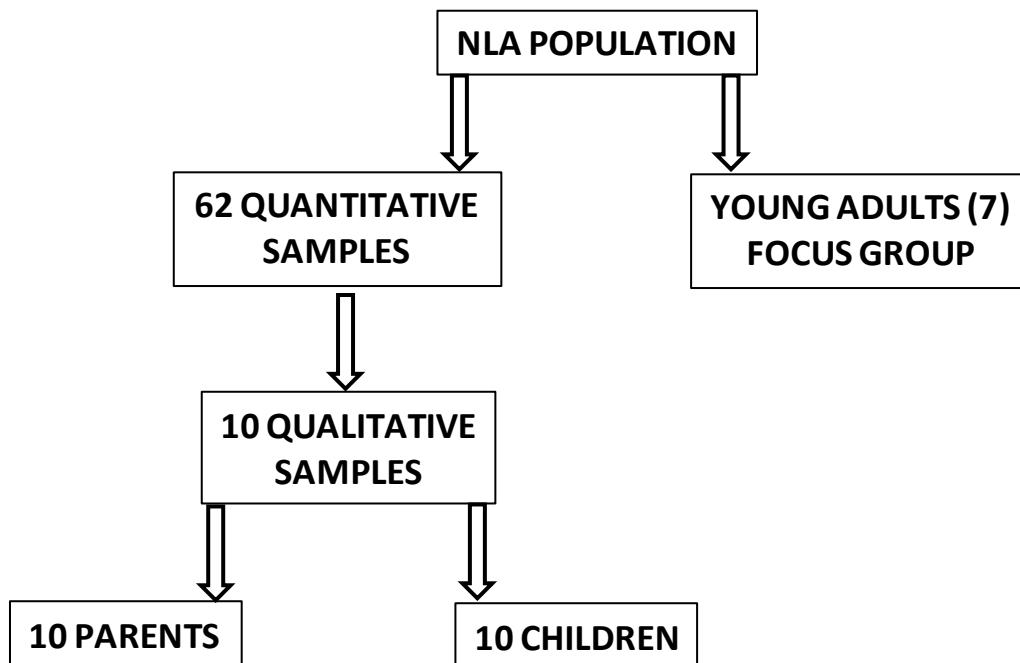


Illustration 3.1 Sampling and Population

Sampling in mixed methods research needs to employ the same strategies usually used for qualitative and quantitative research. However, the issues of sampling can prove challenging (Creswell 2015). Sampling refers to the rigorous procedures

employed for selecting a few participants from a larger group, in both quantitative and qualitative research. Creswell (2015:78) recommends that the “participants should ideally come from the same population”. Although the researcher was able to draw the sample for both strands from the same population, it was not possible to use the same sample size for both the strands of data as recommended by Creswell & Creswell (2018) because the qualitative data would have become too large and therefore difficult to engage with, possibly leading to saturation. Creswell (2015:77) aptly defines saturation as “the point in data collection when the researcher gathers data from several participants and the collection of data from new participants does not add substantially to the codes or themes developed”. In a case study the size should not be specified but considered as a function when saturation occurs in the study. Therefore, it was the researcher’s contention that to collect qualitative data from the 62 respondents in the quantitative sample, over and above that which was presented in the questionnaire, would lead to repetition and saturation.

The researcher’s attempt at the recommended random sampling procedure for the quantitative aspect of the research was not achieved, as explained above. The quantitative sample was drawn using non-probability sampling and the qualitative sample from a purposive procedure. For the qualitative aspect, purposeful sampling was employed because the researcher needed participants who were willing to participate, knowledgeable and informative about the NLA. Furthermore, NLA families do not form a naturally bonded group and are scattered throughout the provinces of South Africa. As mentioned above, the researcher initially aimed for random sampling of 50 families from an estimated 120 families of a closed social media forum for the quantitative sample. Due to privacy issues regarding social media forums, the researcher decided to rather use the snowball technique where a few people, known to the researcher, identified others who they knew were implementing the NLA, and they in turn named people who they knew and so forth. In this way, just over a hundred families were identified as practitioners of the NLA. Using the snowball technique was useful because it ensured that the people who participated in the research were implementing the NLA. Most of them were contacted telephonically or via email. The researcher sent out 70 questionnaires to families who were potential respondents; 62 respondents submitted completed questionnaires.

The qualitative sample for the different instruments was also purposively selected. The researcher tried to ensure a good representation by including families from the different provinces, race groups, and single and same-sex parents who have been practising the NLA for at least two years. Although Creswell (2015) suggests that in a mixed methods research study four to five cases for a case study research should be a good sample size, the researcher decided to use ten because of the unfamiliar territory of the NLA in South Africa.

The issue of integration of the quantitative and qualitative data was also addressed because there are different types of data integration in the mixed methods research design. According to Creswell (2015:82), "integration is the place in the mixed methods research process where the quantitative and qualitative phases intersect". The researcher found, as stated by Creswell (2015), that integration existed in the data collection, data analysis, the results and in the discussion section where the qualitative results were compared with the quantitative results. However, in keeping with the convergent design used in this study, the type of integration was the merging of the quantitative and qualitative data where possible and where the analysis of the data was brought together and compared (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Therefore, the researcher represented the integration of the data in the discussion section after the quantitative and qualitative results were outlined one after the other (Creswell 2015).

3.5 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

The data collection was determined by the mixed methods methodology used in this study. Therefore, to reflect this method, instruments that would provide the researcher with quantitative and qualitative data was considered. To collect quantitative data a questionnaire was administered. However, as mentioned, this questionnaire also contained qualitative questions. With the use of the convergent design of the mixed methods methodology, triangulation of data needed to be considered too. Triangulation is a well-known strategy that is used in qualitative research to increase the credibility and the trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam 2009) because it seeks convergence, corroboration and correspondence of results from the different methods (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017). Therefore, together with the data from the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the questionnaire, interviews (focus group and

individual), documents (journals, social media forums and a parent observation record) were included.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

For the quantitative data collection, one instrument, a questionnaire, was administered to the sample of 62 families. For qualitative data collection interviews (both individual and focus groups) and documents (reflective journals, a parent observation record and social media platforms) were used.

3.6.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire, which according to Macmillan and Schumacher (1993), is the most widely used instrument to obtain information from participants as it is economical and can be administered to many participants, was used to gather quantitative and qualitative data. According to Kumar (2011), a questionnaire is a written list of questions where the respondents, after reading and interpreting what is expected of them, record their responses by themselves. As there is no face-to-face interaction, this method provides great anonymity, which is often an advantage. The researcher included a range of questions that first invited participants to share their biographical and other quantitative data and thereafter more open-ended questions were included for more detailed and in-depth responses. The intention was to allow participants to be forthcoming with their information. Hofstee (2006:133), in agreement with Kumar (2011), recommends open-ended questions as it provides respondents the opportunity to provide in-depth answers and express themselves freely, which results in a greater variety of information. Furthermore, sensitive questions were optional and provided an opportunity for the respondents to provide a comment.

After the snowball technique identified the sample, the researcher sent out the questionnaire to 70 families. Only one parent per family was required to complete the questionnaire. These questionnaires provided the necessary broad-based data of numbers, reasons, approaches, challenges and benefits of the NLA within the families in South Africa. Sixty-two questionnaires were submitted for the study.

3.6.2 Interviews

The use of the interview is a very common and yet a key data collection instrument in a case study qualitative research (Merriam 2009). Through interviews the researcher can obtain information that would ordinarily not be obvious from direct observation. It is a way to obtain feelings, thoughts and intentions from the interviewee (Kumar 2011). Purposive sampling was used to choose ten families from the quantitative sample for an in-depth study. As stated, qualitative studies often use purposive sampling because the researcher needs participants who are willing to participate, knowledgeable, and informative about the phenomenon the researcher is investigating (Kumar 2011). All participants were given a letter explaining the research and the procedure and asking their written permission to have the conversation recorded (Annexure 4). Attempts were made to choose families from the different provinces and to include other demographics to ensure a wide response. The researcher aimed to conduct the interviews as follows: Of the ten families, individual interviews (Annexure 1) were conducted with one parent from each family ($n=10$). The researcher hoped to conduct interviews with 20 children (two per family) in the 8–16 age group ($n=20$); however, only ten children from six families were interviewed (Annexure 2). Three families were not able to confirm a time because of busy schedules. In one family, the young child was not keen to be interviewed and the researcher and parent respected her decision. With permission from the parent, the researcher made a quick decision to change it to an observation. A narrative of the observation was later sent to the parent for approval.

To obtain an in-depth understanding of how the NLA is practised in South Africa, it was essential to interview parents to understand their motivation, understanding, the benefits and challenges, and their unique practice of the NLA. The interviews with the children gave their perspectives on NL: How they feel, and what the benefits and challenges are. Their responses were both valuable and insightful on the unique practice of the NLA in their homes. The interviews were open-ended and semi-structured so that the researcher was guided by the questions but was still flexible to probe when appropriate and to be able to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging world view of the respondent and to the new ideas on the topic” (Merriam 2009). In other words, the aim was to obtain data on how the individuals created meaning from their experience (McMillan & Schumacher 1993). The probing encouraged the participants to provide more details and reflections. This information

cannot be gained from a questionnaire. Only two of the ten interviews were conducted face-to-face, as the participants were scattered across eight provinces. Therefore, it made economic sense to use technology for the interviews; in this instance, a cell phone with speaker function was used, and the conversation was recorded using a recording device and thereafter the transcripts were completed. It must be noted that the researcher chose people to reflect the demographics (race and gender) and the different provinces of South Africa. For example, the sample included one Black stay-at-home father and one same-sex family. The other participants were mothers from the different demographic groups.

3.6.3 Focus Group Interviews

The difference between an individual interview and a focus group interview is that the latter is done with a group of participants (Kumar 2011). This instrument was included because this method can cover common ground quickly and inputs can be obtained from several people at the same time (Barry, Steyn & Brent 2009). Thus, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the NLA in South Africa, the researcher identified, using purposive sampling, a further ten individuals who were 18 years and older and had been educated using the NLA in the last five years. Once again, a network sampling or snowball method was used, whereby each successive participant was named by a preceding participant (Kumar 2011). Furthermore, due to the NLA being in its early stages of implementation in South Africa, there are not many young adults who have been educated in this method; and only seven participants agreed to be part of this instrument. The reasons cited for non-participation were not interested; too busy with their daily schedule; cannot find a common time; and non-communication from the identified participants. Nevertheless, the focus group interviews took place with four participants. The other two were interviewed on two separate occasions because they were unable to commit to the scheduled time, and the seventh participant provided a written response to the questions via email. The researcher was happy to include the three who were not part of the scheduled focus group interview into the study because they could make a very good contribution to the understanding of the NLA.

Once again, attempts to ensure good diversity in this interview saw the group comprise of four White, one bi-racial and two Indian participants. Of the group, there were five

female and two male participants. One from the Western Cape, two from KwaZulu-Natal, one from Mpumalanga, and three from the Gauteng province. Due to logistics, the interviews were done using technology. The researcher learnt how to use Discord, an application that was invented for gamers to talk to each other while they played online games. In this way, all participants could connect to a server and then chat to each other as if they were all around a table. The advantage of this is that one can connect with people all over the country and the world. The participants were very comfortable with this technology because they were familiar with it. Those who did not know it were able to easily download the application and join in. The researcher was concerned about how the interview would proceed without a face-to-face interaction; however, the participants who ranged from 18–30 years old, were not concerned at all. Since they connect to people all over the world, they were used to talking to and playing games with people in different countries without seeing them. The interviews were recorded using a recording device and thereafter a transcript was completed. This ensured the completeness of the interview and provided material for reliability checks (McMillan & Schumacher 1993).

The interviews with this age group of participants provided a rich insight into the NLA phenomenon as the researcher and participants got to hear how they were navigating their studies and work lives. The perceptions, experiences and understandings of this group of participants who have some common experience in the NLA were explored (Kumar 2011). In other words, the researcher obtained high quality data from the rich discussions the participants had in the social context of the interview setting, where their own and other participant views were respected and valued. An interview guide was used, and as suggested by Merriam (2009), it contained specific questions as well as several open-ended questions in the areas the researcher wanted to gain more knowledge and insight on. For example, the question on whether the NLA experience has worked for them proved crucial because the information gained from the discussion aligned with the general literature on the NLA and with the data from the other instruments. However, seeing the NLA continuing to empower people in their growth and development was insightful. Questions on the challenges that they are experiencing and their confidence levels showed that these young people can handle their challenges, adapt to their surroundings and have the confidence to continue to strive ahead in their area of interest. This was important to the study because most

parents seem to be happy to follow this approach when their children are younger and begin to stress about how this approach would work when they are older and looking into careers and further studying. The data from this aspect revealed that this group of natural learners are very well equipped to deal with whatever comes their way with skill and confidence.

3.6.4 Documents

The term document refers to a wide range of written, visual, digital and physical material that was relevant and available for the study. Documents are records of past events that are recorded and a valuable source of information (McMillan & Schumacher 1993). It is a “ready-made source of data” that was easily accessible to the researcher (Merriam 2009:139). According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is a systematic procedure for analysing both printed and electronic material. The recorded data is examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge. Mixed methods research often includes document analysis as part of triangulating data. By using multiple sources and methods of evidence the researcher looks for convergence and corroboration. In this way, the researcher attempts to bring a confluence of data that ensures credibility (Bowen 2009). The researcher used reflective journals, a parent observation record and data from social media; these are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

3.6.4.1 *Reflective Journals*

Reflective journals are one of the common documents to mine data from and therefore generated for this study. From the ten families that were purposively selected for the family interviews, each parent was asked to keep a weekly reflective journal (Annexure 4) for a period of four weeks. In total, six family reflective journals were analysed. The other four decided to opt out of journal writing as they felt that it was too time consuming. Merriam's (2009) contention that documents are a ready-made source of easily accessible data proved true. This instrument was critical for the study because it provided rich knowledge and insight on how children were learning, how the adults were facilitating the learning process for their children and how they view the journey of this approach for their family. According to Merriam (2009), one of the biggest

advantages of using documents in a study is its stability, because the presence of the researcher does not alter or influence what is being studied.

The format of the reflective journal was open-ended. However, the researcher outlined to the participants what information should be included in the journal:

- The conversations the child/children are having and how they are thinking and reasoning on the subject.
- How do the child/children manage and resolve any conflicts that arise during their day?
- Get a good overview of how the different activities are spread in the day and how the day flows with one activity to the next.
- Note the various learning that is taking place. How aware/unaware are the children of their learning process?
- What role are you or any other adult playing in this process?
- Note down your reflections and insights of the day.

Participants were reminded that the journal was their reflection of the learning process.

3.6.4.2 Parent Observation Record

Over and above the ten families who submitted reflective journals, the record of one parent who recorded the observation of her child for a period of a year was included in the study. This was different from the reflective journals in that the parent (and sometimes the child) merely tweeted the different activities in the day as a way for her to see what was done in the year. Observation offers a first-hand account of the situation. It is a research tool when it is systematic, when it addresses a specific research question and when it is subject to the checks and balances in producing trustworthy results (McMillan & Schumacher 1993). Whether any rigorous system was followed by the parent is not known. However, in using this instrument the researcher systematically went through all the tweets and then looked at the patterns of learning that was taking place. As recommended, observations can also be used in “conjunction with interviews and document analysis to triangulate and substantiate emerging findings” (Merriam 2009:117). The parent recorded the raw data as field notes, during and/or immediately after the observation, to ensure that most of what

what was observed was recorded in writing. However, not all that happened was tweeted—just the events that the parent noticed and had time to record. Some days had more than one tweet. This document, because of the longer length of time, provided deeper understanding of the flow of learning and the kind of learning that was taking place in that household. This provided easy data for the researcher to plot the different activities and to understand the rhythm and flow of learning in the household.

3.6.4.3 Data from Social Media

Social media forums have become a rich source of information, support and networking, and therefore, was included as a further source of data collection (Merriam 2009). The Internet and social media have proven to be useful tools for natural learners because it provides many references and data sources that are accessed online. The Internet also supports various forms of communication platforms that harbour valuable information where people are interacting with each other about NL. In many ways, the easy accessibility and availability of online data widened the scope of data available to the researcher (Merriam 2009). Through these interactions the researcher obtained a wealth of information that was very useful and interesting for the study. The data obtained added to the existing body of knowledge regarding how families are implementing NL and how learning is taking place. However, even though it is important to note that there is a discrepancy between real and online personalities, documents of all types help to uncover meaning, develop understanding and discover the insights that are relevant to the study (Bowen 2009). However, researchers do need to be aware of the variables of electronic communication (Merriam 2009). It must be noted that the Internet is “new territory with unfamiliar rules that change as quickly as they are identified” (Merriam 2009:160).

Social media forums also support interactions among people who have never met through various forms of communication systems (email, Facebook, etc.). There are Facebook pages that people can join that focus on the NLA or aspects of it. There are a many blogs and websites available internationally. Some have been cited in this study, for examples, naturalparentsnetwork.com; livingjoyfully.ca/blog; racheous.com; thedadhatter.com; head.edu.au; yes-i-can-write.blogspot.com; www.life.ca.

In South Africa there are public and closed Facebook groups and a blog where the NLA families can participate. The Unschoolers’ Facebook page is the only public page

in South Africa. The researcher gained permission from the group administrator to use the public Facebook page and the blog. However, the researcher later learnt that getting permission to use a public page or blog is not necessary as it has been made available to the public to use accordingly. The researcher looked at data for a period of two months that illustrated the kind of interaction, support and information that is available for South African NLA families. Furthermore, there are closed groups for NLA practitioners that hosts a wealth of information which the researcher was not able to access.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The issue of integration refers to the researcher bringing together the quantitative and qualitative results in the mixed methods study. The combination of the data is directly related to the type of mixed methods design used by the researcher, which in this study was the convergent design (Creswell & Creswell 2018). There are two purposes for mixing quantitative and qualitative that is relevant to the study. Triangulation is relevant because the researcher wanted to use the different instruments so that findings could be compared and validated; for example, this research used a questionnaire, interviews, observation and documents to obtain and collate data. The other purpose is complementarity, because the results from both the quantitative and qualitative are interpreted to enhance, expand, illustrate and clarify findings (Onwuegbuzie & Combs 2011).

Data analysis is the interplay between researchers and data (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Kumar suggests that the researcher takes the raw data through a process of editing to ensure that the data is “free from inconsistencies and incompleteness” (2011:255). According to Merriam (2009), the preferred way to analyse qualitative data is to do it simultaneously with the data collection process. Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising the data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among the categories. These categories emerge from the data rather than being imposed on the data prior to data collection (MacMillan & Schumacher 1993). The inductive process generates a more abstract descriptive synthesis of the data. The analysis is a systematic process of selecting, categorising, comparing, synthesising and interpreting the data to provide explanations of the single

phenomenon of interest (McMillan & Schumacher 1993). Overall, this helps to ensure that the analysis is an ongoing, emerging and non-linear process.

The researcher followed the four phases of mixed analysis as outlined by Onwuegbuzie & Combs (2011) and rigorously checked and refined the analysis and interpretations. The researcher also needed to return to the field to seek additional data to confirm emerging patterns. The researcher used coding to divide the data into manageable categories. The categories were not predetermined but discerned and carved out of the data in accordance with their meanings. Critical analysis was used to critique and to include the different arguments and the power dynamic within that learning situation into the analysis.

3.7.1 Questionnaires

Data was analysed using Google Forms. The questionnaire was developed on the Google Form application and emailed to participants. Responses were collected, and as the questionnaires were submitted, the data was analysed. The application created pie charts and graphs to visually depict the results that lent itself to being analysed in this way. This application made the analysis of quantitative data rather easy. The researcher then looked at the pie charts and graphs and was able to draw inferences from the visual and numerical data presented. For the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, content and thematic analysis were most appropriate. According to Merriam (2009), all qualitative data analysis is content analysis because the researcher looks at the content gathered. Therefore, qualitative content analysis looks for insights from the raw data, focussing on recurring patterns of meaning. According to Merriam (2009:205), the “process involves the simultaneous coding of raw data and the construction of categories that capture relevant characteristics of the document’s content”. As only one instrument collated quantitative data, the analysis was more qualitative.

3.7.2 Individual and Focus Group Interviews

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data from all types of interviews because it contributed to knowledge as it provided an understanding of the phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:508). From the raw data of all three interviews (parent, child and focus group), recurring themes were selected and synthesised across the

cases (people and their experiences). This was done by grouping together some of the questions that reflected the theme, for example, the theme parental role, grouped the following questions: How did your family arrive at this decision?; Why did you choose this approach?; What is your key role as a parent?; and How do you implement the NLA in your home? The responses from these questions related to and deepened the insight on how parents saw and implemented their role. These themes provided the deeper insight into the NLA that the researcher required. In using thematic analysis, themes and main ideas were the primary data. However, in this study, latent content and context information that provide for a richer understanding of the phenomenon was also gained (Mayring 2000). The analysis meant trawling through the large quantity of data and looking for recurring responses to create themes. These responses were then coded and placed into the relevant themes and presented. The qualitative data was linked to the quantitative data where integration was possible, for example, the graph depicting the number of people choosing 'Self-Chosen' and 'Day-to-Day' as the highest percentage was confirmed in the description, and therefore, the understanding that parents provided in the open-ended questions related to the theme of how the NLA is implemented in the home.

3.7.3 Documents

For the documents included in the study, content, thematic and critical analysis was used.

3.7.3.1 Reflective Journals

Thematic and critical analysis was used to analyse the data from the reflective journals. Data from each reflective journal was organised and prepared for detailed analysis. The researcher used the coding process to generate themes from the copious amount of data in the various documents, and thematic analysis was used to categorise the data into themes that provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Some of the themes identified during the interviews were carried through into the discussion of the journals as there were relevant and again deepened the understanding of this theme. For example, parental role, challenges, and support were common themes. Critical analysis was also appropriate because it was important to identify, examine and understand the assumptions that underpin the account

(Sapsford & Jupp 2006). Furthermore, by using critical analysis, the researcher was able to focus on the context where learning was taking place and the power dynamics within that learning situation.

3.7.3.2 Parent Observation Record

Using content analysis, the 2 063 recorded tweets were perused and the recurring patterns from the narrative were noted. Even though the researcher looked at all 2 063 tweets, the researcher grouped them into 500 tweets. Activities that were noted in the first 500 tweets were then checked against the middle 500 tweets and then the last 500 tweets. In this way, the researcher could get an overview of the activity patterns of the year. For example, the researcher chose the activity of cooking and looked at the different intervals to see if the child's interest in cooking continued over the year and to see how this interest developed through the year. The same was noted with other activities, for example, reading, crafts, technology etc. The themes and patterns that emerged from the tweets were then grouped and linked to the overall themes that emerged from the reflective journals and the interviews with the parents and the children. This provided a greater understanding of what kind of learning activities were taking place and the length of time that the child spent on the activities in the year. This was then compared to the data from the reflective journals and the interviews to see if there were similarities and to see how this document deepened the understanding of how learning was taking place. Critical analysis was also used to question the assumptions and shortcomings of this document.

3.7.3.3 Data from Social Media

The conventional content analysis was used to gain a good overview of what was available on these forums. As with the parent observation record, the recurring patterns from the various posts were noted. The interaction and level of support among the members were also noted.

3.8 QUALITY CRITERIA

In as much as some quality criteria may stifle innovation and creativity, it is important that the researcher employs strategies to ensure credibility so that confidence is enhanced and quality of the research is improved (Bryman 2014). Merriam (2009)

aptly states that all research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. Thus, validity and reliability must be taken into consideration through careful attention given to the way the study was conceptualised and the way the data was collected, analysed and interpreted. With this being a mixed methods research, the researcher implemented strategies for credibility for each strand. In the quantitative aspect of the research, the researcher ensured that the instrument, the questionnaire, was consistent and stable and would "measure what it is designed to measure" (Kumar 2011:178). The researcher also ensured that the questions were unambiguous and the items in the questionnaire covered the full range of the objectives of NL in this study (Kumar 2011). Furthermore, the questionnaire was also piloted with four families who were not participants of the research.

In qualitative research, the use of multiple methods is termed triangulation: "Triangulation assumes that the use of different sources of information will help both to confirm and to improve the clarity or precision of a research finding" (Maruster & Gijsenberg 2013:310) and thereby reduce the threats to reliability. Merriam (2009:215) states that triangulation is "probably the most well-known strategy to shore up internal validity". The interviews, reflective journals and social media data allowed for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon that was studied and therefore increased the validity of the study.

In terms of reliability, the researcher ensured that the research instrument used for data collection was consistent, accurate, and stable, and therefore, could be used repeatedly under similar conditions and provide similar results. Reliability indicates accuracy, stability and predictability of a research instrument (Kumar 2011). The researcher ensured a careful design of the study and applied well-developed and accepted standards. The researcher captured detailed descriptions of events so that the authors' conclusions made sense (Merriam 2009). Respondent validation was also used, in other words, the researcher solicited feedback on the findings from some of the participants who were interviewed. This was done by follow-up telephone calls to those who remained available for the research. Confirmation of transcripts were also sent to the participants.

In terms of the mixed methods design, the researcher used two strategies to ensure credibility. The researcher used design suitability to determine if the mixed methods was indeed appropriate to use in this study (Bryman 2014). As explained, there is no

known extensive research on this phenomenon in South Africa, and therefore, no information on the NLA population. Data from both strands was therefore very important to collate. In terms of the ‘within-design consistency’ the researcher had to ensure that the components of the study fit together and that there was appropriate sampling, data collection and analysis of the individual components (Bryman 2014). The researcher also integrated the two strands and explained where integration was appropriate. This demonstrates that the researcher took the credibility of the study into consideration.

The focus on credibility therefore increased the trustworthiness of the study. Transferability, the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied or replicated in other situations, was adhered to. In other words, the researcher asked how generalizable and transferable the results of the study are and are the results consistent and dependable with the data collected (Merriam 2009). To ensure the transferability, the researcher provided rich and detailed information on the setting and the presentation of the data. This is also seen in the variety of instruments that was used in the study. Furthermore, the researcher was very careful with the study sample and gained rich data from the various members of the sample population. Parents, children, young adults were all part of the study to provide different angles and perspectives of the study.

Trustworthiness of a study is crucial, and it depends on the credibility of the researcher because a researcher intervenes in people’s lives. In addition to triangulation, the researcher also increased credibility by doing ‘member checks’ by allowing the participants the opportunity to give feedback on the data. To ensure transferability or replication in another setting, the researcher ensured rich descriptions of how the study was conducted, and the findings were derived from the data were diligently documented (McMillan & Schumacher 1993; Merriam 2009).

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All researchers are guided by a code of ethics and an overall code of conduct that govern the way a researcher carries out the research (Kumar 2011) because “every researcher wants to contribute knowledge to the field that is believable and trustworthy” (Merriam 2009:233). There must be trust that the research study was carried out with integrity. This means that the trustworthiness of the research also

depends on the credibility of the researcher and there are overarching ethical principles that all researchers are expected to abide by. For example, in the qualitative strand the researcher intervened in people's lives, and it was crucial that the researcher respected people's privacy. Moreover, intellectual rigour, professional integrity and methodological competence are essential qualities in a research (Merriam 2009). Other important aspects that ensure trustworthiness are discussed in the following sections.

3.9.1 Permission

Obtaining permission from the relevant offices and people was an essential requirement. For this study permission was granted by the University of Limpopo Research and Ethics Committee (TREC/366/2017:PG). This document was distributed to all participants as a validation of the research from the institution. Permission was also granted by all the participants. Participation was completely on a voluntary basis.

3.9.2 Informed Consent

According to Kumar (2011), one of the key ways in which a researcher demonstrates the ethical code is when data is collated with informed consent from the participants. The questionnaire included a letter that stated the purpose of the research and requested permission to use the information in this study. Participants had to establish their consent before being allowed to continue with the questionnaire. Informed consent in terms of qualitative research is also a key element regarding the ethics of the research. Letters were sent to the various participants requesting their permission for their participation (Annexure 5). In the case of children, assent of parents was sought, who sought consent from the children themselves. Participation was completely on a voluntary basis (Annexure 4, 5, 6). All participants were assured that they could opt out of the study at any point in the study as there was no compulsion from the researcher.

3.9.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity are pertinent elements for trustworthiness as participants must be assured that any identifiable information will not be disclosed to

others without their consent. The researcher had to spend more time than usual on this matter as the participants were concerned about the impact of the BELA Bill with added telephone calls and email correspondence assuring participants that their participation will be confidential. The principle of anonymity means that participants will not be identified in any documentation without their prior consent. All data obtained was treated with greatest care and no names or organisations were included in the thesis. Confidentiality was strictly maintained. By doing ‘member checks’ the researcher also ensured that all information presented was correct and unbiased (Kumar 2011).

3.10 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

This chapter outlined the design and the nuts and bolts of this study that are crucial to ensure that the study adheres to all the requirements for a good research study. It provided the design, data collection methods and instruments, and the how the analysis of the findings were interpreted and presented. Importantly, it outlined how validity and reliability was addressed by triangulation so that this study becomes an authentic and leading resource on alternative education in South Africa.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Truly wonderful, the mind of a child is. Yoda:Star Wars (2008)

4.1 DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the data analysis is presented according to the three instruments used in the study:

- Questionnaire: Sixty-two completed questionnaires were admitted into the study where both a quantitative and qualitative analysis were done.
- Interviews: Three different interviews were completed: Ten Individual parents from ten different families. Six families agreed to the children interviews (ten children in total) and focus group interviews with seven young adult natural learners.
- Documents: Reflective journals from six families and one parent observation record were admitted into the study. Two social media forums on the NLA in South Africa were also included.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

As experienced by Pattison (2013), one of the challenges of investigating the NLA is how to discern when learning is taking place and being able to recognise what is data, especially since the phenomenon takes place over a long period of time and is not observed directly by the researcher. Therefore, the researcher needed to gain access to and understanding of this phenomenon through the families who are implementing the NLA, both the parents and the children themselves. During the living daily process of the NLA, “a chain of understanding is constructed between what children do, what parents notice and how they recount that noticing” and how this is then interpreted and related to learning (Pattison 2013:106). The data existed within the web of everyday experiences of the participants and was extracted to create an understanding of the NLA in South Africa. The data presented in this chapter indicates the depth and variety of learning that is taking place and how it has transformed the lives of those who embrace this approach.

It is critical to note the although there have been many academic articles on home education and the NLA over the last few years (Petrovic & Rolstad 2016), there is still not enough on every aspect of the NLA that was identified in this study. However, information, ideas, and personal experiences are all well recorded in the myriad of blogs and websites dedicated to the NLA available on the Internet. The researcher found these websites/blogs to be useful references when understanding and explaining the data collated because of the rich descriptions and in-depth articles that are available.

4.3 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM QUESTIONNAIRES

In order to gain a variety of responses from the NL community, a questionnaire was used where both closed and open-ended questions were asked. In this way the researcher hoped to gain both quantitative and qualitative data on the NLA in South Africa. The questionnaire contained questions to understand the demographics of the NL community. It also included open-ended and non-leading questions to gain deeper insights on the phenomenon.

In the development of the questionnaire some concerns arose in terms of what should be included. Because of the perceived sensitivity around the issue of race, the researcher tested the possibility of the questions with five NLA parents on how they would feel about including race in the questionnaire. There were conflicting responses that prompted the researcher to work on different types of questions to try and appease their concerns while still trying to get similar data. Finally, for the sake of simplicity, the researcher reverted to the standard question on race that is considered acceptable in South Africa for information and data purposes. However, the question was made optional and a space given for additional comments on the question itself. The researcher decided that this information was important in the South African context, since there is a common misconception that home education is only practised by the White population of South Africa, and racism is often implied as the reason for this choice (Carte Blanche 2019).

The question on annual income was also made optional so that people who felt uncomfortable had a choice without abandoning the rest of the questionnaire. Again, the researcher had no intention of making any statement nor drawing any conclusions on the socio-economic status of the NLA community. Rather, like the question on race,

it was included for academic reasons to gain a general understanding of the spectrum of people choosing to walk the NLA path. It is often touted that home-educated children tend to be economically and culturally privileged and can afford the luxury of having one parent be a full-time stay-at-home parent. This choice is disparaged as hypocrisy because it is seen as abandoning the public school for the sole focus on the individual child (McLaren 2014). Through these questions it was hoped that some insight would be gained on whether the socio-economic status was indeed a deciding factor in the families opting to practise the NLA.

Through the snowball technique just over a hundred families were identified as practitioners of the NLA. The researcher was very pleased that the original idea of identifying people via a social media forum was abandoned for the snowball technique because it identified NLA families who were not part of social media forums and therefore broadened the number of potential participants, who were known by others as authentic NLA parents. As discussed earlier, the data collection coincided with a rather sensitive time for the NLA because of the threat of the introduction of the BELA Bill. Therefore, a significant number of families chose not to be part of the study citing fear of being identified as an NLA family and becoming known to the Department of Education. Unfortunately, this impacted on the number of people participating in the study. It must be noted too that some people were just not interested in being part of any study. Furthermore, an anti-academic sentiment was experienced by the researcher in the NLA community. However, 70 questionnaires were emailed directly to families who shared their contact details with the researcher. Sixty-two completed questionnaires were received; this went beyond the original expected number of 50 responses. Although the questionnaire was subsequently also posted on the social media forums, there was no flood of responses, perhaps because of families being wary and distrustful of the research, fears of the BELA Bill, or other reasons. To help ease their level of discomfort, the researcher disabled the feature that collated the email addresses and made the questionnaire completely anonymous. This did not seem to have made a difference to the number of respondents. According to Geach (2019), it is estimated that one thousand families follow the NL trend and the social media forum boasts over 3 800 members. However, these numbers must be received with caution as not all NLA families choose to be on social media and not all who are on the group are following the NLA. Therefore, as with Pattison's study (2013), the

sample is not representative and any information that suggests a correlation with demographic data or socio-economic factors, like gender, religion etc., would be debatable or perhaps meaningless. However, there is insufficient information on NL in South Africa (or abroad, for that matter) for any current research to make any claims of representativeness. Therefore, in agreement with Pattison (2013), regardless of the issue of representativity, there are good reasons to continue with this research.

As mentioned, initially the researcher hoped to get 50 completed questionnaires, and 62 completed questionnaires were admitted into the study. Analysis was carried out in two stages. The first stage was to collate and present all the biographical and demographic data using pie charts and graphs. Thereafter, using content, thematic and critical analysis, the researcher was able to pinpoint, examine and record the themes that emerged from the responses to the open-ended questions of the questionnaire and the other instruments. The data was then categorised and coded according to the themes that emerged. This allowed the researcher to capture the intricacies of meaning within the data set (Merriam 2009). Thereafter the researcher merged the data from the two strands, where applicable, to provide a better and a more complete understanding of the NLA in South Africa.

4.3.1 Biographical/Demographic Data

This data was mostly captured in pie charts and graphs. The questions on race, income and language were given the option of further comments in long-ended answers. The names of respondents were optional. Families could decide who was Parent 1 and Parent 2 (it was not gender specific) when providing data. This also takes into consideration that some families do not have two parents.

4.3.1.1 Province (Question 1.1 & 2.1)

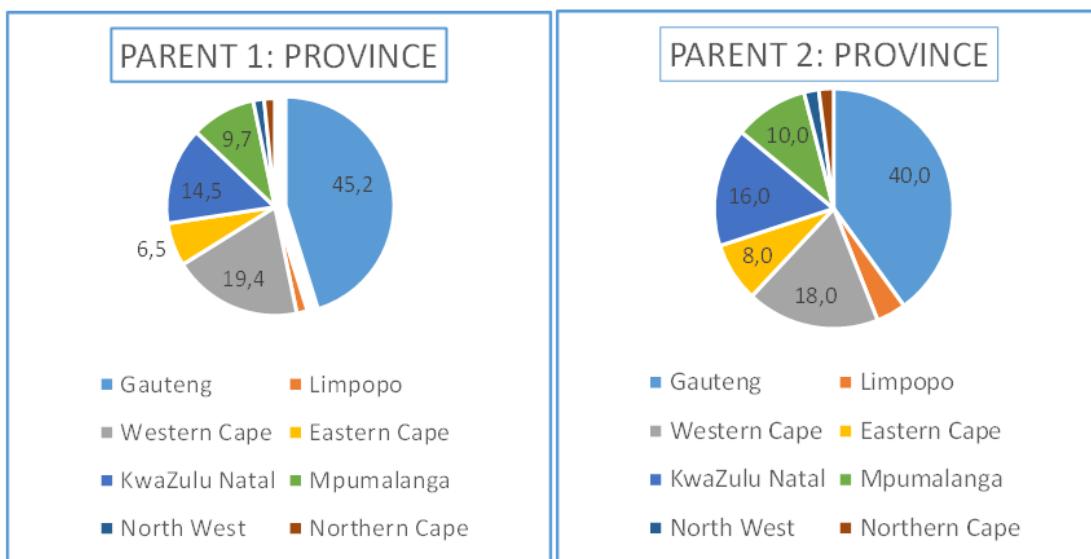


Illustration 4.1 Province

Sixty-two responses from Parent 1 indicated that the respondents came from eight provinces. There were no respondents from the Free State.

Fifty responses of Parent 2 showed the same pattern of Gauteng having the highest number of respondents, followed by the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. There were no responses from the Free State.

Most respondents came from the three major cities in South Africa: Gauteng followed by the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The majority of parents are from Gauteng, the province with the highest economic activity that generates the highest portion (35%) of the Gross Domestic Product in South Africa (Businessstech 2019). This could mean that the Gauteng population have more resources that help them to choose to facilitate the NLA. Another point to note is that Gauteng does not have enough schools to support its population, which has resulted in many children not being placed at a school. Whether this is also a reason for more families in Gauteng choosing home education is moot.

4.3.1.2 Gender of Parents (Question 1.3 & 2.3)

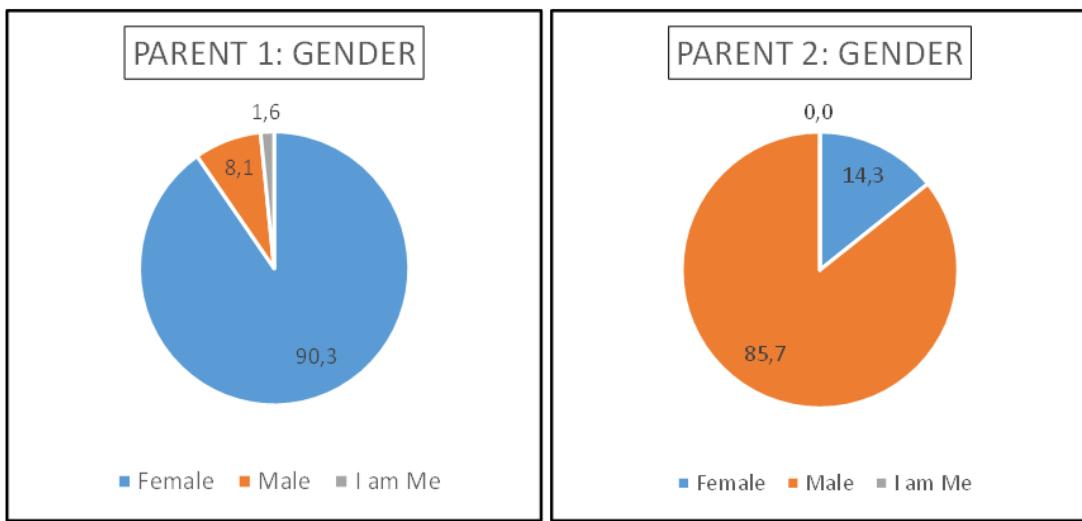


Illustration 4.2 Gender

There were 62 parents who identified as Parent 1 and 90.3% were female. One respondent did not want to be categorised into a gender and the reason was "I am Me". This could imply that the parent felt strongly about being categorised into a gender and preferred to be seen as a person rather than as a gendered person. There were 49 responses for the parents who identified as Parent 2, and 85.7% were male and 14.3% were female. This implies that mostly mothers responded to the questionnaire, implying that mothers are the primary NLA parents in most households.

4.3.1.3 Age of Parents (Question 1.4 & 2.4)

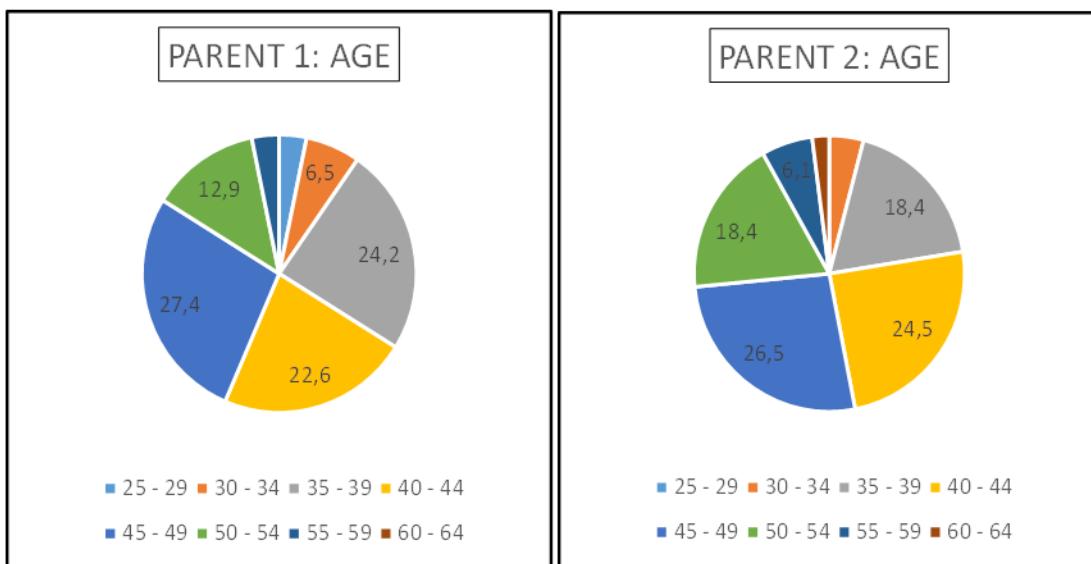


Illustration 4.3 Age of Parents

There were 62 responses for Parent 1 and 49 responses Parent 2. The researcher worked out the age of the mother (with the assumption that the father is generally the same age or older than the mother) when she had her first child. For example, Respondent 1's age sits in the 50–54 category and her first child is 20 years old. The researcher took the middle figure of the category and subtracted the age of the child ($52-20=32$). Therefore, the figure can be 2 years above or below that answer. The results indicate that most of the mothers (32) were 30 years and older when they had their first child, echoing the result of Rothermel's (2011) study. This indicates that most of the parents would be categorised as more mature parents and echoes a study conducted by Sherry (2018), where 80% of mothers and 70% of father believed that 30 was the optimal age for having children as it makes people 'better parents'. According to Trillingsgaard and Sommer (2016), older mothers make better parents because the increased emotional stability, tolerance and mental flexibility that generally comes with age makes for a healthier parenting style. Older parents also tend to be financially more stable, to have completed their education and to be secure in their careers. Furthermore, they tend to be in more stable marriages or domestic partnerships (Panaccione 2011). In short, they tend to have all the characteristics to be able to make different decisions to create a happy home for happy children. As this study cannot draw any conclusive statements regarding age of parents and the NLA,

this would be a very interesting future research topic. However, beyond this data lies another reality in South Africa, where 71 out of 1 000 mothers who gave birth in 2016 were in the 16–19 year old category and 12 million children do not have a resident father (Hall & Mokomane 2018). The implication of this data on the broad implementation on the NLA is significant, especially since the findings in this research lean towards the notion of a stable family. The implementation of the NLA within these social challenges will no doubt be a daunting task (this is discussed further in Chapter 5).

4.3.1.4 Highest Qualification (Question 1.5 & 2.5)

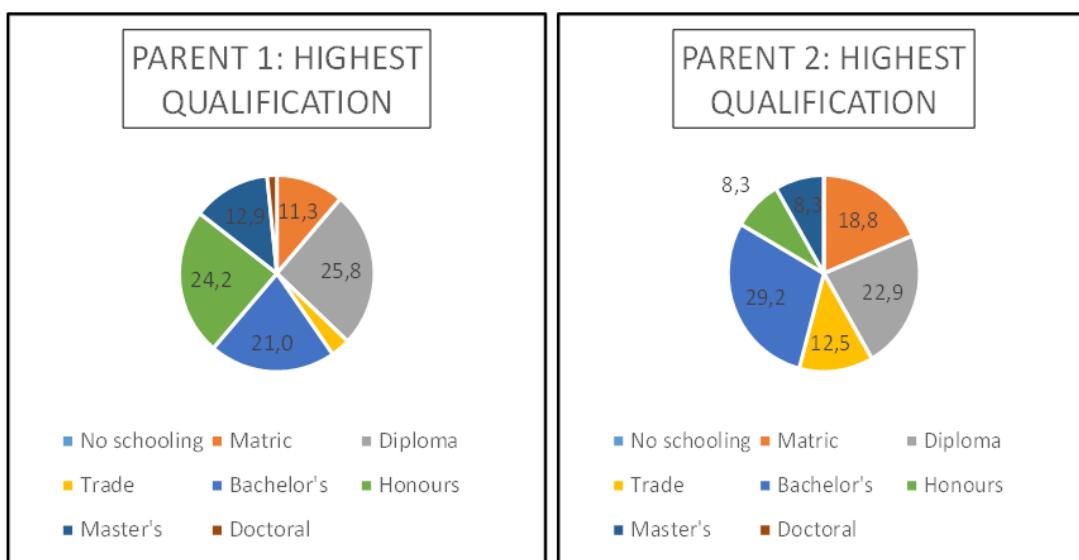


Illustration 4.4 Qualifications

There were 62 responses for Parent 1, and most parents have some post-matric qualification, either a diploma, Bachelor's degree or Honours degree. Forty-eight responses were recorded for Parent 2, and like Parent 1, most parents have a post-matric qualification. There was an increase in the number of respondents in the trade/technical/vocational training option as compared to Parent 1. Interestingly 85.7% of respondents in Parent 2 were male. It is often bandied by authorities that parents need to have a certain minimum qualification to be able to home educate (Pattison 2013). However, within the NLA this is not necessarily true because of the basic premise that parents are qualified to raise their children. The most important qualities

of love, attentiveness, respect, nurture, attachment parenting, kindness, compassion etc. does not come with a qualification.

4.3.1.5 Marital Status (Question 1.6)

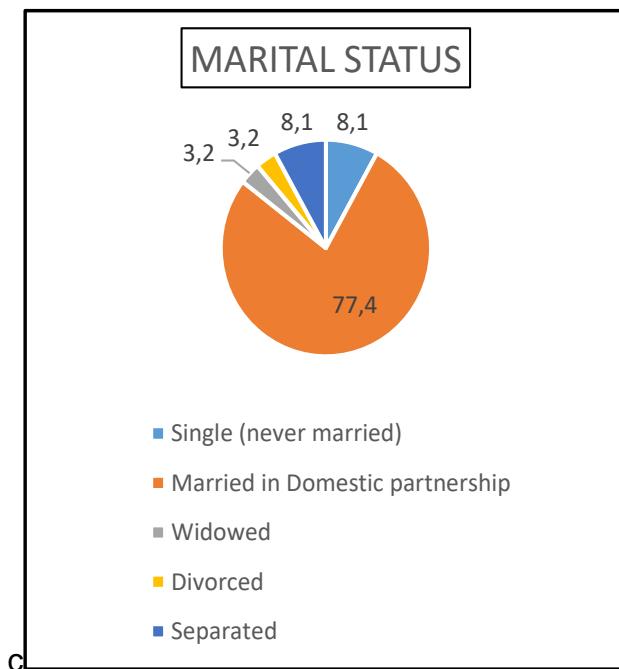


Illustration 4.5 Marital Status

From the responses, it can be seen that 77.4% of respondents were married or in a domestic partnership. A significant 22.6% of the respondents indicated a single-parent household. The question of whether a single parent can implement the NLA is often asked. According to Ellis (2008), there are 18% single-parent homes in the home-education community in the US. Lansford (2016) states there are various reasons for single-parent households (divorce, death, choice) and reasons differ across countries and cultures. In other words, by choice or by circumstances, some families find themselves in this category. Single-parent households are mostly women and are of lower socio-economic status than two-parent households, and therefore, financial difficulties are often experienced. Although implementing the NLA in a single-parent household has many challenges, especially concerning finances, with some planning, determination and creativity it can be implemented. Most parents find employment where they can work from home or have set up a business that can be predominantly home-based (Hunt 2019). These parents often hire someone to help with household chores so that they have more time to spend with the children. According to the two

single parents who participated in the interviews, sometimes their children tag along to the office or for a work-related outing/meeting. This denotes that single parents, despite the challenges, are creating ways to actualise their commitment to the NLA in the belief that it is a more rewarding path for their children.

4.3.1.6 Employment Status (Question 1.7 & 2.6)

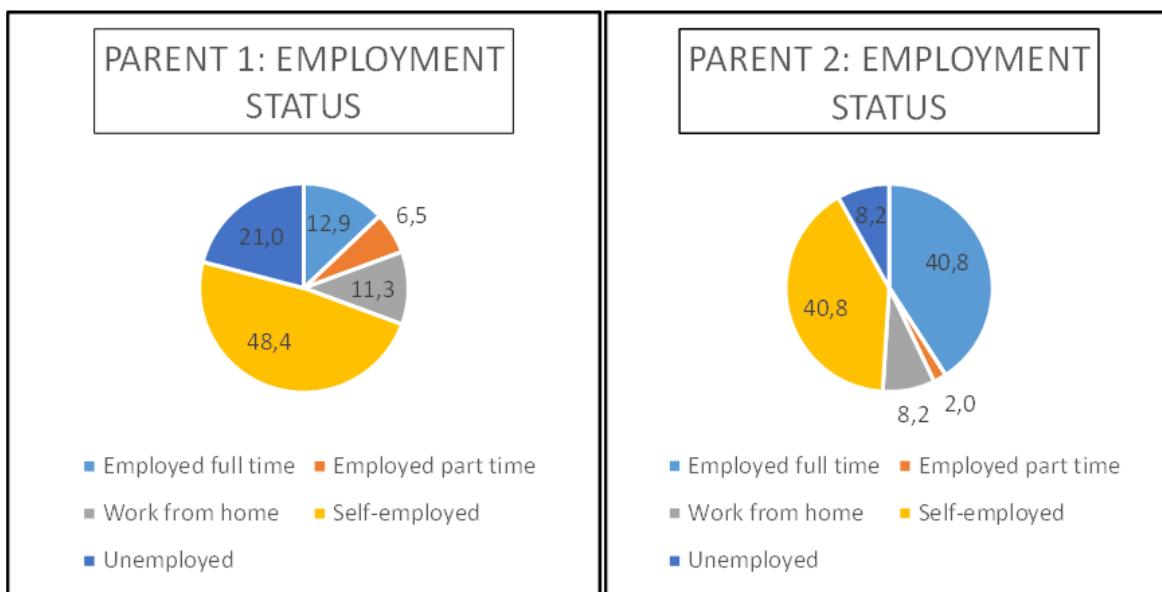


Illustration 4.6 Employment

There were 62 responses for Parent 1 where 48.4% indicated that they were self-employed followed by 21% by who indicated that they were unemployed. The category of 'work from home' was 11.3%. This indicates that most parents from the Parent 1 category are mainly based in the home.

Parent 2 showed 49 responses. Here there was an equal split in the majority between those who were employed full time outside the home and being self-employed. 8.2% worked from home. It is not known if the 40.8% of self-employed Parent 2 (where the majority respondents identified as male) are also home-based. Here are some responses indicating family and home organisation:

R22: I stayed at home and then my husband and I set up our own businesses.

R27: We both opted to be self-employed.

R43: ... I resigned and started working from home ... my husband started working alternative days at home and eventually progressed to working from home full time.

These responses show that families as a collective made decisions that helped them to facilitate the NLA.

However, the data on gender of parents (Illustration 4.2) and employment status (Illustration 4.6), showed that over 90% of the parents who choose to stay at home with the children are mothers. Most of the respondents indicated the mother either stopped working or started working from home so that one parent was at home for the children. Devitt (2017) indicated that most of the home education is done by stay-at-home mothers compared to only 10% of fathers, who are generally the breadwinners of the family, leaning towards a patriarchal nuclear family (Kapitulik 2011). Therefore, Lois (2017) argues that homeschooling is derived from gendered family ideologies and is therefore a highly gendered activity, which in turn produces differential gendered effects on other family members.

With the quantitative data indicating a high percentage of women being the primary stay-at-home parent, alluding to it being a gendered activity, the researcher decided to determine if this was indeed the case with the families in this study. Since this issue was not addressed in the questionnaire nor in the interviews, the researcher conducted a follow-up discussion with the parents who were interviewed. From the ten parents who participated in the family interviews, five of them fell into the two-parent heterosexual category where the mother was the stay-at-home parent. The telephone discussion was recorded using a recording device with four of the parents and two sent responses via WhatsApp message. From the discussions it was evident that the traditional gender dynamics, as referred to by Lois (2017), did not play any role in determining who will be the stay-at-home parent in this study. Three stated that it was a natural progression from birth to breastfeeding and their attachment parenting values. Two of the three stated that the deciding factor was predominantly economics, and as the father had the higher paid job, it made sense that he continued especially since they were moving into a single income status. One participant stated that in her situation it was not economics as she earned the equivalent salary as her husband. However, apart from embracing attachment parenting values, she believed that it was best for her to be the stay-at-home parent because she was passionate about NL and

she ‘wanted to walk this path’ with her kids. Her husband supported NL but was not as passionate about it as she is. This echoes the findings of the Gray and Riley (2015a) study, that mothers were the most influential family member regarding the NL choice. Another mother stated that her being at home was sensible:

IP2: ... I was running my own business and X was still employed, so my time was more flexible. It was just what was practical

To get a more complete understanding of this issue the researcher also contacted the only male stay-at-home parent of this study. He also confirmed that their decision rested on his work being more flexible than the mother’s and therefore it made sense that he stayed at home. In the same-sex family of this study, the parent also confirmed that their decision was based on economics:

IP6: ... it was based purely on viability ... X's income would not have sustained us whereas mine does

From the responses from the participants in this study it became clear that from the NLA perspective, the mother staying at home is not a gendered activity. To further clarify this issue, the participants were also asked to describe the gender dynamics in their home. They all confidently confirmed that there was no forced traditional gendered relationships or dynamics in their household. IP2 mentioned that for their family it was a process:

IP2: Initially it was very traditional with females doing female stuff because that's how we were raised, but we have evolved and now it's simply whoever is able to do something, does it

The distribution of household chores in terms of gender dynamics do take on a different hue in South African society because many families tend to employ a person to assist with both domestic and child-minding duties. It must be noted that this research did not take this dynamic into consideration regarding gender dynamics. However, the other participants also confirmed that household chores were not gendered but was done according to abilities and interests. They stated that they shared, lived and role-modelled a democratic life where respect and equality was valued. In other words, they are working towards the notion of egalitarianism as a family ethos. One mother also stated that her husband was a feminist too and her role as a stay-at-home mother was considered “valuable, radical and not un-feminist”. This

response aligns with the results of a study done by Sheffer (2014), where it was found that many mothers challenged the claim that home education is not feminist, as some women in her study believed that it had added to or given them their strength and voice as they became activists and advocates for their children's education. According to Ellis (2008), women opting to be the stay-at-home parent may seem to be upholding traditional family structures, and therefore, out of line with feminist politics, but when one looks closer one will find a home that embraces the concept of egalitarianism. Often domestic duties are divided as described by the participants in this study, and the parent who stays at home is valued for the role and the contribution to the family.

Moreover, families who choose NL may reject the conservative beliefs about women, the common experience of sexism and sexual violence that are often experienced in schools and the pervasive anti-feminist idea of placing girls and boys in fixed gendered boxes (Ellis 2008). Ellis (2008) states further that feminist stay-at-home mothers cite freedom from gender stereotyping as one of the benefits of the NLA or homeschooling because children are nurtured to develop into their full potential without restriction of oppressive gender stereotypes. Interestingly, the study by Sheffer (Ellis 2008) revealed that the girls who were homeschooled became confident in their abilities, which allowed them to resist gender stereotyping. Furthermore, the study also revealed that even home-educated girls who came from traditional family homes where feminist values were not evident, were still relatively free from harmful gender stereotypes.

Therefore, in many ways, the NLA gives the children the freedom to learn in a feminist way where the ideals of an egalitarian society go beyond the rhetoric and the politics but becomes a natural way of life, and the concept of egalitarianism is internalised. With the notion of egalitarianism so highly valued within NL families, those who do not practice this are often considered not 'true' natural learners. Moreover, there is no evidence that points to equality even if both parents are at home or if the father opts to be the stay-at-home parent. Traditional gender dynamics can also exist within these structures and with the mother working outside the home. The notion of gender equality goes beyond that of superficial home and work reorganisation. Therefore, neither arrangement can assume gender power differential in the traditional sense within the NLA family. However, Illustration 4.2. indicated that in the Parent 2 category, 87% were male and when looking at the employment status (Illustration 4.6.), the data

on Parent 2 indicated that 40.8% are self-employed. As it is not known how many of the self-employed parents are home-based, one can assume that there are a significant number of families who have both parents at home for a significant portion of the day. In both the qualitative aspect of the questionnaire and the interviews, parents indicated that they specifically re-organised work schedules to be more home-based to facilitate the NLA. The responses from the participants indicate that NL families in this study have made a decisive shift from the gendered paradigm of traditional families and are leading the way towards an egalitarian society. Further research on this issue would be very enriching.

4.3.1.7 Race (Question 1.8.1 & 2.7.1)

As discussed previously, the sensitivities around this question was considered. This was an optional question with the opportunity for further comments.

There were 59 respondents with 11 responses under the further comment section submitted for Parent 1. Examples of responses are:

R13: I haven't had a genetic test to this assumption.

R25: African.

R60: I choose not to answer this question as to me it perpetuates racism and that the supposed colour of your skin is important in some kind of way.

There were 46 responses recorded for Parent 2.

From both graphs below one can deduce that the majority of natural learners fall in the 'White' category.

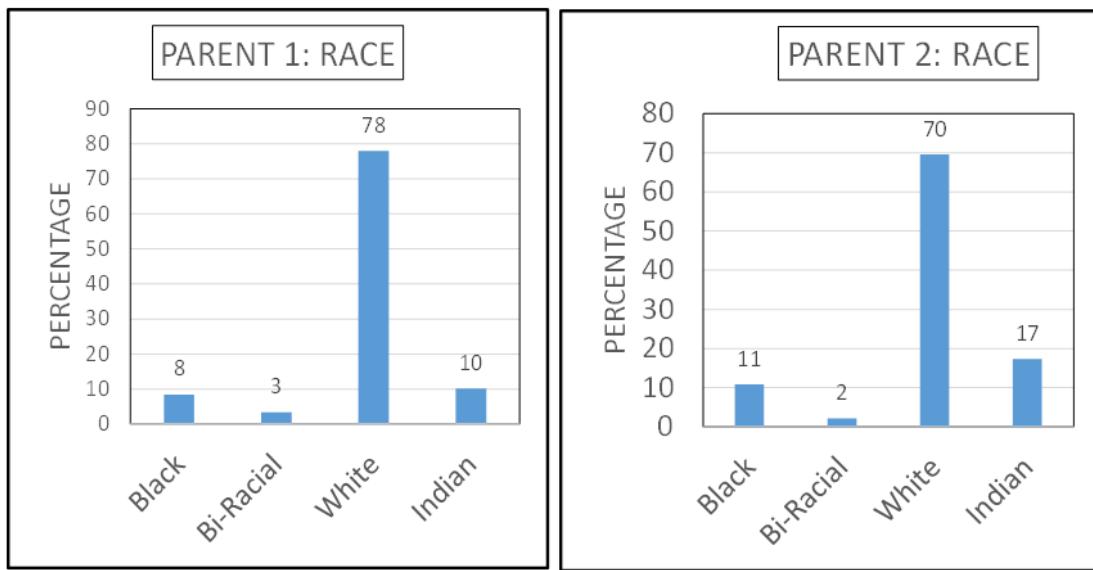


Illustration 4.7 Race

4.3.1.8 Home Language (Question 1.9.1 & 2.8.1)

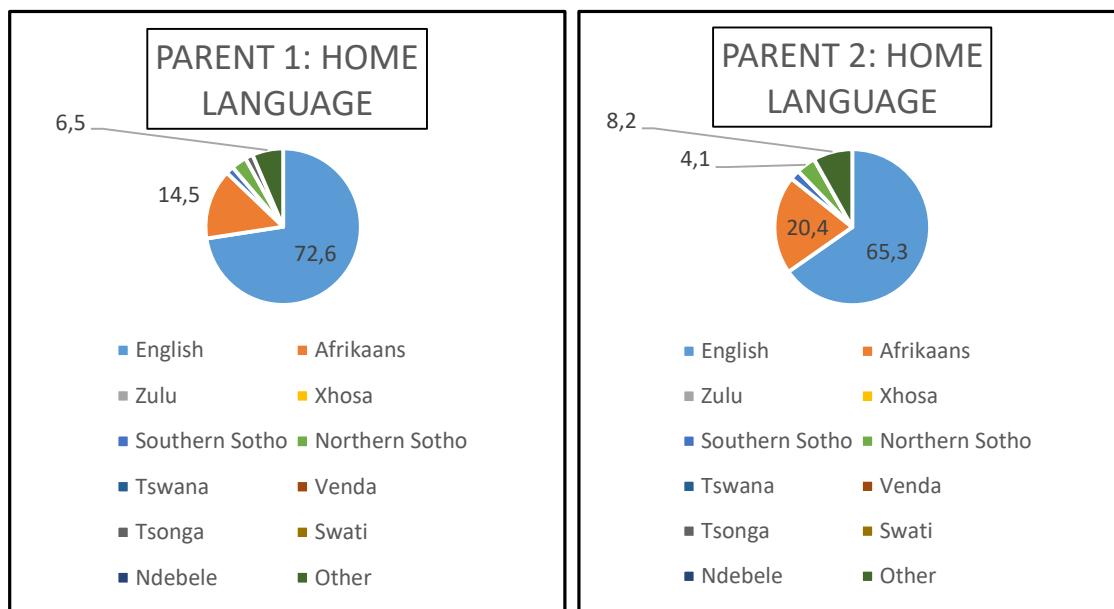


Illustration 4.8 Language

Sixty-two responses were recorded for Parent 1 and 49 for Parent 2.

Parent 1's highest indication is English at 72.6% and Parent 2 is at 65.3% for English. Parent 1 recorded 14.5% for Afrikaans and Parent 2 recorded Afrikaans at 20.4% of the population. In terms of the other 11 official languages in South Africa, Parent 2 showed that only Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho and Xhosa were included, whereas

Parent 1 also included Tswana. Languages other than those specified (Question 2.8.2) were German, French, Dutch, Cantonese, and Spanish.

Although there is a dominance of White English-speaking families who are implementing the NLA, there is a rise in the number of Black people who are following this approach, denoting that over the years home education has become more demographically diverse (Van der Eems 2018). However, as in other countries, obtaining this information is not easy; suffice to state that the number of Black homeschoolers is growing rapidly in South Africa as it is in the US (Mazama 2016; Mazama & Lundy 2015; Van der Eems 2018). Ray (2017) states that 20 years ago home education in the US was close to 100% White and by 2017 the number of Black, Asian, Hispanic and others have risen to 32%. A closed Facebook page for Black homeschoolers in South Africa showed a membership of over five hundred in 2018, and in 2019, at the time of the study, the number rose to 986 (Van der Eems 2018). It is reasonable to assume that the number of Black homeschooling families is higher than the number indicated on Facebook as not all people join social media.

By looking at the trend of the rise in the number of people choosing home education, one can also assume that the number of Black families choosing home education will increase and within this number there will be a significant number who will embrace the NLA. With the estimate of 10 – 12 % of homeschoolers being natural learners (Gray and Riley 2015a; Riley 2018) one can safely deduce that there are more NL families in South Africa than the number cited in this study. It must also be noted that this number and the study in total does not take into account the number of children who have dropped out of the South African school system. In 2017, a study conducted by the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town, showed that 254 000 children in the 7–17 years age category were not reporting to school (Hall 2018). The same study also indicated that 3.3 million people in the 15–24 age group were not in employment, education or training (referred to as NEETs). Technically, these people are unschooling in the sense that they are living and learning through life and it would be interesting to do a study on this group to determine how they are negotiating their lives without any institutional support.

4.3.1.9 Total Household Income (Question 3)

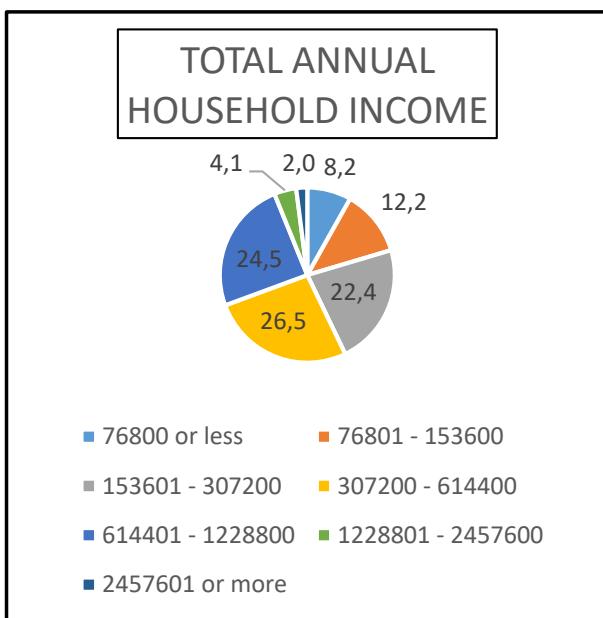


Illustration 4.9 Household Income

Forty-nine responses were recorded for the question on the total annual household income. From the above pie chart one can deduce that 73.4% (a combination of the three highest percentages, namely, 24.5% + 22.4% + 26.5%) of the NLA community earn R153 601 and above per annum. This puts the majority of NLA families at earning R12 800 and more per month. According to BankservAfrica, the average take-home salary in South Africa in 2015 was R12 715 (Staff Writer 2016). This also then places most of the NLA families into the middle-class category, although this categorising must be done with great care because of the extreme inequalities and other socio-economic factors that exist in South Africa. Therefore, different theories on the definition of 'middle-class' exist but will not be discussed here (Visagie 2013). However, from this information the majority of South African NL families are within the middle-class category, who have access to amenities and can afford a reasonable to good quality of life. However, it must also be acknowledged that 20.4% are below the average monthly income of R12 715 and still choose to follow the NLA. It must be further noted that many families choose to be single income families because of their NLA choice. As stated in other articles, in a society where worth and self-worth is measured by how much money one has, it is a challenge for many NL families to live on less money and yet at the same time affirming that there are many ways to lead a

full and satisfying life (Ekoko 2011; Ekoko & Ricci 2014). Gray and Riley (2015a) found that in several studies NL families reported lower incomes than homeschoolers, which indicates that in general the NLA families are more willing to sacrifice income so that they can pursue the lifestyle that the NLA affords.

4.3.1.10 Number of Children per Family (Question 4)

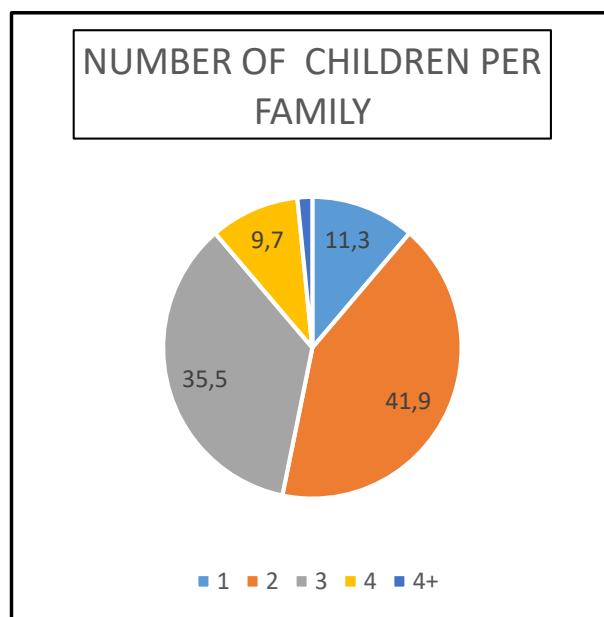


Illustration 4.10 Number of Children

The majority of parents (41.9%) have two children, followed by 35.5% who have three. Families with four and more children were the lowest figure. Therefore, this data was not considered in the analysis.

**4.3.1.11 Number of Children that Follow the NLA/Unschooling
(Question 5)**

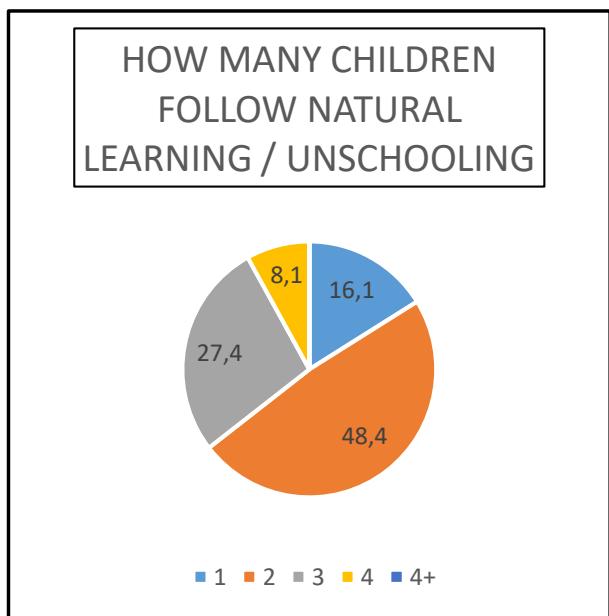


Illustration 4.11 Number of NLA children

There were 62 responses to this question. The above data shows that 41.9% of families have two children, and from this chart one can deduce that most families implement the NLA with at least two children. Whether the number of children was a determining factor in opting for the NLA is not known and none of the respondents indicated this as a reason for choosing the NLA in the questionnaire or in the interviews. The two-child family perhaps fits into the Western idea of a two-children family being the ideal model, the most affordable, and manageable (Sobotka & Beaujouan 2014; Gao 2015)

4.3.1.12 Age of Children (Question 6)

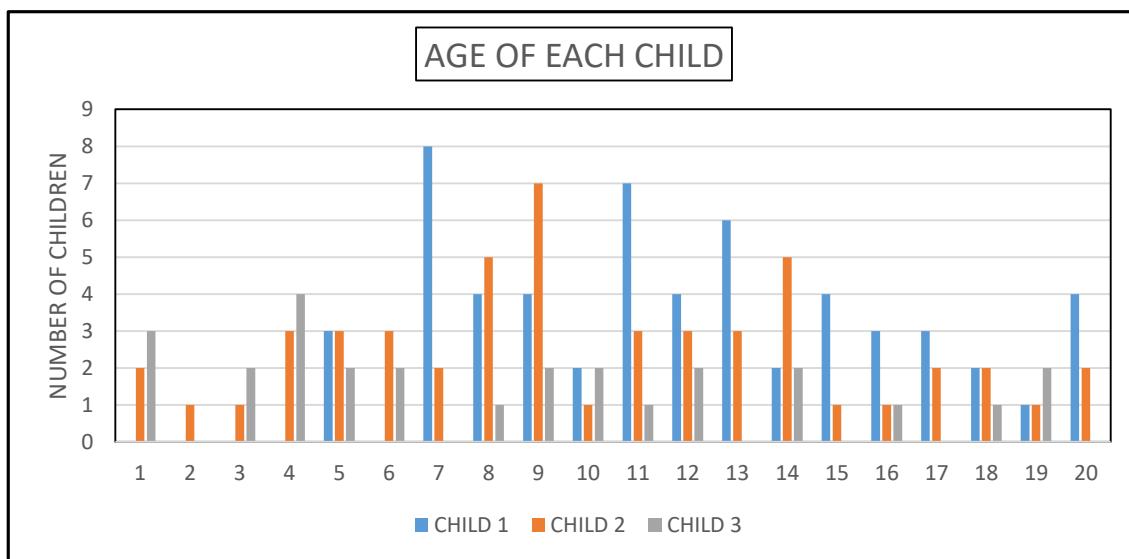


Illustration 4.12 Age of Children

The age range 4–34 years old in terms of the number of children in the NLA household. Most children fell within the official school-going age, below 18. Once again the data on four and more children was not incorporated. The age range shows that some families have been implementing NL for many years. It would be interesting to track the children ten years old and younger over the next ten years to understand their learning development and NL trajectory.

4.3.1.13 Attendance at School and Age at the Start of NLA (Question 7 & 8)

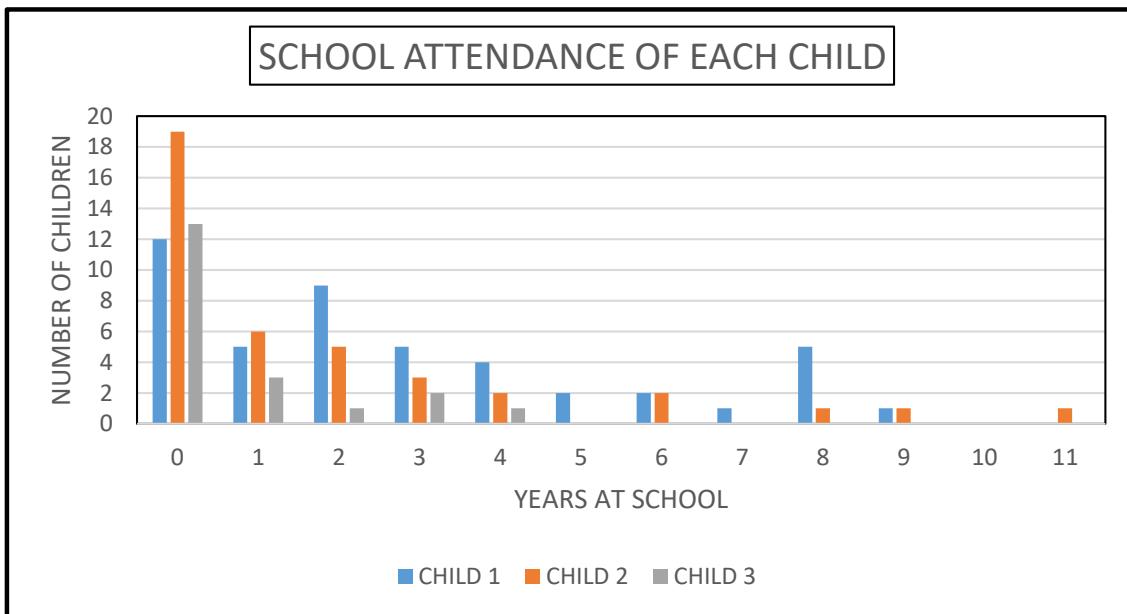


Illustration 4.13 Years at School

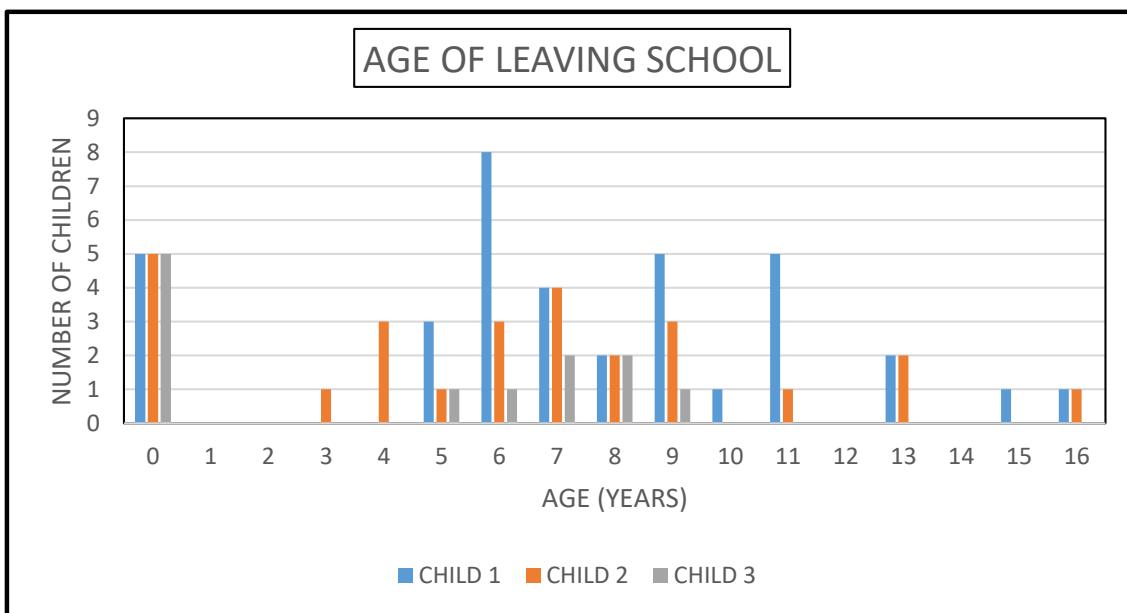


Illustration 4.14 Age of Leaving School

Forty-nine responses provided information on the number of years of school attendance before opting for NL. The number of years spent at school ranged from a few days in a nursery school (which was placed in the zero category in the graph) to age 16 (Grade 10) at school. The age that the children stopped going to school also

ranged from four to sixteen years. This data also revealed that for many families, the negative experience of the first child prompted them to embrace NL and therefore the number of second and third children with zero school years is higher.

4.3.1.14 Number of Years Practising NLA (Question 10)

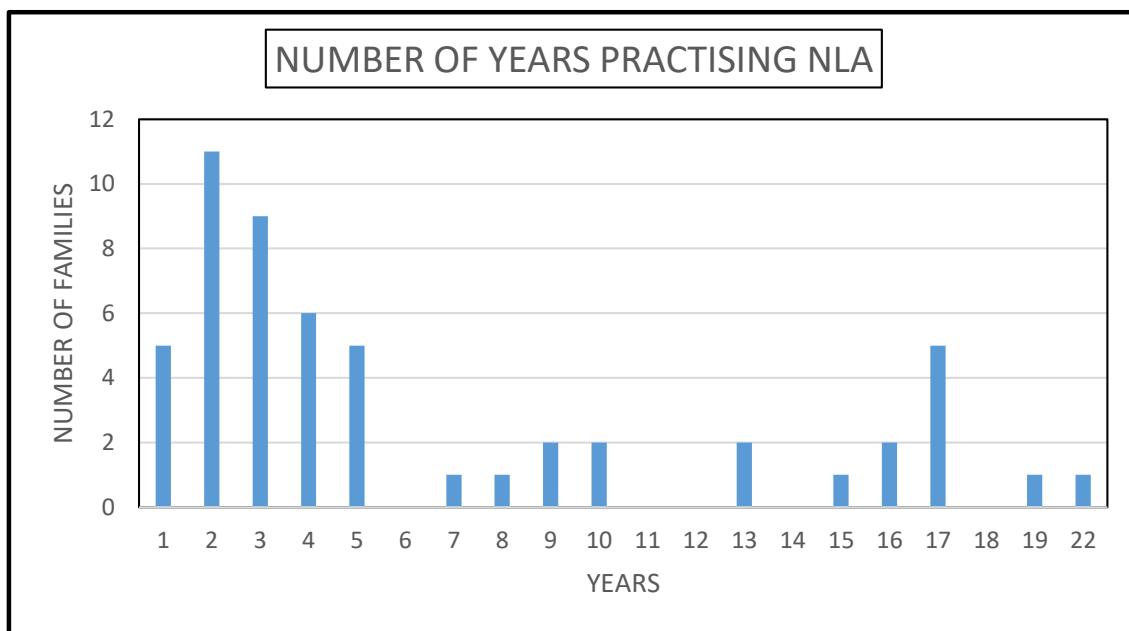


Illustration 4.15 Years of NLA

Sixty-two responses were recorded for the length of time that that families have been following the NLA. From the graph it can be deduced that there has been a significant increase in the families opting for NL in the last five years. The number of NL years ranged from 9 months to 22 years. This data further revealed that there is constant movement of people coming into the NLA world as they become either disillusioned with school or decide to embrace a different lifestyle. For example:

R11: The 15 year old requested to leave the school because he wasn't happy with her learning pace. Sitting on one topic she understood and not being allowed to learn at her own pace.

R62: Bullying, uninspired, hated school and the workload.

R53: We did not feel that school was adding value to our lives and the kids were not being afforded the right learning environment.

4.3.1.15 Description of General Understanding of NLA (Question 14)

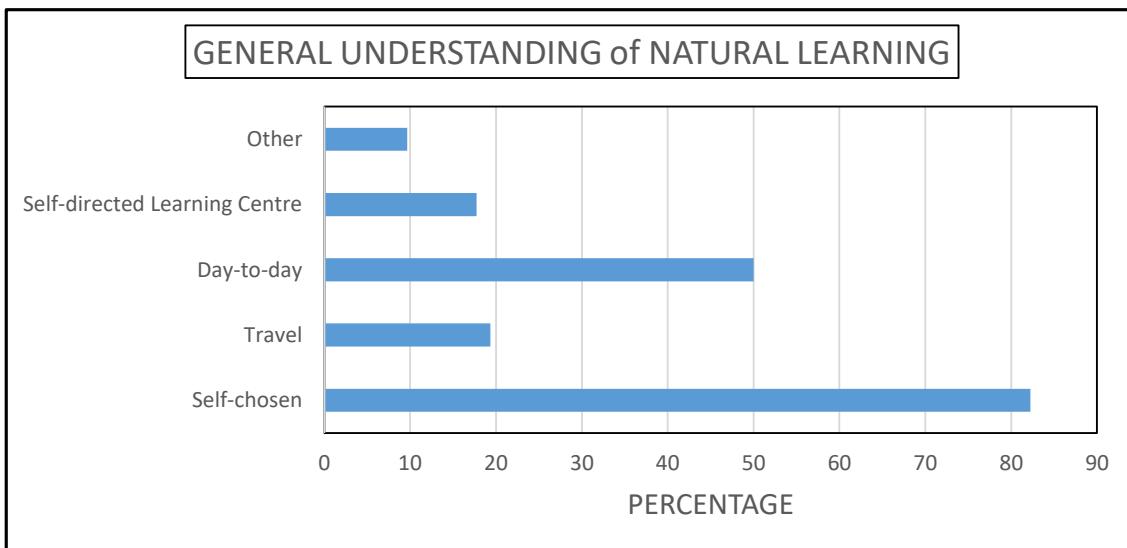


Illustration 4.16 Understanding of the NLA

Sixty-two responses were recorded denoting how families implemented the NLA. The highest number of respondents indicated ‘Self-Chosen’ followed by ‘Day-to-Day’, as how learning takes place in their homes. This aligns to the general description of the majority of NLA homes. A small but significant percentage of families are attending self-directed learning centres (SDLC). These are centres that embrace the basic tenets of the NLA (freedom, autonomy and agency in children’s learning) outside the home. Internationally, the two well-known self-directed centres are Summerhill in the United Kingdom, established in 1921 by AS Neill (1992) and Sudbury, established in 1968 by Daniel Greenberg in the US (Gray 2013). As in the home, these centres are stimulating and well-resourced spaces where children are free to learn according to their own interests and in their own direction. Both schools’ basic premise is that each person is responsible for their own education. There is no curriculum, no tests and no ranking or evaluation of the students. It is a fully democratic community where children take full charge of their own education. As with the families who are home-based, there is complete trust that the children will learn what they need to. Furthermore, all ideas and endeavours are equally valued if it does not impinge on the rights and freedom of others (Gray 2013). In South Africa, there are three such SDLC known to the researcher at the time of this study, namely, Gauteng-based Riverstone Village Self-Directed Education Community and Reimagined Learning Centre, and Mpumalanga-based Freerange Education Learning Centre. These centres, while keeping their own

unique characteristics in terms of philosophy and what it offers, embrace the fundamentals of the NLA within a place-based setting.

4.3.2 Qualitative Data Analysis of Questionnaire

The questionnaire was comprehensive, covering a wide range of questions that were pertinent to the NLA that required long answers. Trawling through the data collated from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire, the researcher identified themes and then grouped the questions accordingly. Some questions overlapped themes. The themes identified are:

- Theme 1: Freedom and Autonomy
- Theme 2: Challenges
- Theme 3: Support and Facilities
- Theme 4: Building Community
- Theme 5: We are learning!
- Theme 6: Technology and the Google Phenomenon

4.3.2.1 Theme 1: Freedom and Autonomy

According to Petrovic and Rolstad (2016:5), freedom and autonomy are co-requisites to the NLA because both are fundamental for the “development of the child as a person who is intellectually independent, capable of living and conducting him or herself in harmony with others and can lead a flourishing life while caring for the flourishing of others”. Neill (1992), Holt (1972), and Gray (2013) further emphasise the notion that the respect and pursuit of one’s freedom should not interfere with the freedom of others to pursue their options. Furthermore, the NLA home is the antithesis of a traditional school because it is free from interferences, obstructions and/or coercions to learning and living. The children see themselves as sovereign because they decide their own learning path. It was therefore significant to see how the notion of freedom and autonomy is experienced and expressed within the NLA community.

The following questions were grouped together to extract responses that related to this theme:

- Question 9: Reasons for taking children out of school.

- Question 13: Briefly explain why you chose NL/unschooling as your preferred educational/life philosophy.
- Question 22: What are some of the challenges you experience with the NLA?
- Question 24: Briefly describe your interpretation of NL.
- Question 25: What would you say is your key role as a parent in this approach?

Emerging from the responses was an overall understanding of the NLA that aligned with the broader definition and understanding of the NLA where the idea of the child being in control of their own learning is most dominant. For example, in a quick Google search of “What is natural learning?” the following response came up:

“Natural Learning, also known as Unschooling, is a range of educational philosophies and practices centred on allowing children to learn through their natural life experiences—including children-directed play, game play, household responsibilities, work experience, and social interaction—rather than through a more traditional school curriculum. Unschooling encourages exploration of activities led by the children themselves, facilitated by the adults”.

Priesnitz (2019) states that there are no rules about what unschooling/life learning should look like in the home and therefore no real definition of it either. The key is to trust the learner to know what and how they should learn. Some respondents mentioned that NL is about allowing children the freedom to choose what and how they want to learn:

R12: It is about allowing children to develop their own skills at their own pace. It is the freedom to choose activities according to their own interests and preferences.

R51: Allowing the individual the freedom to choose what they spend their time and energy on, without any interference.

R52: Allowing my children to be who they are, to direct their own education process.

R26: Allowing children to learn in a way that is natural to them according to their interests.

Some respondents chose to emphasise the naturalness of learning, in that learning is so intertwined with living that it is a seamless process.

R10: Learning happens naturally all the time. The less we analyse what is being learned at any given time the less we box the experience. Learning is part of everyday life.

R13: It is the way to live to the full, throughout life, according to one's own uniqueness and personal definitions of success ... unique in this world in that it allows for 100% freedom with 100% responsibility.

R47: It is an approach that rests on the acceptance that humans are learning animals, that we are fundamentally wired to learn, and that if our basic needs are met we will be 'freed up' to engage with everything in our environment which sparks our interest.

R48: The natural response of a living creature to learn from its environment in order to survive.

R31: Living and growing but not within a defining structure.

Two respondents captured the notion of a partnership within the family:

R50: NL is when there is space and opportunity to live and experience life in an authentic way. Parents and children become partners in navigating life and all that it offers. It's like a dance where sometimes one leads/mentors and the others follow and vice versa. It's not about doing nothing. It's about doing and being how you choose and embracing all the learning that comes with living. It's about respecting each other and the common space, about sharing and compromise and above all it's about being happy and at peace, accepting and respecting the self and others.

R27: Unschooling is the practice of living and learning in freedom, in partnership and community.

From the above examples and the other responses one can deduce that most of the parents see NL, as with the general definitions given above and the various definitions outlined in Chapter 2, as having freedom to choose what, how and when to learn. There seems to be consensus among the families that the idea of autonomy in learning is fundamental to the NLA. The semantics of words like 'allow' and 'parental

'partnership' is merely to raise the idea that there can be two different viewpoints on learning, freedom and parenting. Some see the idea of respecting the freedom of learning only within the realm of the learning process. Whereas the concept of 'respectful partnership parenting' leans towards the notion that the very idea of authoritarian parenting in any form is eschewed for a more egalitarian ethos in the home. In other words, in some families there might be no imposition on what should be learnt in terms of knowledge and skills or what might be constituted as meaningful learning, but it does not translate to freedom in other aspects of the family living, for example, what to wear, what to eat, whom to worship, because the authoritarian or patriarchal nature of a traditional family still holds. As previously discussed, for some people NL in its essence demands an egalitarian relationship between parents and children rather than an authoritarian one, where the family organises itself to accommodate the radical curiosity of the child even when it challenges parental authority (Lyn-Piluso & Lyn-Piluso 2008). It would therefore be important to conduct further research on this aspect to fully understand the dynamics and the impact of the NLA within an egalitarian family setting. Following closely on the definition of the NLA, the question about the key role of the parent also provides significant insight into how freedom and autonomy is unfolding in the NLA homes. Chapter 2 outlined in detail the role of parents in the NLA. The responses to this question revealed that most parents do align with the idea that parents play a supportive facilitator role. In the responses the words 'facilitator' and/or 'supporter' appeared in almost every response.

R3: ... supporting the child's learning.

R8: To facilitate, guide and help kids in their life journey.

R10: Good conversation with my children, develop and maintain a close relationship with them, find ways to support their learning desires—find resources and opportunities.

R14: Just being here to facilitate what they need help with. To protect them and provide for their essential needs.

R20: A facilitator: to provide my children with a smorgasbord of learning opportunities and facilitate (arrange/pay/support/) them in following their interests.

R18: Supporting all interests and supplying tools and information for the learning and exploration in whatever direction is takes.

R61: Being available to guide and support. To encourage curiosity and exploration.

Other interesting responses that would be worth probing are:

R9: ... provocateur of consciousness

R13: ... to protect my children from interference from well-meaning but misinformed others.

R27: ... to partner with my child as they explore life. To protect them from the daily violations on their rights as human beings.

The respondents demonstrated that they are practising the idea of freedom and autonomy in learning and living by providing space and opportunities for their children to maximise their learning and living potentials. Some parents also noted that it was equally important to be good role models for their children in terms of how they live their own lives and how they communicate with their children and the world.

For many parents, the decision to follow the NLA followed negative experiences in the schooling system. Various readings are available that outlines and discusses why schooling is not good for children and society (Gatto 2016; Dewey 2011; Holt 2004). For many of the respondents the negativity of schools prompted them to look for alternative ways and many first went into homeschooling before embracing the NLA. The 34 participants who responded to Question 9, 'Reasons for taking the children out of school', provided a variety of reasons that can be easily slotted into one of the seven sins of schooling, as outlined and discussed by Gray (2013:66–84). These seven sins are discussed in the next sections

Denial of liberty

Forcing children to be in school with various laws and punishments is equivalent to incarceration (Gray 2013). In other words, by forcing children to go to school they are denied their freedom and autonomy.

R17: Freedom to learn, freedom to be who I am.

R18: We believe individuals should be able to choose what they want to learn and engage in, freely following their interests, and also be able to choose when and how to do it, instead of being externally on a fixed schedule or timeline.

R21: Because it aligns with what we as a family stand for, specifically for personal development, growth of the individual, freedom of expression and exploration, sovereignty, respect for our human rights and personal power.

R35: We strongly opposed the archaic, capitalist and colonialist structure of education.

Interference with the development of personal responsibility and self-direction

The belief that children are not capable of making their own decisions or self-direct their own learning deprives them of living their life to their full potential. In school children are not allowed to take responsibility for their own learning, because they are expected to obediently follow the norms of the schooling system in every aspect, making children incompetent. This has led to an increase in ‘individual helplessness’ that is prevalent in our society (Gray 2013). Respondents also cited this reason for choosing the NLA and for taking their children out of school.

R2: We started off doing school at home, but my son is very stubborn and resisted my efforts to do lessons with him. There were many tears (some of them his). After a while I was shocked to see how much he had learnt without my interference. This is when we started natural learning

R16: When I was younger I did not understand why adults do not trust young people/children to know what is best for them, even within limits. As I grew older I saw the distrust never faded, so it must have been taught somehow that you could not trust younger people, and with that came a distrust in yourself ... I decided that I did not want to be the parent that breaks my child. I want them to have the parent that trusts them to know what is best for themselves and when they have made a wrong choice, learn from it. And with that comes a trust between parent and child, which is very important to me as individual. When unschooling was explained, I instinctively knew that was the perfect fit for our life as a family.

R21: We felt restricted by rules and conventions and unable to live in accordance with our family values ... we do not believe that following rules makes a child a better person, but rather turns a person into a conformist, unable to think for themselves and eventually incapable of questioning the status quo.

Undermining the intrinsic motivation to learn (turning learning into work)

Schools fill children's time with a lot of busy work that serves no productive purpose. School also intrudes on family life as children are inundated with homework, projects, assignments etc. Schools have also co-opted parents to be an extension of the school thus impacting on family relationships. By making learning a chore or hard work, the joy of learning is dulled. Furthermore, the constant evaluation of their work and the constant comparison with their peers make learning a source of anxiety (Gray 2013). The respondents also attested to this sentiment:

R34: He hated the busy work, learning not being inquiry-based, felt he had no voice, only one answer is right, no autonomy, no discussion—only lecturing, no deep-diving into interests, fixed curriculum, almost no flexibility, forced to read books that did not have an interesting story-line/below his reading ability, age separation during break.

R20: Much of the content taught was irrelevant or not taught with any real application to life. My oldest was battling with performance stress and social stress at school.

R22: Did not resonate with the curriculum

R23: Unhappy children ... unwillingness to wake in the morning, tears and constant complaining, anxious separation once at school

R29: There was no point, nothing to gain.

R36: Too much pressure in Grade 1 already.

Judging students in ways that foster shame, hubris, cynicism, and cheating

Throughout the history of formal schooling, punishments have been used to enforce control and obedience (Gray 2013). Although corporal punishment in schools is banned in South Africa, there are still incidents of violent punishments meted out by teachers on children, for example, 593 complaints of corporal punishment was recorded in 2017 (Seale 2017). Where the ban on corporal punishment is observed, schools inflict other methods of control and coercion, for example, the use of grades, rankings, constant monitoring, evaluations and other humiliating punishments for non-compliance. This practice has resulted in widespread cheating because children want to do well at any cost.

R44: Child challenges authority and was punished daily and traumatized.

R48: School caused damage to her character and her knowledge.

R58: Being bullied by staff members.

Interference with the development of cooperation and promotion of bullying

Human beings by their very nature are social beings, and therefore, cooperation is key. Yet schools by its very structure and design promote and teach selfishness. Forced competitiveness, age segregation, and lack of opportunities for free play that give children opportunities to develop cooperation, compassion and nurturance are almost non-existent (Gray 2013). There has been an alarming rise in bullying in schools, both physical bullying and cyberbullying. Therefore, for many children school has become a painful place where they are subjected to scorn, ridicule, humiliation and violence, both by other children and teachers (Gray 2013). Often schools perpetuate bullying by allowing children to ‘initiate’ others into various forums. For example, children entering high school will go through an initiation process. An anecdotal example of this scenario of organised approved bullying is that of a young girl who was not allowed to drink water for an entire day while she was forced to do physical exercise as part of an initiation ritual. Her parents and the general school-going community saw this as a rite of passage and that ‘no harm was done’; they felt it would toughen her up. Other examples experienced during initiations at schools are:

Older children can take your place in the queue to get lunch, so the child has to go back to the end of the queue; and rituals of humiliation, like being the servant of the older student where you polish their shoes or carry their books etc. For several of the respondents who felt compassion and outrage at the bullying of their children, subtle or overt, the NLA became an option.

R01: He found it a confusing and threatening place

R07: Bullying. They asked not to go back. Ever.

R25: She was bullied.

R53: There were also issues of bullying by other kids and a teacher.

R58: Being bullied by staff members.

R60: Stop being interested in the world and was bullied.

R62: Bullying, uninspired, hated school and the workload.

R14: He felt bullied and lacked social confidence.

Inhibitions of critical thinking

Although critical thinking is often bandied as one of the important end goals of education, most children learn very quickly that critical thinking skills in schools are not valued at all: "They learn that their job in school is to get high marks on tests and that critical thinking interferes" (Gray 2013:79). Yet, by its very definition NL promotes the development of reason and rational deliberation, weighing evidence and arguments, and revising one's position in day-to-day living (Petrovic & Rolstad 2016).

R20: We felt that the school did not teach thinking skills, but mainly memorisation ... little analysis, synthesis, comparison etc. is included in teaching or testing at schools.

R21: We felt opposed to the dumbing down of our child and then labelling it as education.

R57: It felt like the strictures, structures, boredom and constraints of school dulled her spark.

Reduction in diversity of skills and knowledge

It is often stated that all children are unique with their own unique talents that must be nurtured. Yet, schools demand conformity (Gray 2013). Schools force children to learn the same standard curriculum. Robinson (2007) states that human talent is tremendously diverse. This diversity of different personalities and learning idiosyncrasies are not tolerated in a school. It seems that anything considered different is now declared a learning difficulty or suffering from a mental disorder. Children must fit into the school moulds to function and be successful in school. This culture of schooling may contribute to the increase in the prevalence of childhood Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Piplani, Bhushan & Tekkalaki 2019). Wedge (2013), author of the book *A Disease Called Childhood: Why ADHD Became an American Epidemic*, states that there has been a 53% increase in ADHD diagnosis in the last decade. This scenario has added to the misery and shaming of many children. Some respondents also experienced this:

R23: Teachers and therapists diagnosing our eldest as a person with whom was ‘in need of Occupational Therapy’, speech therapy, diagnosed to be an ‘emotionally immature child’ ... due to his ability to express emotions at such a deep and profound level it was deemed ‘wrong’ ... conformity of school, i.e., must wear shoes, eat some food, behave in a certain way etc. ... feeling that current schooling system takes away from ones unique identity—built within moulds rather than left to craft one’s own piece of art.

R32: My 12-year-old was son was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia and we refused to break his unique spirit with Ritalin.

According to Wedge (2013), there is an alarming rate of misuse of the diagnosis of ADHD and there is evidence of parental pressure on doctors to drug their children to improve school performance of children who are healthy. In the NLA home, a child not being able to sit quietly is not seen as abnormal or pathological, it is seen as childhood (Wedge 2015).

It was important to understand why parents decided to choose the NLA as their preferred approach to living and learning. As it is not a widely recognised philosophy, although it is growing in popularity, the reasons for this choice are rather significant to the theme of freedom and autonomy.

Question 13 asked parents to briefly explain why they chose NL/unschooling as their preferred educational/life philosophy and Question 9 asked for reasons for taking the children out of school. These two questions were analysed together as the latter gave a depth of understanding to the former.

Families seem to arrive at the decision to incorporate the NLA in different ways. According to English (2015), a study conducted by Harding in 2006 outlined the following as parental reasons for choosing home education: Religious beliefs, parental responsibility, social development, personal philosophies, concerns over the quality of teaching and/or schools, bullying and other negative peer experiences, distance, and special needs. One respondent in this study also mentioned safety within the South African context as a reason. The respondents in this study also demonstrated that their reasons for choosing the NLA included philosophical reasons and concerns over the quality of teaching and schooling in South Africa. For some, it is because they are against the very idea of institutional learning and embrace the philosophies of John Holt, Ivan Illich and others. For others, it was the child experiencing problems in the formal schooling system and their unique personalities demanding a different approach.

Another interesting factor is that many families seem to lean towards a more natural and organic lifestyle and practice attachment parenting from the birth of their children. According to the Attachment Parenting website (API 2019), attachment parenting is an approach to parenting that promotes “a secure attachment bond between parents and children” (API 2019). A study done by Grunzke (2010) found that NL parents on average practised alternative parenting tasks like breastfeeding (often prolonged), natural weaning, nutritious food choices, and abundant physical closeness (co-sleeping). This approach to children comes from a place of deep compassion, forgiveness and patience for children as they explore and learn about his world. Parents demonstrate a willingness to give their children more personal attention and show a need to treat their child with dignity, love and respect in the same way as one adult would treat another adult. Therefore, it seems that the attachment parenting philosophy and the choice of the NLA may be “deeply enmeshed” (English 2015:12).

Some responses captured the notion of attachment parenting as they show that their choices were driven by connection, compassion and respect for their children in their decision to implement the NLA:

R1: It chose me. By listening to my children, it led me to this way of living.

R52: It makes sense to me, rings true intuitively. Treating children respectfully and as their own person (so I guess respecting children's rights) is important to me and that makes NL a possible education option

R5: When we started investigating homeschooling and then discovered unschooling a part of me thought it sounded ludicrous while another part of me immediately saw that it made perfect sense. My son was two at that stage where they learn so many things without instruction, the more I watched him and read about unschooling the more sense it started to make.

R34: The increased understanding of how people (including children) naturally learn—how NL supports autonomy, competence, mastery, how it is built on meeting needs and following interests which constitutes 'real' learning, as well as NL being an expression of respect-based parenting all contributed to our decision to follow this meandering path.

R42: I want my son and future children to have enough time and freedom to explore and learn in their most natural state. I want my son to keep his passion and curiosity for learning. Secretly I also want to protect them from the people that might dim their light.

R43: It was a natural progression for us as we learnt more and more about conscious living and parenting.

R50: Authentic learning cannot be confined to an institution. Natural Learning happens as you live life and engage in all that it offers you. We are strong believers in freedom and autonomy in learning and for children to be in a safe, warm, loving, peaceful and natural environment for as long as possible. The stability and the beauty of a loving family is the fundamental foundation in building a beautiful society that embraces love, respect and freedom for all.

4.3.2.2 Theme 2: Challenges

This theme related to the question on key challenges experienced with the NLA. Although, in general families implementing the NLA seem rather happy with their decision and seem delighted by the many learning experiences unfolding, some also cited intermittent periods of doubt and questioned the way they implemented it. A few

found outside criticism and ‘nosy strangers’ difficult to deal with. Some parents acknowledged that their challenges did not have anything to do with the NLA but their own personality and personal struggles. For example:

R47: The main challenge I face are to do with managing my own fears. Whenever I am worried about the future or in a bad mood, I find it hard to see the learning in things I don't really like (such as games, shows or YouTube channels) or find it hard to respond well when the kids say they don't feel like doing something I suggest and instead want to stay home and play online games. But when I am in the right headspace, I can see clearly what they gain from playing the games they like, and watching the shows or channels they like, or I can see that they need a rest day after too many days of going out and doing things.

Responses like the above gives quite a deep insight into how parents are negotiating this approach and the parenting that comes with it. Some respondents cited feeling undervalued as a stay-at-home parent as well as the fear of failing and lack of support. Other challenges included financial stress in providing the various resources that their children often need. One respondent found the role of being ‘everything’ to the children and the provider of everything that the children needed for their learning process far too much of a burden and by the close of this study chose to discontinue with the NLA. Time was also seen as a precious resource that many parents found a challenge, especially as supporting the interests of their children sometimes involved travelling to places and just the sheer amount of time that went into a passion or interest. One parent found it challenging when the children doubted the choice and process of the NLA when they were surrounded by people who followed conventional schooling norms.

The issue of trust also came up as a challenge for some of the respondents:

R20: Our own deschooling. We tend to look for evidence that the children are learning something. We probably quiz them too much to see what they know, e.g., basic arithmetic, spelling. I worry that my kids will never be able to write properly and that my youngest will never read a book as she is dyslexic and avoids the written word whenever possible. I often feel that the kids spend too much time on their screens doing random junk (in my opinion) but then they

amaze me sometimes with things they learn on YouTube. So, they are learning—it is just hard to see. It's hard to let go and hope for the best and that they are learning. We need to keep reminding ourselves about freedom and trust.

The ability to let go of deeply entrenched ideas about learning and schooling is not an easy process. Therefore, browsing through the various NL blogs one will find many people advocating that both adults and children, who choose to opt out of formal education, go through a process of deschooling (Priesntz 2009) so that they become more aware of how their old entrenched habits and opinions on schooling and learning can trip them in the NLA journey. In this study, most of the parents implementing the NLA have gone through a schooling system in some form, so it is reasonable to assume that the participants have been enculturated with school. Letting go of this enculturation takes time, reflection and effort, and it is an ongoing process. According to Sherry (2019), deschooling is the time children need when they opt out of school to do very little related to school so that they can get the rhythm of formal schooling out of their system, in other words, they need to ‘detox’. They need to find a way to adapt to their new life together with their parents. The respondents and participants who have been implementing the NLA since the birth of their children are not necessarily immune to the entrenched ideas of a schooled society and therefore will also need to be part of an ongoing deschooling process.

This following example could be typical of a family who are going through a deschooling process. According to Dubowsky (2019), when children first leave school they go through a time where very little happens, where there is lot of slouching on the couch and perhaps excessive technology time. Thereafter, they start muddling through things to do and finally it morphs into purposeful activities that meet their interests and needs. The challenge is to allow the process to happen, because learning is happening throughout the process and there is no time limit for this process. People are different and it is believed that the longer children have been in school, the longer the deschooling process (Laricchia 2019). As the deschooling process deepens, children develop trust and confidence in their ability to understand themselves and self-learn and the parents develop trust in the children and the learning process grows. Once parents are beyond the fear of what children are learning, the parents’ role evolves to something similar to the following example:

R34: To create the environment necessary to facilitate NL—non-coercive, ready to assist, providing resources (albeit conversations, video, internet, books library, field trips people, expo's, experiences, apps, documentaries) strewing interesting material about, giving him time and space to do his own thing, holding him to account to agreements made (democratic household) supporting his development physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually (philosophical).

Question 11, 'what changes/reorganisation did you and your family need to make to implement the NLA?', was grouped with the theme of challenges. This was an optional question and there were 49 responses to this question. For ten respondents, there were no big changes that needed to be made as they were already in a space that allowed for easy transition into the NLA. Seven of the responses indicated going through a deschooling process or just having to change their mindsets:

R07: No physical changes but we had to make some big paradigm shifts about parenting and learning.

R16: Being an A-grade student myself, I had to deschool myself and start trusting in my boys to know what is best for them. That was the hardest part. NLA fell perfectly into our everyday lives, so we did not have to make any changes there.

Other responses included the mother mainly becoming a stay-at-home parent, and/or organising work so that one or both can work from home:

R60: I needed to change how I work completely. I now work online 100%

R57: I (mum) have taken on less work commitment to be more available.

R47: I quit my job and started doing part time writing work from home.

R22: I stayed at home and then my husband and I set up our own business.

Other interesting responses that show the creative changes people made to commit to the NLA:

R45: Eliminate as much debt as possible to be able to survive on one salary.

R08: Changed schedules, moved house, joined a Sudbury community.

*R13: Complete replacement of social circle/friends but without relocation.
Change of job for the mother.*

R61: Whole lifestyle change. I no longer keep a 9–5 job and work remotely. We are nomadic to incorporate road-schooling so to have experience-based learning on a global level.

The question ‘if you could change two things about the NLA in your present situation, what would they be?’ lent itself to giving some insight on where the family experienced and continue to experience challenges. Some of the responses were more appropriate to other themes, but the following responses helped understand some of the challenges the families were experiencing. Most of the respondents mentioned the lack of community, which will be addressed in Theme 4 (Section 4.3.2.4). Nine respondents cited lack of resources because of becoming a single income family. They felt that if they had more income, their NL life would be a bit easier, from wishing for another vehicle to more physical space to wishing to travel more. Again, indicating that the NLA families are willing to forego a second income to implement the NLA even though it might not be financially easy. The juggling of income and time as a resource is particularly difficult for single parents.

R12: I would like to be able to earn an income so that I can offer my children more experiences, especially travel.

R14: Maybe money. It does get difficult on only one income at times.

R51: Better finances to allow for more travel adventures and to be able to support a business for my children.

R54: For resources to be more available and freer.

R45: To have that second car to facilitate trips etc.

These responses certainly debunk the common myth that only wealthy, privileged people choose the NLA. Other pertinent responses indicated people’s concerns with it not being widely accepted and not considered legal. The situation in South Africa regarding the legality of home education and the pending BELA Bill has been discussed in Chapter 2. As mentioned, the uncertainty of the proposed Bill has created a lot of discomfort and unease within the home-education community.

R01: Society and the government being more open-minded and accepting of our way of living.

R11: The demands to be up to date with regards to each child's interests.

R36: Other people's (mainstream) perception of this approach to learning and living.

R60: That it is legal and that there is more acceptance in the wider community.

R45: Not to have the worry of the law intervening.

R13: Clear and public legalised status—other people's fear of the law is a huge damper.

The responses regarding the law and the government led to looking at the question 'does your Provincial Department of Education support this approach?', to which 96.8% of the respondents stated 'no' and the respondents who stated 'yes' were not sure about the Provincial Department of Basic Education's stance on the NLA.

R20: I really don't know. I do not engage with them. I prefer to stay under the radar.

Only one response indicated a somewhat positive view:

R26: Mixed response. The art classes we attend are presented at a Department of Education facility for homeschoolers.

There were 47 responses for those who responded 'yes' (Question 23.2.). Most of the responses were for the government to accept and recognise the approach and to be left alone. Fifteen of the respondents just wanted the government to recognise the NLA as legitimate so that they would not feel as if they are doing something wrong. This would remove the constant wariness and allow them to practise the NLA in freedom.

R04: Recognition, acceptance and freedom to practise.

R60: That is was respected and legal and recognised for what it is.

Seven respondents would prefer if the government left them alone.

R62: I don't think they are equipped or understand this approach, nor do they want to. The best way they can support unschoolers is to leave them alone.

R13: I'd like them to stay out of our business as much as possible until such time as they genuinely understand self-directed education. Until that day any 'support' will amount to interference and sabotage.

Seventeen responses outlined some wish for the government to provide resources and support in terms of learning spaces, courses, access to government facilities, for example, libraries, schools, sports, to support research and to enable parents.

R16: I would like them to open schools to unschoolers in regard to sport and cultural activities.

R26: Would be great if children could slot in to some of the extra-curricular activities at the schools.

R09: I would like government to support research and to enable parents.

R44: Centres/facilities to encourage learning and play.

4.3.2.3 Theme 3: Support and Facilities (Question 30)

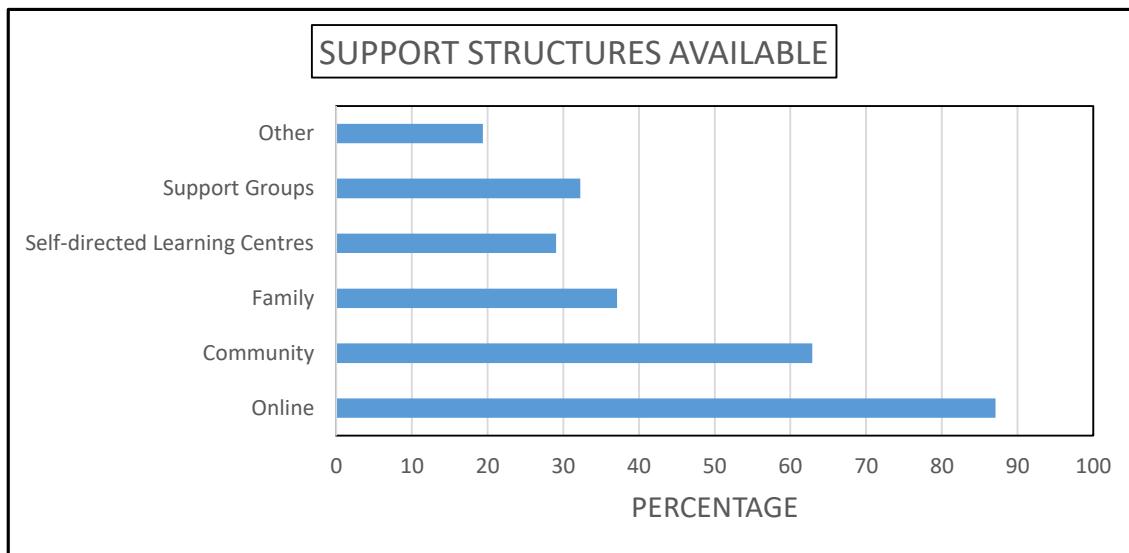


Illustration 4.17 Support Structures Available

There were 62 responses that indicated the available support structures for NL families. Illustration 4.17 indicates that 87% of the respondents cited online support as their main and constant support to get, among other things, information, connect with like-minded people, arrange social events, commiserate, and find joy in being part of a bigger group. The availability of online resources is also discussed in more detail

under Document Analysis: Social Media Forums (Section 4.5.4). According to this study, the NLA community is scattered over eight provinces in South Africa, which means that finding a traditional community and support can become difficult, and therefore, online or other technological (WhatsApp, Discord, Skype) support become an important replacement. However, not all the NLA families choose to use social media forums for support. For example, respondents were also given an open-ended option in Question 12.2. where they could explain what other support structures were accessible, and there were 12 responses for this option. Four respondents included books as a big support for their process. Three respondents emphasised that connecting with people and building relationships were their main source of support. Access to facilities was based on availability and accessibility of the general public facilities. Apart from the availability of SDLC in two provinces, which may be attractive to some NL families, there are no other facilities that are especially available for natural learners.

R12: Informal playdates as well as activities organised by homeschooling/unschooling networks.

R47: I have found a group of friends whom I see a number of times a week for either class activities that our kids share, homeschool special days, or playdates. Once in a while the moms meet for supper to chat about our journeys. It's a wonderful supportive little community and our kids have such a great opportunity to develop deep relationships with the other kids and their moms.

However, the following response indicates that for some families getting in touch with themselves without the ‘noise’ of the information overload of the Internet and the various support groups worked better for them.

R06: Our own intuition that guides our short human life. We got off Facebook and started listening to our kids and our inner voices, our inner child. Stopped going to support groups for Weird Unschoolers and started doing what worked for our children and ourselves—cooperatively and collectively.

Another example of a different way to getting and receiving support:

R53: Indigenous knowledge from extended family and community. We have opened our home to other families (world-schoolers and schooling families on holiday).

R09: Have initiated our own learning centres and activities.

The above examples demonstrate that NL families are creative in finding solutions regarding accessing support.

According to the responses to the question ‘do you liaise with other families who are practising the NLA?’, 79% of the families have found ways to make contact and network with other NL families

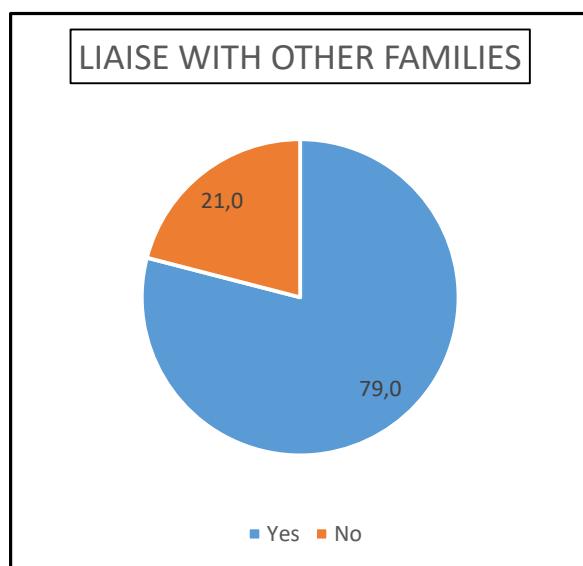


Illustration 4.18 Liaison with Families

It would be interesting to find out more about the 21% who do not liaise with other families. Is this a decision out of choice as indicated in the example of R06 above, or is it because there are difficulties and challenges in this regard? For the question ‘if you choose ‘yes’, briefly describe this relationship’, there were 49 responses that mainly included families meeting to do activities together or just meeting to have a meal together. Some expressed gratitude that they had access to SDLC. Some valued the relationship for the support it provided and for having like-minded people that they can talk to.

The question on support structures cemented the use of some form of online support as the easiest and most accessible support structure available for most NL families.

Of the 47 responses, 17 mentioned social media/online support. Ten mentioned a venue where people can meet, for example, self-directed centres. Other responses included the idea that people saw support for general living and not for the NLA specifically coming from close family and friends:

R15: We don't see this as needing support—we are living life. Sometimes granny comes to be with them when I have to go to the office—but that is not because of their learning journey.

However, one respondent does provide a caution after experiencing negativity when liaising with groups:

R14: Community structure is vital for kids that need people interaction. I do find communities though being very 'clicky' and seek to get very dogmatic on which is the best way to unschool. This is a big 'put off' for me in joining most social groups.

This comment highlights the reality that the NLA community is not necessarily a homogenous community, and therefore, within this relatively small group of the NLA families there are differences. They are as varied as any other community in personalities, interpretations and implementations of a philosophy. For example, there are some natural learners who follow what is termed radical unschooling. This term was coined to differentiate between people who confuse child-led learning with NL or unschooling and those who are considered 'true' unschoolers. Radical unschoolers identify themselves as families that apply the notion of autonomy to every aspect of their children's lives, not just learning. Therefore, there are no rules for bedtime (children go to bed when they are tired); no rules regarding chores or tidying up; children are free to choose and eat what and when they want to eat; and they have total freedom when it comes to whatever they choose to do. Unlimited time regarding technological devices seem to have become a characteristic of this group. Even 'rules' concerning hygiene are not implemented. However, at the same time radical unschooling is not 'unparenting' or chaos because parents are very involved, mindful and intentional (unschoolers.org 2019). There was no question or space to differentiate between respondents who were following the NLA in terms of no imposition of learning and the ones who were following the radical approach. Mainly this seems to be a rather vague and sensitive area (as seen in the above response by

R14), and the researcher's focus was to see how learning is taking place within the families who declare themselves natural learners. Moreover, as most NL families emphasise free choice, children's choice to do a curriculum or to go to a SLDC is respected, and therefore, there cannot be a blanket rule to differentiate one from the other. Furthermore, not all radical natural learners need to fit the unkempt, excessive screen time stereotype to be seen as 'free' children or as 'true' natural learners. Each family is unique in how they approach NL, and there is no one way of implementing the NLA because it rests on a family's unique perspective of life and living. It must be noted that the key focus in this study was to examine how and what learning is taking place within the NLA family without formal schooling or a formal curriculum. The differentiation and nuances regarding the different parenting approaches in all aspects of a functioning family within the broad definition of the NLA or unschooling is an area for further research.

In terms of the question 'what you would consider a priority to help support the NLA?' the following data was collated. Nineteen respondents (30.1%) rated libraries as a high priority, while computers and Internet was rated a 5 by 41 respondents (66.1%) and 47 respondents (75.8%) respectively. Interestingly, libraries and laboratories, which are often perceived as important from a traditional paradigm, were not rated the highest. Instead, computers and Internet seemed to be critical for learning.

Community learning centres got a rating by 28 respondents (45.2%), which was surprising since many respondents cited a lack of community in previous questions. Perhaps the distinction is finding and building community naturally and does not necessarily lead to community learning centres.

Thirty-one respondents (50%) cited mentorship as important. This is also surprising as engaging with other people who can nurture an area of interest in a child can be a very rewarding way to learn and discover one's interest and further one's knowledgebase on a topic. Furthermore, in Illich's (2002) idea of a deschooled society, mentors are crucial as they become part of the 'learning web' that ensures learning opportunities. The response of 19 (30.6%) for volunteers and 'Access to the world of work' also got a scoring of high priority by 24 people. This was also surprising as volunteers and 'hands-on' work experience are all vital aspects of a deschooled learning society. The notion of a deschooled society is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Fifty-one (82.3%) cited 'Access to nature and recreational facilities' as a high priority and 52 (83.9%) respondents indicated 'free and safe outdoor community spaces' as a high priority. This result emphasises the level of importance families have placed on being able to access safe nature and outdoor spaces. This is particularly telling on the South African society because of the high level of crime and because outdoor communal spaces like parks have become unsafe areas. From anecdotal evidence, from conversations and from general news outlets, it is well known that citizens must take very good safety precautions, and this makes families feel uneasy about using the spaces. One parent in the interview lamented that South Africa had so many beautiful spaces but going on a hike in the mountains, as an example, can become a dangerous activity. The level of crime in South Africa has certainly impacted on the way families' practice the NLA. There is a certain level of independence that is taken away from the children because of crime and the lack of safe and reliable public transportation. High incidents of road accidents and the lack of infrastructure also make transportation like cycling to get from one point to another an unsafe activity. Therefore, the level of freedom and autonomy in terms of children being able to explore and experience their neighbourhoods and other outdoor spaces are compromised. The following examples of responses from the question on the two aspects of access that parents consider important also links into this need for safe learning and living spaces and shows the yearning for safe spaces for children to experience their childhood.

R08: Safer spaces where kids can explore freely.

R13: To be reasonably safe from other human beings while free-ranging around—even in urban spaces—without adult supervision and unknown adults could realistically be approached for assistance if needed.

R16: Having more freedom to move around and explore more of their interests.

R62: A safer country to live where we can socialise and just go for walks, have parks to play in etc.

Respondents were given the option to add other ideas onto the list of facilities that they consider important for the NLA.

R07: Adults who are truly interested in young people and are not so tired by their own survival that they can find time to spend with them.

R09: ... photography studio, art centres ... this list goes on. Self-lead learning is re-design of the entire social construct.

R46: Museums

R50: Apprenticeship programmes. Opportunities for children to engage in real work.

R54: Animal centres to allow minors to become volunteers.

R55: Safe foreign exchange programmes or interactions.

R57: More community. South Africa has become a place where you hide behind 6ft walls and don't know your neighbours.

R58: Regular social events for kids, support groups for parents.

These responses indicate that parents want access, exposure and engagement for their children to optimise their learning interests and potential.

4.3.2.4 Theme 4: Building Community

The home-education community is often criticised for being too individualistic in their pursuit of quality education for their children (McLaren 2014). Although, most of the families are comfortable with being at home with their choice of the NLA, various responses to different questions of the questionnaire indicated that many of the NLA families do prefer some form of community so that they can interact meaningfully with other people who are following the same philosophy. Their idea of community is a more natural community rather than an 'artificial' institutionalised setting characteristic of schools. NL families do find it difficult to liaise with children who go to school because of time constraints regarding school hours, homework, assignments and other sporting demands. The three established self-directed centres in South Africa have also helped NL families to meet their need of being part of a community.

As discussed above, most of the families do liaise with other families and are part of socials that they create themselves. As some families do not have other NL families close by, most have found online support and online community very valuable and easily accessible. However, many of the respondents indicated their need for building and creating a vibrant NL community.

For the question ‘would you like your children to have more access to broader society?’ 62 responses were recorded. 69.4% indicated ‘Yes’ and 30.6% said ‘No’.

Respondents were given opportunity to give reasons for their answers. There were three dominant themes that could be gleamed from the responses. Six respondents mentioned the first theme of safety and safe learning and living spaces, that was discussed above. The second theme focussed on expanding the family’s social network, where respondents mentioned interaction with other people and expanding their social networks to include more diversity.

R05: They play every day with kids from different cultures but more exposure to different religions and non-traditional families.

R10: Better understanding of different cultures we live among, different traditions. Better access to learning from rural communities and traditional knowledge.

R45: I think it is important for kids to meet people from all walks of life and cultures to experience how others operate in the world around us.

R41: A space where all ages interactions are welcomed.

These responses indicate that the NLA community want their children to have many different and diverse people to interact with. They are interested in other cultures and traditions, rather than seeing it as a threat. There is definitely a sense of inclusion and widening the circle. This challenges the common myth that home-education families deliberately seek exclusion and isolation. While that might be true of some home-education families, it does not seem to be the case with the NLA families in this study.

The third theme that emerged from this included the need for children to contribute meaningfully in society and to integrate children into the real world of work.

R53: I would love to see my kids be valued as contributing members of society.

R50: Experiencing real work. Being able to spend time with learned people who are happy to share and spend time with the child.

R47: I would like them to be able to move more freely in work environments and the university space as ‘real people’ with real interests and something valuable to offer the world.

The respondents that indicated 'No' felt that they had enough access to society because their children are free to go out and be part of the world because they are not confined to schools and the schooling structure. The general feeling was that the children are not excluded from society because they are engaging with family, friends, community events and whatever other opportunities present themselves.

R03: My daughter is integrated into a wider community and has access to work and opportunity with the community.

R07: They have lot of access to society. We are involved with many differing people in many differing social parts of society. They have this access because they are not at school or exhausted by attending school.

R58: She has access through family, friends, outing, and community events.

The respondents also indicated that oftentimes the NLA can be a lonely road for both the children and the parents. Therefore, many expressed the need for community. For example, for the question 'what are some of the challenges you experience with the NLA?' the following responses indicate the need for community:

R05: Current challenges we experience is finding or building a community where my kids and I can form relationships with other unschoolers or even homeschoolers practising respectful parenting.

R07: Finding, creating, implementing a tribe. For us 30 kids with one female teacher is unnatural but 2 kids with one mom is also just as unnatural. We are constantly looking for and creating the village.

R28: Spaces to simply go and engage or observe. A vibrant learning community.

R43: We have struggled to find a wider community who follow natural learning in our area. Explaining the approach to those unfamiliar with it is always a challenge.

R49: Finding people who are accepting and respecting of this approach. Finding community and more friends for the children.

The question 'briefly describe your ideal learning community' clearly showed that even though parents are happy with being predominantly home-based in the NLA, they did feel that having a natural community, the example of the village community, to be most

desirable. In other words, they want finding, building and involvement in the community to be as natural as their learning philosophy. This, for most of the respondents, is the ideal learning community. Fifty-three responses were received to this question. The responses has been categorised under the headings discussed below.

Placed-based community set up (12 responses)

R05: I would love to have a group of people that can get together weekly.

R12: The ideal would be a communal environment where there is more support for the children as well as the parents. It would also include a wide range of mentor options.

R16: An openminded free community where children are trusted with resources at their disposal.

R47: I would love to meet my natural learning community at least once a week in a space that can be used for multiple purposes, with no concerns about noise level.

R13: A core group of around 150–200 people of all ages who see each other almost daily so that they form real relationships, placed so that they can free range in a richly resourced space that is 100% respectful of children, with open physical and virtual access to a wider community and visitors flowing through.

R57: People of diverse backgrounds, ages, experiences, talents, learnings connecting to learn from each other. A physical space (like a community centre) that provides resources and a meeting space, preferably close to nature.

R56: I would love to live in a shared space with other families. The children should be able to roam from one house to the next and be in total sage [safe] space. There will be resources available such as play areas and other technology such as music and computer rooms. The space will also have visitors that specialise in areas of interest for the kids to pursue. There will be a mix of ages. Parents and children will all be part of the greater community.

Broader concept of integration of community/society (35 responses)

Thirty-five mentioned a community where people can come together and connect and where children can make friends and connect with different people. However, the key idea is that community is a natural part of life, living and learning and not an intentional place-based concept.

R55: A community of people loving each other, living freely (free thinkers), coming together in a richly resourced space, creating, exploring, discovering, helping, nurturing, mentoring, elevating, excelling, simply being.

R43: An intentional cooperative multicultural self-sustaining community.

R01: I would love to see children integrated into society 24 hours a day, where their views are taken into account and heard. A community that is less competition driven and more focussed on letting everyone be to learn what they want and at their own pace. With mentors and facilitators offering apprenticeships and support.

R09: Must co-own and co-design an ecosystem in which every component is designed to create interactional and developmental growth for all concerned. Doesn't need a name or place, needs a certain level of understanding, effective boundaries and good high volition participants.

R62: A community with parks, a learning centre and a library within walking distance, and safe too.

R41: An ecosystem where the kids and adults can develop to their full potential.

R49: A place where children can safely run around in their community, spending time with friends and family daily, being allowed to see how people do their daily work.

R52: A community where children's rights and human rights are respected. Diversity. Play. Communication and especially a way and a willingness to resolve conflicts. Freedom with responsibility.

R53: A place to live, work, learn, share and be part of a diverse community with a shared value of acceptance, love, appreciation and individuality.

Home/Present is the ideal

These are the parents who felt that their home-based system works very well for them and fortifies their understanding of living the NLA.

R02: Learning happens naturally in all environments. A specific learning community is unnecessary.

R07: I don't have one anymore ... But I realised that last year that manifesting that ideal is not as important as the lessons we learn from the not so ideal grouping we are finding now. We are remembering to unconditionally love and learn and maintain healthy balance. Actually, we are living our ideal.

R15: Learning is not forced by coming together as a community. The community is there, and learning takes place within it because people relate to each other.

R21: ... consist of a number of households of natural learners and parents who could devote time (even it were once per week) to talking to kids about whatever they are learning and share their insights and stimulate them in those discussions or activities, for example, one parent might like to take them on a nature walk, another parent might like to watch a YouTube video with them about anatomy, another parent might like to do baking with them and so on.

R25: The whole of our street doing NLA.

R50: A home that provides an amazing natural environment—with access to outdoor nature places where children can roan [roam] about freely engaging with the plants, animals, insects, becoming aware of conservation.

R12: The ideal would be a communal environment where there is more support for the children as well as the parents. It would also include a wider range of mentor options.

R59: ... I thought about a Sudbury type learning centre would be a great thing but then when I really thought about it recently I'm not so sure it would suit us best. We like being together at home most of the time, but my daughter and I enjoy a few outings with other homeschoolers or to places of interest. I think having the learning support that you may need at any point in time is great. So, I guess kind of like any human community where people support and help each

other with the skills each person has and there is access to facilities and resources as needed would be my ideal, but we like to be based at home.

4.3.2.5 Theme 5: We Are Learning!

For this theme, the four questions as outlined below were combined to get a full understanding of the learning process that is taking place in the lives of the children. Looking through the responses, one can deduce that the NLA community has a wide spectrum of activities that they are engaged in. Furthermore, the options captured in Illustration 4.16. indicate that a more home-based system where children are given the freedom to go about living and learning, finding their own rhythm, is preferred. In Question 14.1. Twelve (19.4%) respondents indicated ‘travel’, which means that the family travels to various places (either local or global) to enhance their learning development by interacting with people of different cultures and traditions. Eleven respondents (17.7%) indicated a ‘self-directed learning centre’ as an option and 6 respondents (9.7%) indicated ‘other’ and were given the opportunity to explain. A response that would be interesting to probe was:

R15: We use a unique consciousness building, volition building ecosystem methodology.

For the question ‘does the child attend any other classes/coaching?’, the following responses were recorded:

- Child 1 (62 responses): 67.7% indicated ‘yes’ and 32.3% indicated ‘no’;
- Child 2 (53 responses): 67.9% indicated ‘yes’ and 32.1% indicated ‘no’; and
- Child 3 (25 responses): 72% indicated ‘yes’ and 28% indicated ‘no’.

After going through the responses, it was decided to use the data for up to and including Child 3. Although it was important to see the range of activities and learning that Child 4 and 5 were doing, the number of respondents was low and their responses were a repetition of data. Without any order the following activities were listed by the respondents: Golf, football, dance, scouts, music, drama, swimming, young engineers, cooking, tennis, Parkour, karate, modelling, Pokémon card game, aikido, horse riding, judo, clarinet, sewing, shooting, piano, martial arts, rock climbing, film study, French, community service, gymnastics, singing, drumming, squash, arts, yoga, jujitsu, acrobatics, fencing, Italian, recorder, judo, ballet, nature outings, Sunday school, chef

association, hip hop, acting, theatre, jazz, modern dance, cross fit, German, baking, acrobatics, musical theatre, pottery, sport, playdate activities.

This list denotes that natural learners are engaged in a wide range of activities, from sport to languages. These would typically be classified as 'extra-curricular' activities if the children were in school. These activities are what is reasonably available for the children and meet their interest or 'seed' their interest and it also provide opportunities for socialisation.

For the question 'does the child use any online programme?', the responses were as follows:

- Child 1 (62 responses): 46.8% indicated 'yes' and 53.2% indicated 'no';
- Child 2 (50 responses): 38% indicated 'yes' and 62% indicated 'no'; and
- Child 3 (24 responses): 33.3% indicated 'yes' and 66.7% indicated 'no'.

These responses reveal that most of the natural learners do not use any online programme, which denotes that they spend most of their time engaged in other activities that are not necessarily academically orientated. Respondents were also requested to briefly describe the programme, and a wide range of programmes were identified. Many programmes were repeated but a comprehensive list was compiled of all the programmes mentioned: YouTube, Khan Academy, Coding, Web Design, maths games, Navigation challenges, Netflix documentaries, typing programme, Minecraft, GED matric, Babbel, photoshop, Shaw Academy, zoodles, spelling games, education.com, Netflix cooking programmes, Rosetta Stone, Leapfrog, Prodigy maths, physics, law, cooking tutorials, k12, Khan and Android apps.

The above list of programmes show that natural learners are taking full advantage of that learning resources available on the Internet. From working towards an exit certificate to cooking programmes, the children are finding websites that support their learning interests and needs.

For the question 'does your child use any other programme of learning?', the following responses were recorded:

- Child 1 (62 responses): 17.7% indicated 'yes' and 82.3% indicated 'no';
- Child 2 (49 responses): 22.4% indicated 'yes' and 77.6% indicated 'no'; and

- Child 3 (24 responses): 29.2% indicated ‘yes’ and 70.8% indicated ‘no’.

These responses indicate that the majority of natural learners are not following any set learning programme. They are following their interests and their days are filled with activities that reflect their diverse interests. This also confirms their path of learning as ‘Self-Chosen’ and ‘Day-to-Day’. This also indicates that the families who identify themselves with the NL approach are indeed implementing the philosophy of the NLA. However, for those children who have followed a specific programme, the following examples were given: Cambridge IGCSE, Singapore, Learn to Read programme, Brainline, GED, Udemy, Life of Fred.

Cambridge was the most mentioned formal programme of learning. According to the respondents, older natural learners who want to enter a higher education programme find Cambridge the most suitable to obtain the necessary entrance requirements.

For the question ‘has the child/ren completed any courses and received certification?’, the following responses were recorded:

Child 1 (62 responses): 29% indicated ‘yes’ and 71% indicated ‘no’;

Child 2 (50 responses): 22% indicated ‘yes’ and 78% indicated ‘no’; and

Child 3 (25 responses): 24% indicated ‘yes’ and 76% indicated ‘no’.

Once again, these figures confirm that most of the families that are following the NLA choose not to focus on formal courses or programmes. Responses that did indicate certification included: IGSCE diploma, bush survival, music grades, First Aid, GED certification, driver’s licence, ballet performance certificate, drama school certificate, photography, shooting, sewing, animal communication level 1, Quran memorisation, food hygiene, Scouts, Eisteddfod awards, drumming, animal shelter care, chef certification, Royal academy ballet teacher.

The above list further confirms that the majority of natural learners who are choosing to do some form of certification are doing it areas that would not be considered school subjects. Rather, they are obtaining certifications in courses or programmes that are serving their learning interests. The results for Child 4 and 5 were once again left out because the sample was too small and the data did not make any impact on the overall data and findings.

For the question ‘does the child/ren have a mentor that they spend time with?’, 62 responses were recorded. 53.2% indicated ‘yes’ and 46.8% indicated ‘no’. Most responses indicated that children spend time with other people in their daily life, for example, spending time in the kitchen with the mother because the child enjoys cooking or spending time with grandparents, sport coaches, religious teachers and facilitators at their SDLC. Here are some other responses:

R53: L spends a lot of time with her grandparents who are medical practitioners since she wants to be a surgeon.

R12: The 17-year-old spends time with a friend who is a qualified therapist. She works at her Dad's shop and has learned practical skills in the retail environment.

R43: ... they have a family that live on the same property that mentor them in gardening, self-sustainability and DIY [do-it-yourself] skills like plumbing, carpentry, tiling etc.

R50: Spend time with their scientist friend who invites them to participate in a variety of scientific projects—dissections at the laboratory.

For the question ‘does the child mentor someone in an area of interest?’, there were 53 responses. 22.6% indicated ‘yes’ and 77.4% indicated ‘no’. If they chose ‘yes’ they were asked to briefly describe the relationship. There were only 14 responses for this question.

R50: ... both kids are volunteers at the youth sailing

R53: ... children attend a Sudbury-inspired self-directed education facility—a lot of peer to peer learning and mentoring happens

R34: Mentors his younger cousin regarding Minecraft—have Skype sessions to explain and show—answer questions.

R27:... helps friends with writing—mostly online.

R09:... mentors a spectrum child of her age.

For the question ‘how would you describe the learning that is taking place in your home?’, there were 62 responses. Following the respondents’ definitions of NL, it made sense to look at some examples of how learning is taking place within the

families. There were rich descriptions of how learning is unfolding in the homes. Twenty responses emphasised that the learning was fun, playful, child-directed, organic, spontaneous, open, natural, lifelong, and experienced-based. Forty-two responses provided some detail in their descriptions of the learning. The responses showed the variety of learning interests of the children and the amazing ways in which they go about their learning process. In going through the feedback from the participants the following categories can be deduced:

Building/making things

R02: My son would like to re-build an old car ... has taught himself by researching on the internet.

R13: Child 8 creates her own outfits out of adult clothing and fabric scraps, adapting and sewing as needed.

R36: Creative, messy. Building a doll house out of recycled materials on the lounge floor using a hacksaw, glue gun, wall paper, toilet rolls etc.

R19: ... building a chicken house

R15: ... the willingness/determination to reach a goal—to finish a wooden box he has to get the measurements right—build a machine he has to plan how it will operate but also see how to make do with resources.

R26: ... loves dinosaurs ... a competition she made her own design and 3D dinosaur. She won and that lead to the Cape Town Carnival in 2017. She was interviewed by the media made a costume for Comic.Con. She learnt to plan, drawing pattern pieces, buying fabric, designing, purchasing supplies, painting the end product and how to communicate with all levels of people.

R59: Often my daughter will watch something on YouTube and then she will go and make it afterwards.

Science/maths/technology

R13: Child 13 ... already designs computers and physical games, does coding and conducts endless physics experiments just as part of daily play ... can explain many advanced physics concepts having put this practical experience

together with YouTube surfing and asking for brief maths explanations as needed. When Elon Musk does a launch, he models this exactly in Kerbal space till he gets the same result.

R14: They have learned to build real life things on Minecraft. They use the internet for everything ... does not like reading and will watch all types of YouTube videos from natural disasters to how to take care of dogs.

R16: ... they watch science shows ... they have science kits they explore with or a microscope to check out weird things they picked up, a telescope when the moon is all funny or full and beautiful.

R21: My 5-year-old who loves to run, he loves to feel fast and strong and powerful and so he has created a little running track in the back yard. My older son times and yells out his laps and time ... in his enthusiasm to learn how fast he is he has taken to learning number sequences so that he can tell if 16 seconds is less or more than 14 second ... this has also opened up his fascination with time and how the sun keeps perfect time with the earth's rotation so as to create a set about of daylight hours which we call time.

R29. ... doing advanced physics on Friday nights.

R43: ... most of our maths learning happens around gaming, both online and card/boardgames. All our children have a very good understanding of basic maths as a result, including being able to count in multiples.

R59: ... their maths skills are developing through the games they play and life and having their questions answered by us.

R30: My daughter is obsessed with biology and learns a lot from science podcasts and YouTube science shows.

R33: ... decided to become a farmer from an early age—he taught himself to read by reading the Farmers Weekly. He has spent some time working with his uncle who is a farmer, researched different methods of farming, made contact with farmers in the Cape whose methods of farming he respects, contacted breeders, bred his own chickens and sold their eggs, designed his own farm, is in the process of making a chicken coop which he designed.

Reading

R05: My oldest is starting to learn to read but at the moment he is doing it mostly without my help. He's been watching a lot of random YouTube videos and somehow picks up words ad [and] letters from that. Now and then he will write down a word he wants to search, and he'll then learn that word.

R12: ... wanted to read when she was 4. She asked me to teach her and was reading Nancy Drew by the time she was 6. The 9-year-old insisted that he couldn't read and wasn't interested in learning even while he was playing games like Spell-o-Bingo and following instructions on internet games.

R18: When our son asked to learn to read, we supplied him with reading material, games and apps LeapPad etc. that he used to teach himself ... he started reading words at age 5. Reading, writing and texting efficiently at age 7.

R27: ... they all taught themselves to read by engaging with text-based activities and items—books, video games, magazines, board games, text messaging apps and us as resources to read and spell to them as they engaged with these until they were able to do it themselves.

R42: ... our learning has reached the state where my son is ready to read. Big letters lots of books etc. He gets so excited when he recognises a word.

R49: My children are learning to read through playing games and reading websites.

R59: ... his reading level is very good, and I would say his comprehension level is above these two best friends who are his age and are school going. He was only reading just before he turned 10. My daughter is almost reading I think. I see signs and it should be full reading soon ... my daughter likes being read to, but my son does not.

Arts/creative/practical life skills

R03: Joyful cooking and sewing.

R10: ... cooking, making fires, gardening, fixing stuff, painting, designing spaces. Physical activity—tree climbing, circus skills, games, swimming.

R11: Understanding finances. They now self-fund outings, food preparation on a budget. Limited take-outs, homemade pizza.

R22: ... encouraged to be self-sufficient ... they look after their own rooms, money, time management, they can make their own food and they direct their day knowing they are in charge.

R54: ... I allow my son the time to shoot in the best lighting modes and we use photography to journal nature and learn about the insects and reptiles around us.

R57: ... interested in photography ... studied in-depth the equipment and techniques using online resources and talking to people in the field. Visited specialist camera shops, attended courses, met with specialists in the field. Marketed some of her own work using networks she'd connected to and was employed to so [do] some work for a company ... learnt about business too—contracting, communication, service delivery, invoicing and the rigours and responsibility of having paying clients.

R50: ... playing Dungeons and Dragons with their friends from all over South Africa and England. They write out character sheets, create plots, develop story sequences and roleplay their game.

R51: ... worked for a period of time at my offices.

Nature

R16: Free and always ongoing. We live in a bush, so they are outside a lot, learning about nature and animals we have here, building survival huts with friends ... some days they love doing research on YouTube.

R60: She will listen to a documentary on wildlife and then ask questions ... went to a wildlife rescue centre and she asked questions there.

R46: ... are very athletic ... climb trees and rocks very well ... they are at ease with animals and in the bush and at our stream. My daughter of 9 can milk a goat. She can make popcorn, pizza and bake a banana loaf.

R49: ... they have 13 pets and are learning about animal behaviour and natural science through observing the animals.

People

R58:... helps with her baby sister so is learning about childcare and human development.

R20: ... we watch smart movies ... and discuss them at length.

R23: ... we do have moments of disagreements and emotional outbursts, usually followed by deep discussions.

R34: ... wanted to know what a dictator is—got a book on different styles of government ... we did an experiment—we all took turns to be a dictator ... telling others what to do ... realised what a terrible life one can have under a dictatorship ... also realised how to look for signs in what political leaders say and do which may be indicative of potential dictatorships.

R03: ... interested in the Civil Rights leaders ... explored different religions.

The above descriptions provide rich details and insight into the learning experiences of the children. It also confirms the wide variety of interests that the children engage in. It further denotes that the children are given the freedom to be their unique selves and pursue their unique interests. It indicates the role of the parents in the learning process. They supply the necessary materials and equipment and are present in their children's lives for sharing in activities and discussions that arise during their time together. It also reveals how diverse activities relate and strengthen knowledge in other areas, for example, the young boy who wants to be a fast runner and through timing his running, he has developed a sense of numbers and the concept of time.

4.3.2.6 Theme 6: Technology and the Google Phenomenon

Most of the responses, value the computer and Internet as paramount importance to their learning and lifestyle. From the responses one can deduce that children are using technology for a variety of things: learning to read communication, entertainment, online courses, and many more. It is indeed the magic portal that takes natural learners into their world and area of interest with a simple click. For some it is used as a tool where they seek out information or use YouTube for demonstrations. For others it is gaming, coding programming etc. Although technology is still new to everyone, it is becoming ubiquitous in people's lives (Kayne & Lee 2017). Technology has taken over

the role of the tutor, the library, the dictionary, the demonstrator etc. Most of the parents cited that often the first point of reference in finding information is Google. The question then begs: Has the easy access to information taken away the wonder from children, where the time to ponder and mull over things is disappearing because the answers are at their fingertips? Does the demonstrations and perfections that are seen on the Internet create insecurity and hamper the children from allowing their own creativity to flow?

The reliance on technology was further entrenched in another question on priority to support NL where 66.1% and 75.8% of the respondents considered the computer and the Internet a top priority for NL respectively. In comparison to the 30.6% who rated both the library and laboratories as top priority. As R14 stated, “they use the Internet for everything”.

R05: My oldest is starting to learn to read but at this moment he is doing it mostly without my help. He's been watching a lot of random YouTube videos and somehow picks up words and letters from that. Now and then he'll ask me to write down a word he wants to search, and he'll then learn that word. He is also learning to sew. I am much more involved with that because I have the supplies and the skills he needs.

R13: When Elon Musk does a launch, he models this exactly in Kerbal space till he gets the same result.

R20: ... when I source movies for us to watch then we follow up with Google ... and discuss them at length. We are always googling things or looking things up and learning a huge range of content that way, for example, who is the Dalai Lama, coming from the movie '7 years in Tibet'.

R16: Some days they love doing research on YouTube, playing games on the Xbox and ... they watch science shows or arts and craft shows.

R49: My children are learning to read by playing games and reading websites.

R56: ... spends a time watching YouTube videos or movies ... on technical things or music and they analyse and talk about it.

R59: ... both kids follow a few YouTubers of all types and learn a lot in that way.

R60: Often my daughter will watch something on YouTube and then she will go and make it afterwards. She will listen to a documentary on wildlife as she wants to be a wildlife rescuer and then ask questions.

R14: Gaming is a major part of children's life. They have learnt to build real life things on Minecraft ... they have learnt to work in a team and negotiate skills in a game to contribute to team building and social skills ... watches all types of videos from natural disasters to how to take care of dogs ... immerses himself into researching online.

According to Laricchia (2019), technology is used very purposively with natural learners and children are actively engaged in the process of watching television as an example. This is in contrast to children who go to school and use television as an escape from their regular day. Some NL parents do not limit technology time for their children at all. It is believed that limiting screen time means that the child does not get the opportunity to listen to their own needs and adjust their own activities accordingly (Laricchia 2013). In other families through encouragement and general life philosophy, children spend a limited time on technological devices. According to Laricchia (2013), often parents who are vigilant to their child's needs will, after noticing that their child is uncomfortable with their time on their device but cannot seem to make alternative choices, invite the child to engage in other available activities that take them away from the devices. Recently the World Health Organisation (2019) declared a Gaming Disorder, where people give an increased priority to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities. This disorder is specific to gaming but perhaps some of the concerns can be translated to other technological devices and online activities. On a different but perhaps relevant note, Colier (2018) in her article, *The Dangers of Distracted Parenting*, states rather boldly that people should also be concerned about the amount of time parents spend on technological devices too. Some parents suffer from "continuous partial attention" as they become more and more tuned out as they are distracted by their devices. Colier (2018) also states that the basis of most human learning is responsive communication which comes from an ancient emotional cueing system and with the distraction of devices parents may miss emotional cues or misread them.

However, in the NLA homes, parents generally do spend a lot of time with their children with the key focus on building strong and connected relationships, supporting their

learning and their general development (Griffith 1998). It is therefore assumed that with parenting being such a key component to the NLA, the general negatives of technology are outweighed by the deep awareness and the connection that is shared between parent and child. Once again, to what degree this is present in the NLA homes is difficult to ascertain.

4.3.3 A brief overview of findings from the analysis of Questionnaires

The results from the questionnaire presented data that gave a broad understanding of the demographics and other biographical data of the families that are following the NLA. The qualitative aspect of the questionnaire provided greater depth into how the NLA is unfolding in South Africa. Many questions from the quantitative aspect linked together with the qualitative to give a more definite understanding of this phenomenon. For example, questions on the employment status and income linked to the number of activities, opportunities and resources that most of the children were engaged with. It conveyed that the families had the resources to provide some variety of opportunities and this lifestyle for their children. The question on the general understanding of the NLA linked with the parents' general definition of the NLA, how it is implemented, and the activities they described. It therefore shows that the NLA community in South Africa are in general following the basic tenets of the NLA.

4.4 INTERVIEWS

Interviews are a key aspect of qualitative analysis because it brings an intimacy to the research, it allows the researcher to probe into the answers and it brings in the uniqueness of each person's experience. According to Merriam (2009), probes are questions or comments that follow up something that has already been asked for clarification or examples. Three groups of interviews were conducted: Individual interviews with parents, individual interviews with children and a focus group interview with young adults.

4.4.1 Interviews with Parents

Ten parents from ten different families were interviewed. The researcher used purposive sampling technique and tried to ensure a good mix of people from the different provinces fitting into the different demographics to ensure a wide response.

Nine parents were mothers and one a father. Two were in mixed-race partnerships, two were single mothers and one was in a same-sex partnership. In terms of race, there were two Black mothers, one Black father, one Indian mother, one mixed-race mother and five White mothers in the group. The number of years of NL ranged from two years to thirteen years. In terms of provinces, two currently reside in the Western Cape, one in the Eastern Cape, one in the Northern Cape, one in KwaZulu-Natal and five in Gauteng.

The interview guide (Annexure 1) contained questions that were asked in the questionnaire. However, the researcher was able to search for deeper insights by probing for further information and clarification. Using thematic analysis after reading through the interviews several times, the researcher found that, as expected, some of the themes overlapped with those that emerged from the questionnaire qualitative analysis in Section 4.3. Six themes were identified and are discussed in the following sections.

4.4.1.1 *Theme 1: Parental Role*

The role of the parent was discussed in Chapter 2. The interviews with the parents gave further insight into how parents see and fulfil their roles in the NLA home. The nuances of an interview response that are often missed in a questionnaire are very valuable as it provides a deeper understanding of the situation, and in this case of how families work together in their day-to-day living, negotiating their activities and managing the household.

For this theme the responses to the following questions were included:

- How did your family arrive at this decision?
- Why did you choose this approach?
- What is your key role as a parent?
- How do you implement the NLA in your home?

In terms of choosing NL as an approach to learning, the responses showed that the parents had an acute sense of compassion for their children and for the values they themselves upheld.

IP10: The kids were not happy ... sitting with a curriculum every day, running it like a school ... They wanted to be happy with what they do and somehow we just listened—they directed us.

IP3: I tried everything ... and realised I would never find a school where all my kids can thrive equally.

IP8: ... it made sense ... we need to reverse all the nonsense that is being put in our heads via school ... you basically get manufactured and we needed to find a way to de-manufacture our kids.

In terms of parent's key role, as with the questionnaire responses, participants emphasised the deep connection and respect they have for their children and that their role was to support and facilitate their interests. For example, IP5 mentioned that their family went into the NLA because of its synergy to the notion of peaceful parenting advocated by the La Leche League that they subscribed to. Other examples also demonstrate this deep connection:

IP1: ... a lot of discussion ... we talk about everything. There is no topic that's not allowed in the family ... we have a lot of humour especially uncomfortable topics like sex ... Support everything but if I have a problem for example a simple thing of cleaning a room ... I facilitate the discussion. So, it works both ways.

IP2: I just try to be available to them ... to make all the resources available to them. I just facilitate and listen ... just living our lives so whatever that comes we focus on.

IP3: Facilitator. My role is to share my opinion and make it very clear that it is my opinion. At the end of the day the choice is theirs and for me to facilitate what they need ... we have an agreement ... we have family meetings.

Another participant goes on to describe how her children need to come to her with a plan if they want to do something, for example, how much time it might entail, the costs, how it can be funded. These considerations are important since there are four children in the family and everyone's needs must be catered for. This scenario is common in families where there is more than one child. Learning about compassion, consideration and sharing is an important life lesson for the children who spend all day together, and therefore, are attuned to each other's needs.

IP3: Involvement! Throwing caution to the wind with a lot of things society taught us to allow our kids to do.

IP4: ... I think the role of the parents and other people around them is quite important for them to open up their world ... to pick up their interest (even though it has nothing to do with you).

The participant went on to explain how her child goes into details about an interest that she does not know at all. However, she remains his sounding board, listening, affirming and asking questions when needed. She does not need to know about this area as it does not interest her, but she shows an interest in her child. The participant placed a lot of emphasis on the parent being a good role model and encouraging children to participate in healthy activities, for example:

IP4: ... I go for a jog. I will try to get the kids to go with—I will say listen guys lets go for a jog, it's a nice day and we need to get some exercise ... Now I could say I am not going to do anything—if they want to go for a jog they can go it's there so that would be fine—so saying leave them they naturally would go. But that is not necessarily the case because children also follow, and they are much keener to participate in a peer group or with their parents to offer them that opportunity.

This comes back to the discussion on whether the NLA means that the child is left largely on their own; is it a 'hands off' sort of parenting or does the parent play a facilitation/supportive role when the child asks or when a moment presents itself. Most of the participants seemed to nurture a relationship where the child is open to encouragement for activities that he/she might not have thought of but is willing to try, especially if it is for the wellbeing of the child. The responses show that the parents support not only their learning trajectory but also their general health and wellbeing. One participant gave an example of how she invites and encourages reading:

IP4: I would initiate saying lets read aloud ... but when I stop doing it because my life is also getting hectic, they come back and they ask for it, which to me is an indication that it's not really affecting them negatively because they want to do it ... so there are things that I initiate with them and they participate in and then there are things they do purely on their own and there are things they would ask me to join in.

The researcher probed by asking the question: If you initiate an activity and they really do not want to do it, what do you do? The participant made it clear that it would not be forced. Sometimes they would have a discussion around why and sometimes the parent will encourage it. The activity that the parent described above could be seen as uninvited learning. However, this parent finds that it works for her family's journey as she is 'in tune' with her kids and their needs. Whether the children initiates this activity because of the reading itself or the need to share and connect with the parent using this activity, or both, is another aspect to deepen the understanding of the NL and the nuances that presents itself within the different families. After all, as Laricchia (2019) states, parenting is the key component of the NLA, and the focus is on building strong and connected relationships with their children. This connection comes from living, sharing, being attuned to each other's needs, and caring. This participant also gave the example of how her child will offer to do more in the house without being asked or invited when she sees that the parent is feeling overwhelmed. Thus, the connection to each other's needs is reciprocal, deep and rewarding.

Others found grappling with their own personal development as the biggest challenge:

IP5: I think my key role is to keep challenging myself to think about how our home and our lives could be more exciting ... maybe have a bit more downtime ... maybe we need more things in our life, maybe we need less ... I think like a behind the scene sort of stage manager set-up person that makes sure that we have lots of options to play with at home ... that I am paying attention to the things they say and things they like to do ... bringing more of that and suggesting more of that ... making sure they are exposed to a variety of activities, even if its uncomfortable for me ... they constantly want to do things and I don't always feel like it, and sometimes I have to say that what is needed here is much more important than my exhaustion, but at the same time, there are times when I need to teach them that it's important for all of us to take downtime.

In this extract, the participant once again showed that there is a constant negotiation between parent and child in terms of how, what and when activities are planned and done. Therefore, although parents in the NLA home do not implement strict rules of a traditional school or household, the children are still encouraged to be equal and fair members of the family, where freedom and participation takes into consideration other

people and the situation. However, the participant is also very aware of her own internal process and stressed the importance of connection.

IP5: By controlling my own self instead of trying to control them ... the one thing I have learnt repeatedly is that when I am stressing about something they are doing, it's because there is something lacking in our connection at that time and the solution is not that I stop them from doing it but I sit with them while they are going through their thing ... and try to find what it is they like about the thing and try to connect with them over that thing they are doing.

The participant stated further that trusting the children to find their rhythm in life and giving them the freedom to do that requires a lot of patience on the part of the parent.

IP6: Being present in the time he is questioning or talking about things ... actually paying attention and letting him know that he is being heard ... its very key ... because I think so many parents just 'ah' and 'uhm' ... and kids lose out ... also taking him to various places that introduces him to other topics ... making sure that he has opportunities to discover things for himself.

This participant once again demonstrated the subtle dance between parent and child in participating and finding activities. Although it is often the child who leads in terms of what he wants to do, the parent is always there to invite and offer and to gauge what interest should be deepened or what is just a passing question.

IP6: We spend a lot of time outdoors ... animals ... gardening ... if he mentions something, then we will Google it, or I will explain to the best I know ... Google's our friend

IP7: To have a good relationship with them. To be in a good relation and to share with them ... they have no awareness that a learning process is taking place ... I am as interested in the subjects that they are doing as they are in the subjects that I am doing ... it's about living and learning happening as we are living.

The participant went on to explain how the children often accompany her to the office because they are just as interested in the areas that she is working in and they are often given the opportunity to interact with the people that she is working with if they have questions or would like more information on a subject. The participant facilitates where she can, but the living and learning is a seamless process.

IP8: ... supporting whatever they are interested in ... and I enable that ... show them that anything is possible ... to not be afraid ... to encourage the questioning mind is a privilege ... to make sure I am available for them ... if they get inspired naturally they ask more questions.

The participant focussed a lot on being connected to the children. He also too echoed the thoughts of Laricchia (2019) that the focus is on building strong and connected relationships with the children and in that process support their learning.

IP8: ... being able to connect opens up this grand world ... one of the biggest things we missed as children is that most of us never really connected much with our parents ... your parents don't know you ... a lot of people grew up like that ... so I mean by reversing that, we are talking about things like getting to know who this child is ... not leaving it up to a teacher in an institution to know who the child is.

IP9: My key role is to support her in a way that she can access whatever she wants. I have a car so I can drive her somewhere ... I can offer her options ... I try to make her life as rich as possible. We go out and explore, meet different people, start at the library. Often we just quickly pick a lot of books that might be interesting on different topics. She chooses.

Participant IP4 also shared a wonderful example of how parent and child, through their connection and deep knowledge of each other, assist and prompt in the learning process. The example shared was when the child did not want participate in a mountain-bike race when the rare opportunity presented itself at an NLA event. The child was upset that the parent strongly urged him to go on the ride, but when he came back he was so happy and said that he had great fun. The parents knew this about him and knew that he would have been very unhappy to miss out on the opportunity. This example reveals the responsive communication that takes place between parent and child (Christakis 2018).

IP4: I also try to show the children that it's not always about how you feel right now, but how sometimes you will feel after the experience.

4.4.1.2 Theme 2: Challenges

The following questions were included in this theme:

- What are some of the difficulties/challenges you experience?
- If you could change two things about your present situation, what would it be?

Participants mentioned that their challenges were not any different to any other family's and they did not see any different or special challenges that arose because of the NLA. They also felt that the real challenge was their own growth and development as parents following this approach.

IP7: I change very often ... X needs a more stable environment ... needs a plan. It is very challenging for me that his temperament is different from mine ... we all are very different ... our processes are different.

IP8: ... the biggest one is time ... and having to keep your cool while watching all this unfold ... not being too hasty and not being judgemental. I need to manage myself in all of this. It is growth as well. It's a very uncomfortable process when you are moving from one shell to another.

IP8 also highlighted the challenge to set up their lifestyle so that both parents can enjoy and share the NL journey, rather than one person sacrificing the time by working outside the home and missing out on being with the children and this lifestyle.

Two participants mentioned that the challenges lay outside the home:

IP1: My challenges come from the outside world. We live a normal life and experience challenges like any other family ... nothing out of the ordinary.

IP3: My challenges are not in my house, they happen immediately when I step out of the door.

The participant who lives in a small town must deal with people and their prejudices that prevent the children from experiencing and enjoying the freedom that they should have in living this learning approach, for example, the participant and her family experience adultism and racism. Other participants saw the challenges as more personal:

IP9: ... more around me getting more money, getting more support ... parenting is not easy.

IP5: My challenges are mainly to do with myself, and I notice that if I am in a bad mood everything goes wrong ... I am very short with the kids ... instead of

stopping and watching and observing and thinking ... it's all about me, it is managing my own emotions.

The question 'if you could change two things, what would it be?' revealed other challenges that families were experiencing.

IP5: I wish I could be more chilled because I think I am a little bit of a control freak ... I wish there were more open spaces that you could take your children during the day where they could have access to people doing/making things.

Respondents indicated that time was a scarce resource for them. This was especially a concern for the two single parents:

IP2: ... have more time to be a bit more available.

IP10: ... somehow you do feel like you are not doing enough.

Others mentioned lack of resources:

IP6: I would like to be close to take him to unschooling events ... ice-skating ... not having the second car ... it would give us more opportunity for him to interact with like-minded families and children.

4.4.1.3 Theme 3: Support

It seems that the families do not see support from the NL community as important. They live far from other NL families and the parents are not too concerned about socialising with a fixed group of people for a fixed reason; therefore, the families liaise with a variety of people. The philosophy of NL means that the families are generally very open to all kinds of people and experiences, and confining themselves to only NL families is not a priority. There are outings with NLA families that happen annually, but on a day-to-day basis, the families liaise with people from different backgrounds.

IP7: ... I do but I don't really make an effort to look for NL families ... they (children) need to be in the world as it is ... they love people who have the same thought ... playdates never seem to work out.

IP8: ... yes, as much as possible. It is a big community, not big enough but it is a good community ... and they are resourceful ... they really appreciate relationships ... relationships are there but the question is the quality of relationships ... you need people who really understand you, accept you.

IP7: He also liaises with adults.

IP5: ... I have a practise of sending voice notes to my friends ... we discuss issues we are dealing with and often give each other advice.

IP9: ... child is very social, so she always wants to be out with other people, other children but she prefers the one-on-one interaction

IP4: We have lots of interactions with many families—not only natural learners ... so there's a lot on a social level ... more on an individual level ... popping in for tea or a chat here and there.

4.4.1.4 Theme 4: Culture and Traditions

The decolonisation debate around education and the NLA has been discussed in Chapter 2. In its very approach the NLA may be decolonised in that it does not follow any prescribed curriculum or body of work and functions on the premise of free choice and autonomy in learning. However, it must also be noted that the vast amount of information that is accessible, especially on the Internet, to most people is still Western dominated (Suja 2015; Knowledge Commons Brazil 2019). Although the Internet has made access to information and communication faster, easier and cheaper, the social, cultural and economic hegemony that it exercises is increasing. English is taking over the media and the content, contributing to the further extinction of the other surviving languages. For example, 60% of the Web is in English, yet only 10–15% of the world's population speaks English. This, denies access to large groups of the world's population: The “Internet has become a tool for the unchecked spread of neoliberalism ideology, turning many people into nothing but commodities to be exploited” (Knowledge Commons Brazil 2019).

Is a learning process decolonised when people still choose colonial information and structures? For example, the Black participants consciously chose to have English as their main language of communication. In probing the reasons for this choice, they indicated functionality in communicating with people outside the home and the issue of access to information and society. They expressed no regrets at choosing English as they felt confident that their children will learn the African language/s that they find most valuable to them. As some participants stated:

IP8: ... English is still dominating.

IP10: ... to tell you the truth, I don't know ... I thought they would be able to communicate easier, then later they can learn their own language ... where ever you go English is the common language.

IP3: ... for me language has always been about access to information ... I want to give my children a fair opportunity to gain access to information.

This participant also expressed absolute confidence that the children will learn any language they choose because the participant is a self-taught linguist who comfortably speaks 10 of the 11 official languages in South Africa.

IP3: ... it is more important to teach them about their culture than their language. I knew that if they know their culture, learning would be a natural thing ... the biggest thing about language is connection and access.

This highlights the debate and discussion around the relationship between language and culture. According to Rangriz & Harati (2017), language is the mirror of culture in the sense that people are able to see a culture through its language. However, this discussion, albeit an interesting one, is beyond the scope of this research.

Regardless of the debate around language and culture, many participants brought a richness to the understanding of how the NLA is leading the way towards a decolonised learning society.

IP3: ... in my household we wear our hair as it is ... I have had long discussions to get my kids to understand why I want them to learn to love their hair ... it's not just about the hair, it was about me teaching my girls that they are good enough.

The participant went on to describe how this led to a journey to her extended rural family where the appreciation of the people and the participation in cultural activities deepened their cultural experience.

IP3: ... this journey of NL ... has allowed myself and the girls to gain more respect for our indigenous knowledge, understand and be part of where we come from.

Interestingly, four out of the ten families defined themselves as 'culturally neutral', meaning that they embrace more of a value system that works for the family, rather than confining their culture to a specific tradition. There is exposure and acceptance

of different cultures and even participation in different cultural activities without any compulsion.

IP1: ... we are not culturally driven ... everything sorts of just intertwines ... they (kids) take what they need from me ... value system that we uphold is that you can't have freedom for yourself and then discriminate others.

IP6: ... I don't think anything specific ... we just go through everyday life showing him things. If he hooks onto something and want to know more I would tell him ... he might bring up religion now and then. Then we will explain our points of view ... making it clear that it's our point of view ... we will explain other points of view and say that each person develops their own belief system based on many things, and we don't force what we believe on him or anyone else, and that he will come to his own conclusion as he goes through life.

IP2: ... when we homeschooled, I specifically bought a Christian curriculum because we were very involved in the church ... but we have transitioned ... I was trying to stuff my opinion on religion down my children's throat ... but we don't that anymore ... we are very much a democratic family, which is not always easy ... and we still need to talk as a family when things arise, but no one is forced to believe or practise anything specific.

The two mixed-race families also chose not to focus on any culture.

IP4: ... generally we are quite independent of any of our own cultures. We try not to enforce any culture ... we have a very cosmopolitan view ... we try to expose our children, in our limited way, to different cultures ... talk about different people, where they come from and their religions and habits and their ways ... even religions we explain the concepts and thinking behind ... where possible we go to different festivals ... they develop their own understanding. But for me it's important that they find their own space in those things.

The participant further explained that even though they do not follow a specific religion, they have a lot of discussions on spirituality, moral issues and how to cope with issues that come up. The unique family culture was considered key and this is seen in how the family lived their daily lives—their general habits, eating healthy food, mild exercise, being aware of one's own emotions, and talking about things.

IP5: I think we naturally do it without even realising it, but I try to be aware of it ... they [children] don't have a strong influence from the father's side as the parents passed away ... we are both atheist so we distance ourselves from religious practices that our families are associated with but we do respect those—we just don't practise them ourselves.

The participant also shared how they went from having an alternative diet for the whole family to incorporating other foods that the children preferred into the daily routine because the children do not want to follow the same diet. Again, this shows that the parenting values of freedom and autonomy and of respecting children's choices even though it went against the parents' is an integral aspect of the NLA for some families.

IP5: So that's been a big learning thing ... it's an important value for X and I, but we are not willing to compromise their [children] freedom to be who they need to be and make their own choices.

IP10 and IP8 also mentioned that a lot of the exploration of their own culture and traditions happened during discussions when the topic presented itself.

IP10: ... it's a hard one but we do incorporate now and then our own tradition, our language—just in the middle of whatever they are learning about—it just happens to pop up—well, in the olden days this was happening and this is how we handle things—it's more like chatting about things.

There is exposure and acceptance of different religions, cultures and even participation in cultural activities without any compulsion. This is an interesting question to ask: Has the journey into NL influenced people to adopt a more flexible approach to culture and traditions, or was their fundamental life philosophy one of openness and acceptance of all cultures/traditions/religions that helped them choose NL as a preferred approach to learning and living? However, regardless of how families arrived at the decision, what is important to note is that the families in this study are open to other cultures, participate actively, and expose their children to as much diversity as they can. Furthermore, children exploring cultures, religions, languages and traditions other than their home culture, religion, language and traditions are generally respected. As one parent noted, one morning his children declared that they are now learning Japanese! Therefore, the stereotype of home-

educated children being predominantly religious, kept away from society, and not exposed to the ‘real’ world is certainly not what this study indicates.

4.4.1.5 Theme 5: Learning Insights

Although the participants made it clear that there was little or no distinction between learning and living—both concepts were totally intertwined—it was very interesting to delve into the various learning examples and insights discussed by the participants.

IP9: The learning for her is just living, it's just being ... she is not doing anything particular, she is just following her curiosity.

IP8: ... we looked at the moon, they asked the distance, the different things about it in a natural way ... we just learnt that the Chinese landed at the back of the moon ... so if you align those activities, align the telescope and make it relevant by referring to the news, linking it to what's happening personally in their lives.

IP9 outlined how her child can spend hours drawing and she believes that her child’s drawings are beyond the age and maturity of her seven years. She experiments with water colours and found books that teaches her techniques. She is very interested in animal rehabilitation and they have spent time at animal rehabilitation centres.

IP6 observed how her son loved playing a guessing game with her with a magnetic human figure where one can stick different parts of the body. She realised that the game had all sorts of questions he had around the human body. She noticed again during a museum visit that he also spent all his time at the human body display where he could take and put back the different organs of the body and asked a lot of questions while the other child showed no interest in the human figure (preferred to make a house using blocks). Subsequently, they bought him more resources to play with around the theme of the human body.

IP6 also discussed in detail how her child figured out reading and writing and even wrote a little book. Here is the description:

IP6: She has been learning to read and write very slowly for over years. It started when she was writing her own name and then she would write my name ... daddy's name ... then it was granny and adding other names on the list ...

then it was writing a birthday card and asking us how to spell the words and now she is writing a story.

The parent explained further that when the child was asked if she could read what she wrote (this was done by an aunt who was testing her—a common situation with NLA families), she was able to read what she wrote. The parent was impressed that the child was able to do that by herself, as they had no idea that she could do it.

IP6: Today we were talking about the speed of sound. Even though I did not know much about it to be honest. So, we looked it up and watched a couple of videos, read a couple of things ... some of it are above his level, but I think he got a good understanding of what the speed of sound is, and the speed of light is now the next thing.

The researcher probed on how the topic of speed of sound came up in order to understand the flow of the learning process. The participant mentioned that in a casual conversation with her child, she talked about her school that was near an airbase and how sometimes planes would fly by and suddenly there was a big boom. This grabbed the attention of the child, which led to all kinds of questions, and then they looked it up, and he explored the science behind it. This is the incidental learning that occurs in the NLA home and that Dewey (2011), Holt (1989), Griffith (1998) and many others refer to. Children's interests and curiosity are sparked by anything from casual, random chats with people to exposure in other more concrete ways. This confirms the statement by Ramroop (2011) that there is no quality time without quantity time.

IP3 discussed how the process of learning is not direct in her example of how her child described her hair as hideous. The parent started probing on where and how she came across the word 'hideous', which led to all sorts of discussions about beauty culture, self-acceptance and self-worth.

IP10 outlines how the learning can spill into the children's social lives.

IP10: They made a birdcage ... metal, card box and glue ... and put their birds in there. They had to measure and all those things to merge the metal to the box. I think a lot of maths went into that They are waiting to help another girl (who goes to school) to make a chicken coop ... they have made an actual drawing and are making a model for her.

Thus, these kids will have used their experience with the birdcage and translated it into a chicken coop with a friend.

IP4 discussed how the different personalities of the children determine what and how they manage their day.

Child one: She likes routine. Gets up early and does her sport, practises a mental maths programme that she enjoys, she then reads (enjoying history for now), and will then write something about it. She is busy writing a book with a friend; they discuss characters and they work out scenes; then she will do some gardening for example.

Child two: His focus is not routine based. He gets up later, snuggles in bed and then has breakfast with this dad. He enjoys the conversation he has with his dad, ‘sitting with his father listening to everything happening for the day’, and then depending on his interest, he may continue with his building projects or read.

IP4: ... he would get some mechanical stuff in his head worked out and then he would come with drawings ... his drawing skills are not that mature yet ... I would have to follow very clearly as he explains how this mechanism would work ... he would work out the details of how it would work.

The above description of the two children show that in the NLA home, children are seen and respected as individuals. The approach empowers and nurtures the children's individuality, their unique interests and talents.

IP4: If you give them that space their individuality comes out and that strength of who they are is so beautiful that if you can see that then naturally you can start supporting.

This is the antithesis of schools where conformity is prized (Gray 2013, Gatto 2010).

4.4.1.6 Theme 6: Ideal Learning Community

Without any doubt, all participants stated their homes are the ideal learning environment. However, they would also like to extend their home circle to include other people in a natural and meaningful manner and also have access to various options and activities.

IP10: Home ... right now this is the ideal ... we learn and move around and its working ... they meet other kids and they play, and they learn—it's just perfect at the moment.

IP3: I don't want a centre, I want it to be my life ... I want a farm where we have as many diverse families as possible. I don't want people like me, I want diversity with a similar end goal.

IP4: ... the village environment ... it would be so good if my kids could pop in a house next door, share some time and come back and other children come into our house ... a more natural flowing environment would be really great ... where children could share their experiences ... just natural sharing because that's a powerful way of learning in a natural way.

IP2: I don't think I have an ideal learning space ... sometimes we are challenged by people who think differently ... so I would not want to be around like minded people all the time ... the only thing I would like to change is the location ... sometimes the city is challenging for me ... less rushed city to live in.

IP6: If I could have any learning space it would need a lot of outdoor space.

IP5: I would love a community where we could spend long hours ... maybe a rotating sort of thing among friends ... in a natural environment where they can work together to create things.

IP8: I think to go to the forest for a week ... a community where you don't depend on too many electronics and your life is not run by other people's time.

IP7: Forest ... with an office section for parents to sit and do their work—with great Wi-Fi connection ... and kids being in this forest planting and reaping the benefits and even having their laptops up on the trees.

4.4.2 Interviews with Children

To endorse the data gained from the parents, it was decided that a simple interview with the children would be valuable to the outcome of the study. However, the interviews were in essence a casual chat with the children. It is the contention of Kyronlampi-Kylmanen & Maatta (2010) that to successfully carry out an interview with a child, the interviewer must enter their world, it should resemble an everyday

conversation and the dialogue should be based on equality and respect. The first participant was a bit nervous because he expected it to be like a formal interview, like the ones he saw on YouTube, and was pleasantly surprised that it was just an easy chitchat. The mother indicated that he could relate to the conversation and found it very comfortable to share his thoughts. The children in general were very relieved at the relaxed style of the interview. Children were consulted on this by their parents and thereafter written permission was given to the researcher. Parents had the option to be part of the interview, which some exercised and others not. The children were reminded that they had the freedom to change their minds at any point during the interview. They also knew that they did not have to answer a question if they did not want to, that they were free to ask questions, and they could end the interview at any point. For example, in one interview, the second child in the family began to feel the pressure of having to continue with the interview just when a friend, who he has been waiting for, became available to play. The researcher realised his conflict and gave him the option to leave the interview; he chose to leave as his need to play with his friend was more important to him than the interview, and the decision was respected by both the researcher and the parent.

The children ranged from age seven to fifteen. For two children, the researcher was a stranger, but the researcher was familiar to the other as there had been social interactions of varying degrees with the different families. With one child the researcher realised she was not keen to participate; she was very young and preferred to climb trees, which she was doing with great dexterity and joy. Therefore, with the permission of the parent, the researcher did an observation of them as the families socialised together. The child was relieved when she found out she did not have to do the interview, and as time passed, she became very comfortable sharing and engaging with the researcher. This observation record was sent to the parent for approval. In total ten families agreed to do the interviews but three opted out and one was completed as an observation record. Only two interviews were face-face interviews, and the other five were done as video and telephone calls. As mentioned before, the families are scattered all over the country, so using technology was a cost-effective way of gathering the data. In the telephone interviews, the non-verbal expressions that can be an important support to children during interviews was sadly absent (Kyronlampi-Kylmanen & Maatta 2010). However, it must be noted that the children

are quite accustomed to using technology for communication with family and people from all over the country and overseas through their online games and other online activities. They did not seem very perturbed by the medium used for the interviews.

The researcher used the content and thematic analysis to link the children's responses with the themes that emerged from the other instruments.

4.4.2.1 Theme one: Freedom and Autonomy

The theme of freedom and autonomy was a strong theme that came up again as children communicated that the best aspect of the NLA was that in general they had the freedom to direct their day. They expressed genuine happiness that they had the freedom to choose what they wanted to do every day. This aligned with the data collated from both the questionnaires and the parent interviews under the same theme. The value of freedom and autonomy as a fundamental in the NLA was conveyed by the parents in their definition of the NLA and how they implement it in their homes. The children's interviews affirmed this theme.

CI1: What I really enjoy is that I don't really have to work with limitations that everyone else have to work with. I really like having to put my own limit and to just do my thing and learn as I go.

CI4: I like that at home you can do it at your own time and pace, no one's pressurising you, no one's telling you when you have to do what, by what age or what time you have to know this. You get to choose what you want to do.

CI5: ... you don't have to wake up early, go to bed early, get in a uniform and all that—you can wake up when you want to, you give attention to what you want, you can eat when you want do, and you can play when you want to ... you don't have to be forced to thing ... you get freedom.

CI3: ... that I don't have to do what they say.

Children who went to school before embracing the NLA shared some of their negativity with the schooling system, citing bullying, teachers they did not like, pressure, boredom and general unhappiness.

CI5: ... I get to choose what I can do, and I don't have kids that can bully.

CI4: ... the teacher ... at school ... it's so much pressure.

CI6: It was not fun being away from my mum ... I missed her ... I kept wanting to draw and colour and they would not let me.

4.4.2.2 Theme two: I Am Learning!

The children shared some of the things that they were busy with and once again it was varied and interesting, reflecting the freedom in choice that they enjoy and their unique personalities. The variety of interests that the children shared was quite impressive. Some examples are:

CI4(a): ... I am focussed on gymnastics ... working on biology.

CI4(b): Food and dance ... I start cooking lessons and an online lunchbox website.

CI4 (c): ... painting ... making rockets ... crafts.

CI1 : Story writing for an animation.

CI5: Science experiments.

CI3: animal rehabilitation ... rescued insects ... saved a baby bulbul from being eaten by a snake ... when the snake was gone we put it back in the tree and the parents came back.

CI6(a): Quite a variety ... gardening, piano, drama, painting, reading, gardening

CI2: Drawing and games (online).

CI6(b) : I like doing crafts ... made eight guns ... not one of them worked ... I find it fun ... not actually the result but making it ... I enjoy sewing, horse-riding and soccer.

Participant CI6(b) made the interesting comment that he enjoyed the process of making things and that the result was not the key focus. Although the paper guns he made did not work, it did not stop him from making more and just enjoying the process of making it and trying out different ideas. This is so different from a project one would get from a school where the product would be assessed and then filed away. The child also showed no stress about the end product because for him it was work in progress

and gave him great satisfaction and joy. This shows that children have a learning style that fits their natural being (Holt 1982).

4.4.2.3 Theme three: The Google Phenomenon

Once again Google came up as a key way to access information. The researcher also asked the children how they go about learning something that interests them. Most of them cited Google and YouTube, books and asking another person, mostly a parent or a coach, for help.

For example, participant CI6(b), as a follow-up on his explanation of his craft gun, explained that he uses YouTube:

CI6(b): ... I look at how they design—like how the trigger works and their hitting mechanism ... and then I make my own version of it ... I would make the shape, how it hits, the trigger different from what I saw on the video ... So I use what other people do and change it a little ... and then after a while when I am really comfortable with that I would make my own thing—completely ... so far I am still making my own ideas.

CI6(a): ... Reading books which I enjoy ... sometimes I would watch an art video to see how people are doing something ... ask people ... take lessons.

CI5: ... I usually google and ... ask my parents.

CI4: ... on the laptop ... if I can't find anything on the internet, I go through our house books and if I can't find it, I will ask a family member.

The above responses also show that the children are independent in their learning process. They first find out for themselves and only include another person when they need to. This again echoes the findings of Holt (1982) that children strongly dislike being given more help than what they ask for. The children's ability to find their information and necessary skills for the area of their interest and the activities that they are busy with show that they are very patient, skilful, resourceful and capable of learning whatever they like.

4.4.2.4 Theme four: Making Friends

The children were asked if there was anything about the NLA that they did not like or enjoy. The children who had never been to school were not able to really give an answer because they had nothing to compare with. Those who had been to school missed the easy access to friends. Some expressed that they did not have a need to see friends all the time as they had other interests (which did not really include other people) that they enjoy doing. The following example shows that three times a week is more than enough for this participant to socialise with friends.

C16: I have never really felt like lonely in a sense ... I don't think I would like people over three times a week ... because I do activities I see people ... I can talk to them and it's a place I can connect.

In general, children who follow the NLA are quite happy with the rhythm of their day and not having friends around all the time. NLA children tend to have friends of all ages, including adults. Some expressed frustration that they must wait for friends who are in school, who often cannot keep to arrangements because of school and homework commitments. Despite this, the children expressed that they have many friends and enjoy spending time together, while at the same time guarding their solitary time and activities. They seem to have a good balance between the two.

4.4.2.5 Theme five: Boredom?

The children were also asked if there was anything that they did not like about the NLA. The children were quick to respond that they did not have many things that they disliked about the NLA. One participant missed the sewing and the wide range of sewing resources that she had available when she was at a school. The participants who had never been to school had nothing to dislike. One participant mentioned that she got tired of people asking questions and having to explain the NLA to them. Another important example:

C14(b): ... I know this seems silly but sometimes you seem to run out of things to do. You eventually find new things to do but sometimes it can get boring in a way.

This brings up yet another pertinent point in children's development. The idea of a bored child often makes adults scurry off to find something that will occupy the mind

and keep the child busy. Technology has become the pacifier for bored children and adults alike because there is constant pleasurable entertainment that one can click into. Colier (2018) states that people relate boredom as a nothingness or an absence. Boredom in the NLA sense is not considered a negative thing. Like the participant states, she eventually does find something new to do, which is the crux of the process. Through the process of being bored, children mull over things, use their imagination, invent food for their attention and then find something that they would like to do (Colier 2018). This period of boredom is essential for new ideas and inspirations to come through. Colier (2018) states further that the ability to self-play, to create and generate ideas, to self-engage is a very important skill for the development of a healthy person. In this process, children also learn to enjoy their own company. The ability to not fear or dread one's own company is a very valuable skill (Colier 2018).

4.4.3 A brief overview of findings from Family Interviews

What is clear from the above responses is that families are implementing the NLA in creative ways and enjoying the path that they have chosen. The interviews gave the researcher in-depth information on how families implemented and managed living and learning and how they see their key role as parents. Furthermore, it presented the myriad of learning interests that the children have and how they go about nurturing and encouraging those learning interests. The responses were similar to that in the questionnaire, which indicated that most of the families are following the general tenets of the NLA and therefore strengthens the findings of this study. The parents outlined their ideas for an ideal learning society and again the majority had similar ideas of an ideal learning environment, as in the findings in the questionnaire.

Without doubt, the parents see the immense benefits of the NLA and see that their children thrive in a space of freedom, love and respect. They are nurturing all kinds of learning interests and enjoying it with their children. In as much as there is a degree of isolation because there are so few people who are following this approach, the families do not feel a huge sense of loneliness because of their openness to be part of broader society. Parents are happy with their choices but find that walking the path is not easy as they have their own deschooling issues to deal with; they are finding support to help them with this journey both from people and the Internet. As one parent stated, "I trust unschooling implicitly. It's just myself and my own emotions and my

parenting that's the difficult part". Gray and Riley (2013) also found that the most common challenge for parents was overcoming feelings of criticism and social pressure that came from others and from their own culturally-ingrained, habitual ways of thinking about education.

The interviews with the children were certainly an interesting and an endearing experience. As in Question 4.5.2.2. (I am Learning), the children are involved in many varied activities that gives them joy and fulfilment, and therefore, learning is happening naturally and on levels that are not always easy to verbalise or describe, as often the learning is internal, and therefore, very empowering. The following words perfectly encapsulates what the children in the NLA homes are doing and how very successful they are at their own learning process and life in general:

What is essential to realise is that children learn independently, not in bunches; that they learn out of interest and curiosity, not to please or appease the adults in power; and that they ought to be in control of their own learning, deciding for themselves what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. (Holt 1982:169)

The family interviews proved to be a very successful instrument in gaining valuable data on how the NLA is unfolding in the South African context.

4.4.4 Focus Group Interviews

This study attempted to get as wide an understanding of NL in South Africa as possible; therefore, the inclusion of data from young adults (those who are no longer in the official 'school age' category) on how they are negotiating their lives in the big wide world was pertinent. Studies on young adults in NL are difficult to find. Therefore, Gray and Riley's (2015b) study *Grown Unschoolers' Experiences with Higher Education and Employment: Report II on a survey of 75 Unschooled Adults* is ground breaking and was a good reference for this aspect of this study.

Using purposive sampling, ten young adults were contacted and seven agreed to be interviewed: Four in a focus group interview, two in separate interviews, and one sent her response via email as she was not able to join the focus group interview. The researcher felt that her responses would add value to the findings and included her responses as the seventh participant. The participants were very busy with their lives

and its demands, and it was not easy to get them all together at the same time. They are from different parts of the country: Four from Gauteng, one from the Western Cape, one from Mpumalanga, and one from KwaZulu-Natal. The group consisted of five females and two males, of who four were White, two Indian, and one bi-racial.

All seven participants are involved in a variety of things, including performing arts (jazz singing and piano); farming and natural healing nutrition; business and computer; theatre and performance studies; photography; welding; broadcaster in e-sports; and music teacher working towards a science degree. The age ranged from 18 to 30 years old. Two participants were pursuing a higher education degree, while the others were forging their own way doing internships and developing their skills in their area of interest. Like Gray and Riley's (2015b) study, they saw no need to pursue any formal higher education as their career choices did not require it. A respondent in the Gray and Riley (2015b:137) study also indicated that "internships and apprenticeships would be the natural extension of unschooling into the traditional workplace". One participant in this study stated that should she see the need to obtain any sort of qualification, she has full confidence that she will be able to do it. Once again using thematic analysis the following themes were identified: The joy of the NLA; challenges; opportunities; and learning society. These themes are discussed in the following sections.

4.4.4.1 *Theme one: The Joy of the NLA*

The answers from the following questions were used to glean evidence regarding the participants overall experience with the NLA.

1. In what ways has the NLA helped or hindered you?
2. How do you evaluate your confidence level in your life currently? How much can you attribute to the NLA?
3. Would you recommend the NLA to other people?
4. If you could do one thing differently regarding the NLA, what would it be?

The participants mentioned that they were easily able to adapt to the requirements of their area of interest and pick up the skills they needed to successfully participate because of their NLA background and the benefits they gained through this approach.

FG7: ... it has helped me to know my strengths and interests from a young age ... making career decisions very easy. It has also given me a head start on my career, as I had time during my teenage years to start working towards my goals.

FG5: NL is a lot more adaptive so when it comes to using your skills in the real world it is a bit more difficult, but you are able to see and solve problems at a different level.

FG2: ... learning is everywhere ... the greatest learning I have had has not been stuck somewhere that I don't want to be ... I have been better off mentally and I have been able to grow and develop my person.

FG1: ... for me that I really discovered through unschooling is how holistic learning is—experiences you are having, things you are witnessing, people you are meeting, you learn something new, it's just part of who you are as a human ... being open to experiencing and drawing from those things ... it's a lovely fluid thing that continues through your life.

FG4: ... teaches you to teach yourself and have your own ideas ... gives you more opportunities to dream and to see what you want.

FG3: I would say that I have grown the confidence to be able to jump and so that what I want to do and not allow peoples' influence to get hold of me.

The participants did get into a discussion about the level of confidence and how it can be judged; however, there was consensus that the NLA boosted their confidence levels. The participants who had been to school were able to compare their confidence levels when they were in school and when they started the NLA, and without any doubt stated that their confidence grew once they left school.

FG1: My confidence is much higher than when I was in the system ... equating my confidence to something not numerical has really helped me ... to be myself ... that's what confidence is ... it's like this inner thing that you got to keep feeding.

FG6: ... with NLA you always going to have a confidence advantage over people who are coming from the system—not only confidence but also in terms of how you think—you are going to think in a better way because your thinking

has not being constrained for 12 years ... you can think in a freer context and find other ways to do things ... therefore NLA people have a higher confidence level....

FG3: 100% ... when I was in school, I had no confidence at all ... now I don't feel unworthy.

FG2: It's a living breathing thing—it fluctuates—it's never at the consistent level.

FG4: I never really think about it ... I did not grow up much with humans so that makes me a bit shy and not knowing how to fit in, but otherwise I think I am quite confident.

FG7: I am very confident ... the reason for that is that I have learnt from an early age to trust my own judgement and instinct.

Participant FG3 who was diagnosed with reading difficulties found that once she started the NLA, her confidence level went up because it showed her that she did not have to always read and that there are other ways to access and engage in information on subjects that piqued her interest. She has found ways around her reading problems without feeling like she is failure, which was the case when she was in school. She has started her own photography business while working in administration. Participants in the Gray and Riley (2015b) study mentioned that the advantage they recognised was motivation and self-regulation. The participants in this study also indicated these as advantages.

These responses add to the suggestion in Gray and Riley (2013) that increased autonomy in children's learning leads to general psychological wellbeing, resilience and life satisfaction. In terms of the question 'what would you change if you could do this differently?', the participants who went to school unanimously agreed that they should have started the NLA a lot earlier—they wished they could have started right from birth because they wished they could have had the benefits of the NLA from earlier in the lives. One participant who has been a natural learner his whole life still felt that if he could "have had a more unschooling experience at a young age it would have been better". He went on to explain that his parents were going through their own discovery and understanding of the NLA, and as the eldest, he did not get the full experience of freedom when he was younger in comparison to his younger sister who he sees as having a lot more freedom than he did at that age. This was also

experienced and acknowledged in one of the parent interviews, where the eldest child was the one who had the most interventions (first a curriculum and then a gradual move to the NLA) and the third child was completed unschooled. This is not an uncommon pattern as parents are often feeling their way through what would be the best option for their children and at the same time deschooling themselves.

4.4.4.2 Theme two: Challenges

Surprisingly, all seven participants indicated that they experienced no major challenges that had any reference to NL in pursuing their present interests. The challenges they did experience were part of everyday life. However, their biggest challenge is getting people to understand and be open to their life choices rather than pass judgement. The lack of understanding from people in general and extended family members proved to be quite a challenge for the group. They shared many examples of how family members would try and test their knowledge base, assuming they are stupid because they did not go to school. One participant shared that they had to cut ties with close family members because they did not approve of their choice. Another mentioned how she rarely reveals to people that she is a natural learner for fear of their judgement. This brought a chorus of encouragement and advice from the others. The other difficulty expressed was finding other people who are on the same or a similar journey.

*FG2: I struggle to connect with my peers that are not in alternative education
... I find it so challenging to relate to people who have been in a school system.*

To which participant FG6 answered that participant FG2 (who attended school until 13 years old) would have had just as difficult a time in the school environment because she has such a unique personality, and therefore, finding people whom she can relate to will be difficult. This response also showed the insightful quality of the participant; a mature person who has a good understanding of people and who was able to communicate this understanding in a way that made the other participant feel affirmed. In general, the participants felt that they had no significant difficulties in socialising with people in the work and study space or in general living, for that matter. The group also had a very good discussion and lots of encouragement around owning the NLA identity and not allowing other people's lack of understanding to stand in the way of this confidence.

4.4.4.3 Theme three: Creating Opportunities

As with the Gray and Riley (2015b) study, the participants all agreed that the NLA experience led to them being passionate about learning and having a high sense of personal responsibility in their learning process. They are all very driven to live in a self-determined way and to be successful according to their own definitions. They have had no big hurdles while trying to create their own opportunities that they find satisfying. FG5 for example, through his expertise with technology, participated in four internships and is therefore confident that there are plenty of opportunities available.

FG4: ... It's actually easy to find something; it's just the system that is a bit difficult ... like moneywise to build things up.

FG2 expressed that because natural learners are used to adapting in learning and discovering their own process, she feels she has an advantage. FG1 shared how she created her own opportunities by studying a course, which led to her getting a part-time job at 16 and then an internship in her chosen field of study. As indicated by another natural learner, "... at quite a young age ... I learnt to speak on equal terms with many adults and authority figures. I believe one gains a sense of confidence from this and employers can recognize that as a good quality" (Hern 2008:135). All seven participants were very positive about embracing what comes their way and finding things that would support them in their endeavours. This alone was an indication of their confidence levels. The following response again shows maturity and confidence:

*FG6: ... me being in charge of my own journey or life in general that when things go wrong or I don't do as well as I am supposed to ... I take full responsibility for myself because I know I was in charge ... which is a good thing because you should be able to take responsibility for the s**t you do ... rather than blame this or that.*

This attitude shows the depth of the impact of NL on people. An important tenet of the NLA is that with freedom comes responsibility, and the above response demonstrates this tenet has been absorbed by these participants as part of how life is lived. They have internalised an incredible mantra for a good life.

4.4.4.4 Theme 4: Learning Society

The participants voiced their views on how they saw their ideal learning society. They indicated that if all of society implemented the NLA, the world will be a better place because everyone will be doing and living their passions, enjoying life and being happy.

FG3: ... all education being free so that any person can literally learn whatever they want to learn.

FG7: A group of people of different ages and backgrounds, together with specialists in the field, exchanging ideas on specific topics.

FG4: Where people can learn from nature ... no one knows how to grow food—the things that we actually need to survive are not being taught ... kids having the opportunity to live from nature and learn from the way of nature

FG1: ... it should be devoid of most systems because systems in itself are a learning restriction.

The others agreed that there should be no enforced learning, that a more natural ‘village community’ setting would be ideal with centres that nurture freedom and trust being made available to all. Their responses were very similar to the responses from the questionnaire and the interviews. This shows that the NLA community have very similar ideas in terms of what learning in society should aspire to. The goal should be to create not just free and happy children, but free and happy people and a free and happy society.

4.4.5 A brief overview of findings from Focus Group Interviews

From the above young adult discussion, one can deduce that as with Gray and Riley’s (2015b) study, the most emphatic advantages of the NLA cited by the participants were time and freedom to pursue their own interests. They were motivated to learn, to create opportunities and to work hard towards their goals. They had a strong ability to learn, to be critical of themselves and to take responsibility. The one aspect that they reported as a disadvantage was the annoyance of having to explain, defend and justify their life choices to other people, especially other family members. All seven

participants, without a moment's hesitation, indicated that they would recommend the NLA to other people because it was the best way to live life.

As with the Gray and Riley study (2015b), from the size and the self-selected nature of the sample, one cannot draw strong conclusions about older natural learners and their success in their careers and studies. However, this study also shows that the NLA is compatible with success. All seven of the participants are pursuing fields that bring them satisfaction and they are negotiating their lives with confidence and enthusiasm. They believe that their NLA experience has given them a decided advantage in their fields because it "prepared them well for further education and employment by promoting a higher degree of self-motivation, continued enjoyment of learning, capacity for self-direction, and a sense of personal responsibility" (Gray & Riley 2015b:47)

4.5 DOCUMENTS

In this study two types of documents were used. One was personal documents in the form of reflective journals and a parent observation record and the other a public document, Facebook page and a blog. The reflective journals were generated by the researcher for this study.

4.5.1 Reflective Journals

The researcher requested the parents to record the learning that they observe and their reflections of the learning process. Thus, ten families who agreed to do the interviews were asked to keep a reflective journal of their learning process for four weeks. This was done with the goal of getting a good glimpse of how natural learners live their days and how learning takes place in the home in the hope that these findings will also solidify the findings from the other instruments. It was also hoped that through keen observation, the parents will reveal how incidental activities that spur on learning become concrete learning moments or inspirations for further learning. It was also important to see how general living flows into learning moments and vice versa. Journal writing does require long-term commitment and a dedicated sample of contributors (Pattison 2013). The ten families were keen to provide the data, but as the juggling of life's daily demands took precedence, some participants changed their minds. Three decided to opt out completely, four re-negotiated the number of weeks

of recording, and the others did the best they could with the limited time that they had. Two found great joy in the process itself and appreciated the opportunity to be part of the process. One sent scant information and pictures via WhatsApp. In total six journals were admitted into the study and were analysed using content analysis. As expected from this instrument, there was a richness in the details and a significant volume of information. However, the valuable data provided by the parents and children "remain as interesting for what is not included as for what is" (Pattison 2013:90).

One parent, after some reflection, communicated that she was not very happy with the notion of recording the 'learning' moments, because she felt that there was no distinction between learning and living and she felt it went against her idea of the NLA if she began to differentiate between the two. Many the NLA families do take issue with the 'learning activities' because the basic premise of the NLA is that learning is not a type of activity that is different from other activities. She felt that when parents start looking for specific learning moments then it might change how the NLA is unfolding because they might want to direct or steer conversations or activities towards a specific learning goal, which might be different from what the child wants or what the child might have experienced without that kind of interference. In other words, the emphasis on the 'learning process' being a series of steps that leads to a specific goal or end or seeing it as a journey with milestones and progress (Pattison 2013). Her acceptance of her child just 'being' and living life and her total trust and faith in her child's ability to learn what she needs to learn in the process of living was a very strong value for her. Furthermore, she saw difference in importance among all the activities and its potential learning moments. For example, spending time staring out the window, playing with mud and reading a book were learning experiences of equal value. This echoes the thoughts of Jain (2008) that there is no hierarchy in learning and that every person possesses learning resources and can foster more. Her concerns and explanation are congruent with how the NLA families see their experience. However, for academic purposes this study's aim was to show how learning is happening within the daily life of the family. It does not have to necessarily relate to learning that is seen as typical school or academic learning, but learning or a competency that unfolds in whatever way or on any topic. Therefore, the data that was important for this study was the learning process that the parent could see/observe

while the children went on with their day. Often its learning that the child is totally unaware of.

In a nutshell, families were busy with living their daily lives and incorporating a variety of activities and experiences for their children. Some days were busier than others because of planned activities. In all the accounts, the learning moments were deep, interesting, creative, exciting and empowering. The journal recordings added to the findings in both the questionnaire and the interviews that learning is happening all the time.

4.5.1.1 Variety of Learning

Examples of the variety of learning mirrored the data from the questionnaire, but in the journals, the researcher was able to see the flow of events, of how one moment led to another, and how children's interest was piqued by some event or observation and how they followed it up.

DP6: DAY 3: ... get ready early ... homeschooling outing with the local community. We visited a bakery that specialises in rusks. Kids were shown the whole process ... on our drive back we stopped along the roadside to pick some wild flowers and found an unfamiliar fruit ... supper was made by the two big girls with the help of the babas.

DAY 4: The girls woke up early today still excited about the fruit they found yesterday. They started on their investigative journey. We found that the fruit is called Kiwano otherwise known as the thorn melon. We proceeded to cut it up and examine it and the seeds and tasted it ... after all that excitement everybody reclined into their bedrooms to get on with their personal stuff.

DP5: DAY 4: Watched on YouTube then made her own lava lamp which was pretty cool. We played chess together. She decided to take some of her old complicated Lego pieces and put them together again ... her own imagination play time ... reading books to her ... ballet classes.

Day 5 : X is planning to make her own Wendy house and we went and bought some wood and other material to make it. She watched a YouTube Lego programme and then went and remade some of the figures repainting them and made the same structure for them to live in and a vehicle. Played chess.

Present time play—she does a lot of imagination play by herself. Reading books to her.

The journals also revealed the general rhythm of the family. Although the families do not have set routines, they do have some pattern to their day. This rhythm is flexible and familiar.

DP4: The kids wake up anytime between 06h30 and 08h30 and usually go straight for their phones or the TV, where they check their favourite game ... breakfast together ... then all get dressed, teeth brushed. I do prefer to go out in the mornings and rest in the afternoon ... usually rest time is made up of phone/TV/card games/toys etc. Often we have a friend come over to play in the afternoon In the evenings... play games together ... Eating around 6 or 7pm ... kids' bath and one of us lies and reads to them for bedtime.

DP3: X mainly wakes up around 7am ... has breakfast with his dad ... wanders to the hobby room where he starts doing something at the workbench. He enjoys spending his days doing woodwork ... when he gets tired from being indoors he would jump on the trampoline in the garden or would practise his soccer skills ... he started playing piano again ... he would practise writing a few words with wooden letters or do actual writing and then would read to me ... I read him a story in the evenings before bed ... every second day he plays online and he and sister would walk the dogs or cycle in the afternoon.

4.5.1.2 Different Personalities/Bonding

Participants also noted how different their children's personalities are and how this showed in the learning process.

DP2: X activities are stable and predictable. Gets up at 4am/5am to download what he needs for the day and have his alone time ... Y is always busy. He decides to watch a YouTube on mythology... goes out with his toolbox to create something out of wood and whatever recyclable materials he can find. Busy for an hour and then goes right into cooking something, setting up a movie while he snacks and then on to artistic construction with paper.

DP3: X is more of a social character than Y. He is a dreamer ... he is very creative and inventive. He is slower to take on a new interest and would

complain more easily of being bored ... although he will keep himself busy for hours once he starts on something ... Y is naturally driven to follow her interests ... she seems to enjoy a routine that she sets up for herself. She is naturally tidy ... independent. She can be too hard on herself and I have to remind her to slow down ... she is very sensitive.

Through the journals the relationship and bonding between parents and children also came through.

DP2: I love when the boys come to share something new with me.... X with his most hilarious video clips ... to serious scientific inventions.... Y with his carpentry or motherboards he has taken out of his grandmother's computer.... Today Y took advantage of me being in bed. We played board games ... X awaits the moments that we can be totally alone together....

DP6: ... spent day in bed after pills ... the girls decided to come and snuggle up beside me and we spent the day just chatting and them telling me silly stories ... we can talk for hours and the stories never end.

DP1: ... he asked if I would like to learn a new language with him and I excitedly said yes ... we start learning Spanish.

4.5.1.3 Conflict

It was also interesting to see how parents viewed and handled conflict. In the day-to-day living, the usual sibling conflicts arise and parents find that they sometimes need to manage the conflict with the children.

DP2: ... today Y wanted to play with X and X just wanted to be left alone ... So X gives Y the silent treatment ... Y screams insults at X ... conflict is daily and we need to sit down and talk about the real reasons this is happening ... they always end up loving each other again.

DP4: Most of the time the fight breaks out because X has made a demand that Y finds unreasonable and chooses to ignore ... it ends with someone crying ... I do try to intervene ... usually try to chat about it and reinforce more positive ways of handling a problem. I don't expect them to implement it ... I understand we must play the long game when it comes to emotional regulation ... Usually if I am calm these things can be resolved fairly easily but if I am stressed or in

a rush, I feel a lot more pressure and I don't manage to defuse the situation very well.

It is important that the issue of conflict was recorded by the participants. Conflict is a normal aspect of people living and sharing life together. According to Sharrick and Medlin (2019), the following characteristics of parents allow for a more cooperative child and household: Sensitive, protective, responsive, attentive, available, supportive, respectful, and loving. These characteristics are generally what governs the NLA household, as it is the fundamentals of the NLA. Therefore, children who are securely attached to their parents who embrace the above characteristics are more cooperative than others. Furthermore, children are more compliant and cooperative if their parents understand their perspective during the conflict and handle the conflict with deep and equal respect (Sharrick & Medlin 2019). When these values are in place, parents do not find handling conflict and discipline a difficult aspect of the NLA, or home education for that matter. Parents tend to rate the maturity, cooperation and self-control of their children as above average for their age (Sharrick & Medlin 2019). On the same note, parents of the NLA must also ensure that they too embrace the above characteristics to aspire towards being the kind of parent the NLA needs. In other words, parents disciplining themselves is equally important in how conflict is managed.

4.5.1.4 Role of Parents

There were also some recordings that revealed the role parents played in helping their children in their learning journey. Sometimes the parents needed to respectfully intervene to help children make decisions, to gently direct them onto a learning path or just advise them to take a break from the activities, especially if it was causing them stress or unhappiness.

One participant discussed that her daughter decided to stop gymnastics and after some time the parent talked to her about why she stopped and how she thought that it was important that she try it out one more time to properly determine whether she wants to stop. The child agreed and then totally loved it all over again. It came to light that there was an incident in one class that made her uncomfortable rather than the sport in general. The child was happy to be back in the class after the incident and coping strategies were discussed. Here is another example:

DP2: Y could not wait to go. X said no. I asked him to think about it. Then he said yes but what if he does not enjoy it ... I promised to bring him home if he is not enjoying it, he agreed to go ... after 10 minutes he was having an absolute ball.

Participant DP1 shared how they feel their child is putting undue pressure on himself to complete an online maths programme he has chosen to do. The parents do not agree with it but respect his choice and when he shares his stress they advise him to give it a break as there is “no hurry to go anywhere”. To some this may seem ironical that the parent wants the child to take a break from maths, often seen as the important yet dreaded subject at school. This reveals that for the parent the child’s wellbeing is more important than the subject of the learning.

These examples show that parents are in tune with their children, and the deep understanding of who they are, helps them to coax their children to try new experiences and to provide them with alternatives so that they always have a choice and can exercise the choice if needed. The parents place a bigger premium on the children’s happiness than any other achievement or process. The support that parents provide for their children in this approach comes from a place of ‘knowing’ and respect for the children’s wellbeing.

Another noticeable scene is that the parents and children are constantly communicating. There is a lot of discussion about all sorts of topics and both negatives and positives are handled with respect for the child. This is the child’s first and most empowering socialisation process.

4.5.1.5 Social Circles

All six participants had a social interaction outside the family circle almost every day. The activities ranged from both purposeful and unplanned free play and the interaction included both adults and/or peers. Three participants indicated that their children spent time with their friends online. Acknowledging growth in their socialisation was also noted:

DP4: ... we have dealt with some issues related to their friendships ... with three close friends sometimes rivalry comes up. The moms involved have

chatted about it and tried to uncover the best way to talk to our girls about it, and through the process I feel we all have grown up a little.

DP6: ... attended a family fun day ... it was interesting watching the girls interact with the majority of children who attend school ... my kids are used to being independent and making their own decisions ... they have a distinctive protective aspect to their interactions. I caught them playing the justice implementors and not allowing bulling of others and encouraging fair play. I was proud.

DP4 indicated how the family's involvement in socialising their new adopted dog led them to joining the neighbourhood's dog owners gathering where the kids made friends with the local children. This, like the other two examples above, shows how just everyday living brings a myriad of opportunities for learning and widening the community.

Some parents also reflected on their parenting, their role, their shortcomings and their commitment to this approach.

DP1: The day was more reflective for P and I ... in terms of what are we holding onto, how do we move forward as better parents, better people, how do we live out truth and what's our future plans ... when we all go out for a drive ... is where we spend time with each other. We find out how each other are doing, their future plans etc. ... we really connect ... I see this as indirect, subliminal learning.

DP2: ... his storytelling started with Minecraft roleplaying 5 years ago. At that time, I wanted to pull my hair out over his screen time but kept it to myself... but I failed to see the storytelling talent unfolding. Now when he spends his time watching movies and the making of a movie, I totally understand—it is what lives inside him. He has a story to tell.

The following response encapsulates the role of parents in the NLA.

DP4: I have been thinking about how all of these interests really require a lot of investment on our part as the parents—just stopping what we are doing to play a card game, or taking on the task of setting up some craft thing ... I try to remind myself that everything we encounter, even the thoughts we have, are part of the 'world' from which my kids are learning each day, and to keep that

in mind as we go about our days—to listen to random remarks they make, to enjoy something they are seeing/doing with them, to really look at them and the world, and immerse myself in it all alongside them.

4.5.1.6 The Google Phenomenon

One parent noted his concerns over the amount of time his child spends on his technological devices.

DP1: Today is no different from any other day for X. This has become a concern for me, and I know it has always been a problem for (partner).... Is he becoming addicted, does he know any better, should we intervene or let him find his way by himself. I have been watching his daily pattern and I don't like what I am seeing ... we had a discussion around what is going on and the pattern he is stuck in.

With technology seeping into every aspect of people's lives, it has become difficult for some families to navigate around the issues of time spent on technological devices. Some children are more attracted to the many online offerings and social media than others. Some NL families are of the opinion that one should not restrict children regarding technological devices. It should be approached in the same way as other activities and by respecting the children's need to be on the device. While others feel that they need to intervene and encourage other activities for the wellbeing of the child. Technology and online games can be quite seductive, and time spent on these devices mean little or no time spent on other things that might be equally valuable and important for the healthy development of the child (Christakis 2018). As mentioned before, technology can also become a pacifier for the lack of other interests and may even impede the flow of learning. Some families go through a period of adjustment when the children begin to spend more time on the devices. As demonstrated by Ramroop (2018), children spending more time on screens can create dissonance in the family and within the parents own value system. This generates discussions, deep introspection and a learning growth for both parents and children. Finding the space where everyone remains honest and respectful, and yet are able to continue with their interests, is not always easy to negotiate. Once again, these discussions and decisions will need to be done by families who will take their unique family arrangement and the personalities of the children into consideration. It must be noted

that the World Health Organisation has declared a Gaming Disorder and many research studies point to the negatives of excessive technological ‘screen time’. Therefore, parents do need to take into consideration the possible negatives of technological devices and be vigilant of their children’s health and wellbeing. A quote by Peter Drucker sums this up well: “The most important thing about communication is hearing what isn’t said” (Ratcliffe 2016). With the excessive technological usage characteristic of this age, the long-term impact (both good and/or bad) on children and society is yet to be understood.

4.5.2 The Tweet Project

Over a period of one year, the parent and the ten-year-old child tweeted their observations/activities of the daily learning that the ten-year-old child experienced. After the year, the parent drew up a composite document that contained all the tweets for the year. The researcher used only the tweets in this study (there was also a blog) to get an overview of some of the activities and the flow of learning for the year to corroborate the findings of the other instruments in this study. This document will be referred to as the Project here. It must be noted that this was a joint project between the mother and the child with the aim of it culminating in a book. The older child of the family opted to not be part of the Project. The ten-year-old child had never been to school. According to the parent, her journey into alternative education options was slow and books and curriculums were initiated and periodically offered because of the parent’s own deschooling conflicts. However, over time the parents totally embraced the NLA. Therefore, the Project was affirming for them as a family because they could witness and experience that empowering learning can happen through living life and without curriculums and formal teaching. The parent began to trust her child’s innate desire and ability to learn and the process of the NLA. The parent acknowledges that even during the year of the Project, her deschooling issues still tripped her as it does with all NL parents (Dubowsky 2019). This could be seen in how she grouped some tweets in what one would term traditional school subjects, for example, History, Geography, Mathematics, in her drive to affirm that learning was happening using this approach.

The Project started because the parent wanted to note what specific learning was happening every day and thought a joint project of this nature would be a very valuable

experience for them as a family. Learning and living is so inseparable and difficult to distinguish in a NL home (Griffith 1998) that often parents wonder what are their children learning. For example, cooking and being competent in the kitchen is part of living, and learning how to cook is therefore, if the child is interested, a seamless and natural family activity; therefore, to distinguish it as a special ‘learning’ activity would go against the naturalness of learning. It must be noted that in general, NL parents choose not to distinguish between learning and living as discussed in 4.5.1. However, the parent in the Project decided to look for those activities and competencies that revealed and affirmed her child’s growth and development within this NL journey. The parent acknowledged that not all observations were recorded; her decisions on what to tweet was based on what was noticed and available time. The child had the freedom to tweet what she wanted to note down for the day. They realised that they could not tweet everything and needed to make choices. From the tweets one can see that the focus was mostly on what one could classify as a learning activity or a competency moment.

A total of 2 063 tweets were recorded. Some days had more tweets than others but every day of the year had at least one tweet. From the document one could deduce that the child engaged in a wide variety of activities that was largely child initiated. This corroborated the findings of the interviews, questionnaire and the reflective journals as discussed above.

From the tweets one could deduce the following about the child:

- She loved animals and learning about them from a variety of sources and mediums. She had pets and took responsibility for them.
- She enjoyed cooking and was very competent in the kitchen, making family meals and cooking meals for herself when required. By the age of ten she demonstrated independence in terms of the kitchen and food.
- She enjoyed reading a wide range of books—some that would be considered above her reading ability level if she had been in school.
- She enjoyed a variety of tutored activities like piano, tennis, language lessons, ballet, Brownies, ice skating, singing, modern dancing, crafts and chocolate-making.

4.5.2.1 Examples of How the Activities Flowed

Learning to cook

The first hundred tweets revealed a keen interest in food and making food. There were ten tweets in this regard and then the next food tweet came in at Tweet 197. Whether this means that there was no cooking done in this period or that it did not get recorded is moot. However, Tweet 33 recorded that the child made a three-course meal where she selected the recipes, bought the ingredients, set the table and cooked the food. Tweet 34 shows that the mother was proud of the child's cooking skills. Also, after Tweet 32 the recorded language was no longer "helped to cook" or "learnt how to cook" but "made pancakes" and "baked chocolate cake". This denotes that the child was now accepted as a competent cook. Tweet 168 showed that she was able to take responsibility for the family dinner when the parent was ill. This pattern also indicates a general trajectory of learning in the NLA home, where learning happens in spurts and the more interested children are in an activity the faster their learning can be (Holt 1983). To check how the cooking interests panned out over the year, the researcher looked at the tweets 1 000–1 100 and found four tweets that once again showed that the child was still enjoying cooking and baking, seeking out her own recipes and making her own decisions to make something rather than 'helping to make something'. In the last tweets of the year, Tweet 2049, the child declares herself a pescatarian, and in Tweet 2 062 she baked a bread in an outside primitive oven.

Reading

The year saw the child reading a lot of Harry Potter books and doing related activities, for example, following Pottermore on the Internet, playing interactive games and watching the films. Even though the child was able to read the books by herself, the mother often read out aloud to her, an activity that they both seemed to have enjoyed. Tweet 88 showed that she was very happy with herself that she read 14 chapters of one of the Harry Potter books. There were 12 tweets regarding reading by Tweet 250. At Tweet 472, the reading of the books started again and continued until all books were finished. At Tweet 1 014, the Harry Potter books were done and the child started watching the Harry Potter movies. From 1 000–1 100 there were ten tweets that indicated reading, both Harry Potter and other titles. This is typical example of how

children become immersed in a subject and then spend a lot of time on it. In a follow-up discussion, the parent shared an example of how an interest in one area can lead to another interest. In Harry Potter the main villain's aim is to create a race of purebloods (magical folk with no non-magical blood in their lineage) and to do this he wages a war on people who are not purebloods (Rowling 2008). Through these books and the many discussions that followed, the child's interest went to Adolf Hitler and World War II and his war on people whom he considered not part of the Aryan race. This led to discussions about apartheid. The child read books, accessed information online, had discussions with family members, and visited museums as part of her learning experience. This pattern is quite typical of how learning can meander in the NLA home with an interested child and an involved parent. Similarly, one parent in this study shared how a casual discussion on her school that was near an airfield and her hearing loud booms as certain planes flew over, led to her child expressing great interest and finding out as much as he could about breaking the sound barrier (Section 4.4.1.5).

Technology

There were tweets that indicated that the child did spend some time on the computer, but these were minimal. Tweet 96 indicated that the child had access to a laptop and used it write stories. In terms of online activity, Mushi Monsters, Minecraft and Sumdog were mentioned a few times in the year. Online Harry Potter was also mentioned as the child spent time on the Pottermore website, again, showing her immersion in this area of interest. It must be noted that this does not mean that there was no online activity during the days that it was not mentioned. It does indicate, however, that the child did not have a strong focus on technology. The tweets show a variety of interests of the child and a variety of ways of meeting those needs.

4.5.2.2 Rhythm of the Week

Looking at the tweets from February to June, one can see that the child's week had a general rhythm. Each week she attended ballet, tennis, Brownies, and ice skating. Her time was then interspersed with the other activities that she enjoys, like reading, online activities, watching movies, playing board games with family members, socialising with friends, swimming, tending to animals, and baking/cooking. Random activities also

happened, for example, working with power tools while building her doll house, watching science videos, Kahn Academy, survivor course, making a bow and arrow, and drawing.

The data from this document cemented the idea that learning is taking place in the NLA in various ways. Family involvement and family bonds are strong and nurtured, and many opportunities are made available to the child. Learning is part of life. However, the researcher also notes the following about the document itself:

- Not all tweets were recorded. Therefore, as with the reflective journals, the valuable data provided by the parent and child “remain as interesting for what is not included as for what is” (Pattison 2013:90).
- There was subjectivity in terms of what got tweeted and why that activity was chosen as the tweet of the day. In other words, there is self-selectivity in terms of the available data (Merriam 2009).
- Does the Project indicate the parent is straddled between the schooled and unschooled world? In other words, does the chosen tweets highlight her deschooling issues and her ability to completely trust the process of the NLA?
- Did the family do more ‘learning’ activities because they were recording their lives? Did the decision to record, prime them to think in terms of ‘learning’ activities rather than just allowing the flow of life to happen?

These are important points to consider. However, the value of this document is that it provides evidence that learning and living are intertwined. According to Merriam (2009), although personal documents are a reliable source of data, it is highly subjective because the writer is the only who decides what is important. Documents of this nature reflect the participant’s experiences and perspectives, which makes it valuable to qualitative research. This document not only highlighted the learning that took place for the year, but it also confirmed the data and findings of the participants in this study.

4.5.3 A brief overview of findings from Journals and Parent Observation Records

The documents opened a detailed reflective world of the participants and provided deep insight into the world of NL parents and children. The documents also validated the findings of the questionnaire and the interviews with the parents and the children. The reflections and introspection of the parents provided a deeper understanding of how they are approaching and negotiating the NLA. The evidence of learning in the NLA home cannot be disputed. These documents indicate that children are learning an immense variety of things and are very successful at it with tremendous support from their parents.

4.5.4 Social Media Forums

Social media has revolutionised the way people communicate (Kayne & Lee 2017). The Internet is a hive of information and has become almost indispensable in this present day and age. From games, to networking, to information sharing, to inspiring demonstrations, to entertainment, the Internet and social media has come to dominate our lives in every way.

Therefore, it was considered pertinent to include social media forums into this research. The social media forums used in this study are a Facebook page (Unschoolers in South Africa 2019) and a blog (Ismail 2019) dedicated to the NLA in South Africa. In agreement with Adalberon and Saljo (2017:115), the discussion centres on Facebook as “an example of a social networking site that allows for sustained communication over time and for community building”. However, it must be noted that the popular term unschooling is used as the common reference to this approach in these forums. The forums are public pages and therefore the researcher was able to use the information accordingly. The group administrator informed people on the group that the page is open to the public and they need to use their discretion when posting sensitive issues relating to their children and families. This indicates a “backstage area” (Adalberon & Saljo 2017) where the Facebook page plays an important role in keeping the discussions/awareness/debates around NL for people venturing or trying to gain some understanding of NL/unschooling, who can then move onto the closed pages where more meaningful and open discussions take place. The closed Facebook unschooling pages are not public, and although they contain a

wealth of information, were not used in this research as the right of privacy needed to be upheld. The group administrator also makes it clear that the public Facebook page is dedicated to the unschooling approach, in other words, it is for people who subscribe to the understanding that unschooling refers to “the kind of parenting and educating that affords deep respect to the freedom of the thoughts and passions of the child and the trust in the innate learning instinct that we are all born with” (Unschoolers in South Africa 2019).

Using the conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon 2005), the researcher was able to gain a good overview of what is available on these forums for the NLA/unschooling community. Whether one is a newcomer, simply considering the NLA as an option, or a well-established NL family, there are materials, readings, discussions, and insights that are available for one to tap into. Posts ranging from Frequently Asked Questions about NL to discussions on the current decolonisation of education debates frequent the forum. Furthermore, there are also light-hearted exchanges among members referred to as “banter” by Adalberon and Saljo (2017). In keeping with content analysis, the researcher looked at posts that triggered discussions and comments over a two-month period and categorised them according to the themes they addressed. The identified themes are discussed in the following sections.

4.5.4.1 Theme 1: Learning Skills

Example: The Earthskills Africa Roots skills school.

This programme is run by a NL parent and it is advertised as well-suited for the unschooling, interest-led learning community. Children can learn to make fire using a traditional bow drill, participate in a tracking/nature awareness skill training programme, engage in storytelling, and learn the permaculture principles. Various other skills are also offered where children can expand their indigenous knowledge base and culture. This resonates very well with the general and popular discussions around decolonisation and the need for people to create their own relevant learning spaces and knowledge mediums. The comments that followed this post were practical in that a member queried the venue, time, costs and there was some ‘banter’ as one parent expressed his wish that he had something similar in his town.

These posts show that the NL community innovate and create new learning avenues and are happy to share their ideas and journeys. The learning is experiential. This type of course or training programme is rarely offered in mainstream school. Courses of this nature help young children develop a hands-on experience in nature and furthers their understanding of skills that were important in ancient cultures. This opens up their creativity and perhaps spurs on learning in other topics or gives the child the opportunity to go into more depth in an area that fascinates them. This is in keeping with the general idea of NL that non-traditional forms of learning provide children with the “opportunity to develop talents and skills associated with creativity, and to nurture natural inquisitiveness” (Hundzel & Hansen 2015:184). The challenge of learning within a programme of this nature is how does one deepen or widen the learning experience and go beyond what is offered. Can one use or transfer the knowledge and skills, or does it become ‘tourist’ learning where one just dips into the ideas and move on? This sprinkling of ideas or seeding is not necessarily detrimental as it can open an area of interest.

4.5.4.2 Theme 2: YouTube Videos

Example: Ken Robinson on Education Revolution, Elon Musk created his own school for his five kids, A simple trick to design your own solutions for Rubik’s Cubes:

The video on the Rubik’s cube: This was an interesting video on how one can design one’s own solutions using innovative thinking skills and movements(Wilson 2019). This is in keeping with the general thinking of the NL community that children are exposed to a variety of ways to problem solve rather than follow and memorise one method of doing things.

One cannot ascertain if this video excited members or if anyone tried it out as no discussion or comments were made. Perhaps it was done in private discussions.

4.5.4.3 Theme 3: Pertinent Documentaries

Schooling the World: The White man’s last burden; Self-taught: Life stories from self-directed learners.

Example: The documentary *Schooling the World: The White man’s last burden* (Charlesworth 2014) is a very insightful documentary that boldly states that schooling

can create massive changes to a culture within one generation. Schooling creates distance between children, parents and their cultural expectations and traditional way of life by eroding crucial skills and knowledge-building that communities nurtured for generations to ensure their survival. It further shows that the domination of Western ideology is detrimental to the survival of cultures, traditions, languages and religions of various communities. The Western dominated value system of schooling cements the view that formal school is anti-diversity because it entrenches the concept of a monoculture in its insistence of uniformity and prescription of curriculum.

This documentary is important in the South African context and it should be shown to a wider audience than the NLA community purely because of the relevance regarding the erosion of cultural and traditional values of indigenous communities. The popular decolonisation debate in South Africa highlights the need to affirm and include traditional values and practices within mainstream education but there is conflict on how it should be implemented. With the education system still Western dominated, the discussions are within the dynamics of school-based education and school-based authoritarian culture (Ryan 2017).

4.5.4.4 Theme 4: Trending Articles

- *How many well-intentioned people dehumanise children?*
- *20 ways to make children hate learning.*
- *Why unschoolers grow up to be entrepreneurs?*
- *Kids learn maths easily when they control their own learning.*

These articles are accessed from other websites/blogs and are posted on the group by various members of the group. Sometimes it creates further discussions and/or have 'like' icons posted. What is evident is that the NLA community is active and share articles that they found to be a useful read in their NLA journey. The articles that appear on the blog Growing Minds offer interesting and thought-provoking articles that challenges the status quo of mainstream education and parenting and reaffirms the tenets of the NLA or unschooling as it is referred to in the blog. Most of the articles resonate with the numerous articles available on NL websites and blogs, where mainstream values on children and learning are challenged. For example, the article *Unschooling as Social Change* emphasises the importance of re-examining power

differentials within the parenting dynamic and its impact on society (Ismail 2018). Thus, from the wisdom of NL icons like John Holt to present-day advocates like Wendy Priesntz and the variety of blogs and websites available on the NLA, these articles take the debate of freedom and autonomy for children to more than just within the realms of learning but into the idea of working towards an egalitarian society as the goal of the NLA. To what extent this sentiment is embraced by all members of the NLA community in South Africa is currently not known.

4.5.4.5 *Theme 5: Advice*

People also ask for advice on some matters that are important to their children or situation. Examples:

- “My boys (8 and 6.5) play Minecraft every other day and they are still exploring. Now they are interested in joining other kids online. I have no idea where to start and want a safe online environment for them. Any advice?”
- “If I decide to unschool, and my children want to study one day to become a lawyer, or doctor etc. How do I get them into university?”

4.5.4.6 *Theme 6: Quotations*

On the Facebook page, many little excerpts are posted to make people think about NLA and generate discussions. Here are some examples of thought-provoking captions/quotes:

- “people say that home-school kids are too sheltered from the real world. At what point did sitting behind desks all day become the real world”
- “Children must never work for our love. They must rest in it—Gordon Neufeld”
- “A child knows, and much better than anyone else, what he wants and need to know right now, what his mind is ready and hungry for” (John Holt).

4.5.4.7 *Theme 7: Support and Encouragement*

Members show their support to people in various ways by sharing resources, helping find friends, and making playdates. There are posts that affirm their choice by sharing their own examples and just urging people to continue the journey of NL.

4.5.4.8 Theme 8: Other Useful Information

- There are often notices for people to join activities or share activities, for example, “Any teenagers around Joburg interested in film making” and “Build a concert quality guitar with me”.
- Other links related to the NLA are also shared, for example, Ecoversities.org and psychologytoday.com
- Further reading: There are many links to interesting and empowering articles and reviews of good books that support and further the ideas of the NLA and peaceful parenting.
- Resource sharing: Advertisements for the buying and selling of resources and information on SDLC and their activities are shared.

4.5.5 A brief overview of findings from Social Media Forums

From browsing through blogs and websites on the NLA/unschooling it was found that the above two forums, although within the same landscape as what is on offer internationally, is in its infancy in terms of range of articles and support. For example, the *Life Learning Magazine*, which was founded in 2002 and is available online, offers 400 in-depth articles based on a wide range of topics that are pertinent to the NLA. It includes articles on learning to read, mathematics, definitions of NL (or life learning as it is called on this website), the arts, teenagers and young adults, socialisation and much more. Many of the articles are from well-known advocates and researchers of NL/life learning. On the South African blog *Growing Minds* (Ismail 2019), information and support mainly comes from the blogger with a few contributions from other people. As it is the prerogative of a blogger, most of the articles are opinions on issues that are pertinent to the South African context, for example, decolonisation, BELA Bill, and corporal punishment. Priesnitz (2019) states that parents and children know what is best for the family and that parenting and life learning is a journey where thoughts and practices evolve as people gain more confidence in respecting and trusting children. So, there is no pressure to follow a certain way nor is there any criticism or belittling of parental choices and practices. The administrator of the Facebook page, on the other hand, states firmly the values and reasons for the Facebook page and who should be involved in it (Unschoolers in South Africa 2019). Members who sometime

choose to include a specific learning programme, for example, to ‘teach’ reading in an innovative way is firmly reminded that this is not the forum to discuss any teaching/learning programmes and the member is asked to respect the space. It appears that any form of learning that resembles anything ‘school like’ is rejected. This indicates that the administrator is firm in managing the boundaries and the identity of the group as an online unschooling community.

Without doubt, these forums provide a space for people who choose to opt for NL to share, collaborate, discuss, alleviate fears, grow as NLA parents and support one another. Although the Facebook page has 3 829 members, the posting of various materials, the debates and the discussions seem to be generally done by a few people. Adalberon and Saljo (2017) aptly calls this phenomenon the onstage and backstage distinction because some people are just not comfortable being part of a big forum. Some are more comfortable with a smaller group, or in this instance some people might choose to remain anonymous. Although comfort/discomfort levels cannot only be measured by the members’ involvement, it is assumed that active participation is an indicator that the member is involved and finds the post significant (Adalberon & Saljo 2017). The discussions on the various topics posted seem fleeting as members tend to respond to posts as they come along—sometimes leaving discussions ‘in the air’. The group administrator also initiates and generates a wide range of topics pertinent to the approach while at the same time ensuring that members understand and respect the purpose of the forum. The Facebook page certainly serves the function of the ‘social glue’ for the people who choose to be part of it. It must be noted, however, that a significant number of NL families prefer not to have any online presence and some choose to have an anonymous presence on online forums.

4.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

This study saw the use of mixed methods because of the lack of biographical, demographic and qualitative data available on this phenomenon. From the evidence gained in this study, one can see that it does indeed provide more data and therefore a stronger understanding of the NLA in South Africa. The quantitative and qualitative data was presented and discussed sequentially (Hollohan & Barry 2014) with some reference to how the combining of the open-ended qualitative and the closed-ended

quantitative data both strengthened the findings and furthered the understanding of the other. It must be noted though that the larger focus of the data collection and analysis was on the qualitative aspects of the research because of the kind of data needed for a complete understanding of the NLA in South Africa. In order to understand how the two data strands converge, some examples are discussed.

Illustration 4.16 indicates that over 80% of NL families choose the 'Self-Chosen' option, followed by the 'Day-to-Day' option. These were validated by the examples and the explanations given by the participants in the interviews and the documents as the participants described a wide range of activities that they enjoy. Furthermore, most of the participants emphasised that they prefer their NLA to be home-based. Illustration 4.17 indicated that 87% of the respondents cited online support as their method of accessing information, connecting with like-minded people, arranging social events etc. This was certainly confirmed in the interviews and documents analysis that online support was key for the NLA families as their first port of reference is often Google. This was also seen in the question on resource priority for the NLA, where 66.1% and 75.8% of the respondents rated computers and Internet, respectively, as a high priority. These two data sets can easily be merged to enrich each other on the theme of Google and online support. More than 65% of the children were attending other classes/coaching, which was confirmed in the qualitative findings as both parents and children provided a list of the large variety of activities that they were engaged with.

One of the fundamentals of the NLA is that children choose what they want to focus on and through that learning happens. Over 70% of the answers to the question that asked if the child used any other programme of learning was 'no' for all three children, and this is in keeping with this fundamental; this was also confirmed in the interviews. Further confirmation of this is found in the answers to the question where respondents were asked about courses and certification: More than 70% of the children had not received any certification for a course and those that did receive certifications were mostly in activities that they enjoyed rather than anything that might be considered academic, for example, music, first aid course, and driver's licence.

However, there are also two examples where at a glance the quantitative information points to a certain conclusion, but upon probing using qualitative instruments, a deeper understanding is achieved. For example, the data on gender and employment status

of parents (Illustrations 4.2 & 4.6) showed that over 90% of the parents who chose to stay at home with the children are mothers, alluding to it being a gendered activity; but in Section 4.3.1.6 it is extensively discussed why this result needed to be probed with qualitative instruments to get a deeper understanding. Another example is seen in Illustration 4.7, where it is indicated that the majority of the NLA families in this study fall in the race category of White. However, as this may be true for the number of people who responded to the questionnaire, it must be noted that there is a significant and growing population of Black homeschoolers (this includes bi-racial and Indian population groups) in South African as discussed in Section 4.3.1.7 Van der Eems (2018) estimates that by 2027 there should be 100 000 Black families opting for home education. The quantitative strand also spurred qualitative probing in the example of the 22.6% of single-parent households: From the interviews and further resource articles the researcher was able to show that single-parent families also opted to work from home and to have flexible office and meeting hours so that they can be available for the children to facilitate the NLA.

Therefore, one can see that although the quantitative aspect of this study was small compared to the qualitative, it was significant to the study because the data it provided both supported and confirmed the qualitative findings. It also inspired the researcher to probe further into some results. In this way the researcher was able to provide an enriched understanding of this phenomenon.

4.7 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

In this chapter the core objective of how learning is taking place in the NLA home was outlined and discussed. The various instruments revealed the kind of learning and how this learning takes place in the homes of NL families. The results from the questionnaire presented the much-needed quantitative information that this study needed especially since there is no known research in this phenomenon in South Africa. It is unfortunate that the response to the questionnaire was not as widely embraced as hoped by the researcher. However, the information from the questionnaire provided a greater understanding of how learning is taking place. Furthermore, it provided insight on other important matters, for example, the role of parents, the nature of NL families, their expectations of the government, and their ideas on an ideal learning society. The interviews deepened this insight and gave the

researcher a more intimate view of the families' journeys in the NLA. The interview also lent itself to probing deeper understanding of the role of parents in the NLA journey. The data indicates that parents and children in general see themselves as partners in the learning process. The parents see the immense benefit of this approach as they see their children thriving in a space where freedom, autonomy and respect for learning is valued. It was also revealed that families are implementing the NLA in creative and fun ways and that learning is very relaxed yet varied and in-depth. Furthermore, it presented the myriad of learning interests that the children have and how they go about nurturing and encouraging those learning interests. The responses were in keeping with that of the questionnaire, and therefore, strengthened the findings of this research. Interestingly, the parents found their biggest challenge lay not in implementing the NLA but in overcoming their own deschooling issues, outside criticism and social pressure. The interviews with the children cemented the idea that learning can spurt from the most incidental to the deliberate. The joy of learning and the joy in the freedom of learning was very strong in the children's voices. This value of freedom was again expressed by the young adults in the focus group interviews. The data from the young adults' interviews agreed with the Gray and Riley (2015b) study that one of the biggest advantages of NL was that they had the time and freedom to pursue their own interests. They attribute their present success, their confidence levels, and their ability to create opportunities for themselves to the NLA. This once again reiterates that the NLA is very compatible with success (Gray & Riley 2015b).

The documents used in this study further corroborated the evidence that was collated in the questionnaire and interviews. The reflective journals and parent observation record provided further insight into how families negotiate the NLA. It gave a good understanding of the rhythm of their days and how learning and living flows. From these documents one can easily deduce that children are learning an immense variety of things and are very successful at it. The partnership between parent and child in the learning process was also demonstrated. Trawling through the social media forums proved very useful in that it enriched the study in terms of what is available on these forums and how families are engaging with them. Although caution must be exercised in using these forums as online and offline personalities can be very different and/or deceptive (Kayne & Lee 2017), the analysis showed that for the families who are

comfortable with social media forums, it is an immense support for networking, sharing information, resources and other fun activities.

This chapter is the heart of this study in that it showed clear and irrefutable evidence that learning without teaching, without set curriculums and without institutions can be rewarding, empowering and successful. Furthermore, it showed the importance of the family and that the NLA's values of freedom, autonomy and agency for both children and families are crucial for successful families, and therefore, for successful societies.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSION

It always seems impossible until it's done. N. Mandela (2001)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the researcher connects the findings of the study with the literature and the objectives of the study. A summary of the findings of the different data instruments are outlined and discussed. Recommendations following from the findings are discussed. Some of the unique challenges that confront South Africa are also included in the discussion. The researcher then provides a broad framework of a new learning system by proposing the idea of transforming society into a learning society. Suggestions for further research, limitations of this study and the conclusion close this thesis.

5.2 FINDINGS

The aim of this research was to investigate the NLA in the South African context through a critical lens. To obtain this aim the researcher identified the objectives that needed to be met so that the aim of the research is achieved. This study indicated four objectives.

5.2.1 Objective 1: To Explore the Trajectory of the NLA and Analyse the NLA Learning Process

This objective was realised by the researcher trawling through several articles and books that were available both in print and electronically. With the NLA seen as a new approach and being relegated to ‘fringe’ status for a long while, there is not a lot of academic literature that delves into the approach. Therefore, the researcher had to make concerted efforts to access academic documents, articles and books that served this topic, which resulted in the literature review spanning through decades. Valuable writings from a wide range of thinkers and leaders, from Dewey to the myriad of authors available on the Internet (Priesntz, Laricchia, Ricci), were accessed, perused, analysed and included in the study.

In order to have a complete understanding of the NLA, it was imperative that the researcher look into how learning takes place. This led to examining the theories that underpins the NLA and linking it to how learning within the NLA is approached and implemented. Thus, an analysis and discussion of the following theories were included: Constructivism, constructionism, social constructivism and anarchism. This was considered important to include because the basic understanding of how knowledge is constructed is that learning is a process that is both personal and subjective to the learner, and therefore, constructed by the learner. Both Piaget's and Von Glaserfeld's theories on learning was discussed to indicate the notion of the child directing his own learning as a valuable approach to authentic learning. The writings of Vygotsky, Papert and Montessori that support the idea that learning needs to be directed by the child and describe the immense benefits of this approach were included. Furthermore, writings and discussions on the concept of anarchy were discussed to further determine the value of autonomy and individual freedom to the learner and the process of learning. The NLA home embraces these theories and implement it because of the fundamental understanding that children have an innate desire to learn, can manage their own learning interests and flourish in a space where autonomy, agency and freedom to actualise this learning desire are respected and encouraged.

In order to place the NLA within the span of modern education and to understand some of the reasons why families are choosing to opt out of mainstream schooling, the researcher outlined the history of schooling. The critique of schooling in its present paradigm led to an understanding of why schools are no longer meeting the needs of the children and families of present society. The writings of Holt, who is seen a modern pioneer of the NLA, were included and explained, together with other leading authors like Gray and Riley. Their writings together with a wide variety of other literature were explored to merge their ideas with the philosophy of the NLA and to deepen and endorse the fundamentals of the NLA. Furthermore, a deeper explanation and understanding of what constitutes learning led to the explanation of what is NL, even bringing in some of the fundamental characteristics of learning in the hunter-gatherer society as parallels with the NLA. This comparison was done to highlight how successful learning took place in and sustained those societies over thousands of years. The incorporation of these values within the NLA is not to create the notion of

wanting to go back to a glorious past, but it is a way to demonstrate how these values are fundamental to general human wellbeing. Therefore, there is a need to creatively merge the fundamentals of freedom and autonomy into modern present society so that we can look forward to a glorious future. This also brought into focus the role of parents and how traditional parenting paradigms need to be confronted so that these values are supported and realised.

A discussion where some of the common myths around socialisation were debunked and various research data presented that indicated that natural learners are, contrary to popular opinion, very involved socially and have social skills that often surpass that of their school-going peers (Romanowski 2006). These vital social skills are developed because the primary medium of learning in the NLA home is play, and through play children experience and learn all that is needed for successful living. Moreover, NL children socialise in natural settings with people of all ages. To allay the fears of some parents, the researcher included how reading, which is considered an essential skill in modern society, can be facilitated in the NL home without any formal teaching.

In acknowledging the present debate around decolonisation in South Africa, the researcher also briefly outlined the general colonisation/decolonisation discussions and presented reasons as to why the NLA, in its very essence, is an approach that completely houses the ideas of a decolonised learning and living experience. Furthermore, the researcher outlined how and why the present schooling paradigm is anti-democracy and how democracy is lived rather than learnt in most of the NLA homes. This then leads to the discussion on learning societies and how the fundamentals of the NLA can be incorporated and implemented in broader society, including families and communities that are considered under resourced. This objective was therefore met in Chapter 2 of the study.

5.2.2 Objective 2: To Examine How the NLA Is Practised in South Africa

To obtain this objective, the researcher used various techniques to collate data that would indicate how the NLA is practised in South Africa. As part of triangulation that is characteristic of qualitative research, the researcher used interviews, documents and a questionnaire to try and collate as much information on this objective as possible. Some of the questions were repeated in the different instruments so that the

data could be corroborated. The researcher collated the evidence from the various instruments and used content and thematic analysis to examine the data.

5.2.2.1 Questionnaire

This instrument served a two-fold purpose in that it provided the researcher with important biographical and demographical data and in the qualitative strand it provided valuable data in terms of how the NLA is practised in South Africa. Through the questionnaire the researcher was also able to obtain other important information, for example, what changes did the family need to make to implement the NLA, what support structures are available, what would be an ideal situation to optimise this approach, and some of the challenges experienced in implementing this approach. Furthermore, insight on how children approach learning was also gained, for example, apart from books, parents and outside tutors, computers and the Internet are considered crucial in most of the NLA homes and children often use Google and YouTube for a variety of reasons related to their learning interests.

5.2.2.2 Interviews

This instrument was used in three separate settings: Individual interviews were conducted with one parent of a participating family and with the children of that family, and a focus group interview was conducted with NLA young adults. This technique allowed the researcher to probe the responses and get a deeper understanding of how the NLA was practised in the homes. In other words, to go beyond the responses that were presented in the questionnaire. Participants described in detail how learning takes place in their homes, what role the parents play, how they go about facilitating the learning interests and process, how they manage their resources, and their challenges. The interviews with the children provided their perspective on their learning interests but they also indicated how much they liked being at home and being able to do what interested them. It was clear that their sense of autonomy and agency was very important and valued. The focus group interviews with the young adults was in many ways the culmination of the results as they demonstrated how the NLA gave them a decided advantage in their present endeavours. They felt privileged that they were able to live a life that embraced NL. The discussion on their competence, their confidence, and their ability to negotiate their way in the ‘adult’ world was very

enriching. The three types of interviews provided evidence from the participants' perspective and corroborated the data in the interviews and the questionnaire. It provided very clear indications of how the NLA is successfully implemented in families.

5.2.2.3 Documents

The use of reflective journals and a parent observation record further revealed how learning takes place in the NLA home and once again corroborated the evidence provided in the interviews and the questionnaire. The deep reflections and descriptions of how parents lived their day-to-day NL lives with their children and the wide variety of learning interests that the children were engaged in added to the understanding of how learning takes place.

These three instruments provided the essential corroboration of evidence that is required in a study of this nature and it met the above objective.

5.2.3 Objective 3: To Explore the Current Practice of the NLA Internationally

The researcher combed through available literature on how NL is implemented in other countries to meet this objective. This was discussed in detail in the literature review in Chapter 2 and intermittently in the thesis when discussions and comparisons were made (see Sections 2.3.12 & 2.3.15). From the available literature it became evident that NL is a growing phenomenon in many countries even though not all governments are supportive of this approach.

5.2.4 Objective 4: To Inform Educational Policy on the NLA in South Africa and Explore Possibilities for a New Education System

In Chapter 2 the researcher critically explored the research and information available on how to incorporate the basic tenets of the NLA into broader society so that more families can reap the benefits that this approach offers. From this study, a policy brief (Annexure 7) was developed to inform educational policy on the NLA. The ideas of Ivan Illich who wrote the book *Deschooling Society* (2002) and others with similar ideas were discussed. Furthermore, from the questionnaires and the interviews it also became evident that many of the NLA families share a vision similar to Illich's deschooled society. These ideas also informed the recommendations that is to follow.

5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Using the mixed methods design this study obtained quantitative and qualitative data on the NLA in South Africa. The aim of the research was to investigate the NLA in South Africa using a critical lens. The data collection instruments were designed in a way that the data could be corroborated with each other and from the instruments and analysis the following were the main findings of the study.

From the theoretical underpinnings of the literature review, it was clear that the NLA is broadly embedded in the various theories/approaches (as discussed in Section 5.2.1) in that it holds the notion of autonomy and freedom of the child as a fundamental to learning and living. This proved to be the recurring and powerful theme that was evident throughout the study. From the findings of this study, it was clear that learning in the NLA was varied, vibrant, in-depth and enjoyable. The 62 respondents of the questionnaire provided both biographical and qualitative data that created some understanding of the NLA community in South Africa. From the 62 respondents the following quantitative data can be summarised and highlighted:

- The NLA families are scattered all over South Africa as eight of the nine provinces were represented. However, most of the families are based the Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces.
- Most respondents fit into the category of White, English-speaking, middle-class, heterosexual, married or in a domestic partnership, and nuclear/co-residential families with a post-matric qualification. However, the findings also point to a significant and rising number of families who are Black, bi-racial and Indian/Asian.
- The number of single-parent NL families is significant at 22.6%. This is in accordance with the 2016 General Household Survey conducted by StatsSA that indicated that 22% of families in South Africa are single-parent families (Hall & Mokomane 2018).

The quantitative and qualitative data strands converged to provide a broader and more complete understanding of the NLA in South Africa. From the responses to the qualitative aspect of the questionnaire it was evident that the families were following the NLA and understood their role as parents in this learning process. They indicated

how they facilitated the learning process and their own growth as they confronted their own entrenched ideas of how children learn and how learning should be approached. The interviews provided further details on how the NLA is implemented. Moreover, it showed the uniqueness of each family, the nuances of their experience, and their interpretations, challenges and joys in this approach. In the attempt to gain a wide response, the ten families were purposively selected so that the individual parent interviews reflected diversity. As mentioned in Chapter 3 and 4, of the ten participants there were five White mothers, one Black father, two Black mothers, one Indian mother, and one bi-racial mother. Of the five White mothers, two were single parents, one in a same-sex partnership, and two in a mixed-race partnership. From the interviews, it was evident that the parents see the immense benefits of the NLA. They expressed joy and perhaps some relief in seeing their children thriving in this environment. The parents themselves are fascinated at how much their children learn and how varied their children's learning interests are. They share the enthusiasm of learning with their children, support their ideas and go to good reasonable lengths to ensure that they are providing a varied, interesting and loving environment for their children. The children engage in a variety of activities, including coding, piano, martial arts, rock climbing and many more. From the interviews, the researcher could see that the parents were very conscious of setting the scene to create opportunities, for example, strewing (placing interesting books or resources in the house for children to see and choose to engage in), ferrying children to activities in their immediate surroundings or beyond, and accessing resources that support specific learning interests. Families often come together on various organised outings that create opportunities for further activities and socialisation. However, the parents not only ensure their children's learning development, they are also vigilant at ensuring their general wellbeing. Apart from healthy eating and physical exercise, many parents also demonstrate that the children's general wellbeing is of paramount importance. For example, one parent encouraged her child to stop with a mathematics programme that he chose to work on because she could see that he was stressed about it and she did not believe that this stress was necessary. Some parents intervene and encourage different activities to their children when they see they are spending too much time on a technology device. Parents in the NLA home are very attuned to their children and their needs.

Ten children from the ten selected families were interviewed in a very casual manner, which is appropriate when interviewing children. These interviews also revealed the variety of learning that was taking place in the homes. Children shared their current area of interests and how they went about accessing information and learning more about it, demonstrating the notion that “inherent in human nature is the propensity to be curious about one’s environment and interested in learning and developing one’s knowledge” (Niemiec & Ryan 2009:1). In homes that had more than one child, the children’s unique interests, personalities and learning styles were accepted and nurtured by the parents. This is the direct opposite of the conformity and uniformity that is generally demanded in the schooling system (Gray 2013). Some children gained certification in areas that would not be considered traditional school subjects, for example, drama, scouts, chef, and animal shelter. However, for the children who were working towards an academic certification, Cambridge and Udemy were mentioned as preferred institutions. The findings of the family interviews with their rich and detailed discussions on how learning happens in their homes met the objective of discovering how learning is happening in the NLA home, as substantiated by various authors on the subject in the literature review (e.g. Holt 1989; Gray 2013; Lewellyn 1998).

The interviews with the seven young adults cemented the notion that learning in the NLA is holistic and empowering as they described their current endeavours in the working and academic world. With curiosity and engagement touted as the essentials of intrinsic motivation (Riley 2015), these young adults shared that they were motivated to learn and to create opportunities for themselves and that they worked hard on their chosen area of interest. They indicated that they negotiate their current work and academic life with confidence, demonstrating in real terms that competence, autonomy and relatedness, which are part of the basic tenets of the NLA and the necessary conditions for intrinsic motivation, lead to successful outcomes (Riley 2015). The one participant who was diagnosed with a reading problem at school found that because of the NLA, she was able to overcome feelings of failure and create her own employment as a photographer. This echoes Gray and Riley (2015a) who state that autonomy in children’s learning leads to general psychological wellbeing, resilience and life satisfaction. The data from this instrument also met the objective of discovering how NL is being implemented in South Africa.

Three documents were used in this study: Six reflective journals, one parent observation record and social media forums were admitted into the study. These documents further revealed that the children and the families are engaged in a variety of learning interests that are totally supported by the parents. Further information on the different personalities and interests that children have and how this is nurtured by the parents were also discussed. However, the diaries also revealed other important dynamics of the day-to-day living of this approach: Parents shared some of their bonding moments that strengthened the family ties; they outlined how conflicts arise and how this is managed; they shared how they sometimes intervene in some of the decisions that their children make because they are concerned and can see that their perspective might be appreciated, and sometimes after those discussions, the children do reconsider; and they mentioned their challenges, concerns and shortcomings in the implementation of this approach. The parent observation document that recorded learning and competency moments of one child for a whole year gave greater depth in terms of the rhythm of the NLA in a home and how incidental learning can grow into bigger learning interests. It also indicated the growth and competency level that the child gained in the year merely by following the interests that gave her joy. The data in these documents validated the findings of the questionnaire, interviews and the literature review of this study and met the objective to discover how learning takes place in the NLA home. The findings on the social media forums showed that it offered a space for NL families to connect, access information, engage in discussions and debates, and network on different levels.

The following findings need to be highlighted:

- Learning and living in the NLA home are not separated. Rather, learning is seen as a natural part of living. However, for the purpose of this study parents provided information about learning activities. In the NLA home, parents trust that their children will learn what they want to learn at to their own pace and on their own timetable. However, parents play a key role in that they are attentive and supportive of children's learning interests and help when children need help. It is acknowledged that children are by nature driven by a need for competence, which comes from successful experiences and positive feelings (Riley 2015). The parents state that their key role is to support and nurture this very need. According to Riley (2015), autonomy, support and relatedness go

together, and therefore, children who have parents who are involved with them are highly motivated and self-directed.

- A strong value of autonomy and freedom, which is considered the cornerstone of the NLA, is prevalent in the homes. The data from the children and young adult interviews confirmed that the participants deeply appreciated and valued the freedom and autonomy they possess to follow their own interests and to manage their day. The theme of autonomy and freedom was evident in data from all three instruments where examples of how autonomy and freedom is lived was described. This was seen in both examples of learning activities and how conflict was managed. In other words, the notion of autonomy and freedom was practised as part of daily living. However, it must be noted that encouraging autonomy does not mean discouraging accountability (Neill 1992). This is also a key concept that is prevalent in the NLA home: With freedom comes responsibility and accountability. In the interview with the young adults, the participants also discussed how they understand that they must take complete responsibility for their lives.
- Most of the parents who took their children out of school to implement the NLA cited reasons of dissatisfaction with the schools and the general schooling ethos. From the interviews it became evident that, as seen in the study by Grunzke (2010), NL families prefer a more alternative lifestyle that incorporates attachment parenting, deep compassion, equal dignity and respect for their children; therefore, they found that the authoritarian nature of schools was a mismatch. Moreover, they strongly believed that the schools did not meet the needs of their child nor optimise their learning abilities.
- The biggest challenge that participants mentioned was their management of the process of NL. It was their own deschooling process, their doubts and outside criticism that they sometimes found difficult to deal with. The other challenges they cited were lack of support and financial strain. The children and young adults cited the frustration of having to explain to people what NL is and how they go about living their lives.
- One of the recurring themes that emerged from the data was the NLA families' reliance on technological devices and the Internet. There is such a proliferation

of easily available resources on the Internet that the families use it to support and supplement their learning activities. With the vast variety of information, the websites, and online support groups, technology has certainly made information and connections available to the masses and the families of NL are taking full advantage of this.

- As with the results of the research done by Ray (2017) and Romanowski (2006), the NLA families enjoy a wide range of social activities both in terms of the activities they participate in and as part of daily living. Furthermore, from the questionnaires and the interviews, many of the participants indicated that they liaise with people across cultures and would like more opportunities to widen their social circles. They tend to expose their children to the cultures and traditions of different communities, indicating that they embrace and respect the diversity around them.

Further issues of importance:

- Although the results show that the majority of NL families fall in the category of White, there is a significant number of Black families who are opting for home education, as seen in the Facebook page (only for Black homeschoolers) that has 994 members. This number rose an average of one new member per day in the last two weeks of the completion of this thesis. This figure is important because within this number there is a significant estimated 12% of families who are following the NLA (Riley 2018).
- Data also shows that a large percentage of parents who opt to stay at home with their children are mothers, categorising it as a gendered activity. However, on closer investigation the research revealed that the reasons for this choice are not gendered. Most of the NLA families embrace the values of egalitarianism and therefore the parent being at home is highly valued as families make decisions that work best for the family situation. For example, from the ten parents who were interviewed, the mothers who opted to stay at home cited earning capacity, flexible working hours and commitment to the NLA as the reason for their decision. The one father who opted to stay at home cited that their family's decision rested on his flexible working hours. Therefore, the data from this research shows that traditional gender paradigms did not feature

as the reason for this choice. Furthermore, the data indicates that many families choose to work from home, which means that both parents are mainly home-based.

- From the above, it is evident that the NLA as a preferred learning and living approach is benefitting the children of these families. The children are enjoying their learning interests. Their autonomy and freedom impact on their intrinsic motivation and they create opportunities for their own learning and development. The parents play a pivotal role in creating an environment that is conducive to a loving, democratic and respectful life. The families' emphasis on the values of egalitarianism further provides the children with the opportunity to live the values of freedom, respect, autonomy, and freedom and to know that they are also accountable for their actions within the social dynamics of the family and broader society. The question then begs: Can this approach be extended to the general society?

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the data it became very clear that parents play a crucial role in children's learning and development. The parent has a vested interest in their children and coupled with deep love, compassion and the need to see the children succeed, the parents give them a lot of time and attention and provide the necessary resources. However, the data from this study also pointed to mostly a nuclear middle-class family. Therefore, implementing this approach in South Africa will be a challenge as the notion of families is diverse. According to Hall and Mokomane (2018), although international research consistently show that functional families offer the most natural environment for children's optimal growth, development, protection, support and socialisation, the concept of family may vary. Research in South Africa debunks the notion of a nuclear family being the hegemonic model because South African society houses a variety of other family structures (Rabe & Naidoo 2015). The first destruction of family life in South Africa came with the abhorrent migrant labour system that underpinned the policies of the apartheid system. This system created a legacy of socio-economic damage in terms of impoverishment of the rural hinterlands and deeply fracturing families and communities (Bank 2017). With men working on the mines and mothers

sometimes leaving their children with other family/community members to work in urban areas for financial sustainability, family structures were changed.

However, in the recent decades other factors have also changed the way families are defined. Non-marital childbearing and the HIV epidemic has resulted in many grandparents (12%) becoming primary caregivers of children (Hall & Mokomane 2018) and the rise of child-headed households. Furthermore, 54% of families are female-headed, and 30% of the poorest 20% have no co-resident parent, meaning they live with kin, and 66% of African children live in extended family households (Hall & Mokomane 2018). These numbers confirm the variety of family structures in South Africa that must be taken into consideration when looking at how the NLA can be implemented.

To implement the NLA in broader South African society, families in their diverse structures need to be supported so that they can support their children. First on the agenda should be a programme to support and empower families and communities so that they have the resources to provide the fundamental base for the children. Governments will need to understand that to provide a ‘better life for all’, families are the first unit of society that needs support and intervention. The wellbeing of the adults will ensure the wellbeing of the children. Therefore, programmes to support families need to be identified and people who can contribute and help families reach their potential need to be brought to work with the communities. In other words, the traditional social worker together with village elders, mentors etc. need to play a more definite role in addressing issues of parenting within a whole community. A study conducted in Pune, India, (De Wit et al 2017) recognised that the rapid development parents were experiencing caused high levels of stress and anxiety that impacted on their relationship with their children, and this led to the implementation of a creative stress relief programme for parents, where parents were encouraged to foster autonomy in children in a stress-free environment. Parents participated in sessions that involved creativity and play, self-awareness and bonding, and communication (De Wit et al 2017). By supporting parents and connecting them to new parenting paradigms, the bond and communication between parents and children was greatly improved. Davies (2019:2) states that human evolution has always depended on communities collaborating with each other because “collaborative learning is a powerful way of creating new knowledge” and through sharing, new and better

solutions emerge; and therefore, there must be trust that families and communities will find solutions that meet their needs with the help of government resources. A study conducted by Burton & Slater (2019) found that more than 15% of participants highlighted the importance of the active involvement of extended family in children's lives as they taught them life skills across multiple generations. Thus, the 66% of extended family structure in South Africa may not be an impediment to NL.

The next recommendation that comes from this study is the equal provision of resources to communities. The concept of what constitutes a resource can be a debatable issue as it is often seen from a middle-class perspective. There are a variety of resources available that might not necessarily fall into what mainstream thinking deems a resource. For example, the Amazon jungle is an entire library in the forest that is accessed for learning and living. Also, there is a difference between having resources and being resourceful. However, from the research, it was evident that NL parents make reasonable efforts to ensure that their homes are well-resourced (within their definition) with a variety of materials and that their children are involved in a variety of activities that enrich their lives in terms of competence and confidence. In Johannesburg, there are libraries, museums, art galleries and other facilities that families can access. In contrast, most schools in Limpopo, as an example, do not even have a functioning library (UNESCO 2012). This gross disparity in resources was inherited by the new government from the apartheid system. There has been countless writings, discussions, articles and personal experiences regarding the huge impact of apartheid on South African society, the details of which will not be addressed here; suffice to state that the impact of apartheid still reverberates in all aspects of South African society and it needs to be taken into consideration when looking at recommendations of how the NLA can be implemented in broader South African society.

The question of how to ensure freedom and autonomy in children's learning needs wide discussions. People often baulk at the idea that children can be free to choose their own learning interests and to manage their learning processes without constant adult intervention and supervision. Furthermore, it is difficult for society to imagine that learning can happen without teaching. Yet, the NLA indicates that for true and joyful learning to take place, there must be no compulsion because authentic learning can only happen with autonomy and freedom. The recommendation for this would be to

conduct more research that would involve larger numbers of children to see if the same results can be found. Furthermore, people in the education system need to read through the variety of literature available on this aspect of the NLA and engage in discussions in order to change the current thinking, teaching and learning systems to incorporate these values.

Most of the parents in this study who took their children out of schools cited a deep dissatisfaction with the schooling system. It is important to note that the present education system in South Africa could be contributing to underdevelopment rather than ensuring a 'better life for all'. Spaull (2012) provides the following information that indicate the stark disparities and realities that exist in education that impedes development:

- In the 2010/2011 period, 20% of the budget and 6% of the gross domestic product made education expenditure the largest single line item on the budget.
- South Africa spends 18 times more per child than Uganda and yet the literacy level at Grade six level is the same.
- Only 38% of the children who entered Grade 2 in 2001 passed their matric in 2011.
- At grade 6, 25% of pupils were considered functionally illiterate and 39% were classified functionally innumerate.
- 75% of schools can be considered dysfunctional.

These figures were included to highlight that despite the increase in resources, the state of education in South Africa continues to perpetuate the disparities that exists in society and to produce dismal academic results. Most children in South Africa are receiving poor education in poor learning environments. At the same time the figures show that more resources are not the answer to the myriad of problems that needs to be addressed. The children in private schooling and better resourced schools are also not shielded from the negative experiences of the schooling system as their daily lives are inundated with competition and hyper-individualism and pressure to excel academically, they are socially distant from their peers, and they experience different levels of anxiety and stress (De Wit & Regeer 2017).

Therefore, it becomes imperative for South Africa that a new educational framework be considered to take South African out of the doldrums of education. The aim should be the liberation of human creative potential and the mobilisation of human resources to solve social, political, economic, and material problems (Ramroop 2004).

It is the researcher's contention that the NLA can be adopted by the broader South African society. In an ideal NL society, the following will be visible:

- In every community in South Africa, there will be a vibrant learning ethos.
- Communities will have well-resourced learning centres and other resources that cater for the needs of the community. These centres will be open and accessible to all who want to learn.
- Learning activities and programmes will be conducted by learnt and skilled people who might be from the community or might be a visiting 'expert'.
- There will be apprenticeship programmes for all people who want to learn or re-skill.
- There will be open and safe areas for children to play.
- There will be coaches and community volunteers who manage a variety of activities like sports, arts, crafts and music.
- There will be a variety of higher learning institutions and programmes available.
- People will have access to technology and to the Internet so that they can access information, check out tutorials, network and connect with people in the rest of the world.
- There will be no compulsion, no punishments for attendance to any learning programme. People will be free to choose their learning interest and pursue it according to their interest and ability.
- Tutors and other more skilled people will be available to help the people when they need help and will also run courses on a variety of topics that people can access and enjoy.
- Elders will be valued in the community and share their indigenous knowledge and skills. They will be part of the learning environment.

- The community will be environmentally and ecologically aware, and sound conservation practices will be part of their daily lives.
- People of all ages will be enjoying the variety of learning opportunities that is available in a natural and seamless way.
- People will be connected, share, collaborate and live their full potential both within their own communities and with the rest of the world via their technological devices and the Internet.

In order to obtain the above scenario, there needs to be systemic shift within the concept of learning and living. Section 2.3.14 discussed in depth and detail the concept of learning societies and its implementation in South Africa, thereby addressing the objective ‘To inform educational policy on the NLA in South Africa and explore possibilities for a new education system’. Looking at the five elements of a social change process (Hartwell 2016), the three characteristics of a community of practice, and the ideas of Illich (2002), one can see the possibilities of a new system of education that incorporates the NLA unfolding in South Africa.

5.4.1 A Learning Society: A New Framework for Education in South Africa

The notion of a learning society was first proposed by Robert Hutchins in 1968 who advocated a society where continuous learning, active citizenship and social well-being are primary aims (Miller 2001). Illich in his book *Deschooling Society* (2002) made further proposals on how society can transform learning. In this study, the idea for a new framework for education in South Africa is underpinned by the five elements of a social change process (Hartwell 2016), the three characteristics of a community of practice (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner 2015) and the ideas of Illich (2002), as discussed in Section 2.3.14.1. To simplify the researcher’s ideas of how a learning society can replace the present education system, the process is divided into stages.

5.4.1.1 Stage 1

This is the understanding phase where the general society, governments, communities and individuals need to agree that the present education system is not working. Humility and honesty is key in this stage. Thereafter, robust and deep discussions need to take place nationally, in all forums, and in all communities where

ideas on what skills are needed for people to contribute for a thriving and flourishing society to exist. It is imperative that in this stage the perspectives of the various actors, stakeholders and beneficiaries are heard and honoured, fulfilling one of Illich's purposes of a good educational system, which is to "furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known" (Illich 2002:75). However, caution must hold that political parties do not hijack these processes for their own political gain. The inclusion of indigenous knowledge becomes authentic as elders play a pivotal role in the process. Various communities of practice can be set up in the different groups of the community so that people who have a common purpose can begin to collaborate, share, have dialogues and learn from each other. Various community tasks, for example, community gardens or clean-up campaigns, can be set up for concrete sharing of skills. The debates and discussions must address the present disconnect and detachment between schooling and living and what is needed culturally, environmentally and economically in the different communities to enhance their lives. Apart from identifying the various skills needed, the communities also need to develop ideas that will strengthen the bonds of caring and mutual wellbeing rather than the competition and hyper-individualism of the present education system. Communities' understanding of the basic tenets of the NLA is crucial, and discussions about society moving towards a more egalitarian ethos is a common occurrence. The dialogue around these ideas will be an ongoing process as people reflect and add to their ideas as they gain a deeper understanding of the process. These ideas will feed into the next stage.

5.4.1.2 Stage 2

In this stage, armed with the ideas of Stage 1, all consultations to determine the collective vision should be done from a position of caring and not as a government technocrat. For example, resource audits need to be done and creative use of resources need to be considered. With all committed to the vision of creating a new way of operating, the transformation of relationships and institutions begin, guided by the government and the community members. In this stage, communities would have identified the aspects of their indigenous knowledge systems that they want to inculcate and look at how this system can be enmeshed with other learning possibilities and how to straddle this knowledge with modern day living and ideas.

Various communities of practice is set up and robust discussions about their contributions towards the vision of a learning society is commonplace. In other words, members of this shared domain will consolidate their competence and learn from each other. People offer their services for the ‘skill exchange’ and the peer matching as suggested by Illich (2002), which will become the cornerstone of learning in the community. Thus, in this stage, the dialogues towards a more collective vision become stronger and more concrete, fulfilling one of Illich’s purposes of a good educational system, which is to “empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them” (Illich 2002:75).

5.4.1.3 Stage 3

Here communities and national representatives begin to implement the transformation of institutions and communities to harness the fundamentals of the NLA and the values and ideas that the communities generated in Stages 1 and 2. The collective creativity in being able to transform the environment to encourage learning will again lead to fresh perspectives and innovative thinking (Davies 2019). For example, schools are turned into community centres, which become thriving learning centres that offer a variety of learning programmes and activities that all members of the community can access and engage in, endorsing the idea of lifelong learning. As Illich (2002) states, to deschool society two things must be addressed: The general physical environment must be made accessible and the physical learning resources must become generally available for self-directed learning. Governments should therefore not only provide learning opportunities until the end of the school years of the child. Rather the government needs to expand its role in supporting learning for all its citizens. A point to illustrate this need comes from the research report compiled by Hall (2018): As mentioned in 4.3.1.8., in 2017 there were 3.3 million young people, termed NEETs, between the ages of 15 and 24 years who were not employed and not in education or training institutions. Very little is known about this group and what they do with their time. This group of young people are vulnerable, and the concern is that this scenario perpetuates poverty and potential social issues that are generally related to ‘idle youth’. The number is increasing and there is no progress towards addressing this issue (Hall 2018). However, a learning society as discussed in this study would be able to eradicate this phenomenon as people of all ages will be able to access learning

opportunities at any point in their lives as entrance and exit points will be non-existent. It must also be pointed out that this group of young adults are engaging in self-directed learning because they are fending for themselves as they negotiate their day-to-day life, finding ways to forge a life. Therefore, there are 3.3 million young adults who may be implementing the NLA without the security and aplomb that families in this study enjoy.

Communities need to identify the people within the community who have expertise in areas of interest and develop plans on how this knowledge and skills can be shared with the others. Members of the community of practice have also developed their repertoire of knowledge and skills and are ready to share their expertise with the rest of the community. This is a similar idea of 'learning webs' that Illich (2002) refers to in his book *Deschooling Society*. The government is engaged in terms of what resources and facilities they can provide to assist the learning societies. Each community should have a database on all the identified skills, the people who can provide those skills within the community, and how to access skills that are not available in the community. The concept of apprenticeships becomes part of the learning society, making it accessible to all so that people can be exposed to their area of interest and work and earn at the same time.

5.4.1.4 Stage 4

The communities are empowered and supportive of all the transformations and learning that is taking place. The NLA is enmeshed with community life. Learning and living is seamless. A variety of learning networks are established and the healthy exchange and sharing of skills are ubiquitous. The community members have access to all available resources to help them self-direct their own learning and development, thereby fulfilling yet another purpose of a good educational system, which is to "provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives" (Illich 2002:75). Together with the government, the following, among others, are provided: Multilevel resources and a multitude of learning providers, spaces and organisations. Individuals become learners and teachers to others, and resource centres are available to all. All formal institutions are multipurpose and available to all. At this stage, members of the various community of practice groups become skilled practitioners and through sharing and interactions, they develop a shared repertoire

for their practice, which they share with others. In this way the communities now have a wide range of resources, people and activities to nurture their learning society.

5.4.1.5 Stage 5

The community has transformed, and the notion of the learning society is cemented. The NLA is now a normal practice and therefore the learning is authentic, decolonised and there is an easy straddle between traditional, indigenous and modernity. Authority is devolved and the belief that power grows through building trusting relationships is central to the process of continual transformation of learning systems (Hartwell 2016). There is a constant need to reflect and bring in new ideas and new skills as life and living continues as systemic thinking is an integral part of the community. Systemic thinking emphasises patterns, trends and feedback loops, and it focusses on understanding the interactions between human and ecological systems. Davies (2019:15) states that without systemic thinking the community will “continue to apply ineffective band aid solutions that do little to resolve underlying problems”.

To continue with their local initiatives and in pursuit of the vision of a transformed learning society, the community need to be supported financially by the government because the government still has a responsibility to support equity and use public resources towards the wellbeing of all its citizens, especially to alleviate poverty. The government is no longer the sole providers and controllers of education, but together with the economic sector, are partners to the communities in meeting their needs and therefore building society.

This is a broad and brief outline of a possible framework of how a learning system can be changed to incorporate the ideals of the NLA and a learning society. The ‘devil will be in the details’, which cannot be outlined here and needs further research.

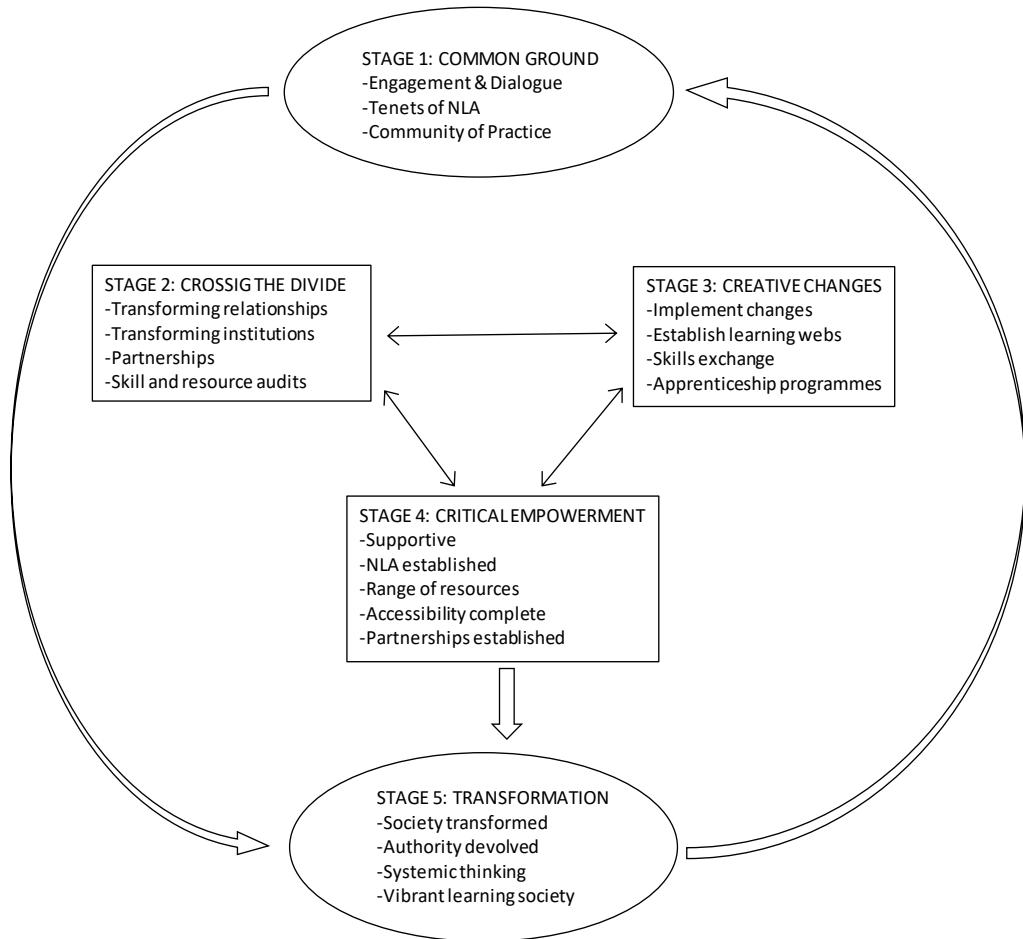


Illustration 5.1 A Diagrammatic Understanding of the Above Stages

The above Illustration indicates that Stage 1 is a crucial stage where establishing common ground is fundamental for the whole process. This process should be in-depth and wide reaching to gain the full consensus required for a programme of this nature. Understanding would be the key outcome here. Stages 2 and 3 are crucial for getting things off the ground and into the implementation phase. These two stages can feed into one another and also feed into Stage 4 when processes, programmes and communities of practice are established and functioning. Stage 4 indicates that all plans made in the previous stages are being realised in the critical empowerment stage, meaning that the community is constantly being critical of what is on offer and the process so that fine tuning and changes can be made accordingly. In Stage 5, the society has been transformed into a vibrant learning society embracing the tenets of NL and egalitarianism. However, these stages feed into each other as there is a continual need to reflect, to bring in new ideas, and to strengthen and renew the vision.

A further recommendation that needs to be included is that the government needs to see the home-education community as allies in creating a learning society. It is the contention of the researcher, supported by Suissa, Holt, Gray, and Kirschner, that to create a society that embraces the values of love, compassion, respect, diversity etc., one needs to confront how education and its structures are impeding the development of people to reach their full potential. This study, supported by literature, has shown that home-educated children, who have a caring, attentive and present adult in their lives, perform far better than their school-going peers. Therefore, constantly vilifying the families and dismissing these results as unimportant because it comes predominantly from a privileged group is ignoring great potential for future education. It is Swidler's (2010) contention that the NL movement is a close ally to progressive public schooling ideas because of its philosophy of equality, of valuing common, free and democratic spaces and of advocating open access to all, as opposed to the private education ethos of other home-education alternatives. These commonalities between NL and the vision for most societies holds collaborative potential to spur educational change. Therefore, instead of making laws to get this group of people to conform to the government's idea of education, the government should be engaging with this group to find ways to collaborate, understand and share, so that new ideas that will benefit the whole of South Africa can emerge. Arons (1983:88) asks this pertinent question:

Why is it that a million children who are pushouts or dropouts amount to business as usual in the public schools, while one family educating a child at home becomes a major threat to universal public education and the survival of democracy?

In the same vein, the urgency of the BELA Bill regarding home education within the context of the existence of the 3.3 million NEETs (Hall 2018) becomes rather preposterous! Therefore, taking in consideration the socio-economic challenges of the country, all changes to this learning approach will come with great challenges too. It would be wise for the government to support families who can already afford to provide the necessary resources for their children's education by creating an open environment with healthy partnerships and proactive exchange of ideas. This also then frees the government to place a larger focus on the children and families who are considered 'vulnerable' or 'at risk', the poor, and the NEETs, so that concerted efforts

to take them out this category would improve their lives and therefore the South African society.

5.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

- As this is the first known comprehensive research into the NLA phenomenon in South Africa, the study highlighted many opportunities for further research into the NLA. Perhaps the most important is the need for research that would include a wider demographic of the South African population.
- Although the notion of the stay-at-home parent in NLA families seen as a gendered activity was in some ways challenged by the data in this study, it remains an area for further research to understand the various family dynamics and to deliberate the impact of this decision on general society.
- The concept of egalitarianism and parental paradigms within the NLA population would make interesting future research. It would deepen the understanding of NL in terms of freedom and autonomy for children in all aspects of living.
- The impact of the NLA on family bonding and the creation of strong family ties that span the lives of the family members would also provide valuable evidence on the long-term impact of this approach.
- Although research on the young adults was included here, it would be important to conduct further research on this cohort of NL as it will also provide evidence on the long-term impact of the NLA. Thus it is recommended that the 7 young adults of this study be followed for the next five years as part of a longitudinal study.
- Further research on NL as a tool for decolonisation would feed into the current debates on decolonisation.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though the researcher obtained more than the anticipated number of questionnaires, the sample was still small and the population not diverse enough. Furthermore, random sampling could not be used. Any future research should attempt to take cognisance of this limitation. It was not easy to track NL families, and some

were not prepared to commit to participating in the research. However, this is not an unusual experience as most NL families are protective over their privacy, mainly because of their fear of repercussions from educational authorities. Researchers like Gray and Riley (2015b) and others have encountered similar limitations in their studies of NL or unschooling. Perhaps as Gray and Riley (2015b) caution, the small sample size and the sampling technique can mean that the findings of this study become more like hypotheses than conclusions.

Although the number of homeschooled children who do not fall into the race category of White, are rapidly increasing, it was not possible to increase the participation numbers for this research. For a broader understanding of NL in South Africa, this cohort of participants need to be included.

With the participants spread over eight of the nine provinces, it made sense to use available technology to obtain data. However, this also created a limitation as the researcher was not physically present for some of the interviews. Although the participants, especially the children, were comfortable with the use of technology, the researcher was not able to get the full benefit of a face-to-face interaction. Therefore, further research efforts can include face-to-face ethnographic techniques to re-examine the second objective, this is, the data regarding gender, patriarchy, sex education, religion and the imposition of adult structure on the NLA.

As with most studies, time became a limiting factor, especially since the researcher wanted to ensure that there was no significant time span between the data collection/analysis and the final thesis. Time was also a limiting factor with the participants. Some were happy to participate in the study but because of the busyness of their lives, no longer had time to participate, which resulted in scant information from some of the participants.

With the NLA still in its infancy regarding research, and therefore, research articles, obtaining relevant articles for the research posed some difficulty. However, as experienced by Gray and Riley (2015), this study, with all the limitations, is the first known research study to explore NL in South Africa. It is the researcher's contention that this study, with its identified limitations, is a ground-breaking initiative as it takes the approach of NL out of the homes of the practitioners and into the broader educational forums to debate and discuss, so that it contributes to the debate on the

current education paradigm. Therefore, it adds to the body of knowledge on education in general by creating knowledge around the concept of alternative education, particularly the NLA. This research also adds the South African voice and experience to the international body of knowledge on the NLA.

5.7 RESEARCHER'S REFLECTIONS

This study began when looking into the NLA phenomenon revealed that most of the information and research was dominated by the US and the United Kingdom, with a smattering of information from a few other mainly Western countries. There was no research that provided the South African perspective, even though it was known to the researcher that a significant number of families were following this approach. The need to have the South African voice with its unique NL experience became imperative. The journey into the world of NL was a rich and rewarding experience. Using the snowball sampling technique was most valuable as the researcher discovered many more people beyond the small familiar group, in various parts of the country, who were happily and authentically following the NLA. Although the researcher did experience a small degree of negativity, distrust, and perhaps, evidence of hyper-individualism that made a few families dismiss a study of this nature, most parents were happy that research in the NLA was finally taking place in South Africa. Through the various brainstorming sessions and the many interesting conversations, this research took its shape and the results exposed the incredible learning potential of NL and how it is being implemented in the South African context. In delving deeper into possible broader implications of the NLA in South Africa, the literature on the various family structures, the NEETs and the other socio-economic factors that needed to be included was quite staggering and made an impact on the researcher and on the study itself.

5.8 CONCLUSION

From the literature review to the data provided by the participants, it was made abundantly clear that NL is a powerful approach not just for learning but for the authentic transformation of societies. Concerns that education is commodified (Illich 2002) and promotes mass consumerism; issues around the health of the planet; erosion of languages and cultures; building family and community bonds across

multiple generations; alleviating poverty; empowering citizens; and creating a society based on the values of egalitarianism can all be addressed with the implementation of the NLA in a learning society. However, in a society so steeped in institutional learning it might be difficult to imagine how life can be in a world that is free of compulsory schooling (Falbel 2008). According to Otieno-Hongo and Ochien'g (2001:36), institutions ensure collective amnesia in that people 'forget that the current 'reality' is man-made and that it can potentially be 'un-made''. Furthermore, it is difficult for society to imagine that learning can happen without compulsion and without teaching interventions. Yet, the NLA indicates that for true and joyful learning to take place, there must be no compulsion because authentic learning can only happen within an ethos of autonomy and freedom. According to Smith (2012:xiii), it is not enough to hope or desire change because "systemic change requires capability, leadership, support, time, courage, reflexivity, determination, and compassion. It is hard work and the outcome often seems a distant vision". However, for the wellbeing of the people and the planet it is imperative that society work towards closing the distance to this vision as soon as possible. This foundation of values as experienced in the NLA homes will in turn become the bedrock values of a broader happy society. The small but growing cohort of people worldwide and in South Africa implementing the NLA, embracing the notions of freedom, autonomy, equality, diversity and respect for all, are paving the way towards a vibrant learning and happy society.

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ANNEXURE 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR 1 PARENT FROM EACH FAMILY

1. How long have you and your family been practising NL?
2. How did the family arrive at the decision?
3. Why did you choose this approach?
4. What are some of the difficulties you experience because of this choice?
5. Describe your interpretation of NL and how you go about implementing it in your home.
6. What would you say is your key role as a parent in this approach?
7. How would you describe the learning that is taking place in your home?
8. What are your challenges?
9. Do you liaise with other families who are practising NL?
10. If you could change two things about your present situation what would they be?
11. Describe your ideal learning community.

ANNEXURE 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE CHILDREN

1. Have you ever been in school or had a ‘schooling’ experience?
2. How long have you been doing the NL?
3. What do you like about NL?
4. What do you not like about NL?
5. What is your current area of interest?
6. When you are interested in something how do you go about learning more about it?
7. Describe your ideal learning community.

ANNEXURE 3: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. For how long have you followed NL?
2. What are you currently engaged in?
3. In what ways has the NL experience worked for you?
4. What are the current challenges that you are experiencing? How much of this challenge do you attribute to NL?
5. How do you evaluate your own confidence level in your life presently? How much of this can you attribute to NL?
6. How open or easy is it for you to find or create opportunities in the area of your interest?
7. When you are confronted with something 'new' how do you go about learning it?
8. What would you consider an ideal situation for a person like you?
9. If you had to do two things differently regarding NL what would they be?
10. What does your ideal learning society look like?
11. Would you recommend NL to others and why?

ANNEXURE 4: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW NATURAL LEARNERS

Dear Natural Learners.

Re: Request for permission to collect research data from parent and children who are currently following the Natural Learning Approach (Unschooling).

I am a PhD student presently enrolled at University of Limpopo and I am conducting research in fulfilment of this degree.

The topic of my study is “Natural Learning in the South African context: a critical analysis”. As a researcher, I have realised that there is no known in-depth study on Natural Learning in South Africa and therefore would like to gather information on how natural learning is practised in South Africa. Apart from a questionnaire, I believe that interviewing you and your child/children will be of great significance for this study. The little conversation with your children can take place in your presence and at a time that is convenient for you and your child/children. I also further request you to keep a written record—a diary of your family’s learning process. You can start this process as soon as you can. However, for data purposes I require a minimum of 4 weeks of your record. The last day of entry should be 30 January 2019. I will also need your permission to have access to this diary.

You may want to take note of the following guidelines for the diary:

- The conversations the child/children are having and how they are thinking and reasoning on the subject.
- How do the child/children manage and resolve any conflicts that arise in their day?
- Get a good overview of how the different activities are spread in the day and how the day flows with one activity to the next.
- Note the various learning that is taking place. How aware/unaware are the children of their learning process?
- What role are you or any other adult playing in this process.

- Note down your reflections and insights of the day.

Remember this diary is your reflection and notes of the learning process. It should be as unobtrusive to the child/children as possible.

Participation is voluntary, data will be gathered anonymously, and strict confidentiality will be adhered to. Please consider this letter as a formal request for permission to conduct the above-mentioned interviews with you and your child/children, to obtain access to your 4-week written record of the learning process, and to obtain your completed questionnaire. Through your participation I hope to gain the necessary data for my research to provide a rich and meaningful understanding of Natural Learning in South Africa.

Should you have any further queries please contact me.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to your reply.

Yours faithfully

Renuka Ramroop

I _____ have read and understood the requirements of my participation in this research. I give full permission to the researcher Renuka Ramroop to:

- interview me and record the interview
- to interview my children and to record the interview
- use the data collated in the research where appropriate

Signed _____ at _____ on _____ the
____ November 2018.

ANNEXURE 5: PERMISSION: QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Parent

RE: Request for permission to use data as presented in the completed questionnaire towards the collation of quantitative and qualitative data on the Natural Learning Approach (unschooling) in South Africa.

I am a PhD student presently enrolled at the University of Limpopo, South Africa and I am conducting research in the fulfilment of this degree.

The topic of my study is “Natural Learning in the South African context: A critical analysis”. As a researcher, I would like to use the information from your completed questionnaire to collate raw data on Natural Learning in South Africa. At present there is no known research on natural learning or unschooling in South Africa. Therefore, through your participation I hope to gain the necessary data for my research to provide a rich and meaningful understanding of Natural Learning in South Africa.

Participation is voluntary, data will be gathered anonymously and will remain strictly confidential. Please consider this a formal request for permission to have access to the questionnaire and to use the necessary information in my research.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your completed questionnaire.

Yours faithfully

Renuka Ramroop

kaulha4@gmail.com

ANNEXURE 6: NATURAL LEARNING/UNSCHOOLING: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Dear Participant

RE: Request for permission to use the research data from the focus group discussions on natural learning (commonly referred as ‘unschooling’) in South Africa (SA).

I am a PhD student currently enrolled at the University of Limpopo and I am conducting research in fulfilment of this degree. I have received full ethical clearance from the University’s Research Ethics Committee. Please see attached letter from the University.

The topic of my study is “Natural Learning in the South African context: A critical analysis”. As both a fellow natural learning parent and researcher I have realised that there is no known in-depth study on Natural Learning in SA. Therefore, I would like to use the information from our focus group interviews to collate the necessary important data on the Natural Learning Approach. Through your participation I hope to provide a rich and meaningful understanding of Natural Learning in SA.

Please note that your participation is voluntary and questions are optional. Data will be collated anonymously and will remain strictly confidential. Please consider this a formal request for permission to have access to the questionnaire and to use the data in my research.

Please reply to this email with the following or similar:

“I _____ declare that I have read the above and fully understand the role of my participation in this study. I give my full permission to the researcher to record and use the information I provide in the focus group discussions towards her research.”

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to our discussion.

ANNEXURE 7: POLICY BRIEF

SUMMARY

In the ever-changing nature of present society, all citizens of South Africa need to have access to learning and skills development programmes so that the notion of lifelong learning is inculcated in the South African Society. With the present general dissatisfaction of education in South Africa and the inability of the Department of Education to meet the diverse needs of the learners, it becomes imperative that a different system of education be considered.

Context of creating Learning Society

The inability of the present education system to address the learning and diversity needs of the children, spurred the investigation into a new education system. The following statistics also added to the investigation:

- 75% of schools in South Africa are considered dysfunctional(Spaull 2012).
- 25% of Grade six learners are functionally illiterate (Spaull 2012).
- 3.3 million young adults who are not employed, in education or in training and the high unemployment rate (Hall 2018).

The above outlines, amongst others, the current state of the education system in South Africa. It is believed that rather than education being the ticket for a better life, it is contributing to under-development. Through the present schooling system of poor education in poor learning environments and dismal academic results, South Africa continues to perpetuate the disparities that exists.

Recommendations

Research shows that all children have an innate desire to learn and develop themselves (Gray 2013, Holt 1989). Therefore, it is believed all citizens should have the freedom and autonomy to create their own learning and growth trajectory to realise their own goals. However, it is the task of the government to provide resources for communities that will enable people to realise their goals. The following recommendations can be highlighted:

- Research shows that functional families offer the most natural environment for children's optimal growth, development, protection, support and socialisation

(Hall & Mokomane 2018; Visser 2001). Therefore, families need to be supported with resources and programmes that empowers them to manage their own lives.

- The notion of Community Learning Centres becoming the hub of learning activities in all communities for all people in South Africa will be a dynamic learning model. These centres are to be open and available to all who want to learn. Various activities and learning programmes are offered by the community members and by other ‘experts’. This is a partnership between the community and the government. The task of the government is towards the equal provision of resources to all communities.
- With the vast variety of information, the websites, and online support groups, technology has certainly made information and connections available to the masses and communities need to take full advantage of this resource. Access to technology and internet needs to be provided in partnership with government and communities.

Conclusion

This brief proposes the concept of a learning society as a new approach to education so that people are empowered to manage their own learning growth (Illich 2002; Visser 2001). It will ensure that knowledge and learning is authentic, intrinsically motivated, decolonised, embedded in indigenous knowledge and skills and transformational. In this way, all citizens, regardless of age, will have access to learning opportunities throughout their lives to both fulfil their contribution to the development of the South African society and their own personal growth and well-being. Happy individuals make happy families who make happy societies.

**ANNEXURE 8: GOOGLE FORM QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO PARTICIPANTS VIA
EMAIL**

Please complete the following questions:

1. PARENT 1

1.1. PROVINCE

- Gauteng
- Limpopo
- Western Cape
- Eastern Cape
- KwaZulu-Natal
- Mpumalanga
- Free State
- North West
- Northern Cape

1.2. NAME (optional)

1.3. GENDER

- Female
- Male
- Other (explain)

1.4. AGE

- 18-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60-64
- 65-69

1.5. HIGHEST QUALIFICATION

- No schooling completed
- Matric
- Diploma
- Trade/Technical/Vocational Training
- Bachelor's Degree
- Honour's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree

1.6. MARITAL STATUS

- Single (never married)
- Married or in a Domestic Partnership

Widowed
Divorced
Separated

1.7. EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Employed full time (outside the home)
Employed part-time (outside the home)
Work from home
Self-employed
Unemployed

1.8.1 RACE

Black
Bi-racial
White
Indian

1.8.2. Any additional comments regarding question 1.8.1.

1.9.1. HOME LANGUAGE

English
Afrikaans
Zulu
Xhosa
Southern Sotho
Northern Sotho
Tswana
Venda
Tsonga
Swati
Ndebele
Other

1.9.2. If necessary, please specify the home language other than the 11 mentioned in 1.9.1.

2. PARENT 2

2.1. PROVINCE

Gauteng
Limpopo
Western Cape
Eastern Cape
KwaZulu-Natal
Mpumalanga
Free State
North West
Northern Cape

2.2. NAME (optional)

2.3. GENDER

Female
Male
Other (explain)

2.4. AGE

18-24
25-29
30-34
35-39
40-44
45-49
50-54
55-59
60-64
65-69

2.5. HIGHEST QUALIFICATION

No schooling completed
Matric
Diploma
Trade/Technical/Vocational Training
Bachelor's Degree
Honour's Degree
Master's Degree
Doctoral Degree

2.6. EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Employed full time (outside the home)
Employed part-time (outside the home)
Work from home
Self-employed
Unemployed

2.7.1. RACE

Black

Bi-racial

White

Indian

2.7.2. Any additional comments regarding question 2.7.1.

2.8.1. HOME LANGUAGE

English

Afrikaans

Zulu

Xhosa

Southern Sotho

Northern Sotho

Tswana

Venda

Tsonga

Swati

Ndebele

Other

2.8.2. If necessary, please specify the home language other than the 11 mentioned in 2.8.1.

3. TOTAL ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

76 800 or less

76 801-153 600

153 601-307 200

307 201-614 400

614 401-1228 800

1228 801-2457 600

2457 601 or more

4. How many children do you have?

5. How many of your children follow the NLA?

6. Please specify the age of each child.

Child 1

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

+ 4

8. If they have been to school, how many years did they attend?

Child 1

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

+4

9. At what age did your child stop going to school?

Child 1

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

+4

9. Reasons for taking the child/ren out of school.

10. How long have you and your family been practising the NLA?

11. What changes/reorganisation did you and your family need to make in order to implement the NLA?

12.1. What support structures are accessible to you and your family. Tick the ones that apply.

Online

Community

Family

Self-directed learning centres

Support groups

Other

12.1. If you chose 'other' in 12.1., briefly explain.

13. Briefly explain why you chose NL/Unschooling as your preferred educational/life philosophy.

14.1. How would you describe the general understanding of NL/Unschooling in your family?

14.2. If you chose 'other' in question 14.1., please give a brief explanation.

15. Does the child/ren attend any other classes or coaching? For example, music, sport, language. List the activities for each child.

Child 1

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

+ 4

16. Does the child/ren use any online programme? Briefly describe the programme.

Child 1

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

+ 4

17. Does the child/ren use any other programme of learning? For example, a specific curriculum. Name or briefly describe the programme of learning.

Child 1

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

+ 4

18. Has the child/ren completed any courses and received certification? Name or describe the course for each child.

Child 1

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

+ 4

19.1. Does the child/ren have a mentor that they spend time with?

Yes

No

19.2. If you chose 'yes' in 19.1., briefly describe this relationship.

20.1. Does the child/ren mentor someone in an area of interest?

Yes

No

20.2. If you chose 'yes' in 20.1., briefly describe the relationship.

21.1. Has the child/ren job-shadowed an adult at any stage?

Yes

No

21.2. If you chose 'yes' in 21.1., briefly explain.

22. What are some of the challenges you experience with the NLA?

23.1. Does your Provincial Department of Education support this approach to learning?

Yes

No

23.2. If you chose 'yes' in 23.1., describe the support you receive.

23.3. If you chose 'no' in 23.1., what support would you like to receive from the Department of Education?

24. Briefly describe your interpretation of NL/Unschooling.

25. What would you say is your key role as a parent in this approach?

26. How would you describe the learning that is taking place in your home? Provide at least one example.

27. How would you describe the amount of 'screen time' (e.g. television, computers, laptops, phones, playstations) that your child/ren engage in?

Child 1

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

+

28.1. Do you liaise with other families who are practising NL?

28.2. If you chose 'yes' in 28.1., briefly describe the relationship.

29. What other support structures can you access that supports you and your family in implementing this approach?

30. On a scale of 1-5 (1= low and 5 = high) what would you consider a priority to help support the NLA.

Library

Short Courses

Computers

Internet

Laboratories

Community Learning Centres

Mentors

Volunteers

Access to nature and recreational facilities

Access to the world of work

Free and safe outdoor community spaces

Other (please specify)

31. If you could change two things about the NLA in your present situation, what would they be?
 - 32.1. Would you like your child/ren to have more access to broader society?
 - 32.2. If you chose 'yes' in 32.1., list 2 aspects you consider most important.
 - 32.3. If you chose 'no' in 32.1., explain why?
33. Briefly explain your ideal learning community.
34. Any further comments on the NLA and how it is implemented in your family within the South African context.

ANNEXURE 9: TURN IT IN REPORT

Thesis			
ORIGINALITY REPORT			
8%	6%	2%	4%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
1	www.swaraj.org Internet Source		<1%
2	wiki.ecmascript.org Internet Source		<1%
3	Submitted to University of Birmingham Student Paper		<1%
4	www.eliasmotsoaledi.gov.za Internet Source		<1%
5	centerforchildwelfare2.fmhi.usf.edu Internet Source		<1%
6	jual.nipissingu.ca Internet Source		<1%
7	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source		<1%
8	docplayer.net Internet Source		<1%
9	repository.up.ac.za Internet Source		<1%

ANNEXURE 10: EDITOR REPORT



WORDPLAY EDITING
Copy Editor and Proofreader
Email: karien.hurter@gmail.com
Tel: 071 104 9484
Website: <http://wordplayediting.net/>

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to confirm *Natural Learning in the South African Context: A Critical Analysis* by Renuka Ramroop was edited by a professional language practitioner.

Regards,

Karien Hurter