

FILLING THE GAP?

**A STUDY OF SOME SOUTH AFRICAN TEENAGE READERS'
RESPONSES TO THE SIYAGRUVA SERIES BOOKS AT THE
EERSTERIVIER PUBLIC LIBRARY IN CAPE TOWN**

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**A research project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of MAGISTER
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Supervisor: Dr Genevieve Hart



This research work is dedicated to my late father “**NANAYI, JOHN MYEZA.**”
Also, to the six teenagers who graciously and unselfishly participated in this study
showing quest for literacy.
Special thanks go to my family especially my one and only son, **SIFUNDESIHLE
MABUZA**, and his father who took care of him during his first grade in my absence.
Everything has been possible through my God Almighty.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate responses to New Africa Book's Siyagruva Series among six enthusiastic teenage readers (ages 10 -16), at Eersterivier Public Library in Cape Town. The series aims to provide a series of popular books accessible to second language English readers. The question that underlies the research project is whether they fill a gap in the South African teenage reading market. There are several motives behind this study besides the fact that South African learners read very little:

- The need to investigate reading preferences and choices among South African teenagers
- To find out factors which affect reading choices of South African teenagers
- The need to encourage reading culture in South Africa.

The qualitative case study of reading response tries to answer the research question through face to face interviews with selected readers. The nature of the small-scale case study means that it can make no generalised statements about all South African teenagers. It explores the views of only six teenagers.



The study finds that the books do fulfil a need in the readers to read about "real" issues and situations that reflect their own lives. The participants like the idea of a series of books with the same characters whom they like and identify with. They find the appearance and style of the books appealing. They now wish to read all the books in the series.

This investigation will be of interest to various role players like:

- publishers, who wish to be in touch with their teenage market
- booksellers, who wish to stock saleable books
- librarians and school educators who wish to provide young people with appealing books
- the Centre for the Book and NGOs who wish to promote a reading culture.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

1.1 Introduction to the project

The title of the project indicates that the purpose of the study, a small qualitative case study of the reading responses of six enthusiastic teenage readers, is to explore whether the Siyagruva Series of books, published by New Africa Books from 2002 onwards, fills a “gap”. The word “gap” has a double meaning. It refers to the gap in the teenage book market in South Africa that the New Africa Books Siyagruva series of books set out to fill when its first books were published in 2002 (Malan, 2004). It also refers to the needs of South African teenage readers for books that reflect the issues that interest them at this stage of their lives.

The project is a small one. However, I hope that its findings will interest writers, publishers, librarians and booksellers, and other role players, such as the Centre for the Book in Cape Town. In reading about the reading habits and reading responses of six South African teenagers who are enthusiastic library users and readers, they might get insight useful for their work. There is a need to find out what South African teenagers want to read in order to improve the publishing market and to improve readers' satisfaction in the use of books.



This chapter aims briefly to:

- explain the motivation for the project
- describe the Siyagruva Series
- set out the research problem and its research framework.
- list the questions, that come out of the above problem
- outline the remaining chapters and
- state the ethical principles of the study.

1.2 Motivation for the study

My interest is to find out more about what teenagers like to read. I believe that, if young people enjoy reading, they will read more. Providing them with books that they find relevant to their interests will encourage them to read more. The more they read, the easier they will find it. Then, the better they will perform in their academic work. Research has shown that the ability to read well improves academic achievement (Krashen, 1993). Reading literature also benefits the emotional and moral development of young people (Tucker, 1981; Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1986: 20-40).

Reading literature lets young people explore their feelings and build a sense of their own identity and values. South African children need to read South African books in order to build a stronger sense of their cultural and national identity (Hart, 2002). But there is a shortage of reading material for black children in South Africa which reflects their own lives (Anderson, 1999).

Research has shown that South African school learners do not read very much (Machet, Olen, & Chamberlain, 2001). They read below their age levels and cannot understand their textbooks (READ Educational Trust, 1998; Caelers, 2004). If they had access to more books relevant to their lives, they might read more and therefore read better.

There are several motives for the study, for example:

- the need to develop a reading market for indigenous books in South Africa
- a wish to promote better reading habits
- an interest in the factors which affect the reading habits of enthusiastic teenage readers.

1.3 The Siyagruva Series



The editor of the Siyagruva Series, Robin Malan, says that the idea for the series came after he heard Elizabeth Anderson, Director of the Centre for the Book, talk at a seminar at the University of Western Cape in 1999 (Malan, 2004). In her talk, she pointed out that there was a big gap in South African publishing as there was no popular series of books in English for young black South Africans. There was a need for books in easy English but which might deal with the issues South African teenagers need to explore (Anderson, 1999). Malan sold the idea to New Africa Books and began to build a team of writers. The publishers assessed the reactions of teenage readers to the first three books before embarking on the series. Now there are 16 books in the series. The series is set in the fictional Siyagruva Dance Studio and has the same group of characters, a multicultural South African mix, running through them. But each book has its own story and themes.

The Siyagruva Series revolves around the lives of eight South African teenagers (Brunette, Mncedisi, Rashaad, Regan, Samantha, Shelley, Thabiso, and Zadie) who are faced with the challenges of the adolescent stage. The stories place them into situations where they are forced to confront contemporary problems. They are faced with social and personal issues such as racism, hatred, jealousy, and loss of identity.

The problems are always presented from a teen perspective. We see racism when one of the imprisoned girls in a police van in *Mom's Taxi* calls Brunette a "coconut". In *Divine Dump Dancer* we see Mncedisi, a rising star, dance out of despair to self-fulfillment. The story in *In the Fast Lane* explores the fact that there are people affected as well as infected with HIV. In *Breaking Out* we see Rashaad going through a rough patch trying to figure out his culture, religion and sexuality. In *Girl Goes Missing* police can't solve the kidnapping case, but Shelley sees it as a way of drawing her father's attention back to her.

As a review in the Star (Mayet, 2003) puts it, "The Siyagruva Series books are written using accessible South African English, with familiar slang words". The novels have "cool" photographs on their covers. They use large print and are rather short. The stories cover real-life incidents and issues that South African teenagers can identify with. The need for acceptance of friends and other peers is typical of teenagers' social development. Teenagers at this stage question a lot of things. They are curious and experimental. They exchange clothes and get involved in sex, smoking, drugs, and liquor. In the books, they try to work out a plan on how to deal with these problems on their own. The characters act out their dissatisfaction, disappointment, and fear in different ways. The novels deal with matters that are present in most adolescents' lives, such as racial and religious discrimination, people with disabilities, living with HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, drugs, questions of sexual orientation and over-protective parents.

1.4 Research framework

The research project has roots in two research schools: readership or user studies in the field of Library and Information Science and reader response studies in the field of Children's Literature.

Library Science has a strong tradition of readership or user studies research, examples of which will be described in Chapter 2. User studies use research techniques like questionnaires, interviews and observation to clarify relationships between library clientele and the information resources, facilities, and services of libraries.

Reader response theory refers to one school of thought within the study of children's literature. It is less interested in the literary value of a text and more interested in how children respond to the text. It is about what the reader makes of the book not

the book itself. Chapter 2 will describe a few examples of these studies. According to Benton (1996: 74-85), reader response research has five themes:

- the processes of response, for example comparing how children and adults respond to a text or studying how children respond to fiction
- the developmental stages of reading. Examples are studies of what teenagers like to read in relation to their developmental phase
- different styles of reading and reading behaviour - including case studies of the appeal of series writers like Enid Blyton and of how individuals make their own meaning from whatever they read
- cultural studies which include multicultural studies and “whole culture” studies. Multicultural studies look at the responses of readers of different cultures to texts and whole culture studies look at responses of readers within their surrounding culture, for example studies of teenagers’ reading tastes in relation to their environment.
- text-oriented studies which focus on specific books. Benton calls these “surprisingly rare” (p. 83).

Benton warns that there is overlap among these groups. He explains that reader response theory sees the act of reading and the text as two sides of the same coin so there can be no rigid divisions (p. 75). My study falls inside almost all Benton’s groups. It is about responses to specific books, the Siyagruva series. It could also fall in the third and fourth group as I am interested specifically in a group of teenagers in one community in Cape Town.

My project has two parts:

- The first is a typical readership or user study as it interviews the participants on the use of the library and their reading habits.
- The second is a reader response study as it explores how the participants respond to the Siyagruva books.

1.5 Research problem and questions

The research problem that comes out of the discussion so far is an exploration of responses towards South African books among a selected group of enthusiastic teenage readers at Eersterivier Public Library in Cape Town. There is research that suggests that readers prefer and become more involved with stories that are related to their personal experiences and prefer characters and events they can identify with

(Purves and Beach, 1972; Langer, 1994). The problem is narrowed to an examination of the appeal of the Siyagruva Series. A fundamental question is: Do the Siyagruva books fill the gap which they set out to fill?

Research questions that relate to the problem are:

- What books do young teenage readers choose to read for leisure and how do they find them?
- What influences, if any, do librarians exert on reading habits and tastes of South African teenagers?
- How do teenagers respond to the Siyagruva books? Would they look for other books in the series? If so, why?
- Is the South African setting of the books a positive factor in their responses?
- Is the choice of relevant current issues in the books a positive factor in their responses?

The design of my project aims to throw some light on these questions. It is a small scale qualitative project involving six teenagers. It cannot claim to represent all South African teenagers. But I hope the case study will provide some useful information.



Chapter 3 will describe the choice of research site and the methodology I used to answer these questions. Chapters 4 and 5 summarise and present my findings.

1.6 Chapter outline

This report consists of the following:

- Chapter 1 introduces the project. It includes the research framework, the statement of the problem and summary of chapters.
- Chapter 2 surveys existing research.
- Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology.
- Chapter 4 summarises and analyses the data gathered in the two interviews.
- Chapter 5 interprets the findings in terms of the research questions and draws some conclusions.

1.7 Ethics statement

Since my participants are young people, care was taken to get written permission from their parents. Appendix A gives the letter requesting permission of parents.

Participation was voluntary. (One participant chose to withdraw as will be described in Chapter 3). Participants are given pseudonyms.



CHAPTER 2

YOUNG PEOPLE'S READING HABITS: A SURVEY OF THE RESEARCH

2.1 Introduction

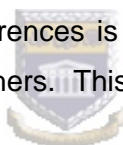
The purpose in this chapter is to survey existing research in reading preferences of young people, with an attempt to focus on Africa and South African children. The chapter does include one study from the United Kingdom since it was the basis for a major South African project. The emphasis in the chapter is on empirical studies of children's reading rather than on comment from publishers, booksellers or librarians.

There are two kinds of studies in this chapter:

- surveys of numbers of children, which gather data on reading habits and preferences
- smaller reader response studies, which explore readers' responses to specific books or types of books.

2.2 Surveys of reading preferences

The aim of surveys of reading preferences is to provide information for publishers, writers, suppliers, librarians and teachers. This section begins with a British study as it led to a major South African study.



2.2.1 A study of young people's reading habits in the United Kingdom (Reynolds, 1996).

The study, *Young People' Reading At The End Of The Century: A Summary Of the Children's Literature Research Centre Survey Of Young People's Reading Habits*, conducted by Reynolds in 1996, is the first of a series of five-yearly surveys to provide information on young people's reading habits in the United Kingdom. The survey, which involved 8,834 pupils between the ages of 4 and 16 in a sample designed to represent the school population, was carried out by The National Centre for Research in Children's Literature (NCRCL) at the University of Surrey Roehampton. The study, in particular, was concerned:

“ with finding out what children read, how they come into contact with all kinds of reading matter from comics and magazines to more traditional books both fiction and non-fiction; what their preference are; whether they are satisfied with kinds of publications available to them” (Reynolds, 1996: 6).

There was a good representation of all categories of readers: enthusiastic, average and reluctant readers. All the children completed a questionnaire and some were also interviewed.

Some of the research questions asked in the study were:

- How do children choose what to read?
- What kind of characters do they like?
- Who helps them choose books? or Who influences their choice?
- How much time they spend on reading.

The study found the following:

- Eleven to 16 year olds, according to this study, chose books by a mixture of cover (36-44%), title (40-49%), abstract (42%), and name of author (41-44%).
- With regard to character and theme, it does not matter if characters' gender, colour and country of origin are different from the reader's. The main ingredient that is rated essential is "lives at the same time as yours."
- The children choose books by themselves and rarely rely on mothers, teachers, and school librarians.
- More girls (62%) than boys (24%) state that they read fiction more than three hours per week (Reynolds, 1996).

2.2.2 A study of young people's reading in South Africa (Machet, Olen & Chamberlain, 2001)

This study was modeled on Reynolds's study which is described in the previous section. It was conducted by the Children's Literature Research Unit in the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa (Unisa) in 1998. The study surveyed a representative sample of over 2,000 learners in the Pretoria region by means of a detailed questionnaire. The age group was 10-16 years, from Grade 5-10.

The survey focused on identifying the following:

- why young people in South Africa choose books and other texts like comics and magazine
- what kinds of books are most suitable for reluctant readers, second language readers and so forth
- ways in which children encounter books and choose what to read

- the influence of and effect on reading of new media like electronic texts.

The study found the following (Machet, Olen, & Chamberlain, 2001:126):

- Children in South Africa have limited access to school libraries and public libraries
- South African children do not read much
- A contributing factor to not reading could be the shortage of books in their mother tongue language
- Low level reading skills are a problem in South Africa
- Children chose books by themselves rarely relying on their mothers, teachers and librarians.

2.2.3 A study of Nigerian secondary school students' reading habits (Ogunrombi & Gboyega, 1995)

Ogunrombi and Gboyega investigated the factors affecting the reading of students in secondary schools in the Ogbomoso area of Oyo state in Nigeria in 1992. This study was prompted by students' low scores in English in both junior and senior secondary school examinations.



Ogunrombi and Gboyega's study aimed to examine the following:

- the factors that affect good reading habits among selected schools' students in the Ogbomoso area
- the availability or otherwise of adequate reading materials in the school
- how to promote better reading habits.

The study's data were collected by means of questionnaires administered to the population of 600 secondary school students from ten schools. The questionnaire was divided into three categories:

- The first section was addressed to the principals of the sampled schools to collect data on the calibre of teachers, the availability of functioning libraries and opening hours, size of library collections, the availability of school librarians and how the libraries are maintained.
- The students completed the second section. It centred on their demography (age, gender, nationality, etc), parents' occupation, likes or dislikes in reading, use of spare time, ownership of books and opportunities offered by school or home for reading.

- Teachers of language and literature in the schools completed the third section.

The data collected by Ogunrombi and Gboyega (1995: 50-57) show that some social economic factors hinder the formation of good reading habits by some Nigerian school students. For example:

- 79% indicate that they like reading when they are given a conducive environment such as a quiet place for reading.
- Since there are few family backgrounds with libraries at home, parents do not contribute to the reading habits of the children. It seems that parents have not cultivated the book-buying habit, hence, the low interest in reading.
- Scarcity of operating libraries in most of the schools surveyed and trained librarians or teacher-librarians are important issues. In the few schools that have operating libraries first priority is given to senior secondary students
- Language teachers, equipment and resources for teaching reading skills are lacking.

Ogunrombi's and Gboyega's findings lead them to recommend that Government set up public libraries in rural and urban areas with enough "relevant" books for students' use.

2.2.4 A study of the reading habits of Standard 5-7 pupils in Gaborone, Botswana (Darko-Ampen, 2004)

This pilot study of the reading habits of Standard 5 to 7 pupils was carried out by Kwasi Darko-Ampen of the University of Botswana in Gaborone in 2004. Respondents were taken from 15 English medium (private schools) and public schools. A sample of ten students was randomly taken from each of the Standard 5, 6, and 7 classes at the schools. The researcher distributed 150 questionnaires with a return rate of 128 (85.3%) - 70 girls and 58 boys. The ages of the respondents ranged between 9 and 14. They spoke 23 different languages.

His research questions were as follows:

- how often a book is chosen because of the look of the cover, title, write-up inside or the cover or the pictures inside
- reasons for choosing series
- who helps children choose books

- where books are borrowed.

He found the following:

- A modern look to a cover and the book's pictures are important factors when choosing a book whereas bright colors on the other hand are not important.
- For boys, the way books are displayed plays an important role.
- Whereas with girls, the style of writing and knowing what to expect as well as the way books are displayed are important.
- The least important factor for girls was reading about the same kind of people.
- Fifty percent of boys and 65% of girls choose books for themselves. Friends are the fifth least important source of choices for boys and for girls are the second most important.
- Books are mainly borrowed from the school. Public libraries are used less often, and books are rarely borrowed from friends. Girls borrow from school, family members and from friends more frequently than boys. Boys borrow books from the library more frequently than girls (Darko- Ampen, 2004:18).



2.2.5 Two Masters Degree studies of children's reading in Cape Town in 1983 and 1993 (Marock, 1983; Baker, 1994)

Marock 's Masters project in 1981 set out to find out why children do not like reading. The researcher had identified a problem of reading reluctance amongst the children who had mastered almost all the reading skills. She had three aims:

- to test whether the reading reluctance was inborn or purely made
- to trace the factors that contributed to the reading reluctance
- to survey the way forward to prevent this reading reluctance.

The main study had a sample of 11 and 12 year olds registered at a school with a well functioning school library. These children were subdivided into two groups: the readers and the reluctant readers. Questionnaires and reading cards of the children were used to collect data.

She found the following (Marock, 1983: 451-452):

- Attitudes of parents and their childhood experiences influence the reading skills of the children. Parents who have never used the library could not inculcate a reading culture to their children because they are not role models.

The parents who discuss books with their children stimulate the children's reading interests and therefore encourage them to be readers.

- Reading interests differ between readers and reluctant readers. Reluctant readers loved reading comics and preferred subjects that do not require a lot of reading in school subjects.

Baker researched how children and selectors perceive and construct the reading of fiction in two schools in Cape Town in 1994 for her Masters degree. She was interested in selection policies for school fiction and how they might change. She looked at the situation of two schools as representatives of two systems in Cape Town with different histories to establish what the conditions were that created their situations. She carried out a series of interviews with children who were selectors and observed them choosing books for their classmates. She took a group of pupils from the Walter Teka Higher Primary School in Gugulethu (Cape Town) to a bookshop to select books for their classmates. Then they talked about their choices. The children were adamant that the setting of a book was not important but that the story was. They also claimed that the colour of characters was irrelevant to them



2.2.6 A study of the reading preferences of black second language English readers in Johannesburg (McMurray, 1996)

McMurray undertook this informal survey of children in the Johannesburg Public Library in August and September 1993 to assess changing reading preferences of the young readers.

The questionnaire had the following questions:

- What books had the children enjoyed recently?
- What were their favourite authors?
- How did the children's choose their books?
- How might the responses of black second language be compared with those of the first language English readers?

Favourite books mentioned include: The Nancy Drew series, The Hardy Boys, The Famous Five, The Secret Seven, Sweet Valley High and Asterix. The top six authors were Roald Dahl, Enid Blyton, Carolyn Keene, Franklin W. Dixon, Judy Blume and Francine Pascal. This indicates a taste for foreign titles and for series.

The same few authors were mentioned over and over, showing a lack of variety in the preference of the readers. Responses of black second language readers were different from those of the first language English readers. They seemed to make do with whatever titles were on show rather than looking for specific books (McMurray, 1996).

2.3 Reader response studies

The studies in this section are small reader response studies. They all present the chosen group of young readers with a range of books and then explore the responses to them.

2.3.1 Reading interests of some Zulu-speaking Standard Two children in Pietermaritzburg (Radebe, 1995)

Radebe studied the reading habits of some Zulu-speaking Standard two children in Pietermaritzburg in 1995. She set out to find out more about the Zulu children and the situations and settings influential in their reading interests. Radebe's study was conducted in response to the needs of parents, teachers and information workers media teachers and publishers for information and guidance regarding the reading interests of South African black children.



She collected data through interviews and arranged questions by categories. Her first category was aimed at getting background information about the respondents. Her second category was aimed at establishing whether literature depicting familiar situations and settings was preferred. Radebe displayed a sample of books and divided children into small groups. Each child was allowed to select one book and then had to explain the choice of books.

Radebe finds that reading is an individual matter regardless of the reader's ethnicity or race. Children's preferences had no specific relationships to the ethnic origin of the story. In terms of story location, that is urban or rural, there was no corresponding difference in the Zulu children's preference for books. The children were attracted by situations that were not familiar to them. The children's most popular topic seemed to be animals.

Another finding of the study was that reading interests of black children are not confined only to literature that is written in vernacular. Some of the participants

preferred English because they considered it an important language. Others wanted to copy parents and relatives who have mastered the language well.

2.3.2 Literacy in a multi-cultural environment (Machet, 1996)

Machet, of the University of South Africa, gives a different perspective in her report of a study that explored the accessibility of Western stories to black children from an oral environment. To test African children's understanding of Western story structure, a Western literate story, with a typically linear structure, was compared to a traditional African story. Her research had two parts. Firstly, two stories were read to 11 and 15 year old children in Standard 5. They were asked to summarise the stories. Machet then compared the summaries of the two stories in order to examine how the African children responded to the differences in style and structure. Then she interviewed the children on their reading likes and dislikes.

Machet found differences between her sample and those in other research with Western children. She found that the African children did not see cause and effect, goals or resolutions. However, they found other non-linear connections. Her conclusion is that the typical Western story might have no appeal to young African children and might put them off reading permanently. She suggests that books for young children must be culturally specific.

2.4 Conclusion

The studies discussed in this chapter have some common research goals. They are all interested in how children choose books and why they choose specific books. They are all motivated by a wish to encourage children to read. Therefore they are interested in the factors that encourage children's reading.

Many of their findings are similar but others are contradictory. It seems that children choose by cover, title, and name of author. They like to choose their own books and rarely rely on parents, teachers and librarians. There is agreement that there is a shortage of books in the vernacular and that South African children are not good readers. There is debate over the need for "relevant " stories. Perhaps, it depends on the age group of the reader.

The research studies surveyed in this chapter helped me in my research design and methodology. They helped me focus on what questions my study should focus on. These will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 The research problem and questions restated

As stated in Chapter 1, the research problem is to investigate the responses to the Siyagruva Series books of a selected number of teenage members of Eersterivier Public Library. The purpose is to see how the young readers respond to the books' contemporary South African themes, characters, accessible writing style and appearance.

The books have already been described in Chapter 1 [1.3]. The series is an attempt by the publisher to fill a gap in South African publishing and to meet the needs of South African teenagers for accessible appealing books.

3.1.1 Research questions

As stated in Chapter 1, this research problem leads to the following questions:

- What is the reading background of the selected teenagers who are described as “enthusiastic” readers?
- What books do young teenage readers choose to read for leisure?
- How do they find their books?
- What influences, if any, do librarians have on reading habits and tastes of South African teenagers?
- How do teenagers respond to the Siyagruva books? Would they look for other books in the series? If so, why?
- Is the South African setting of the books a positive factor in their responses?
- Is the choice of relevant current issues in the books a positive factor in their responses?

My study sets out to explore readers' responses to the Siyagruva Series, a series of 16 books aimed at 13-16 year old age group. My focus is whether the readers like them because they are set in Cape Town and because they deal with contemporary and “relevant” issues.

3.2 Research site

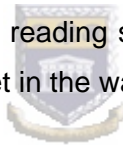
The six participants were chosen by the Librarian at Eersterivier Library. I asked her to identify enthusiastic readers from her young members. The Eersterivier area has

a population of 45,000. The Eersterivier Public Library has a stock of 31136 books and has 8694 members, both children and adults. The library has four full-time staff and four part-timers. The library is open for fifty-one hours per week.

I chose Eersterivier Public Library for the following reasons:

- The librarian in charge is a fellow-student and therefore access is possible
- Eersterivier Public Library is now a multicultural community, although it was built to serve a historically Coloured community in the apartheid days
- It is convenient due to transport, safety, and contact with the librarian
- The librarian has built up an active reading programme and therefore it was easy to find a group of participants
- Eersterivier is a disadvantaged area in terms of its socio-economics and I want to do research that might make a difference in people's lives.

I chose to work with “enthusiastic readers” because of the purpose of the study – namely to focus on attitudes and responses to the Siyagruva series. The participating teenagers were already skilled regular readers and active members of the Eersterivier Public Library. Their reading skills therefore were not a factor. For example a lack of such skills might get in the way of the research questions.



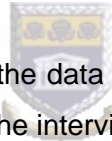
3.3 Methodology

The study can be described as a qualitative case study. There are only six participants but the aim was to gather in-depth data by means of two face to face interviews. The personal interviewing was necessary as the participants were too young to fill in a questionnaire by themselves. It also allowed me to explain difficult terms like “blurb” or “genre”. The UNISA survey, described in Chapter 2 [2.2.2], found children's lack of understanding of literary terms to be a problem (Machet, Olén & Chamberlain, 2001). Rosenblatt explains that eliciting a true reader response involves setting up situations in which readers feel encouraged to respond freely and to choose from a number of books (1994: 1066).

My research study consists of three steps:

- Firstly, on 6th October 2004, I interviewed the six participants to build a picture of their reading habits and history using the structured questionnaire described below and given in Appendix B.

- Secondly, at a group meeting, each chose a book from the set of Siyagruva books I brought to the library, which had been donated to the University of the Western Cape for my project by Robin Malan, the series editor. They made the following choices:
 - Michelle *Boy in Da City*,
 - “OJ” *In The Fast Lane*,
 - Nolwazi *Taking The Rap*
 - Christell *In The Fast Lane*
 - Grace *Troubles, Taxis and Toilets*
 - Shalony *Mom’s Taxi*.
- I then met with them as a group two weeks later to explore their responses and made appointments for individual interviews. Observation notes were taken during this second interview by a library assistant in Eersterivier Public Library. Some in the interview would say she did not understand and ask the Library Assistant to interpret in Afrikaans. I also took notes and recorded the interviews, then afterwards transcribed the tape recordings. The interview schedule is given in Appendix C.



The interviews were transcribed and the data were analysed using content analysis. The data analysis even began whilst the interviews were still underway

3.3.1 Interview 1: Reading histories

The questionnaire / interview schedule is given in Appendix B. It relies on some of the studies discussed in Chapter 2, for example the UNISA study of South African children’s reading preferences (Machet, Olën & Chamberlain, 2001). My supervisor checked my draft and suggested some changes. Then it was piloted with a young son of a friend but no changes were made for the final version.

The questionnaire has three sections:

- Section A asks for biographical details: age, gender, home language, etc.
- Section B gathers data on their reading preferences. It does this directly and indirectly. Thus it asks a general question, for example asking what kind of books they like then it follows up with more focused questions, for example asking for specific titles of books they have been reading. The questionnaire records the titles of books they are reading, what books they like, what language they like to read and what puts them off a book.

Section C gathers data on their literacy background. For example it asks about whether their parents belong to any library.

3.3.2 Interview 2: Responses to the Siyagruva Series

The second interview came after a group discussion. I met with all six teenagers and we discussed the books they had spent the past two weeks reading. In the group interview it was difficult to get equal participation. This is a lesson for the future. One or two participants were too quiet. One of the boys commented that the girls were “too clever”. I made appointments to interview each one alone. This interview was more open-ended than the first interview. The 20 questions are given in Appendix C. But it was still hard to keep to the schedule. Rubin and Rubin (1995: 227) describe the process as redesigning one’s questions to focus in on critical themes as one continues interviewing.

Basically, I was interested in the following:

- Whether they enjoyed the books
- What they liked in the books, what they disliked and why.

The 20 questions reflect the issues raised in the statement of the research problem in Chapter 1 and the issues raised in the literature survey in Chapter 2.

The questions focus on:

- Why they chose a particular book
- Responses to the books’ characters
- Responses to the book’s situations and events and issues.

3.4 Choice of participants

The age group is 13-16 years old. This is because the Siyagruva books are aimed at this age group. Because of the diversity of culture in South Africa, especially the multicultural area of study (Eersterivier), I wanted a multicultural group so chose from the Eersterrivier’s librarian’s list two Afrikaans-speakers “coloured” teenagers, two Xhosa speakers, and two English speakers “coloured”. However, I was informed that all of them are regular readers of books in English. The six participants consist of two boys and four girls. I gave them pseudonyms. They are:

- Grace - Grade 10 -15yrs old)
- Nolwazi - Grade 9 - 15yrs
- Christell - Grade 9 - 15 yrs old

- Michelle - Grade 8 - 14yrs old
- Shalony - Grade 9 -14yrs old
- OJ - Grade 10- 15yrs old)- boy
- Tino - Grade 9 -15yrs old (who dropped out).

Tino dropped out after the first interview because he said the girls talked too much. But his sister picked up his Siyagruva book at home and asked to be part of the study. Therefore, she completed the first questionnaire later than the others.

3.5 Conclusion

The following chapter will analyse and summarise the data gathered in the two interviews.



CHAPTER 4

READERS' RESPONSES TO THE SIYAGRUVA SERIES: INTERVIEWS 1 AND 2

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present data collected in the two interviews. As stated in Chapter 3, my study consists of two phases:

- Interview 1: Reading histories - which is a questionnaire / interview schedule given in Appendix B; which has three sections
- Interview 2: Responses to the Siyagruva Series - a group interview then individual interviews [see Appendix C].

4.2 Questionnaire / Interview 1

This section summarises the data gathered from the first interview. This interview relied on a structured questionnaire (See Appendix B). Its purpose is to gather some preliminary and background information on the six participants. The face-to-face interviews allowed me to observe body language and expressions and allowed me to probe a little more deeply.



The first interview also allowed me to hand over the Siyagruva books to them. It was interesting to observe how the respondents set about choosing from the pile of twelve books. They jumped from their chairs to the tables like a dog seeing meat.

At the beginning of each interview, I asked the participants why they joined or came to the library. They gave me the following answers:

- to read books
- to meet friends
- to do assignments
- to make photocopies
- to refresh in a reading environment of school going children outside school away from teachers and parents.

They all told me that they liked coming to the library. This was a factor in choosing them for the research project as mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3.

4.2.1 Questionnaire Section A: Biographical details

Questions 1-5 gather data on respondents' age, gender, language, Grade and school.

The youngest girl is Michelle who is 13years old. She speaks Shangaan and she is doing Grade 8 at Stratford Primary School.

Shalony, and Christell are both 14year olds, and Tino (the one who pulled out after the Interview 1) is 15 years old. But all three are doing Grade 9. Shalony speaks English; her mother is Moslem. Tino and Christell speak Afrikaans. All these three are schooling at Eersterivier Secondary School.

Nolwazi and Grace are both 15 year old girls and "OJ" is the only 15 year old boy. Nolwazi's home language is Xhosa, Grace speaks Chichewa and "OJ" speaks Swahili. Nolwazi is doing Grade 9 at Eersterivier. Grace and "OJ" are doing Grade 10 at Blackheath Secondary School.

4.2.2 Questionnaire Section B: Reading Preferences

Questions 6 to 16 gather data on participants' reading preferences. This section provides information that might be useful in the second interview on the Siyagruva Series books.

Table 1 summarises the responses to Question 6, *How do you choose a book?*

Front Cover & first few lines	4	Blurb & first few lines	2
By friend	1	Favourite genre & blurb	1

Table 1: How do you choose a book in the library?

Analysis of replies to Question 6 shows that the most common way to choose a book is by looking at the front cover with four mentioning this as their usual method. Only two of the six participants read the blurbs, the very same two read the first few lines of the book before choosing it. The respondent who chooses by genre is the male who prefers biography and non-fiction.

The discussion that followed Question 6 made it clear that no parents, teachers or school librarians assisted these children in choosing a book. This shows that there was no adult influence; it was rather genuine honest choice of the children.

Table 2 summaries answers to Question 7, *Which books do you like to read?* Each of the genres listed was mentioned, except for horror and fantasy.

Series	4	Love stories	2	Non-fiction	1
Comedy	2	Adventure & mystery	1	Biographies	1
Table 2: Which books do you like to read?					

Four of the participants like to read books from series and two of the four add love stories. Two like to read comedy books and one adds adventure and mystery. One boy likes to read non-fiction and biography books. Parish and Atwood (1988:25) found that students who read romance novels read many other kinds of literature too.

It is interesting to compare responses to Question 7 with responses to Questions 12 and 13, which ask for participants' book titles, read in the year. Answers to Question 13 match their preferences stated in Question 7. The three who claim to like love stories and comedy chose books like *Mills and Boons*. The participant who likes adventure and mystery lists Michael Williams's *Who killed Jimmy Valentine?* and *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew*, books which are all mysteries.

Question 8 asks participants to explain why they like these genres chosen in Question 7. Four of the participants who say they like books from series answer that they like such because they are interesting and the fact that they are a continuation of what they have been reading. The two girls who both like comedy say they like such genre because they are fun and easy to follow. The boy who likes non-fiction and biographies says he likes these because they help him to learn more about other people and "real stuff". His home language is Swahili and he reads totally different books from the other children.

There are two girls who say they like "love stories". But it seems that some might be too shy to even want to mention love stories. For example, the Moslem girl, Shalony, who includes love stories did so shyly. She says she is scared that her mother will hear about it. She is not allowed to talk about anything to do with so called "love"

until they are ready for marriage. The carefree one, Grace, is more open. Grace, who, like OJ, sometimes participates in class debate forums, says, “This is not a nightmare to her”. She talks about love, AIDS and anything debatable.

Table 3 summarises answers to Question 9, *Where do you get the books?*

Bookshop	1	Home	1
Public library	6	School library	0
Table 3: Where do you get your books?			

Only one participant responds that a parent buys him books occasionally, all the children respond that they get their books from the library. This shows that parents do not assist participants in the literacy issues. No participant mentions a school library. This may mean they do not exist in their schools or they are not properly functioning.

Question 10 asks whether the children are familiar with the Siyagruva Series books. All the children said they have never heard or seen the Siyagruva Series Books. This shows that these books are new in the market for the participants even though the Eersterivier Public Library has some of them on its shelves. These books were first published in 2002. It seems that the Library has forgot to market them.

Question 12 asks about the number of books, except textbooks, the teenagers have read this year. Most of the participants reply that they have read more than eleven books. One says she has read more than six English books but has read more than 11 Afrikaans books. Their answers to Question 12 show that all the selected informants are indeed enthusiastic readers.

Question 13 gathers data on the titles the participants have read. Some of the titles mentioned are:

- *Lucky Fish* by Reviva Schermbrucker
- *Madiba Magic*
- *Vlerkdans* by Barry Hough
- *Who killed Jimmy Valentine* by Michael Williams,
- *Whitney's Kiss* by Onne Vegter.
- *Life in America* (Author forgotten)

- Tintin books
- *The Hardy Boys series*
- *Nancy Drew series*
- *Sweet Valley High books.*

I noticed that some titles re-occur in a number of lists from the participants. When I asked about the appearance of the same titles, the teenagers say they recommend books to one another. After one has read a book the other recommends it to another and the other takes it, so it's a club of some kind. I also noticed that several of their titles were published in South Africa or about South Africa. This implies that they do like books about their country – or do not dislike them. Series books from overseas are mentioned often like the Nancy Drew books and the Sweet Valley High.

Question 14 asks whether they ever do not finish a book. Four say they never give up on a book. Two of the participants who give up on a book state the following reasons:

- It is no longer interesting.
- There is a lot of history.
- What they expected in the first few lines does not appear.
- The plot of the story does not follow immediately.



Question 16 asks about language preference. For the two participants who preferred both languages, English and Afrikaans, the reason could be one of the parents is English and the other is Afrikaans. The two who prefer Afrikaans don't seem to have intentions of improving their English. They prefer to stick to their Afrikaans. One prefers English. This means they are English speakers at home. Two preferred English and African languages. One of these says her mother speaks an African language and the other says her parents speak both languages English and Swahili. This might imply the teenagers maintain their cultures. They want to know their roots by wanting to improve in both parents' languages.

4.2.3 Questionnaire Section C: Literacy Background

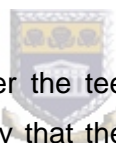
Question 17 gathers data about parents belonging to any library. Three of the participant's parents are members of the library and three of them do not belong to any library. Perhaps the participants lack parental support to encourage them to read. In my experience of the Eersterivier Public Library I observed scores of

learners do their homework and photocopying pages. I wondered how many pages were really relevant to their school work.

Question 18 documents data on what the teenagers' parents read. Table 4 documents the answers.

Newspapers, novels,	4	Magazines	2
Bible	2	Koran	2
Table 4: What kinds of books do your parents like to read at home?			

Four mentioned that their parents read newspapers and added novels/love stories. Two of the children added Koran, magazines on top of the newspapers as what their parents like to read. Two teenagers' parents read the Bible and magazines. The implication of these findings is that the parents are not full time and regular readers but at least they are staunch believers of their religions and they keep themselves up-to date with current periodicals.



Question 19 gathers data on whether the teenagers' parents ever find time to sit down and read. All the children reply that their parents do find time to sit down to read for themselves. This shows that there is some culture of reading but it seems they don't read books. Perhaps if the parents were enthusiastic readers at home the quality of reading of the six participants might improve.

4.2.4 Observations

The observations relate mainly to the challenges of interviewing teenagers. Most of the teenagers were reserved at first; even when I provoked them they just kept quiet. As mentioned already, one boy after the questionnaire did not want to be interviewed as he felt the girls would outshine him. He mentioned that the girls were "chatterboxes".

Interviews carried out in the afternoon when the children were just out of school are tiresome for them. To them it is more or less like from one class to another. So when I noticed the fatigue in the child, I decided to end the interview. Otherwise the questionnaire interview proceeded extremely well.

When I laid down the books on the table, the participants jumped to choose first. They were fighting over the books. One boy was so disappointed that he did not get the exact book he wanted that he refused to come for the second interview. However his sister picked up the book he did take and enjoyed it and wanted to replace him. Some of the participants like Christell finished the book in one day and asked to read another available one. This is why Christell read *In the Fast Lane* and *Breaking Out*. The rest of the participants also took between two and three days to finish the books and wanted to read the next advertised at the back of the last copy. All in all, the children were excited by the covers saying they are the first of a kind. They said the covers look “real”. The people looked familiar as if they had seen them before or they would meet them may be when they go to the next street.

4.3 Interview 2

This section summarises the data gathered from the second interview, which were recorded and transcribed. The purpose of this interview was to find out the readers’ responses to the Siyagruva Series. This face to face interview allowed me to probe participants’ responses even further. Appendix C gives the interview protocol. This second interview consists of 20 open-ended questions, exploring the participants’ responses to the Siyagruva books. As mentioned before, it was difficult to keep to the protocol and the summary in this section does not always match the protocol.

4.3.1 Why did you choose this book?

The first question asks why they chose that particular book. Four say it is the cover that attracted them. The cover in some way reflects themselves. Nolwazi says she likes rap music so the rap cover attracts her. Christell, who read *In the Fast Lane*, says she was attracted by the cover of girls because she likes girls and she is also a girl. Michelle says she was attracted by the familiar face of the L’Oreal products model, the one with dreadlocks on the front cover.

Two responses mention the title. Grace says the title “it provokes one’s mind.” Christell also says the fact that the book was not thick like other books appealed to her.

4.3.2 Did you enjoy it?

All the participants claim to have enjoyed the books even though it was their first time to read them.

4.3.3 Reasons for liking / enjoying book

It seems that they liked the books because they tell good stories and because they can identify with the characters' situations. Michele mentions that she enjoyed seeing young people be independent. Examples of their reasons are as follows:

- "OJ" says "Most of the stuff happening there I can relate to it."
- Michelle says "Young kids are thinking like adults."
- Grace says when "I started reading it I didn't want to stop I wanted to continue until I get to understand what is really going on."
- Christell says "It's interesting and it reminds her of real life today. Things that happen in the book are like real stuff that happens in real life." She says she enjoyed this book because of Brunette's help to Rashad, the Muslim boy making him to become himself again.
- Shalony, who replaced her brother, says she picked up the book and found it interesting and decided to come for the interview.

4.3.4 Who is the main character & what do you think the character is thinking or feeling?

The participants often would talk of the characters as if they knew them. Characters' need to be thought of as "cool" is mentioned often.

- "OJ" says Brunette is "going through a lot of stuff in her mind, like she didn't expect her cousin pregnant." "That was like mind-blowing experience for her."
- Christell says Rachad is excited to be the main character.
- Michelle says she "agrees with Equiano because he was left alone nowhere by his father."
- Christell says everyone wants to befriend Samantha, and they all listen to her. "I think she feels great to be the main character."
- Grace says Regan wants to be a "cool guy". He wants people to believe he has changed because he was a gangster.

4.3.5 Reasons for character's behaviour

Replies show how the readers identify with the characters.

- "OJ" says one needs to be aware of what is happening around her. Since Brunette was caught up in being young and wanting to experience stuff

she went on to find out that it is not the way she has been thinking stuff is. "There is more to life than what is seen."

- Shalony says Shelley is angry because she thinks her father has got an affair outside marriage.
- Christell says she agrees with Brunette because she becomes Rashad's friend although their beliefs and cultures are not the same. But she also says she disagrees with Brunette's behavior because she goes to parties, drinks ciders and smokes. She thinks "She might get hurt."
- Grace says she likes Regan as, after he messed up by putting dagga in Georgie's pocket, he realized that it was wrong and decided to clean up his mess.

4.3.6 Who do you like in the book?

Responses show the appeal of characters who make mistakes but who admit it.

- Shalony says she likes Shelley and her father as well. She says most of the story is about Shelley and the things she's good in. She says she is angry because she thinks her father has an affair outside marriage. But "Shelley's father was so loving but she couldn't see that."
- Michelle says Equiano is a sweet boy, and he is brave after losing his mother and the whole family.
- Christell says it's Brunette because "the character reminds me of myself, my character, the way I do things and the fact that I don't like to go to late night parties."
- Grace says she likes Georgie as he is a little boy looking up to Regan as his role model who disappoints him but Georgie understands in the end why he behaved that way.

4.3.7 What do you think the book is all about? What is the author trying to communicate?

The readers understand the social and personal issues in the Siyagruva books. Their answers are sensitive. They bring up the issues of learning from mistakes, tolerance of different cultures and making wise decisions about sex.

- "OJ" says the book is about things that young children go through. "Showing how they go crazy, in trying to do things in their own way but get to find out there is a way that you need to follow in life in order to succeed in life."

- Shalony says the book shows that their parents love them very much even though they may not show it. The author according to Shalony is trying to show that the community in the story showed love and care. “They showed that they did not only think for their families but thought for other people as well.”
- Christell says “We mustn’t tease other people just because you are not the same culture with that particular person.”
- Nolwazi says ”The author is trying to tell us that there is a stage in life where you look back and see lots of bad things you have done and you make a decision that you want to change completely.”
- Michelle says the book is about a boy coming from a foreign country to South Africa not being comfortable with elders because he is scared of being called names “Amakwerekwere”. “The author is trying to show us that South Africans need to change their mindset and stop calling others names.”
- Grace says the book is about Regan and Zadie who both want to belong in different ways. They both do dancing but Zadie also wants “good life” by getting involved with the taxi driver. He is a “sugar daddy”. The author is trying to tell us that you must concentrate in what you good at, don’t rush things.”
- Chistell says “The author wants us to be careful and learn that we must think before we do things. The author gives an example of sex saying people must think of the consequences of being pregnant and getting AIDS.”

4.3.8 Do the books remind you of any other characters or situations in other books, movies or TV programmes?

The simple moral story lines are mentioned by a few.

- Michelle’s compares her books to a traditional fairy tale because of its happy ending. “The book is similar to a fairytale I read long ago , like there is sadness at the beginning and at the end there is happiness.”
- The TV programme *Yizo Yizo* is mentioned by two participants. OJ says is because it is about ”a lot of things that young children go through and it gets to teach us a lot of things.” Grace also mentions *Yizo Yizo*. She says they both are like the song that says “It’s your future, it’s your life, it’s your choice.”

4.3.9 How did you find the English in the book? Is it the way your friends speak?

All agree that the language is readable. Two mention the nice font. They like the style which is how they speak.

- “OJ” says most of his friends speak the same language that is in the book like you see me my ma’an (“Uyabona mfana, chini.”
- Shalony says “Friends speak like this slang language used in the book”.
- Nolwazi “Like Yah! Bru - and they talk like the other people here in the book”
- Michelle says they mix all languages.
- Grace says most of her friends speak like that and “we love it.”

4.3.10 Are there any surprises in the books? Are they different from the books you usually read?

The participants find the books different because they are “real” and “about what is happening now” (Grace). Nolwazi likes the black characters. Christell says her usual books “mostly are stuff that people make up and it cannot happen in real life maybe in your dreams.”



4.3.11 Do you look forward to reading another book in Siyagruva Series? If so, why?

All the participants would love to read more of the Siyagruva Series. They give two reasons:

- their relevant themes. Shalony says “These books are nice because they don’t talk about adult stuff but today’s teenage things that are happening nowadays, they are okay for everyone.” Michelle says these books are raising the issue of xenophobia and racism and “I think they need to write more books raising other issues like child abuse, gangsterism, and rape because there are a lot of kids being raped.”
- interest in the characters. Christell says she wants to read more about the characters.

4.3.12 Is there anything in the book that is close to your own life? Please explain.

Four answer “yes” to the question but most refer to friends not themselves.

- “OJ” says most of the stuff discussed in the book is close to his life. He says it’s happening to him because most of his friends drink, and he ends up going to places he doesn’t like just to be a “watchdog.”
- Michelle tells of her friend whose family was abused by the rebels and some of her family were even killed. This is why the friend decided to settle here in Cape Town.
- Grace says there is something close to her friend’s life. She dated an older guy. She thought the guy loved her back but instead after the guy had broken her virginity he disappeared.
- Shalony says she knows how it feels when somebody is missing at home.
- Christell says a girl she used to school with in standard 7 would come late tell them that she’d taken her baby to the clinic and sometimes would not do her homework saying the baby was crying all night.

4.3.13 Did the book make you change your mind about anything? If so in what way?

Michelle is the only one who says that her book did not change her. She says she was not a racist before the book. The others all report a new way of looking at something.

- “OJ” says it did change his mind about AIDS because he thought people with the virus are identifiable but now he knows that so long as they haven’t tested it is difficult to tell who has it and who doesn’t have it. He has also learnt that it is not dangerous to live with such they are the same as someone who has flu.
- Shalony has learnt that “even though our parents sometimes fail to tell us that they love us by going to work in the morning and coming back in the evenings, that doesn’t mean they love us any less. Their going to work shows that they love and care for us.”
- Christell says it taught her to respect other people’s rights, religion and culture. She also says she is not going to have sex before marriage because it can be difficult once you have to look after a baby.
- Nolwazi says it changed her mind about the gangsters in that there is a positive way in that they think positively.
- Grace says it made her realize that she has life, and that she mustn’t rush things. She has to believe in herself and always do what she is good at.

4.3.14 Do the Siyagruva books have problems that appeal to you? Please explain.

Four answers refer to teenage issues:

- peer pressure. “OJ” makes an example of Brunette and Samantha influencing each other but “Samantha stood her ground and she didn’t change the way she was”.
- wanting to belong. As Grace says, “As a teenager you always want to belong somewhere and if you don’t you feel left out.”

4.3.15 Do you like the fact that the books are set in Cape Town?

All like the Cape Town settings. Michelle and Grace think they should have them in other provinces as well so children there will enjoy them.

- “OJ” says “I like it very much since I’m here in Cape Town I’d like to meet them and still have a lot of questions to ask them when we meet.”
- Shalony says “I like it very much since I grew up in Cape Town and the fact that it’s a nice place and all the Siyagruva Series are set up here. And when I was carrying this book they [her friends] saw the face of one of the actors on the cover page and they thought it’s a book about local people.”
- Christell says “Yes! I can relate to people of my town and clan.”
- Grace says “I love it when reading about a place you’ve been to yourself , you become more interested and want to read more about the place and start imagining where it happened. It is a nice feeling. I think they should set more for people in Jo’burg too.”

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has summarised and analysed the data. The answers of these six teenagers show the success of the Siyagruva books. The books are appealing because they reflect the teenagers’ lives. Chapter 5 will interpret the findings by going back to the research questions asked in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

Does the Siyagruva series fill the “gap” that was mentioned in Chapter 1? This chapter goes back to the research problem and questions from Chapter 3 and tries to draw some conclusions.

In Chapter 1, I said that the aim of the editor of the series was to provide accessible books for South African teenagers. The Director of the Centre for the Book had suggested that there was a gap in the publishing market and that SA teenagers needed a popular series of books. My project set out to find out if the Siyagruva books do fill this gap by working with just a small group of teenagers from one library.

5.2 Some answers to research questions

The following questions were given in Chapter 3:

- What is the reading background of the selected teenagers who are described as “enthusiastic” readers?
- What books do young teenage readers choose to read for leisure?
- How do they find the books they like?
- What influences, if any, do librarians have on reading habits and tastes of South African teenagers?
- How do teenagers respond to the Siyagruva books? Would they look for other books in the series? If so, why?
- Is the South African setting of the books a positive factor in their responses?
- Is the choice of relevant current issues in the books a positive factor in their responses?

The following discussion of the findings from the two interviews will try to answer these questions. However it cannot be stated that these are the definite answers to the questions as I worked with only six teenagers.

5.2.1 What is the reading background of the selected teenagers who are described as “enthusiastic” readers?

The participants’ homes do not have many books except for magazines, newspapers and religious books. The public library is important to them. They read regularly and

recommend books to each other and discuss them. They make it look like a sort of a book club. None of them mention a school library.

5.2.2 What books do they choose to read for leisure?

The first interview showed that they read a mixture of picture books, adventure, romance and biography. They read a mix of South African and overseas books. The participants who like “love stories” also read other kinds of books. The boy who likes biographies says he likes these because they help him to learn more about other people and “real stuff”. They read a mixture of languages with all reading English books.

The second round of interviews confirmed these findings. They liked the Siyagruva books because:

- The characters are like themselves
- The series with the same people in all the books makes them know the characters
- They are easy to read
- They deal with teenagers’ issues like relationships, identity, making mistakes, problems with parents
- The social issues like gangsters and xenophobia are meaningful.

All of them describe the Siyagruva books as different from their usual books because they are “real”.

5.2.3 How do they choose books and what influences, if any, do librarians have on reading habits and tastes of South African teenagers?

In choosing a book to read, word of mouth among their peers is important. They often mention the “cool” covers and interesting titles of the Siyagruva books. They read the first few lines. The thinness and look of the Siyagruva books are attractive.

They make hardly any mention of adults’ influence. But my observation shows that the Eersterivier Librarian provides a nice atmosphere for young readers. She motivates the children by giving them incentives after drawing /painting a best picture to decorate the children’s section, or after narrating/ reading a story. She gives them book markers, pencils and sweets and soup every afternoon. The Library is obviously an important part of the six participants’ lives.

One question I had was why the Eersterivier Library did not market the Siyagruva books more. None of the teenagers knew about them even though they were listed in the Library's catalogue. This is the problem with "word of mouth" as readers do not get to know of new titles. This research has assisted the Eersterivier Public Library staff and community in that the children were deprived of these books since they were still kept in the store room and the Librarian had totally forgotten about them. She has promised to display them now.

5.2.4 How do teenagers respond to the Siyagruva books?

The children liked them very much from the first day I asked them to select their choices of interest. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, when I laid the books on the table the children jumped like dogs seeing meat. After reading the books, "OJ" and Grace even commented that they would like to meet the editor and the authors to have a chat with them. "OJ" said that he has some questions lined up for them. Shalony was so impressed that she suggested that if only they could produce other books on cases like child abuse, rape, drug abuse, etc.

5.2.5 Is the South African setting of the books a positive factor in their responses?

The South Africa setting is an important part of why they like the books. They prefer them because they can relate to them. Grace, for example, says that she loves reading about a familiar place that she knows and starts imagining the place. She explains, "Such a feeling increases the anxiety [interest?] of what you're reading and you enjoy more."

5.2.6 Is the choice of relevant current issues in the books a positive factor in their responses?

It does seem that a main attraction of the books is that they talk about what the participants keep calling "real" issues. The situations are familiar to the participants but, as stated in Chapter 4, the books give new ideas to the readers.

5.3 Conclusions

Even though it involves only six readers, the final conclusion of my study is that the Siyagruva books are successful because they do fill a gap in the teenager publishing market in South Africa and in the reading needs of teenagers. My interviews show the excitement over the books. The readers felt that they found a book that reflected them. They were queuing up for more books in the series as they were identifying

with the characters. The books are now being translated into Afrikaans, Xhosa and Zulu which is excellent news.

One worry is that it took my project to sell the books to the library staff. They just started marketing the Siyagruva Series after the Librarian had seen the teenagers' keen interest in the books I was using for my research. When one of the participants was carrying one of the books, the staff fancied the cover. The Librarian then decided to photocopy the front covers and put them on the wall as posters to attract children. The Librarian has promised to put the Siyagruva books on display in an accessible area as from January 2005.

However, my observations and my experience with the six enthusiastic readers in the study show that the Eersterivier Public Library is playing a major role in encouraging reading. School libraries are not functioning properly or not existing.

5.4 Recommendations

I would like to make a few suggestions about the Siyagruva Series:

- Libraries, bookshops and schools need to promote new authors and series like the Siyagruva Series to encourage and sustain the reading habits of teenagers
- It would also be nice to have “toddlers, jump and hop” teenage books to help starters from rural areas who are not exposed to English and for third language peoples
- A translation of some of the Afrikaans words or a glossary of some sort as one participant mentioned would be a good idea
- Another participant suggested that if the books would be set in all the regions more teenagers would be interested
- If the Siyagruva Series books would be in all the eleven languages, it would increase the readership and the market
- More advertising should be done through posters and in all channels of media, especially in schools and libraries so that teenagers are aware of these books.

Siyagruva Series read by participants

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**APPENDIX A
LETTERS OF PERMISSION
LETTER TO THE LIBRARIAN**

Block T 28, Hector Peterson Residence,

University of the Western Cape

P/Bag X 79

Bellville

7535.

29th July 2004

The Librarian

Eersterivier Public library

P. O. Box 194

Eersterivier

7100



Dear Mrs. Thomas

Permission to conduct a research project in your library

As you know I am doing a research project called “Filling a gap? A study of some South African teenagers’ responses to the Siyagruva Series” I am grateful for the support you have offered me.

I would appreciate if you could help me identify six enthusiastic readers in your library – 13-15 years old boys and girls of different cultures and personalities. They should be regular readers of books in English. I plan to conduct the research in the weeks of the school holidays 24th September to the 4th October. Could we meet to discuss my plan further? My supervisor is Mrs. G. Hart.

Yours faithfully,

Peggy D. Mabuza.

LETTER TO PARENTS

Block T 28, Hector Peterson Residence,
University of the Western Cape
P/Bag X 79
Bellville
7535.

2nd August 2004

The Parent
P/B ...
Eersterivier

Dear Sir/Madam

Request to discuss and interview your child on Siyagruva Series books

I am an M.Bibl student in the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of Western Cape. I am doing a research project at Eersterivier Public Library on reader response. I will be issuing Siyagruva Series books to six enthusiastic readers, which we will discuss afterwards.

May I then have permission to work with your child in discussing and interviewing the books with your child from 27th September to 7th October 2004?

Please be assured that the information received will be treated confidentially and professionally. Your child will remain anonymous.

Your co-operation in this project will be highly appreciated.



Yours faithfully
Peggy Dumisile Mabuza

I hereby give permission for my daughter/son to be interviewed for research project

.....

APPENDIX B

FILLING A GAP? A STUDY OF SOME SOUTH AFRICAN TEENAGE READERS' RESPONSES TO THE SIYAGRUVA SERIES BOOKS AT EERSTERIVIER PUBLIC LIBRARY.

I am an M.Bibl student researching teenagers' reader response to the Siyagruva Series books. The aim of the study is to find out the responses of the teenagers towards these new South African books. Currently, I am at the stage of collecting data, and would appreciate if you could assist me by completing the questions below.

Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW 1-QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Biographical details

1. Age: _____

2. Gender: Male  Female

3. What is your home language?

English	<input type="checkbox"/>	Xhosa	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chichewe	<input type="checkbox"/>	Afrikaans	<input type="checkbox"/>
Venda	<input type="checkbox"/>	Swahili	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tswana	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sotho	<input type="checkbox"/>
Zulu	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shona	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shangaan	<input type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. What grade are you doing? _____

5. What is the name of your school? _____

B. Reading Preferences

I believe you are an enthusiastic reader.

6. How do you choose a book in the library? (More than one tick is okay).

Cover	<input type="checkbox"/>	Favourite author	<input type="checkbox"/>	Favourite genre	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blurb	<input type="checkbox"/>	Told by friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	First few lines	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others	<input type="checkbox"/>				

7. Which of these kinds of books do you like to read? Tick as many as you want.

A book from a series*	<input type="checkbox"/>	Love stories	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adventure and mystery	<input type="checkbox"/>	Horror & fantasy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comedy*	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-fiction i.e. animals, sports, religious etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Biographies	<input type="checkbox"/>	None of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Series books are succession of books with same look and characters

*Comedy is a literary work written in a funny style or treating a funny theme.

8. Why do you like to read the above books?



9. Where do you get the books? Tick as many as you want.

Bookshop	<input type="checkbox"/>	Home	<input type="checkbox"/>
School Library	<input type="checkbox"/>	Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Library	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
if other specify _____			

10. Have you read or heard about the Siyagruva Series books?

Yes No

11. If yes, list the titles here

12. How many books have you read this year except textbooks?

0	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	6	<input type="checkbox"/>	9	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	7	<input type="checkbox"/>	10	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	<input type="checkbox"/>	8	<input type="checkbox"/>	More than 11	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. Please give their titles below:

14. Do you ever give up on a book? Yes No

15. If "yes", what makes you give up on a book?

16. What language do you prefer your books to be in?

English Afrikaans
African language Other (specify please) _____



C. Literacy Background

17. Do your parents belong to any library? Yes No

18. What kinds of books do your parents like to read at home?

Newspapers Non-fiction: sports, cookery. Knitting,
Bible / Koran Magazines
Novels/story books Other (specify please) _____

19. Do your parents ever sit down and read? Yes No

I appreciate your cooperation.

11) Is it the way your friends speak? _____

12) Are there any surprises in what you read on the Siyagruva Series books? Are they different from the books you usually read? _____

13) Please explain the answer to the above question. _____

14) Do you look forward to reading another book in Siyagruva Series?

15) Please explain why. _____



16) Is there anything in the book that is close to your life or your friends' life?

17) Please explain the answer to the above question.

18) Did the book make you change your mind, in what way?

19) Does the Siyagruva book have problems that appeal to you, and do you like it? Please explain. _____

20) Do you like the fact that the Siyagruva Series books are set in Cape Town?

Thank you for your cooperation.