The Invisible Females: Analysing Gender in the OBE-oriented Language Books for the Intermediate Phase in South African Schools

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Introduction

In acknowledging that historical marginalisation of groups of people would be corrected through education and having identified females as part of the marginalized groups, South Africa as a country embraced the Education For All (EFA) principles, goals, targets and guidelines contained in both the World Declaration on Education for All and The Dakar Framework for Action (Department of Education—DoE 1999). The Dakar Framework for Action pledges members, among other commitments to:

> ▪ eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to and achievement in education of good quality;
> ● Implement integrated strategies for gender equality in education, which recognize the need for changes in attitudes, values and practices. (THE CSAEMP 2001)

As such, the South African Constitution guarantees gender equality and the right of everyone to basic education and with the adoption of the new constitution came the transformation of the education system guided by various legislative instruments and policies (DoE 1996; DoE 2000). In the light of this human rights approach to education, in 1998 South Africa adopted

a policy that aimed at changing the curriculum in all schools to make education inclusive to all learners (including female learners). This curriculum—that was based on the Outcomes-based education (OBE)—was launched in April 1997 (DoE 1999:24). Following the launch of 'Curriculum 2005' new schoolbooks that claimed to follow the OBE-approach became available from publishers in South Africa.

In 2002, the DoE published The Revised National Curriculum Statements (NCS) Grades R-9 (DoE 2002) which adopts an inclusive approach to the curriculum (DoE October 2002; DoE July 2001) by specifying the minimum requirements for all learners. Also, it takes into cognisance human rights issues such as inequality, gender, disability and HIV/AIDS that influence the degree and way in which learners can participate in schooling. This inclusive policy did not only aim at making schools accessible to female learners, but also aimed at eliminating gender disparities that existed in school books / materials.

Though in real situations women cluster in the lowest of skills, pay and status, South African females are diverse in terms of their social, professional, cultural, financial and political standing. However, in the schoolbooks and school materials the general ideological perception that the role of women is wife or mother and that the women's participation in the labour market is marginal, is expressed in a number of different ways omitting the diverse realities of women. As such, all the Learning Area Statements in the NCS document try to create awareness of the relationship between human rights, social justice, a healthy environment and inclusivity, and learners are encouraged to develop knowledge and understanding of this rich diversity of South Africa (DoE 2002). Specifically, The Language Learning Area in the NCS document contributes to the curriculum by developing in learners, critical tools necessary to become responsible citizens.

With special reference to the learners in the Intermediate Phase, the Language Learning Area in the NCS document requires that these learners should be introduced to a wide range of text including broader social and environmental issues that are national concerns like gender, HIV/AIDS, and poverty. The NCS document specifies that these social issues should not just be treated as the content of texts, but as the conscious part of learning experience. In this way learners will be exposed to the authentic use of language and through language they will develop critical skills to recognize and challenge stereotypes (including gender stereotypes), and learn how texts persuade readers to particular points of view and to challenge these uses of

language (DoE, 2002). Thus, this article seeks to analyse six OBE-oriented language school books for the intermediate phase to determine how far they cover these language learning area requirements, and if they reinforce / challenge stereotypical images of girls and women in typically female activities and occupations that omit the diverse realities of women.

Language, Gender and The OBE-curriculum

After recognising that the curriculum in schools does 'exert some form of control over learners and educators by the way in which knowledge is presented' (Wolpe, Quinlan & Martinez 1977:95), and that it has 'contributed to reinforcing stereotypical notions of gender differences' (DoE 2002:34), the South African Department of Education through the new OBE[1] curriculum in schools intends developing critical thinking skills in learners and challenging the stereotypical female images in school environment. Since all texts carry specific values, the language learning area (according to the NCS document) is an important vehicle to achieving democratic principles. Therefore, when learning a language the NCS document requires that learners should explore the values carried by texts with an aim of identifying and discussing constitutional values and challenging stereotypes—gender stereotypes in particular (DoE 2002). It also requires that the themes selected for language learning should cut across gender and diverse backgrounds (rural/urban) including all realities of women and men.

Regarding gender the learning outcome six in the NCS document specifies the necessity for learners to develop their meta-cognition (DoE 2002). Since short passages in language books form the contexts in which language structures and skills are learnt, these passages should then provide ideas and contexts where questions can be posed in relation to learners' own experiences of 'being gendered' and 'being actively positioned within a gender system'. Therefore the inclusion of the realities of women's lives in the schoolbooks will provide a context in which learners visualize the oppressive codes and the wider range of problems emerging from histories, social systems and traditions that reproduce the inequalities of gender. Furthermore, when gender issues are contextualised within other experiences of difference or

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[1] OBE is Outcomes-based-education, an approach that is learner-centred and emphasises learning more than teaching. It focuses on the results or outcomes of learning.

identity, learners will interrogate their own development, particularly in the intermediate phase where learners develop a sense of 'self', the positioning of 'self' within a culture and the performing of 'self' according to the expectations of that culture. Language being one vehicle for identity formation and cultural construction should then be used effectively to create contexts for learners to see their beliefs in perspective and to discuss the implications of the things they think about males and females. That would be of great importance for the gender agenda in the classroom.

Gender Stereotypical Images in Primary Schoolbooks

Gender bias is a worldwide phenomenon and in schools, it is practiced in many different forms. From the differentiated school uniforms (dresses for girls and trousers for boys), to the different school rules (boys to cut their hair short and girls to tie their hair with ribbons), to the different sports (rugby for boys and netball for girls), to the schoolbooks read in class and in school libraries, gender stereotypes are entrenched deeply throughout the school culture. Because gender bias has always been so obvious in schoolbooks, and as Nilsen (1977:161) says that 'Culturally, print in most minds suggest veracity', and because of the power of the printed word which is often taken as true, feminist groups were concerned that children would learn certain behaviours through role models in schoolbooks (Sugino 1998) and that they would also learn psychological and sociological values when reading the books. As a result, many researchers throughout the world (Nilsen 1977; Sugino 1998; Manjari 1998; Tepper 1999; Schaunn & Flanagan 1992; Holmes 1993) have studied children's literature to determine what children are being exposed to.

When studying gender bias in schoolbooks in three suburban New Jersey communities, researchers have discovered that there is a prevalence of male over female images (Nilsen 1977:162). In the content of stories in the same books, different genders had been presented with stereotypical personalities and qualities. For instance, females played passive, appreciative and supportive roles while males played active roles and were presented with strength, bravery and leadership skills (Nilsen 1977:162). Girl characters— usually in the roles of mothers and princesses—were often represented as naïve, conforming, dependent and being rescued by achieving their goals through help from others while boy characters were independent, capable and

successful through their ingenuity and perseverance (Manjari 1998). These stereotypical images were identified even where the characters were animals. Such stereotyping of the roles has not only been confined to social roles but also to professional roles where males have most often been portrayed as authors (Nilsen 1977:165).

In folklores and fairy tales that are often read in elementary classes in schools, gender stereotypes are often constructed. 'Heroines' as characters attain their status not because they rescue themselves from their situations, but because they are beautiful and can endure suffering, and the reward is most often marriage. So, 'heroines' wait patiently and passively to be chosen for marriage while the young men in fairy tales win the prize if they are active and brave, and the prize is often a beautiful girl (Schaunn & Flanagan 1992:245). In analysing fairy tales, Schaunn and Flanagan (1992:258) argue that these stories establish a 'dichotomy between women who are gentle and passive, and those who are active, wicked and ugly'. Women who are powerful and good are never human—they are fairies that little girls cannot identify with; women who are human and have power are nearly always portrayed as repulsive. So, in most fairy tales, girl children are socialized to the stereotype of beauty that leads to success and success for the girl child is attained when a 'prince' chooses her for marriage.

Research has also discovered that reality is not emphasized in schoolbooks. For instance, the illustrations picture boys as having larger bodies than girls and that is, contrary to reality where the maturing girls have larger bodies than boys of the same age (Nilsen 1977:165). Again, where the generic words like 'man', 'mankind' and 'person' are used in books, the illustrations do not follow through the generic meanings, as they only show males (Nilsen 1977:173). This use of the generic terms excludes females from the schoolbooks therefore 'produces the impression that women are ignored and passed over' (Sugino 1998). However, limited specific research has been done to study gender bias in OBE-oriented books used in South African schools to determine whether the influence of the transforming South African social environment and curriculum in schools has been felt in the literary world, and whether the new schoolbooks reflect this transformation.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study is based on Pharr's theory of oppression where one of the common elements in oppressive behaviour is the 'defined norm' (Pharr 1988:7), and the

'norm' is the standard of correctness wherein all others are judged in relation to it. People who fall outside the 'norm' are 'those who seek their rights and inclusion' (Pharr 1988:9). Since they are not part of the 'norm', they are seen and as such presented as 'inferior' and 'marginalized'. The 'other's' existence, everyday life, capabilities and achievements are kept unknown through invisibility or selective presentation. Then there is reinforcement of the idea that the 'norm' exists in the majority and 'others' do not exist or do not count (Pharr 1988:9).

Therefore, this study hypothesizes that in the current OBE-oriented schoolbooks the male and only the able-bodied male is the 'norm' and the female is the 'other', and as such, the female is defined in relation to the male. Since females are not part of the 'norm', they are seen and thus presented as inferior and marginalized. Their everyday lives, capabilities, achievements, real contributions and gains are kept unknown through invisibility and selective presentation that only highlights the stereotype female.

The intermediate phase (Grades 4,5 and 6) was selected as an area for investigation because in this phase learners are at their pre-adolescent stage (ages 9-11) and are therefore often restless and unsure about themselves. They are at a stage where they are self-conscious and as such, the issues relating to identity become important to them. Therefore, when teaching language in this phase, the relationship between language and identity should always be kept in mind. Grade four was chosen as it is the first grade in the intermediate phase and as such forms a transition between the Foundation and an Intermediate phases.

The six OBE-oriented books for grade four that were analysed are *Making Sense* by Liz Stewart, *UVulindlela* by Z. Ndlela and T. Mkhize, *Daybreak* by D. Clohessy, E. O'Riordan, L. Beake and C. Kühne, *IsiZulu Sempela* by Z.A. Ziqubu, *Nuwe Afrikaans Sonder Grense* by Mari Lätti and Sonia Gouws and *Dynamic English* by Gus de Villiers, Helene Strauss and Sylvia van Straaten. All six books are language books—three English books, two isiZulu books and one Afrikaans book—the three languages that are taught in KwaZulu-Natal schools. All six books were published in the year 2000, almost three years after the OBE-curriculum was launched in 1997. Maskew Miller Longman published three of the books and Kagiso Education published the other three, both of which companies have extensive experience in publishing schoolbooks.

The design of the study is content analysis and the six OBE-oriented language books for the Intermediate Phase (Grade four in particular) are the

unit of analysis. Qualitative analytical methods were used to examine the character roles and activities both in the pictures—as forms of non-verbal communication—and short passages in relation to selected themes from the books. In all the six books analysed, the themes for analysis were selected on the basis that they involve the pictures of people and the gender of the characters in the stories is clearly described. Themes that did not include human or animal characters with a clearly described gender were not analysed. The short passages were selected as an area of focus because in language books, short passages most often form a context in which specific language structures and skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking) are learnt in a particular theme. The pictures reinforce the theme or context. In analysing both the short passages and the pictures firstly, the gender of the characters was identified. Then the social or professional roles as well as the actions associated with the characters were linked to the relevant character.

The Invisible Females

This section presents the analysis of the six selected language books for grade four. The six books were selected as the publishing companies claimed that the books were written in the OBE-style. They are all language books for grade four and published by the two companies that have an established record of publishing schoolbooks for South African schools. Maskew Miller Longman has over one hundred years of educational publishing experience in Southern Africa (Maskew Miller Longman Company Profile http://www.mml.profile.asp. 2003-08-11) and Kagiso Education being one of the well-known imprints under which Maskew Miller Longman publishes (Maskew Miller Longman http://www.mml.co.za/general/index.asp 2003-08-11). In all the six books selected, themes that have characters and pictures with a clearly described gender were analysed. Themes that did not have human or animal characters with a clearly described gender were not analysed. In the selected themes in each book, the roles and actions of all the gendered characters in the passages and in the pictures were considered for analysis. In analysing both the short passages and the pictures firstly, the gender of the characters was identified. Then the social or professional roles as well as the actions associated with the characters were linked to the appropriate gender in order to identify the stereotypes and these were presented in table form.

Making Sense

Table 1: Character Roles and Actions in *Making Sense*

Social and professional roles	Gender of the characters	Action
Old man Police Learners Principal Doctor Inventor		Singing Speaking Interviewing Researching Doing experiments Presenting a book Thinking Watching others
Old woman Mother Wife Teacher Learners		Telling stories Cooking Holding a baby Sitting and listening Watching others

Making Sense is an English language learner's book for Language, Literacy and Communication for Grade four. Out of the six themes in the book, five were analysed. As represented in Table 1, the pictures and the character roles in the passages in this book, depict males in a variety of professional roles while females are presented in traditional roles of mother, wife and teacher. For example, in the theme *PLACES* in the book, three units of huts create a rural family context and the woman is cooking in a large pot outside the huts. With the three children sitting and fowls in the yard, the impression created is of a rural home, the woman's roles probably being that of mother and wife who is responsible for the raising up of children.

While the pictures present both male and female learners side-by-side, the male learners are depicted as active and assertive. They take leading roles and speak most of the time while the female learners exist passively, quietly playing the roles of watching what the boys do and listening to the boys speaking. Actions done by male learners are standing and speaking, thinking, doing presentation, reading books, doing experiments and researching. The female learners are presented sitting or listening. Adult females are presented in traditional roles of cooking, holding babies or telling stories.

In this book the invisibility and non-existence of women has been compounded by their identity being integrated with that of husbands. For
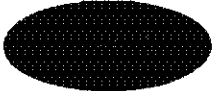
instance, in the passage on 'Pollution', Doctor Little is described, as a 'very busy little man with a beard', while his wife is invisible. Dr Little is active and speaks to the animals. He is a doctor and an inventor who has a new invention—a space ship (TSM)—and he solves the problem of pollution. Dr Little's wife has no identity of her own in the story as she depends on her husband's surname for recognition and identification. She is defined as Doctor Little's wife by words like, 'his plump, jolly wife', 'my wife and I'and 'Mrs Little'. There is no mention of her name and she is silent throughout the story only existing on a page as a passive illustration next to her husband, Dr Little.

However, not just any male is the 'norm', or the 'example' or 'active' in the book: it must be an able-bodied male. The males who are physically challenged are represented as a category standing on their own and focus on their blindness makes their 'disability' more salient. The six men in the passage, 'The blind men and the elephant' are presented as 'stupid'. When they touch the elephant, they cannot feel that the parts of the elephant are joined together. So, they make wild, far removed guesses saying that the elephant's trunk is a snake, the tusk is a knife, the ear is a leaf, the tail is a rope, the leg is a tree and the body is a wall.

UVulindlela[2] meaning 'Paving the way'

Table 2: Character roles and actions in *UVulindlela*

Social and professional roles	Gender of the characters	Action
Fire fighter Soccer player Learners Doctor Builder Artist		Running Playing basketball Reading a newspaper Speaking Painting Listening to a radio
Housewife Mother Learners		Fetching water and firewood Playing netball Skipping rope Cooking Serving tea

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[2] This is an isiZulu name for a male person and the book has been personified.

In *Vulindlela*, an *isiZulu* language book for the first language speakers of *isiZulu* there are five themes and four were analysed. As illustrated in Table 2 the males are represented in a variety of social and professional roles while the females are stereotyped as housewives and mothers doing domestic work of cooking, serving tea, fetching water and firewood, and so on. In the theme *ISIKOLE* (school), the males are stereotyped as doctor, builder and females work in hospital and sew wedding dresses.

The ability of the male to make decisions—whether good or bad— for themselves and standing by their decisions is evident in the poem '*Ngikhathele Isikole*' (I'm tired of school). This poem is about the boy who does not want to wake up and go to school. His sister pleads with him to go, bribing him with chocolate cake and ice cream. However, he does not want any sympathy, nice stories or scary things and stubbornly says, '*A-N-G-I-V-U-K-I*' (I'm not waking up). The girl in the poem plays the role of a female who takes responsibility for the wrong decision that the male has made about his own life. This, she does by trying to plead with the boy who is stubborn, and does not want to go to school. She is going to be late for school herself.
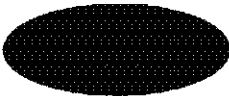
The stereotype of a man who is the sole provider in the family is greatly highlighted in the passage '*Amabombo Abheke Ekhaya*' meaning 'Going Home'. A man who works far from home arrives in a taxi with a lot of goods that he has bought for his family. The passage emphasises the 'joy' in his family when he arrives home. He does not want to be dropped off by the taxi next to his home but prefers to be dropped at a distance so that the children, wife and dog can run to meet him. The picture also shows the dog, three children and the wife running to meet him and among the goods that he has bought for the family, female shoes obviously meant for the wife, are particularly mentioned to emphasise that she is also dependent on him.

Daybreak

Table 3: Character roles and actions in *Daybreak*

In *Daybreak*—an English language book—eight themes of eleven were analysed. Table 3 illustrates that in this book, males are presented in a variety of social roles as compared to females who play limited roles of 'housewife', nurse and singer.

Not only is the female presented within the confines of the domestic sphere, but she is also shown as lacking in confidence to move out of this

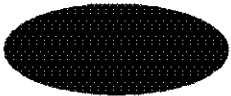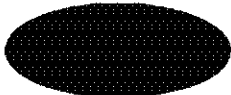| Social and professional roles	Gender of the characters	Action
Uncle Ticket officer Tractor driver Taxi driver Bus driver Grandfather Cyclists Learners Criminals/thieves Police		Making tea Selling tickets Driving tractor, taxi and bus Providing Steal diamonds Catch thieves Escapes from thieves Control emotions Sad, angry, happy, frightened
Nurse Housewife Singer Grandmother Learner		Giving medicine Cooking Buying necklace Knitting Chatting to each other Holding a baby Lonely, shy, excited, sad

allocated sphere. She is presented as needing and dependent on male support when she is outside the domestic confines. In the passage 'Benji wants to see his grandfather', Benji's father works in a business and Benji's mother works at home doing house chores and the picture shows her cooking. When Benji asks his mother that they visit his grandfather, his father is too busy at work to come with them, and Benji's mother is shown as not confident enough to travel alone without her husband. She is described as being 'a bit worried about this' and she indicates that she would rely on Benji's help on the journey. The help Benji's mother is referring to is not about luggage since they are not carrying lots of bags/luggage. Benji's mother has only her sling bag and Benji is carrying his backpacker bag. So, this need for help implies dependence and lack of confidence. In the pictures, Benji is the one who speaks to the ticket officer and he walks confidently with his mother following slightly behind.

The male-dominated world of risk-taking, bravery, ingenuity and emotion control is demonstrated in the passage 'Stolen diamonds' where the thieves have put stolen diamonds in Justice's pocket. They kidnap him to get

their diamonds back. The thieves and police are males and Justice is a brave, clever young boy who controls his emotion of fear, takes risks and 'outwits' the thieves thereby leading them to being arrested by police.

IsiZulu Sempela meaning 'proper isiZulu language'

Table 4: Character roles and actions in *isiZulu Sempela*

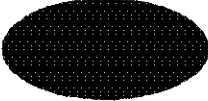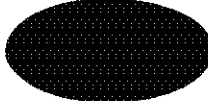| Social and professional roles	Gender of the characters	Action
Driver Business owner Salesperson Business Manager Human resource manager Financial manager General manager Radio Broadcaster		Reading a newspaper Listening to a radio Driving Writing Phoning using landline and cell phone Sitting in front of computer Employing people Broadcasting Watering the garden Raking leaves Marketing
Public relations officer Mother/housewife		Helping the injured people Talking to people Washing clothes

In isiZulu Sempela, an isiZulu language book for the first language speakers of isiZulu there are ten themes and five were analysed. In the book, both pictures and text show the world of business. Table 4 illustrates that in this book males are represented in office environments, occupying a wide range of high paying jobs and mostly management (thus decision-making) positions as compared to

females who are represented in limited roles of wife, mother and public relations officer. In a formal complaint letter in the theme *UMFUNDI NENDAWO AHLALA KUYO* (The learner and the environment), Mr Mdletshe is either the owner of the store or the manager and the shop assistant is clearly a female who is described by the words '*intombazane eyayingisiza*', meaning 'a girl who helped me'. Social roles are clearly gendered as the female do the laundry while the males are watering the garden and raking the leaves.

The stereotype of news being a domain for males is evident in the passage about the importance of the radio and newspaper. This passage emphasises that the radio and newspaper are important for news dissemination though there is also mention of other programmes that are broadcast. The males are reading the newspaper and listening to the radio. With the heading on the front cover of the newspaper, 'Peace in DRC' and the back cover heading, 'Soccer Feast', a stereotype is clearly reinforced: the news is for men and what is newsworthy is what interests men (male domain).

Nuwe Afrikaans Sonder Grense

Table 5: Character roles and actions in *Nuwe Afrikaans Sonder Grense*

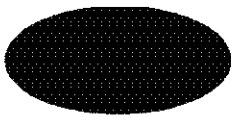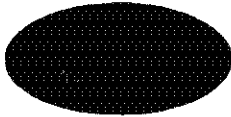| Social and professional roles	Gender of the characters	Action
Learners Father Grandfather Shopkeeper		Listening to the radio 'Braai wors' Taking photos
Learners Mother Grandmother		Knitting Baking Cleaning Rides bicycle Plant mealies Buying Selling produce

The Afrikaans book, *Nuwe Afrikaans Sonder Grense*, has eight themes of which four were analysed. The book is written for learners who take Afrikaans

as a second additional language. So, in this phase learners are at their elementary stage of learning Afrikaans. The book is mainly intended to improve their vocabulary.

However, gender stereotypical roles are evident in the book. For instance, in the picture of the theme of *VROLIKE FAMILIES*, each family member is represented in a gender stereotypical role. Grandfather is listening to the radio, grandmother is knitting, mother is cleaning the wall, father 'braai wors' and Mpuka (male child) is taking photos using a camera. Again, the contents of a fridge to teach the vocabulary of the groceries in 'Wat is in die yskas?' (What is in the fridge?) are presented in a kitchen context with a female picture.

Dynamic English

Table 6: Character roles and actions in Dynamic English

Social and professional roles	Gender of the characters	Action
Learners Father Doctor Driver Mechanic		Speaking Working in the garden Doing the washing Fixes cars Play soccer and cricket
Learners Mother Teacher Beautiful lady Working at the bank Patient		Speaking Studies at night Reads stories

In Dynamic English, an English language book written for the second language speakers of English there are nine themes in the book and seven were analysed. In this book in the theme *FAMILY AND FRIENDS*, the social and professional roles are clearly gendered in such a way that the binary of strong

and weak is evident. A doctor (healthy and strong) is male and the patient is female (sick and weak). Again, evidence of the undervalued, and thus not remunerated, jobs that women do is indicated in the passage 'Saturday in Town'. The passage also depicts the role of women as caregiver and child bearer. Mrs Zondo goes to town with her daughter, Lindi. She buys cough syrup from the pharmacy for her husband. They visit the library to read, visit a neighbour who has given birth to a baby in hospital, and then stop at many shops in the mall until they are hungry.

Furthermore, the idea of marriage as destiny is evident in Cobus's story that sounds like century-old fairy tales. In this story a lonely man, John, feeds an ugly cat that has come from nowhere with milk until the cat asks him to make a wish. Then he asks for a wife and is immediately given a 'beautiful lady', Stella, who appears from nowhere. As in the old fairy tales where the destiny and mission of females was to fulfill the two offices of being wife and mother, the story ends with John and Stella getting married, and the vague statement of 'they lived happily ever after'.

Conclusion

The major project of the DoE is to deliver the OBE-curriculum in schools. To ensure this delivery and that relevant materials are used by schools the education department has its monitoring systems. However, the blind spot in the horizon is that despite the monitoring systems of the DoE, the OBE-oriented schoolbooks are still not reflective of the curriculum that they intend to deliver. While the gender-sensitive language of 'he or she' is used in the books, and the pictures mostly represent males and females side-by-side, addressing issues of gender bias goes far beyond the putting of 'he or she' (whether in words or pictures) next to each other.

In the analysed books, pictures and characters in the passages still reflect traditional gender stereotypes where females are represented in the traditional roles of wife and/or mother as well as in limited professional roles of teachers, while the males are represented in a variety of professional roles where they have power to make decisions and control resources. In the books, there is absence of role models that girl children can identify with if they want to continue with their education and, much against the requirements of the NCS document, none of the passages and pictures in the books presented contexts where learners will use language to develop skills to identify and

challenge gender stereotypes. The question therefore is: Are the monitoring systems of the DoE effective enough to ensure that books and materials used to deliver the OBE-curriculum in schools, do not reflect and thus perpetuate the gender stereotypes that they are supposed to challenge?

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