AUTHORS:
M. Armstrong[1]
C. Boughey[1] iD

AFFILIATION:
[1]Rhodes University

LEARNING TO LEARN: CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN A MARGINALISED COMMUNITY IN PORT ELIZABETH

ABSTRACT

This article draws on a long-term ethnographic study that explored the way the home based practices experienced by children in a marginalised community in a large South African city, Port Elizabeth, prepared them for, and supported them in, schooling. The study was informed by the field known as 'New Literacy Studies' and which draws extensively on the likes of Heath (1983) and Street (1984). It acknowledges that individuals have the power to exercise agency in the context of structural and cultural constraints but shows how, in this particular community, poverty and geography and the educational backgrounds of caregivers impacted on their best efforts to contribute to their children's development.

Keywords: *Literacy, language, preparation for schooling, support for schooling*

1. INTRODUCTION

International tests of literacy such as the Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) consistently identify the poor reading performance of learners in South African schools. The outcome of the 2016 study, for example, positioned South Africa as last amongst the fifty countries taking part (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena, & Palane, 2016) and showed that a staggering 78% of South African learners were unable to read for meaning in any language, including their home language, by the end of their fourth year of formal schooling (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena, McLeod & Palane, 2017).

Although popular discourses tend to locate such low levels of performance in the poor quality of schooling available to the majority of South African learners (Economist, 2017), a wealth of literature identifies the way in which children's home environments influence the development of literacy. Heath's seminal (1983) ethnographic study, for example,

shows how influences such as the educational background of parents and the kinds of access to reading materials experienced in the home affect what young learners do with, and around, printed text.

By drawing on ethnographic research, Street (1984) was able to make a distinction between understandings of literacy: the autonomous model and the ideological model. The autonomous model sees literacy as a set of technical skills involving the decoding and encoding of print. Successful reading and writing are dependent on mastering the "technology" of decoding and encoding and, thus, on schooling in which these processes are mostly taught. The ideological model takes literacy a step further. Although it acknowledges the importance of the ability to decode and encode, it sees literacy as a multiple phenomenon involving socially embedded ways of relating to text. Different social groups will engage with different kinds of texts and will engage with these texts in different ways. Literacy is thus related to social disposition and emerges as a set of socially embedded practices involving a set of values about the role of printed text in the lives of individuals and what it is appropriate to do in relation to it.

From here it is possible to come to understand literacy as a multiple, rather than a unitary, phenomenon. It is also possible to see that literacy does not necessarily involve a relationship with printed text since some social groups choose to set print aside altogether or engage with it in minimal ways (see, for example, Breier, 1996). Some literacies, typically those associated with formal schooling, are privileged over others, however.

What all the studies that draw on the ideological model have in common is the acknowledgement that socio-cultural context matters as reading and writing are developed (see, for example, Street, 1985; Baynham, 1995; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996). Although text-based literacies require the ability to encode and decode, mastering these processes in order to read and write fluently is dependent on practice and, thus, on whether or not learners are supported and encouraged to rehearse the skills to which they have been introduced. The socio-cultural context will also impact on the kinds of texts to which readers are exposed and will shape the way they engage with them effectively creating their reading "identities" (O'Shea *et al.,* 2019). All this means that, depending on their home contexts, some children will be introduced to, and supported in, mastering literacies privileged in schooling whilst others will not (Gee, 2015; Stroud & Prinsloo, 2015). As a result, access to literacies is uneven regardless of the quality of schooling available as the development of different literacies extends beyond formal educational contexts.

PIRLS researchers in South Africa consider the relationship of access to early childhood development facilities, conditions in schools (including overcrowding) and the involvement of parents with their children to results of the tests (Howie *et al.,* 2017; Mullis, Martin, Foy & Hooper, 2017). They go on to argue that the quality of learning experiences available to children is related to the literacies they will go on to master that may not be the same as those tested by PIRLS. Research (see, for example, Gee 2015) shows that many children arrive in school having been exposed to literacies that do not match those that are valued in formal educational settings. For these children, learning to read and write involves much more than the technicalities involved in reading and writing since they also need to begin to understand values attached to certain kinds of texts and ways of engaging with them. A point that is not made so markedly by the PIRLS researchers, however, is that the vast majority of learners tested will not have been exposed to, and have thus acquired, the dominant literacies
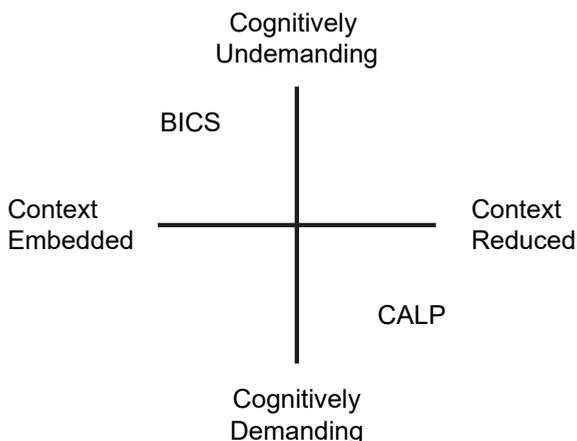
associated with the tests since this will correlate with social standing particularly in countries where low levels of educational attainment pertain.

In South Africa, twenty-five years after the first democratic election, socio-economic class still tends to mirror the old race-based groupings of apartheid. PIRLS reports do not correlate reading performance with skin colour but it is possible to use other proxies for this, including language. Thus, Howie *et al.* (2016) note that 93% of learners tested in Sepedi could not read for meaning. Percentages for isiXhosa were 88% and isiZulu 87%. Other indigenous languages show similar results. What all this suggests is that it is black children who are still bearing the brunt of poor reading scores. If Street's (1984) ideological model of literacy is called upon, this can be explained by the fact that the majority of black children in the country come from homes where, thanks to apartheid, parents have not been afforded the kind of education that will have exposed them to the kinds of literacies valued in formal schooling. The differences in income that continue to divide the country along old lines of skin colour then exacerbates the situation in ways we will demonstrate in our analysis below.

The relationship of language to socio-economic class in South Africa has just been noted. Language is also implicated in literacy development. It has long been acknowledged (Cummins & Swain, 1983) that children should be introduced to reading in their home language. This is because their knowledge of the home language allows them to engage in processes related to prediction (Goodman, 1967; Smith, 1971) which are part of reading. Unfortunately, attitudes towards language that privilege English, along with the multi-lingual nature of society that results in English being used as a lingua franca in areas where multiple indigenous languages are spoken, mean that many children are denied the right to learn to read in their home language (Casale & Posel, 2011; Van der Walt & Evans, 2017). The 2013 Annual National Assessment (DBE, 2013), for example, showed that 77% of children enrolled in grades 13 in South African schools were using English as a medium of learning. By Grade 4, 90% of children were using English (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016). This by no means mirrors the use of language in their home environments. In addition, the 2014 Annual National Assessment (DBE, 2014:19) notes that "English is the main language in which exams are being conducted", an observation that is indicative of the dominance of English in the schooling system.

Discourses dominant in South Africa construct proficiency in what might be termed the "code" of the language (syntax, vocabulary and so on) as key to learning (Boughey, 2002; McKenna, 2004). However, understandings of language (see, for example, Halliday 1973, 1978) increasingly identify the importance of context in the way language is used. One such model (Cummins, 1983) is particularly illuminative in understanding the way children may be prepared for schooling using a four-quadrant plane.

The horizontal axis of the plane depicts the extent to which language is embedded in a context and can thus draw on more than the language for meaning making. The vertical axis describes the cognitive demand on language users. On the plane, Cummins then describes two kinds of language use: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

Cognitively
Undemanding

BICS

Context   Context
Embedded ————————————|———————————— Reduced

CALP

Cognitively
Demanding

Figure 1: Range of contextual support and cognitive involvement in communicative activities (Cummins, 1983)

Basic Interpersonal Language Skills (BICS) involves the use of language for "everyday" purposes in specific settings. An example might be the conversation between two friends taking place in a kitchen. Gesturing at the kettle and containers of tea and sugar on the counter, one might ask "Do you want a cup of tea?" In this example the language use takes place in a context which itself constrains what might be discussed. Language use is face-to-face, so gesture and facial expression are also available to support meaning making. On the plane depicted above, we could locate this conversation in the upper left-hand corner of the upper left-hand quadrant.

Another form of language use might involve reading something from a textbook with few illustrations or other forms of support for meaning making. In this example, meaning has to be made from the symbols on the page. In addition, the topic is likely to be relatively abstract and complex. Engaging with language in this way is an example of what Cummins (1983) terms Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). On the plane above, it would be located in the bottom right-hand corner of the bottom right-hand quadrant.

Acknowledging the importance of context in language use allows us to see the limitations of focusing on the "form" of language by insisting that, for example, mastery of grammar is not alone sufficient for meanings to be understood or communicated. Most language users are familiar with using language for everyday purposes in contexts rich in support for meaning making, i.e. with BICS. The extent to which they may be exposed to CALP before they are immersed in formal schooling is related to the way language is used in the home and, thus, to the educational levels and literacy practices of caregivers regardless of which language is used.

As a result of this brief overview, it not difficult to see that there are considerable impediments to black South African working-class children learning to read and write in ways tested by international measures of literacy and, given the role of reading and writing in formal schooling, to "learn to learn" itself. Although a great deal of research has been conducted into learners' performance in schools, there is little, if any, in-depth work that draws on some of the

ideas noted above to explore what happens in learners' homes as they are prepared for, and supported in, schooling. It is this gap that this paper seeks to address.

2. THE STUDY

This paper is based on a study conducted amongst residents of a group of nine houses, owned by the City Council, in an impoverished area of Port Elizabeth known as "South End". The houses had been left standing as apartheid planners moved residents of an entire district to the outskirts of the city in order to allow for prime residential land to be made available to white social groups. The area immediately surrounding the houses, consisting of disused factories and workshops, had been left undeveloped for many years but was now subject to "gentrification". As a result, residents of the houses lived in fear that they would eventually be forced to move because of the "development" taking place around them.

All this meant that the community existed in a sea of poverty surrounded by wealth. Many of the old factories and workshops had been changed into businesses focused on design or marketing or had become recreational venues such as bars and restaurants. The only schools nearby were former "Model C" state schools charging fees beyond the means of parents and caregivers.

Demographically, six of the households constructed themselves as Coloured and the remaining three as White. Household income tended to be dependent on adults securing temporary, low paid jobs, many lasting only a few hours. Some of the women produced additional income by running home-based "spaza"[1] shops serving local businesses. Many of the households consisted of more than the immediate family members of the Council tenant.

2.1 Ethnographic approach

The study itself was ethnographic in nature and consisted of long-term engagement over a period of many months. This engagement involved visiting the households during the day, assisting with chores, playing with children and generally passing the time with their members. All participants in the study were aware of the nature of the study and provided informed consent for all data collection. Extensive field notes were collected and formed the data for the study itself.

Studies drawing on Street's (1984) "ideological" model of literacy (see, for example, Baynham, 1995; Prinsloo & Brier, 1996) rely on ethnography as it is only through long term engagement with communities that literacy practices can be identified and explored. Other work including Heath's (1983) seminal piece of work on the literacy practices of three communities in the United States also draws on ethnography. There is thus a long and established tradition of using this approach in the field in which this study is located because of the way it allows researchers to explore sets of social practices in depth.

Ethnography relies on the observations, and the interpretations of those observations, made by researchers (see, for example, Angrosino, 2007). Those doing ethnographic work are therefore at risk of allegations of bias. As the study on which this article is based was conducted by a white middle-class woman from a privileged background, issues of positionality were obviously relevant. In order to try to manage this, the study commenced with the development of a reflective piece of writing that attempted to surface assumptions about literacy, education,

---

1   In South Africa, a "spaza" shop is an informal convenience store selling groceries and other essential goods from the owner's home to supplement the household's income.

the role of parents and caregivers and so on. This piece then provided a means of attempting to control for bias as insights from the study were developed.

Extensive field notes were made in the course of the study and observations, and the tentative conclusions derived from them, were shared with members of the community as they emerged. Sharing in this way thus served as a form of member checking. As the study was conducted for the purposes of a doctoral degree, ethical clearance was obtained at proposal stage. Members of the community were informed of its goals, the methods that would be used to study their practices, their right to withdraw at any time and so on.

Overwhelmingly, community members expressed their hopes that the study would lead to an improvement in the education available to their children. This article, along with presentations made at conferences, is intended to contribute to this goal by making the insights derived from it more widely available than the doctoral thesis itself.

The study was informed by theory noted above and sought to answer the question: How do the home practices of a marginalised community in Port Elizabeth initiate and build learning for the children within it?

This question was underpinned by a firm understanding of the way socio-economic structures influenced those practices. For this reason, the study embodied a particular focus on the way phenomena such as poverty and geography impinged on the lives of participants. The study also acknowledged the role of parents and caregivers, as well as the children themselves, as agents interacting with socio-economic structures in order to pursue personal projects and goals (Archer, 2003).

3. INSIGHTS FROM THE STUDY

3.1 Access to schooling

One of the most overwhelming insights resulting from the study related to the value placed on education by parents and caregivers as a means of succeeding in life. The need to provide early childhood education is prioritised in South Africa's National Plan 2030 (RSA, 2012). This has been followed through with the development of the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (RSA, 2015) which outlines a comprehensive early childhood development programme encompassing, inter alia, health care and nutrition, caregiver support programmes as well as the provision of opportunities for learning, including play.

For most of the members of the community, the costs incurred for attendance at early childhood development facilities were prohibitive. One mother, for example, described her desire to send her young son to a pre-school nearby noting that the fees were R400 per month. This cost needs to be seen in relation to the minimum wage in South Africa which, for 2019, was set at R20 per hour. Given that the majority of the community members would be working for the minimum wage or less, this would mean that the mother would have needed to work for 20 hours to pay the fee even had she been able to find work. It was not only the payment of fees that was a problem, however, as attendance at the pre-school would have required her to walk up a steep hill with her young child before catching a communal taxi, which would have added to cost of attendance. Poverty and geographical location both functioned as structural impediments to the child accessing the sort of early childhood educational experiences that, following the sort of thinking outlined earlier in this paper, could have stood him in good stead for the rest of his life.

When caregivers were employed, their employment sometimes constrained school attendance as individuals would need to absent themselves from work to travel to schools to try to enrol their children. As a result, attempts to register children were made late with the result that preferred schools were often full by the time this happened (see also Mail and Guardian, 2019). Most children attended low fee schools in the northern areas of the city and this meant that they had to travel long distances on a daily basis. Because of taxi costs, many families chose to locate their children with members of extended families living in the areas near the schools they attended during the week and sometimes for longer. As a result, children experienced disruption in their living arrangements over the course of the school year. Children attending school generally travelled together so that older children could care for their younger siblings. If an older child was sick, siblings were often kept at home for the duration of the period of ill health. Children might also not attend school when money for taxi fares was not available. Numerous South African studies (see, for example, Hunter & May, 2011; Spaull, 2013) have examined the impact of poverty on school achievement and support the observations made in this study regarding difficulties related to access to schooling.

3.2 Stability

Schooling was not the only area in which a lack of stability was demonstrated. The lack of permanent employment for community members, as well as other factors sometimes related to behavioural issues, meant that the presence of caregivers was not always stable. Caregivers might travel for work and thus be forced to absent themselves from their children's lives for periods of time. Alcohol abuse was fairly common and, in some instances, family members were forced to bring charges against their kin in order to protect the younger members of the family, as well as their own wellbeing. In these cases, children were often sent to live with relatives in other parts of Port Elizabeth, or even with grandparents in other towns, for varied periods of time until the host family could no longer support them or the problems had been resolved.

Also evident was instability in the material resources available to households; a phenomenon resulting from the complex interplay of social and economic factors. For example, only two homes owned a computer over the course of the study and one of these was sold in order to purchase a dysfunctional car. The family that purchased the car had originally sold a television to buy the computer. Not only was the car not in working condition but no one in the household held a driving license. One of the women residents in the house explained that the car was needed because it would provide a physical sanctuary in cases of domestic violence.

Over the course of visits to homes in the community, items would appear and disappear. One household had links with a municipal employee working at the city dump who would often offer items he found there to family members for sale. If the price asked was too high, another item from their home might be exchanged for what was now being offered. Household items were also often exchanged in order to obtain items necessary for school. On one occasion, a fish tank and angel fish, given to one of the households by a member of the church they attended, was exchanged for a hockey stick at the local second-hand shop.

Children, therefore, were likely to experience a constant state of flux in relation to those who provided care for them and to the material circumstances in which they lived.

3.3 Language

All the households in the community identified themselves as Afrikaans speaking although the majority of adults spoke English and some isiXhosa. The majority of children were enrolled in schools using Afrikaans as the language of teaching and learning.

The dominant position in the community was that it was the responsibility of schools to teach English, which was regarded as the "language of employment". Although adults tended not to use English when speaking to children, watching television programmes and videos, many of which were in English, occupied a major portion of free time. However, as the study showed, it was not access to a specific language (for example, English rather than Afrikaans) that affected the children's ability to engage with the forms of language that would be used in the classrooms in which they would finally sit.

Over the course of the study, instances of Cummins' (1983) "Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency" (CALP) were rare with participants largely drawing on BICS and regardless of whether Afrikaans or English was being used. As a result of the context in which they were being raised, the forms of language mastered by the children in the community meant that they were more likely to be comfortable using language for "everyday" purposes than those required in formal educational settings. What quickly became evident was the way poverty in the physical environment impacted on language use. An example from the data will serve to illustrate this point.

On one occasion, an aunt providing care for children in the family, asked a two-year old child to fetch her "purple jersey from the cupboard in the bedroom". This was an unusual request, not least because family groups would often only occupy one room in a house occupied by a much large group of people with the result that all belongings were kept in one small area. The ability to direct a child to fetch a "purple jersey from the cupboard in the bedroom" was therefore indicative of a relatively privileged situation in which i) the individual owned more than one jersey ii) had more than one room available to them and iii) had access to storage for belongings. On this particular occasion, the child returned with a jersey other than the one the aunt had wanted. She then took the child to the bedroom to find the correct item of clothing pointing out that it had been moved from the cupboard to the bed without her knowledge.

This example is an instance of relatively rich linguistic description. The child was asked to fetch the *purple* (not the red) jersey, from the *cupboard* (not the bed) in the *bedroom* (a room different to the one the language users were currently occupying). Observation during the study showed that in many households with fewer belongings the language of description did not need to be so detailed.

The extensive use of gesture, rather than language, was also noticeable. Gesture would be used to indicate location and facial expression would be used to replace verbal language altogether. A caregiver wanting to convey to a child that something was bad might screw up their face, turn down the corners of their mouth and shake their heads.

3.4 Access to written text

Noticeable in the majority of the households in the community was the absence of printed text. One family collected old books from the city dumpsite. Another owned two bibles, collected a

free daily newspaper and received hand-me-down schoolbooks. Generally, children did not have access to story books or, even, textbooks.

Possessions in the community were generally closely guarded. This impacted on the few instances where engagement around a written text was witnessed. On one occasion, one of the smaller children had gained possession of a picture book belonging to a neighbour's daughter. About five children gathered around the child's grandmother who sat turning the pages of the book using English to ask the names of animals depicted within it. The children responded in English with the names of some of the animals, a phenomenon probably indicative of their association of the language and activities involving engagement around print with formal schooling. An older child, absent from school on the day in question, eventually took over from the grandmother. This interaction around printed text was interrupted when the owner of the book demanded that it should be returned to her.

In this example, a limited opportunity to engage around printed text was halted because of concerns about ownership. Once again, it is possible to see how poverty influenced the development of a literacy practice associated with formal schooling from which all children could have benefited.

3.5 Technology

Although printed text was rare in the community, access to technology was abundant and prized. Most households owned a television set and adults would sit together watching television in the late afternoons. Although the provision of a quiet environment in which older children could complete homework was not privileged, children were expected to be quiet while their caregivers watched their favourite programmes. In advertisement breaks, adults would discuss the show and what they thought of the plot and the behaviour of protagonists. Engagement was thus around a visual, and not a written text.

Cell phones were prized in the community not only as a means of communicating with others but also as a way of accessing information, if the owner had access to data. They were also used extensively as a means of entertaining children who were often provided with access to a phone to amuse themselves by listening to music. Observation revealed the existence of literacies focused on the phone screen. On one occasion, for example, a seven year old child, who claimed she was not able to read, was able to demonstrate how she accessed music on the phone by pointing to the music icon on the main screen and then identifying particular songs by their order in the list that appeared. The child was able to explain how, when new songs were added to the playlist, she would need to listen to a few bars of each song until she could remember the new ordering. She also explained that, in some cases, she was able to identify songs by the length of their title and the shape of some of the words.

Many caregivers chose to instruct even very young children in the use of the cell phone for emergency purposes. One mother of a five-year-old child had taught her daughter to memorise her own and her grandmother's cell numbers in case of emergencies. The young child not only knew how to make a call using a cell phone but also how to use the "please call me" function. On another occasion, a mother produced her cell phone to share a picture of her eldest daughter, taken a few weeks beforehand. The sight of the device excited her younger child, a three-year-old, and her mother demonstrated how photographs could be accessed saying "Swipe soft, swipe soft".

All the homes in the community had access to electricity using a pre-paid meter. Funds to buy electricity were scarce, however, and, on more than one occasion, adults were observed warning children not to charge phones otherwise there would be no electricity to cook the evening meal. Access to screen-based texts was therefore not a given because of the impact of poverty.

3.6 Play and games

As with all children, play formed an important part of the lives of young community members although poverty meant that any toys available had usually been retrieved from the dump. Where adults engaged in play with children, it was usually unemployed men who did so as women claimed they were too busy with household chores to entertain young ones.

Nonetheless, opportunities did exist for teaching to take place around many of the activities in households. Many households ran spaza shops and children were often asked to fetch items requested. It would have been possible to use these simple tasks as a form of literacy development and opportunities also existed for engagement with numeracy. Without support and encouragement, adults did not take advantage of these opportunities, however, to the detriment of children.

4. CONCLUSION

Engagement with the community that was the focus of this study showed how its location in a city still divided along the old lines of apartheid, now being re-emphasised thanks to "development", impacted on the best efforts of caregivers to prepare their children for, and support them in, formal education. It was not only location that influenced these efforts, however, but also the poverty that structured their lives in an ongoing fashion.

The ethnographic nature of the study meant that it was possible to obtain insights into the way practices within children's homes impacted on their potential to learn. These practices encompassed language use and the use of technology as well as those related to everyday living arrangements that were often in a constant state of flux.

The paper began by outlining understandings of literacy as a social phenomenon and not simply as cognitive processes related to the encoding and decoding of text. Understandings of reading and writing as sets of social practices have profound implications for policy and initiatives intended to enhance literacy. Above all, and as illustrated in this study, they mean that attempts at improvement need to consider the conditions in children's homes and include parents and caregivers.

The homes in the study on which this article reports had few reading materials and adults did not read to children or otherwise engage widely with them in other learning activities. Researchers (see, for example, Heath, 1982) have long pointed out that simple activities such as reading bedtime stories enable language and literacy development. In addition, studies (see, for example, Ishengoma, 1988) have shown how oral activities such as telling riddles can build vocabulary and teach cognitive functions such as comparing and contrasting. Without support and encouragement, it is unlikely that parents and caregivers such as those in this study will understand the importance of engaging with their children and planning for early childhood development initiatives needs to take this into account. However, even if this were to happen, geography and poverty would be likely to affect the ability of parents and caregivers to interact with formal educational initiatives in ways that would support their

children's learning. Nonetheless, this does not mean that policy makers and others charged with the responsibility of improving education should not take account of insights emerging from studies such as that on which this paper is based.

Although studies such as PIRLS acknowledge phenomena such as parental involvement and access to early childhood development facilities in accounting for the poor results of South African children on standardised tests, it is difficult to find published studies that explore the challenges faced by marginalised communities as they endeavour to support their children for education. This paper attempts to address this gap and to encourage others to attempt the sort of work that will provide more in-depth understandings of the learning practices in homes other than those of the educated middle class.

REFERENCES

Angrosino, M. 2007. *Doing ethnographic and observational research.* London: Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208932.

Archer, M. 2003. *Structure, agency and the internal conversation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139087315.

Boughey, C. 2002. Naming students' problems: An analysis of language related discourses at a historically black South African university. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 7(3): 295–307. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510220144798.

Baynham, M. 1995. *Literacy practices: Investigating literacy in social contexts.* London: Longman.

Breier, M. 1996. Taking literacy for a ride – reading and writing in the taxi industry. In M. Prinsloo & M. Breier (Eds.). *The social uses of literacy* (pp. 213–234). Amsterdam: John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/swll.4.16bre.

Casale, D. & Posel, D. 2011. English language proficiency and earnings in a developing country: The case of South Africa. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 40(4): 385–393. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2011.04.009.

Cummins, J. 1983. Language proficiency, biliteracy and French immersion. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne de l'Éducation*, 8(2): 117–138. https://doi.org/10.2307/1494722.

Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2013. *Report on the annual national assessment of 2013*. Pretoria: DBE.

Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2014. *Report on the annual national assessment of 2014*. Pretoria: DBE.

Economist 2017. South Africa has one of the world's worst education systems. *Economist*, January 7.

Gee, J.P. 2015. *Literacy and education.* Abingdon: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315739571.

Goodman, K. 1967. Reading: A psycholinguistic guessing game. *Journal of the Reading Specialist*, 6:126–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/19388076709556976.

Halliday, M. 1973. *Explorations in the functions of language*. London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. 1978. *Language as social semiotic*. London: Edward Arnold.

Heath, S. 1983. *Ways with words.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511841057.

Heath, S. 1986. What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. In B. Schieffelin & E. Ochs (Eds.). *Language socialisation across cultures* (pp. 97–126*).* New York: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511620898.005.

Hunter, N. & May, J. 2011. Poverty, shocks and school disruption episodes among adolescents in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *Development Southern Africa*, 28(1): 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2011.545167.

Ishengoma, J. 2005. African oral traditions: Riddles among the Haya of Northwestern Tanzania. *International Review of Education*, 51(2/3): 139–153. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-005-1841-9.

Mail & Guardian. 2019. Too late to register children for school on Wednesday – Lesufi. *Mail & Guardian*, 8 January, 2019.

McKenna, S. 2004. Lecturers' discourses about the interplay between language and learning. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 18(3): 278–287. https://doi.org/10.4314/sajhe.v18i2.25468.

O'Shea, C., McKenna, S. & Thomson, C. 2019. We throw away our books: Students' reading practices and identities. *Linguistics and Education*, 49: 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2018.11.001.

Prinsloo, M. & Breier, M. 1996. *The social uses of literacy.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/swll.4.

Republic of South Africa (RSA). 2012. *National development plan 2030: Our future, make it work.* Pretoria: Pretoria: National Planning Commission.

Republic of South Africa (RSA). 2015. *National integrated early childhood development policy*. Pretoria: Ministry of Social Development.

Smith, F. 2010. *Understanding reading,* 6th edition*.* Taylor & Francis e-Library.

Spaull, N. 2013. Poverty and privilege: Primary school inequality in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development,* 33(5): 436–447*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2012.09.009.*

Street, B. 1985. *Literacy in theory & practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stroud, C. & Prinsloo, M. 2015. *Language, literacy & diversity: Moving words.* Abingdon: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203576953.