Copyright Notice

The copyright of this thesis vests in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, in accordance with the University’s Intellectual Property Policy.

No portion of the text may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including analogue and digital media, without prior written permission from the University. Extracts of or quotations from this thesis may, however, be made in terms of Section 12 and 13 of the South African Copyright Act No. 98 of 1978 (as amended), for non-commercial or educational purposes. Full acknowledgement must be made to the author and the University.

An electronic version of this thesis is available on the library webpage (www.wits.ac.za/library) under “Research Resources”.

For permission requests, please contact the University Legal Office or the University Research Office (www.wits.ac.za).
Transitional Literacy in Gauteng Primary Schools: Two Collective Case Studies of Reading and Writing Experiences of Grades 3 and 4 Learners.

Juniel Shoko Tanga Matavire

A thesis submitted to the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Johannesburg

2016
Abstract

This study examines literacy experiences of grade 3 learners as they transition into grade 4 in two primary schools in Gauteng. In the first school IsiZulu and Sepedi are the languages of teaching and learning in the foundation phase and learners transitioned to English in grade 4, while English is the language of learning and teaching in the second school. The study poses four questions. The first explores whether reading and writing in the foundation phase adequately prepare learners for the academic and cognitive demands of the intermediate phase. The second and third questions investigate the strategies used by learners and teachers to negotiate the transition and how those strategies could be understood and explained in relation to the increasing academic and cognitive demands of the literacy curriculum. The fourth question examines the role of language as children transition into grade 4.

The study draws on the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (2005) and adopts a socio-cultural orientation to literacy, drawing on scholarship in New Literacy Studies (Street, 2007). The research design was a collective case study in the qualitative paradigm. Classroom observation, interviews and document analyses gathered over 9 months comprise the data. Two grade 3 classes were observed for three months in each school before ten focus learners were identified and these children were followed into grade 4. One grade 4 class was studied in each school for six months.

What emerges from the data is that, at a macrosystemic level, curriculum change is a major factor in what happens to learners as they move across grades. The time of this study coincides with a curriculum transition from the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) of 2011 and 2012. When curriculum transition was not clear to teachers, and they did not buy into it, the effect on the mesosystem was confusion, anxiety and frustration on both teachers and learners that resulted in negative attitudes and poor delivery.

The choices of language of learning and teaching schools make for the literacy instruction of their learners an important factor in transition. Language alone is a huge demand and resource factor (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) in learner literacy learning. In both schools the majority of learners accessed literacy through languages that were different from their home languages. This compromised learners’ access to and conception of academic texts.

There are complex physical, structural, psychological and academic transitions a learner must deal with at the mesosystemic level on reaching grade 4. Inadequate literacy skills impact negatively on learners’ academic and social transition from one phase to another in multiple ways. Psychologically, learners had a sense of fear of the next grade and when their fears were confirmed it made transition challenging when dealing with grade 4 work. Structurally, the organisation of teaching changed from one teacher to many teachers, and hence many subjects with different expectations on learners. Some teachers had inadequate pedagogical knowledge, did not communicate within and across grades, and had generally autonomous conceptions of literacy, resulting in learners’ literacy development being compromised.
At the microsystemic (classroom) level learners were confronted by grade 4 academic and literacy demands that the foundation phase did not equip them for. Reading and writing practices changed in grade 4. Vocabulary, fluency and comprehension skills learners brought from grade 3 became inadequate for the demands of grade 4 work. Also absent in grade 4 was the environmental print and other supports learners had in grade 3.

When learners’ complex, challenging situations were compounded by poor teaching, inconsistent literacy practices, lack of resources, large classes and timetabling issues some learners lost interest, accepted their fate and developed negative attitudes to schooling. Carelessness surfaced, written work was not prioritised and often not completed, while other learners sought support from the exosystem in the form of parents and siblings to hedge the challenges of transition.

Consequent to this study there was a realisation among teachers in the two schools that they could do something about transition and literacy. An appetite for knowledge and revisiting of pedagogical practices was rekindled among some teachers. Transition and literacy became topical issues in both formal and informal teacher conversations. This raises questions about the coordination and smooth cooperation between systems which further research may tap into.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

...............................................................

Juniel Shoko Tanga Matavire

................. Day of ......................................... In the year 2016
Dedication

To Petronella Chido, Juniel Mtumwa and Jurnel Mufudzi
Acknowledgements

A research journey can be quite exhausting without appropriate and gentle guidance, mentorship and tutoring. I always felt in good hands during the countless supervision meetings I had with Dr Kerryn Dixon. Her incisive reading and penchant for appropriateness became a resource with which I learnt to trust for an unfettered academic opinion.

The principals, deputy principals, staff and students of my two research sites were interesting to work with. Thank you for enduring the intrusion that comes with research work in schools and classrooms. Through you the list of my friends has grown longer. Shylet has an interesting way of propelling me to keep working on my academic work even when the body and mind start dithering. Her motivation kept me all the way.

In funding my studies I received immeasurable support from the University of the Witwatersrand through the post-graduate merit award, the research completion grant and the Tothill scholarship. Without this support I couldn’t have travelled this far. And many others whose contributions I cannot single out, I say thank you for your support and kindness, in their various forms.
Table of Contents

Abstract ....................................................................................................................................................... iii
Declaration ................................................................................................................................................ v
Dedication ................................................................................................................................................ vi
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................................................... vii
Chapter 1: The Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1
  1.2 Literacy and My Reflections ........................................................................................................... 2
  1.3 Aims of the Study ........................................................................................................................... 4
  1.4 The Research Questions ............................................................................................................... 5
  1.5 Rational ........................................................................................................................................... 5
  1.6 Significance of the study ............................................................................................................... 8
  1.7 Background to the study ............................................................................................................. 9
    1.7.1 The Educational Context before 1994 ................................................................................ 11
    1.7.2 Towards Educational Reform – post 1994 ........................................................................ 14
  1.8 Definition of terms .................................................................................................................... 20
  1.9 Overview ....................................................................................................................................... 21
Chapter 2: Review of Literature ..................................................................................................................... 23
  2.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................................................... 23
  2.2 Transition Defined ....................................................................................................................... 23
  2.3 Transition and Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory ................................................................... 25
    2.3.1 Process ...................................................................................................................................... 28
    2.3.2 Person ...................................................................................................................................... 29
    2.3.3 Context ..................................................................................................................................... 30
    2.3.4 Time ....................................................................................................................................... 31
  2.4 Contextualizing the Ecological Systems Model ............................................................................. 33
5.5.1 Inter and Intra Phase Knowledge ................................................. 151
5.5.2 Teacher Conceptions of Learners in Transition ............................ 155
5.5.3 Teacher Expectations of Learners’ Literacy ................................ 160
5.5.4 Confronting Transition ............................................................. 162
5.5 Conclusion .................................................................................. 164

Chapter 6: Foundation Phase Experiences, Pedagogy and Instructional Conversations
6.1 Introduction .............................................................................. 166
6.2 Multilingualism and the Classroom .......................................... 168
6.2.1 The Home Language Factor .................................................. 169
6.2.2 LOLT and Class Composition ................................................ 172
6.3 LOLT and Literacy .................................................................... 178
6.3.1 Home Language Literacies .................................................... 180
6.4 Transfer of Literacy Skills ......................................................... 182
6.4.1 Longitudinal Studies .............................................................. 183
6.4.2 Benefits of Multilingualism .................................................... 188
6.4.3 Transition to English LOLT ................................................... 189
6.5 Teachers’ In-class Practices with Language ............................... 193
6.5.1 The Poor Lesson .................................................................... 194
6.5.2 Code Switching and Mixing .................................................. 198
6.5.3 Learners’ Attitude towards English ........................................ 200
6.6 Conclusion ................................................................................. 202

Chapter 7: Literacy Resources Strategy and Pedagogy ..................... 203
7.1 Introduction .............................................................................. 203
7.2 The Environment and Resources .............................................. 205
7.2.1 Environmental Print .............................................................. 205
7.2.2 Other Literacy Resources ...................................................... 210
7.2.3 Approaches to Teaching Reading .......................................... 213
9.2.2 Meso Level Findings ................................................................. 295
9.2.3 Micro Level Issues ................................................................. 298
9.3 Recommendations ................................................................. 300
9.3.1 Macro Level ................................................................. 301
9.3.2 Exo Level ................................................................. 302
9.3.3 Meso Level ................................................................. 303
9.3.4 Micro Level ................................................................. 305
9.4 Contribution of the Research to the Case Schools ......................... 307
Appendices ............................................................................. 310
References ............................................................................... 352
List of Figures

Fig 2.1 Influential systems on learner transition .................................................... 33
Fig 2.2 The ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1994) ......................... 33
Fig 2.3 An adapted summary of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model ........ 34
Fig 3.1 Multiple transitions .................................................................................... 66
Fig 3.2 Transitional literacy issues impacting on education .................................. 68
Fig 7.1 Literacy rich classroom environments ....................................................... 206
Fig 7.2 Literacy famished classroom environments ............................................. 207
Fig 7.3 English literacy teaching chart ................................................................. 234
Fig 8.1 Changing conditions in grade 4 ................................................................. 265
Fig 8.2 Literacy strategies at work ......................................................................... 277
Fig 8.3 Changing literacy practices ....................................................................... 278
List of Tables

Table 3.1 Curriculum structure as recommended by the Chisholm Commission of 2000 … 72
Table 3.2 Literacy by province 2001, 2007 and 2011 .................................................. 77
Table 4.1 Summary of teacher participants................................................................. 94
Table 4.2 Teachers observed for the first data set ..................................................... 95
Table 4.3 Learners selected for close observation and interview in grade 4 ............... 96
Table 5.1 Time allocation compared ................................................................. 119
Table 5.2 Time distribution for intermediate phase subjects ............................... 120
Table 5.3 reading and writing skills time allocation per day .............................. 121
Table 5.4 NCS and CAPS literacy content compared ........................................ 125
Table 5.5 NCS and CAPS literacy in grade 4 compared .................................... 126
Table 6.1 Teachers’ home languages in the foundation phase .......................... 171
Table 6.2 Home language distribution by class .................................................. 173
Table 6.3 Differences between English, isiZulu and Sepedi ............................... 185
Table 7.1 Overview of grade 4 CAPS content, skills and strategies ..................... 222
Table 7.2 Comparison of literacy teaching strategies between schools ................. 230