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Janks, H. (2014) Globalisation, diversity, and education: A South African perspective. The Educational Forum, 78 (1), 8-25.

Janks, Hilary

2014

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Janks, H. (2014) Globalisation, diversity, and education: A South African perspective. The Educational Forum, 78(1), 8-25. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2014.850981

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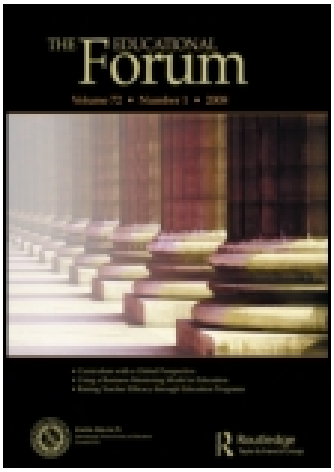

The Educational Forum

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/utef20

Globalisation, Diversity, and Education: A South African Perspective

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Published online: 27 Nov 2013.

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To cite this article: Hilary Janks (2014) Globalisation, Diversity, and Education: A South African Perspective, The Educational Forum, 78:1, 8-25, DOI: 10.1080/00131725.2014.850981

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2014.850981

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The Educational Forum, 78: 8–25, 2014
Copyright © Kappa Delta Pi
ISSN: 0013-1725 print/1938-8098 online
DOI: 10.1080/00131725.2014.850981



THE EDUCATIONAL Forum

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Globalisation, Diversity, and Education: A South African Perspective

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Abstract
In this article, literacy, which is conceived of as a set of cognitive skills, is juxtaposed with a sociocultural orientation that sees literacy as a set of social practices for the production of meaning. Cognitive, skills-based pedagogies treat literacy as universal, autonomous, and independent of context, whereas sociocultural literacy pedagogies focus on the production of socially situated meanings that are inclusive of diversity. I argue that current policy formulations of literacy in South African curriculum documents, which are based on deficit constructions of teachers and learners and organized around language and the communicative skills, is a pedagogy of despair. I offer a more hopeful, futures-oriented alternative.

Key words: *curriculum, diversity, literacy, social practice, South Africa.*

Education in a globalized world needs to prepare people who are capable of high-level symbolic engagement and who are also creative and critical. Moreover, the current knowledge economy needs sophisticated literate subjects. In a 2006 book chapter entitled "Critical Literacy Across Continents," Barbara Comber and I wrote,

> *Analyses of globalisation take for granted the ways in which digital communication technologies and twenty-first century modes of transportation have shrunk the world, enabling flows of information and people. What is generally omitted is the question of access to mobility. For teachers and students living and working in poor communities, the rest of the world is as far away as ever. … Even cyber space is out of bounds, unless … schools are wired and the children and teachers are computer and Internet literate. (Janks & Comber, 2006, p. 99)*

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Little has changed in poor schools in South Africa since 2006. Language acts as a further barrier to participation in flows of information for children who speak local languages. In South Africa, nine indigenous African languages are recognised as official languages (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 200, 1993), yet hardly any material is published in these languages in print or on the Internet, including material for use in education. Most African parents elect to have their children schooled through the medium of English from fourth grade. Some even opt for English from first grade.

By offering a South African perspective on education and diversity, I show that the challenges presented by globalisation look very different from the periphery. I use the word periphery in two senses. The first signifies centre-margin relations between the political North and the political South, that is, between developed and developing nations. The second signifies centres and margins in the education system itself. Apartheid left a legacy of unequal education provision. Where previously the divide between centre and periphery schooling was based on race, now it is based on capital, with children in poor communities and rural areas left on the margins. In effect, this continues to mean poor schooling for black children because poverty in South Africa continues to be overdetermined by race. Whether from the political North or the political South, children from homes rich in cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) are more likely to have access to an exclusive education, which prepares them to join the global elite.

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Globalisation

Although largely excluded from participation in global flows, poor communities are not immune from the effects of globalisation. Giddens (1991) defined globalisation as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (p. 64). For example, manufacturing and service industry jobs move to parts of the globe where labour is cheap and unions are powerless, affecting employment opportunities elsewhere; energy consumption in one country creates climate change in another; the flow of cultural products—largely from the United States—cultivates new patterns of taste and values (Bourdieu, 1984); there is a new global economy of languages (Canagarajah, 2007; Creese, Martin, & Hornberger, 2008); transnational worker migration disrupts family life and produces economic dependence in home countries that rely on migrant worker remittances (World Bank, 2003); ongoing advances in technology continue to revolutionise the nature of work, requiring high levels of symbolic analytic ability (Alba, González-Gaudiano, Lankshear, & Peters, 2000).

One of the local effects of globalisation is the flow of foreign Africans into South Africa since 1994. Some come as political or economic refugees, some as educated professionals or academics to take the jobs that require qualifications that are out of the reach of poorly educated South Africans, while others come as migrant labourers or as students hoping to stay. They are a mixture of legal and illegal immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees. In a country where the official unemployment rate is around 25% (Statistics South Africa, 2013), many South Africans see foreign Africans as competition for limited resources, or as job stealers, drug dealers, or criminals. Xenophobia is widespread, and locals view the

makwerekwere—the widespread derogatory name for foreign Africans—as a threat to their own already limited life chances.

What is clear from this brief description of some of the effects of globalisation is that it presents challenges for education. Education has to prepare students for a world of ongoing, unpredictable, and rapid change that requires deep specialised knowledge, broad general knowledge, and the ability to think independently and imaginatively. Creativity and adaptability have to be underpinned by enhanced skills and values that embrace difference along with responsibility for others and the planet. If education fails in this task, then it will contribute to the ever-widening chasm between haves and have-nots and do nothing to limit the growth of an elite that feels at home in a global networked society (Castells, 2009).

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Education: A South African Perspective

South Africa is currently not well-positioned to meet these challenges, as its school system is in a state of collapse. In 2006, the South African Institute of Race Relations estimated that 80% of schools were dysfunctional. According to the Minister of Basic Education:

> *Many of our schools are dysfunctional. … South African learners exit the foundation phase without basic literacy and numeracy skills required to succeed later on. ... The majority of teachers lack the required subject knowledge, are not teaching what they are trained to teach and too often lack the commitment to teach for six-and-a-half hours every day. (Motshekga, 2010)*

South Africa scores near the bottom of international systemic measures of performance in Grades 4/5 such as Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The poor Annual National Assessment scores are consistent with these results. At the higher levels, Grades 10 to 12, there is also cause for concern.

Although the matriculation pass rate, which qualifies learners to continue to university, improves marginally each year, these rates as a measure of the system are problematic. According to Spaull (2012), first, fewer than half the students who start school ever reach grade 12, and the matriculation statistics do not account for these students. Second, more students are opting for easier subject choices (such as Math Literacy rather than Mathematics, or Tourism/Business Studies rather than Physical Science). Third, it is possible to get a pass in the matriculation examination with only 30% in three subjects and 40% in the remaining three. Only 25% of the students who do pass obtain the kind of pass that gives them access to higher education. Consequently, many students who obtain a matriculation certificate are unemployable and unable to continue their education, which explains why South Africa has both a skills shortage and a high rate of unemployment; the education system is unable to provide young people with the knowledge and skills that the country needs to grow, let alone to be globally competitive.

The reasons for the dysfunctionality of schools are many and varied, including inadequate infrastructure; problems with school leadership; teachers' limited content

and pedagogic knowledge; a poor work ethic; powerful unions; trial and error curriculum reform; change fatigue; quick-fix, short-term planning; and corruption or the misappropriation of funds. Some of these challenges can be attributed to the legacy of apartheid, but they could have been and still could be addressed were there the political will to make difficult decisions, beginning with competence tests for teachers and requirements for ongoing re-certification; an understanding of what enables some principals, teachers, schools, and students to succeed against the odds; long-term planning based on solid research findings; and a greater willingness to listen to teachers and parents. Yet addressing these particular challenges would not get at the vexed issues of language, literacy, and identity—root causes of difficulties in learning and teaching.

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Language and Literacy in South Africa

Language and literacy are fundamental to learning across the curriculum. Young children need to understand the language of instruction for lessons to be meaningful and for them to be able to participate. They also need a developed vocabulary and the ability to decode texts with increasing automaticity to leave sufficient cognitive capacity for comprehension of and interaction with a wide range of texts. Because language is tied to both identity (Norton, 2000) and access, language in education policy is often a site of struggle. Pennycook (1994) described both "Orientalism" (the imposition of mother tongue education) and "Anglicism" (the imposition of English) as two sides of the colonial coin: marginalization and co-option. Although the right to education in any of the country's 11 official languages is enshrined in the Constitution (1993), most parents in South Africa have elected to have their children educated through the medium of English rather than the home language. They choose it because they want access to the language that has the most symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) in South Africa, which is needed for tertiary education and high-paying employment in this globalised world.

This is also understandable as a reaction to Apartheid language policies, which imposed mother-tongue medium of instruction in primary schools as a means of excluding black children from "the green pastures of European society in which [the native] was not allowed to graze" (Verwoerd, 1954). Mother tongue instruction also ensured that students were ill-prepared for the switch in high school to instruction that was half in Afrikaans and half in English. This has produced ongoing parental resistance to mother tongue education beyond third grade. Having given parents the choice, the government has a responsibility to provide ongoing support to students' learning through the medium of an additional language to ensure educational success rather than failure.

Proper support requires investment in human and material resources, including language teaching assistants/interpreters in classrooms, small classes, teachers trained in methods for teaching an additional language, teachers trained to develop literacy in an additional language across the curriculum, teachers who are fluent and literate in the medium of instruction and in the children's home language, bilingual classroom materials, and television and radio programmes for young children that scaffold the acquisition of English, amongst others.

In providing such investment, the system would be confronted by the access paradox, as Janks (2004) stated:

> *If you provide more people with access to the dominant variety of the dominant language, you contribute to perpetuating and increasing its dominance. If, on the other hand, you deny students access, you perpetuate their marginalisation in a society that continues to recognise this language as a mark of distinction. You also deny them access to the extensive resources available in that language; resources which have developed as a consequence of the language's dominance. (p. 36)*

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Perpetuating the dominance of English in South Africa has consequences for children's identity formation and undermines the status of African languages. While this is de facto what is happening, the overt sanctioning of English in education would be politically risky. The only way that the system can escape the access paradox (Janks, 2010) is simultaneously to invest in bilingual education. All students in South Africa should have to learn at least one African language in addition to the language of instruction (Granville et al., 1998), thus ensuring that the existing policy of additive bi/multilingualism becomes a reality. This would require the development of modern, vibrant materials for teaching African languages as both home and additional languages, as well as training educators to use such materials. In addition, the status of African languages in the wider society would need to be addressed. This could be achieved by making matriculation with an African language a requirement for entry to tertiary education and the professions, supporting the publishing and newspaper industries to produce material in African languages, and stimulating the use of African languages on the World Wide Web.

Since 1994, the post-apartheid, African National Congress government has attempted to improve education. Much has been done to improve facilities at schools, to supply equipment and materials, and to upgrade teachers' skills. In some cases the interventions have been aspirational rather than practical. For example, the move to place computer laboratories in schools was unsuccessful because teachers did not know how to use them and because the connectivity costs were prohibitive for poorly funded schools. Short-termism has plagued the system, and teachers have had to adjust to major curriculum changes since 2000. Curriculum 2005 introduced outcomes-based education. This outcomes-based curriculum focused on skills rather than content and imagined that teachers schooled in the authoritarian and rote pedagogies of apartheid schools and Bantu Education Teachers' Training Colleges would be able to implement this open frame curriculum with limited in-service training and no support materials for learners or teachers. The Revised National Curriculum Statement and the National Curriculum Statement that followed simplified the required outcomes but were no more successful that Curriculum 2005.

CAPS to the Rescue?

Recognising the difficulties that teachers faced with an unstructured curriculum based only on outcomes, the 2011 *Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement* (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011) is overly prescriptive. Influenced by Bernsteinian theory (Bernstein, 2006; Christie & Martin, 2007), this curriculum specifies content, pace, and

pedagogy. CAPS introduces a text-focused (genre-based) orientation while retaining the communication skills-based orientation of the previous outcomes-based curriculum.

Replacing teacher autonomy with mandated teaching regimes is seen as the way to transform teachers' practices and to ensure that they are in class teaching. Two examples taken from language and literacy policies, one national and one provincial, illustrate this. I chose the province in which I work, Gauteng. The examples were chosen randomly: Each example is the first plan given in each policy.

An Example from National Curriculum Policy

Nationally, CAPS for Languages provides two-weekly work plans for the different grades. Figure 1 provides an example of a two-week plan, which is taken, as are the other examples in this article, from Grade 5 First Additional Language. These plans are organised around listening and speaking, reading and viewing, and writing and presenting, which are treated separately. Itemised aspects of language are specified and expected to be included in the work relating to the skills. Teachers see the bulleted points included in all the plans as requirements to be fulfilled and ticked off. The organization of CAPS on the basis of skills is supported by the requirement for a communicative pedagogy, but seems to undercut the requirement for a text-based pedagogy, based on genre theory (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Derewianka, 1990; Kress, 1999; Martin, Christie, & Rothery, 1987):

> *A text-based approach explores how texts work. The purpose of a text-based approach is to enable learners to become competent, confident and critical readers, writers and viewers of text. …. The text-based approach also involves producing different kinds of texts for particular purposes and audiences. This approach is informed by an understanding of how texts are constructed and will require quite a lot of modeling, support and scaffolding in the First Additional Language classroom. Suggestions for these are built into the teaching plans. (Department of Basic Education, 2011, CAPS First Additional Language Grade 5, p. 13)*

Because genre pedagogy is new and unfamiliar to the teachers, the weekly plans become the mechanism for implementation. The plans specify the content, yet the choice of genre-based texts—the one area of the curriculum where teachers might need support—remains unspecified. Teachers who do not read widely in English themselves and who do not understand the genre approach will perforce rely on textbooks. This means that texts will not be chosen in relation to the interests of particular classes of children, and textbook writers will have to mediate the fairly sophisticated linguistic knowledge required of genre theory. In fact, many of the textbooks are organized around skills rather than around texts and provide atomistic activities designed to cover the different bullet points in the curriculum.

An Example from Provincial Curriculum Policy

The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) has introduced the Gauteng Primary Literacy and Maths Strategy (GPLMS) in the province. Running in all poorly performing

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GRADE 5

GRADE 5 TERM 1				
SKILLS	LISTENING AND SPEAKING (ORAL)	READING & VIEWING	WRITING & PRESENTING	LANGUAGE STRUCTURES & CONVENTIONS
WEEK 1–2	**Listens to a short story** (Choose from contemporary realistic fiction/traditional stories/personal accounts/adventure/funny/fantasy/real life stories/historical fiction) Text from the textbook or Teacher's Resource File (TRF) [instruction will be repeated every fortnight] • Answers literal questions • Expresses simple opinion on the story • Predicts what will happen next **Retells a story** • Retells events in correct sequence, using simple past • Names the characters correctly **Practises Listening and Speaking** (Choose one for daily practice) • Performs a short poem or rhyme • Plays a simple language game • Gives and follows simple instructions/ directions • Tells own news	**Reads a short story** Text from the textbook or reader/s or Teacher's Resource File (TRF) [instruction will be repeated every fortnight] • Pre-reading: predicting from title and pictures • Uses reading strategies, e.g. making predictions, uses phonic and contextual clues • Discusses new vocabulary from the read text • Discusses the title, plot and where the story takes place (setting) • Expresses simple opinion on the story • Uses a dictionary **Does comprehension activity on the text (oral or written)** **Practises reading** • Reads aloud with appropriate pronunciation, fluency, and expression **Reflects on texts read during independent/pair reading** • Retells story or main ideas in 3 to 5 sentences • Gives opinion on story	**Writes a personal recount of events** • Selects from experience • Chooses appropriate content for the topic • Stays on the topic • Frame used by struggling learners • Uses appropriate grammar, spelling and punctuation. • Uses vocabulary related to topic **Writes an opinion on a story** • Pre-writing: discusses what they like/ dislike • Writes 2 sentences to express what they like/dislike **Creates a personal dictionary** • Labels pages with letters of alphabet • Enters 5 words and meanings (drawing/sentence using the word/ explanation of word) • Or continues to enter words into dictionary created in Grade 4	**Spelling and punctuation** Uses the dictionary to check spelling and meanings of words Builds on phonic knowledge to spell words, e.g. builds word families based on how they sound or look. Builds on knowledge of sight words and high frequency words Revises full stop, question mark and exclamation mark **Working with words and sentences** Understands and uses countable nouns (e.g. book – books) Builds on use of proper nouns, e.g. with capital letter Revises 'a' and 'the' with nouns. Builds on use of personal pronouns (e.g. I, you, it, us, them) Builds on use of subject verb concord, e.g. There is one book/There are two books ... Builds on understanding and use of simple past **Vocabulary in context** Words taken from shared or individually read texts

Figure 1. Extract from CAPS: The first two-week plan of the year for grade 5 English, First Additional Language. CAPS = Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement.

(largely African) primary schools, this strategy is fourfold. It includes (a) word-for-word lesson scripts that teachers have to follow, (b) teaching materials that teachers have to use including graded readers, (c) prescribed assessment tasks, and (d) the deployment of trained teacher coaches. Teachers have no control over lesson content, pace, or pedagogy, and their performance is supported and monitored by coaches of variable quality, who were trained specifically for the programme.

This second example is taken from the *GPLMS Term 2 Lesson Plans 2012 Intersen First Additional Language English Programme Grade 5* (Gauteng Department of Education, 2012), which is part of an accelerated programme that was designed to bring children to grade level. Figure 2 shows the outline of how the first week of the programme in grade 5 is structured (p. 8) and illustrates the separation of the different skills on different days of the week. Only language appears to be integrated. As is evident in the first lesson, when language is part of writing and presenting, it becomes the main focus of the lesson, and writing becomes a spelling or language practice activity, rather than a meaning-making process.

The two-week overview is followed by a scripted lesson for each period. Figure 3 is the lesson for Period 1 (p. 9) and Figure 4 is the homework given for Period 1 (p. 9). Figure 3 shows the extent of the scripting. Teachers are instructed on how to present the lesson moment by moment, including what to say, what to repeat, and how to respond.

While it is clear that this lesson derives from a traditional phonics-based approach to literacy, it is not a particularly good example of this approach. All of the "sounds of the week" are represented as letters as if there were a one-to-one correspondence between grapheme and phoneme, which is not the case in English. Three vowel sounds that are completely unrelated are introduced at the same time, where it might make more sense to distinguish between the different phonemes associated with one of the graphemes.

PERIOD	ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	HOMEWORK	MARKING
1	Writing and presenting	Spelling	Write sentences with spelling words. Learn spelling words.	Check spelling words. Learners mark spelling sentences.
2	Listening and speaking	Language building	Create theme page.	Check language sentences. Check theme page.
3	Listening and speaking	Oral Task		Mark oral task.
4	Writing and presenting	Language structures	Complete grammar activity.	Check grammar activity.
5	Reading and viewing	Reading words Class reader Oral Comprehension	Learn reading words.	

Figure 2. First week of routine.

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WEEK 2	
THEME: **ME AND OTHERS**	
TOTAL TIME	5 x 30 minute periods
PERIOD 1 (30 MINUTES)	
WRITING & PRESENTING: Spelling	
TIME: 30 minutes	
PURPOSE OF LESSON: To improve learners' English phonic awareness, spelling and vocabulary. To teach learners relevant spelling rules.	
By the end of this lesson, the learners will be able to understand, pronounce and spell the following words: apple, catch, socks, body, summer, jump, luck, me, happy, town, school, family.	
You will need: • The heading, date, and all the spelling words written neatly on the chalkboard in 2 columns: phonic words, and high frequency / reader words. • Real objects or pictures where possible. • Learners' class books and pens.	
ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION	
Words (10 minutes) 1. Introduce the phonic sound by saying it clearly and then pointing it out to the learners on the chalkboard. 2. Introduce the phonic words by saying them whilst showing a picture or real object, doing an action, or using them in a sentence. 3. Show the picture or real object, or do the action again – this time the learners must say the word with you. 4. Read the phonic words off the chalkboard, the learners must repeat the words after you. 5. Point out that all of these words include the same phonic sound – underline the sound. 6. Go through the high frequency words in exactly the same way. 7. Point out that these words do not all include the same sound – we learn them because they are common words – we read and write them often. **Writing (10 minutes)** 1. Learners carefully copy down the date, heading and all the spelling words into their books. 2. Underline the phonic sound in all the phonic words. Rule: If there is only one vowel in a word, it will make the short sound. **Sentences (10 minutes)** 1. Ask if any learner can make a sentence using one of the spelling words. 2. Let a few learners formulate sentences orally – correct any mistakes that are made. 3. Let the class repeat each correct sentence that is formulated. 4. Give learners the homework instructions. If there is time, they can start in class.	

Figure 3. The first scripted lesson for Week 2.

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What is called "activity descriptions" in fact sets out each step in the procedure that teachers are instructed to follow. This deliberate dehumanization of the teacher supposedly in the interests of the learners is deeply problematic under any circumstances. It is of particular concern given the assumptions about the value of a phonics approach. The differences between the vowel sounds in English and African languages create significant difficulties in the classroom. Because African languages have fewer vowel sounds than English, the distinctions in English (e.g., bid, bed, bird, bide) are not easy for the teachers or the learners to hear or to produce.

The homework based on this lesson (see Figure 4) highlights the dullness of the routine. Here, children have to use the lesson's words in sentences, merely to show that they are able to spell them. This focus is made clear in the instructions to the teachers and the peer markers. This focus on the mechanics of writing reduces writing to a decontextualized, arid exercise removed from any understanding of literacy as a technology for the making and sharing of meaning.

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Discussion

Both of the national and provincial curricula interventions take seriously the idea that education needs to give learners access to the specialized codes and the enhanced skills necessary to compete in a global economy. Both of them imagine that it is possible to do so by reducing both teachers' and learners' autonomy. Prescribed pacing makes no allowance for children's different abilities or interests, and there is little focus on creativity, imagination, and innovation. It is as if the languages, the literacies, the community funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), and the identities and dispositions that teachers and students bring with them to school are irrelevant.

From a sociocultural orientation to language and literacy education, this thinking is deeply problematic. Literacy is not just a set of decontextualized, discreet cognitive skills, it is also a set of social practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1990; Pahl & Rowsell, 2012; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996). What matters is that children understand what literacy is for, how they can use it for their own purposes, and how they can draw on their linguistic resources and develop them further. For children who speak languages that do not often appear in print; who do not have access to books, magazines, or newspapers at home; and who live in print-poor rural communities, schools are key to children's literacy development. But this work has to recognise and build on community literacy practices in order to give the practices of school meaning in the lives of the learners.

Rooted in the work of anthropologists (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984), a social practice view of literacy recognizes that like language varieties, literacies are multiple, varied, and socially situated (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivani , 2000; Street, 1993). Yet in South African education, the dominant view of literacy as a single unitary phenomenon that is made up of a set of technical and cognitive skills prevails (Street, 1996).

This view that privileges middle class funds of knowledge and practices simultaneously leads to the deficit construction of parents and children from poor and working class

HOMEWORK
Homework Instructions: 1. Make up two short sentences of your own using a spelling word in each sentence. 2. Write your sentences below the spelling words you copied down. 3. Make sure: • Your sentences start with a capital letter and end with a full stop. • You underline your spelling words. • Your sentences make sense—do not leave any words out. **Learn your spelling words as follows: READ; SOUND OUT; WRITE; CHECK; WRITE** 1. Read through your spelling words and check that you know what they mean. If you do not know, ask someone. 2. Read the first word. 3. Write it down on a piece of paper. 4. Check if you have spelt it correctly. 5. If you have made a mistake, write the word again, correcting the mistake.
MARKING / FEEDBACK
1. As learners finish copying down the spelling words in class, you must walk around and check that they have copied down the words correctly. They must not learn to spell the words incorrectly. 2. Initial the work to show that it has been checked. 3. The next day, you must mark the sentences as follows: **(5 minutes at start of lesson.)** • Learners swop class book 1 with a partner. • Ask learners to check that 3 sentences have been written. Take down the names of learners who did not do their homework. Make a time for those learners to catch up their homework. • Next, write the spelling words on the chalkboard for learners to check the spelling. • They only have to check **the spelling of those words.** • If the word is correct, they must tick it in pencil. • If the word is incorrect, they must correct it in pencil. • Learners return books to the owners. • Finally, ask one group of learners to each read out one of their sentences. • Orally, correct any mistakes that are made. • The learner must correct his or her sentence in pencil. *Note: do this with a different group every week.*

Figure 4. Homework for Lesson 1.

communities. Standardized curricula and scripted lesson plans assume one size fits all and allow little room for variation in relation to the diverse interests and needs of students.

Successful schooling values and builds on the knowledge and practices that children bring from home and their communities. By valuing who they are, where they come from, and what their needs for and uses of literacy in a globalized, networked world might be, schooling could be made more inclusive. Education has a responsibility to extend students' worlds and to lift

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them out of the everyday, but in the beginning, there has to be the kind of light that helps children from diverse communities make connections between school and the worlds that they inhabit (Nieto, 2010). This is a particular imperative for children who come from marginalized spaces. Many teachers in township schools come from these communities, yet their knowledge of the children they teach is not seen by the GPLMS strategy to be important for teaching literacy.

Testing a Different Way Forward: The Mobile Literacies Project

The literature is full of critiques (for example, Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Freire, 1972; Gee, 1990; Goodman, 2005; Larson, 2001; Larson & Marsh, 2005) of system-wide interventions like the current practices in GPLMS. The current state of instruction in South Africa serves as the context of our small-scale literacy project that intends to establish whether or not a different approach to literacy education can succeed when other interventions fail. It is highly unlikely that the dumbing down of literacy as imagined within the GPLMS will improve South Africa's scores on international measures any more than workbooks designed to help learners answer only the lower-order matriculation questions to score a 30% pass mark, will improve young people's life chances.

The Mobile Literacies Project, which I co-direct with educational leadership expert James Stiles and software engineer Barry Dwolatsky, addresses questions relating to the education of children who speak an African language, yet learn through the medium of English, in under-resourced township schools. In this case, the two schools are located in Orange Farm, situated south of Johannesburg. Although the children come from communities that privilege orality over literacy, the communities recognize the importance of literacy for education and employment.

Grade 5 is the level that we wanted our research to target. Because it is situated after the switch to English medium of instruction in grade 4, the hope is that it can provide not-yet-literate-enough learners with a second chance at literacy. The two research schools were given the choice of which learning area to locate the project in. One school with two teachers on the project chose life skills and social sciences, and the other chose social sciences only.

The project has three dimensions that link literacy to technology and educational leadership. It is conceived of as multidisciplinary research with specialists in each of these areas co-directing the project. What is particularly exciting is the collaboration between researchers in education and software engineering. Each of the three dimensions is conceived of as interconnected and concerned with children's identities (community), learning (education), and futures (aspirations). To achieve this interconnectivity, first, literacy is tied to identity through a focus on community funds of knowledge and practices. It builds on the practice of texting and shifts the emphasis in literacy education to producing texts. Second, reading is assumed as a support for text production and as the reason for making texts in the first place. Writing and designing texts for real audiences and real purposes motivates text producers and affects the form that texts take. This provides a link with the new text- and genre-based curriculum. Third, technology is linked to community through the ubiquitous use of mobile phones, because technology is seen as necessary for success in a global knowledge economy and because it provides access

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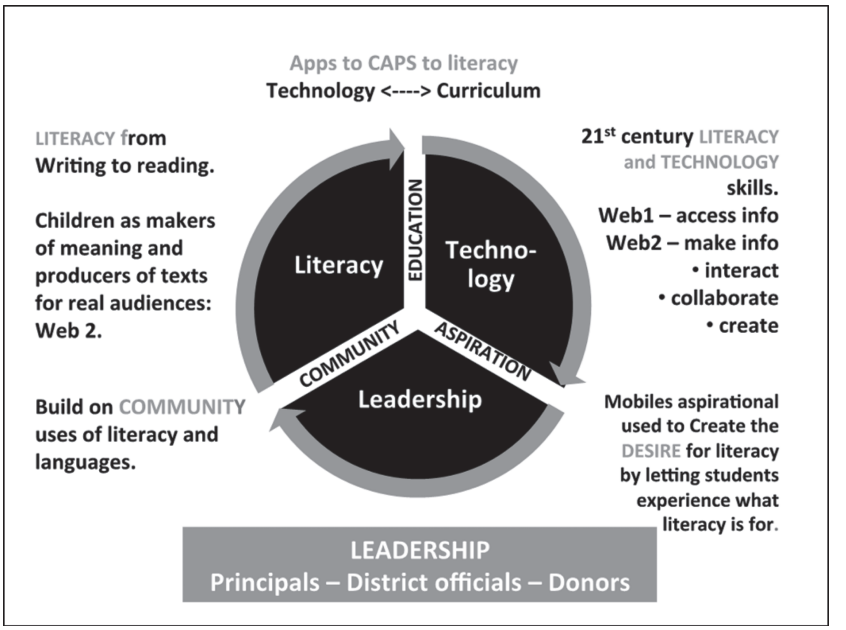

Figure 5. Conceptual map of the Mobile Literacies project. CAPS = Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement.

to information (Web 1) and the opportunity to join the Web as an interactive and creative participant (Web 2). Because mobile phones are coveted devices, they are likely to entice children into literacy as they come to understand how to use literacy to maximize the potential of their phones, thus setting the children on a path into a digital future. Finally, leadership is essential for the proper management of any project. To stand a chance of success, the project requires mutually supportive partnerships among researchers, school management, district officials, and donors (see Figure 5).

The Mobile Literacies Research Project

In conceptualizing this research, we were determined to address the mismatch between school understandings of literacy and children's out-of-school experiences, as well as their future needs, in relation to globalisation and a rapidly changing communication landscape. Schools choose book literacy; children come from homes that tend not to have books, apart from the Bible, and from townships that have no bookshops or libraries. Early enliteration is usually in an African language, yet outside of school, there is very little print material (newspapers, magazines, food packaging, signs) in these languages, apart from religious material. Literacy, therefore, tends to be equated with reading and writing in English. Schools use stories to teach literacy. In African communities, storytelling and performance poetry are part of an oral tradition, and literacy is reserved for the domains of work, study, and business (administrative, legal, commercial, and financial).

From the outset, two concerns framed the research: (a) the need to find a widespread community literacy practice embedded in daily life, and (b) the need to create a desire for literacy in children living in print-poor communities. Apart from literacy practices associated

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with religion, the one practice that stands out in both urban townships and rural villages is the extensive use of mobile phones for text messaging. Black South Africans, deprived of telephone infrastructure under apartheid, were early adopters of mobile phone technology. In granting cellular network licences, the government required providers to establish widespread coverage. The result is that South Africa currently has 95% cell phone penetration across households. Text messaging, because it is cheap and asynchronous, is used extensively.

Text Messaging

One way to build school literacy is through text messaging. Children grow up around family members who communicate using writing more than ever before. Mobile phones, unlike books or computers, are now a familiar technology. In the unpoliced domain of texting, users are free from the constraints of writing standards. They can code-switch, create and use new linguistic forms, abbreviate, invent spellings, and include images. Through texting, literacy has found a place in communities that previously had relied predominantly on oral interaction. Mobile phones have become highly prized possessions that can be personalized as markers of identity and status. But devices are also shared, and younger family members are quick to help one another grasp their niceties. This is a domain in which authority has shifted: Young people are relied upon to know more than their technophobic elders. Teachers are relatively comfortable with this familiar technology and are willing to allow learners their expertise.

Texting as a practice gives children choice and control over the meaning-making process; it is the creative end of literacy and enables connection with real audiences. Additionally, mobile phone technology increasingly enables the production of multimodal texts that include images, video clips, and drawings. Children are able to engage in social networking, explore the Web, play games, or blog, all without the bottom-up, staged approaches to literacy that focus on phonics—the sub-skills of reading and graded reading books. This approach is antithetical to the rigid dictates of the curriculum. How then might space be found during school time for this alternative approach to literacy education?

Applications

Informed by Gee's (2003) work on the educational benefits of video games for learning and literacy, we chose to introduce the iPod Touch to classrooms for our research project. Although not a phone, it is in all other respects like the iPhone. The use of a touch screen and icons make it easy to use. In addition, a wide range of applications (apps) are freely available, as are applications that are reasonably priced. Additionally, apps are visually enticing, employ context-specific literacies, allow for choice, offer levels that advance gradually and provide built-in scaffolding, including feedback loops that reward and enable success.

The project has thus far identified and described over 100 applications that are suitable for young people in Grade 5. These, in addition to Internet access (controlled to protect youngsters), provide for a great deal of choice. Learners can choose to play games; do quizzes; read weird facts or children's books; learn phonics; make drawings; create books, comics, or poetry; and learn about dinosaurs, geography, soccer, science, or history. The only requirement is that every time they use the device, they produce a text.

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To this end, the project engineers have created an easy-to-use application that enables learners to produce written texts that are automatically uploaded to a server. Anyone who has access to the server can read and respond to these texts, but only the writers can edit them. This is seen as a safe writing space that prepares students to post texts on the Internet or on a Web site that is shared by all the schools participating in the project. The next step in developing the software will enable multimodal text production.

To support the creation of texts (e-mails, text messages, reports, reviews, scripts, posters, instructions, descriptions, and comics), the researchers, in collaboration with the teachers, are developing posters with annotated model texts for different genres that learners might like to use. This links the project to CAPS and the genres specified in the languages curriculum, modeling ways in which the learners might like to write about the apps provided on their iPod Touch devices. Additionally, apps can be connected to the content of the learning area, such as Google Earth for social studies, or an app dealing with emotions for life orientation.

Teachers and researchers have worked separately and together to ensure that everyone feels comfortable with the technology and are now ready to implement the project in two schools: in three grade 5 classrooms and in two different learning areas, life skills and social sciences. More importantly we are now ready to learn from the choices that the learners make and from the texts that they create.

Students' Disposition to Literacy

While the main aim of the research is to develop learners' literate habitus (Albright & Luke, 2008; Bourdieu, 1991) with a positive disposition to literacy, we are also concerned with improvement in students' literacy skills. The research is designed to test the assumption that when learners are allowed to use literacy for their own purposes, to read what interests them, and to design and produce texts for real audiences, their literacy will improve.

Acquisition theory (Krashen, 1981, 1991) tells us that as they read the texts of other children and access the information they need on the Internet, students' vocabularies will grow, their desire to use literacy for a wider range of social purposes will expand, and their language will develop. Collaborative interaction in social networks and on Web 2.0 also suggests that children will benefit from working together to write and design texts. To facilitate this orientation to text development, our project requires that two learners share a device. Moreover, they will be encouraged to work across pairs and will be taught how to comment constructively on the texts produced by their peers. It remains to be seen if we can create an appetite for literacy in these young people and whether this, combined with the ongoing use of literacy for their own purposes and across the curriculum, can improve the quality of their reading and text-making.

Conclusion

A conception of literacy as the making of meaning is at the heart of this research project. It recognizes that young children have interesting ideas and much to say. Literacy is fundamentally about having the skills that enable us to participate in the global flows of meaning, encoded in texts. As readers and consumers of texts, we have to learn how to

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take meaning *from* texts at the same time as bringing our own understanding of the world *to* texts. The miracle of reading is that fluent readers can decode print so automatically that they can simultaneously think their own thoughts about what they are reading (Wolf, 2007). Experience with a range of texts helps us to develop an understanding of how texts work to achieve different social purposes. As writers, we are free to experiment with different design choices and their rhetorical effects. In producing texts for a range of real audiences, we learn that we have to take responsibility for what we write and for the images we choose. Literacy is a social practice that has social effects, and we have to deal with the consequences of our literacy actions.

The promise of literacy is its global reach. We may be tied to time and place, but our texts are mobile. The World Wide Web is a fundamental part of an interconnected world, made possible by new communication technologies, such as mobile phones. The Mobile Literacies Project captures the idea of mobile technology as the gateway to literacy while simultaneously signifying literacy's ability to extend children's horizons of possibility. In offering a vision of literacy education for children from marginalized communities that imagines them taking their place in a globalized and technologically sophisticated world, it chooses a pedagogy of hope over despair. The future of these children hangs in the balance.

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