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# Exploring a culture of reading: a case study in an under-resourced South African primary school

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# Exploring a culture of reading: A case study in an under-resourced South African primary school

**Claire Biesman-Simons**

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.

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## ABSTRACT

South Africa faces an undeniable literacy crisis. Since 2000, there have been increasing calls for the creation of a culture of reading to address this crisis. This has been on the part of the South African government, academia and civil society. However, this has occurred without clear consensus on the term's meaning and with little explanation of how a poorly-defined concept with its origins in the Global North would achieve this outcome. How this term has achieved such national prominence and the ways it affects school practices motivated this research. The first phase of the study investigated how the term "culture of reading" functions in national government education discourse, and its impact on the country's reading landscape. This was followed by an ethnographic-style case study exploring the factors that shaped a culture of reading at a no-fee primary school, situated on the Cape Flats in Cape Town.

Drawing on a review of more than 400 South African, African and global texts that reference "culture of reading", this study provides a definition of a culture of reading that is appropriate for the African context, and central to the analysis of this study. To investigate how the term "culture of reading" functions in government discourse, I performed a textual analysis of a corpus of 58 publicly available texts produced by the South African government from 2000 to 2019. The analysis reveals an uncritical faith in a culture of reading as fundamental to improved reading levels despite there being no clarity on the term's meaning or evidence of tangible outcomes in learners' reading achievement. Bourdieu's notion of doxa is drawn on to demonstrate how the government's consistent return to an ill-defined Global Northern ideal is indicative of a misunderstanding of what reading is and can achieve, and of a need to further grapple with the complexities of South Africa's reading landscape.

Approaching reading from a socio-cultural perspective, the ethnographic-style case study investigates how habitus, capital and field (Bourdieu, 1990b) interact to shape school reading practices, and how the resulting culture of reading is reflected in one school's reading practices. The case study shows the contextual realities and conditions in the field that affect the promotion of a culture of reading. Data was generated from interviews with

51 participants, classroom and schoolwide observations, photo elicitation, and document reviews which were subjected to a thematic analysis.

Findings indicate that despite the evident value that staff and most learners attribute to reading and their positive dispositions towards reading (i.e. their habitus), the school's culture of reading is undermined by external and internal forces. This is most notably with regard to inappropriate curriculum demands, a multilingual learner body restricted to learning in English, the impact of a community fraught with violence, as well as a dysfunctional culture of teaching and learning that has resulted in a divided staff body and poor discipline. Bourdieu's attention to how no field exists in isolation is demonstrated by educators' battles to promote reading in an education field that does not account sufficiently for social, cultural and economic contextual realities.

Data generated in the Grade 5 classroom evidenced that agentive educators, equipped with the necessary cultural capital, can construct a sub-field that supports a culture of reading in spite of these constraints. However, this is precarious, and findings from the Grade 1 classroom demonstrated how overlapping fields and a dysfunctional culture of teaching and learning constrained an experienced educator, impacting on her wellbeing. The study highlights that there are many ways in which schools and educators can navigate and overcome institutional constraints that threaten South African learners' reading development.

The research highlights the need for closer alignment between government's expectations of schools and their contextual realities, with educators' professional and emotional wellbeing needing to be prioritised. Recommendations for research include further investigation into learners' home and community language and literacy practices and how these practices can be built on at school.

**Keywords**:

Culture of reading; Reading in primary school; Literacy; Bourdieu; Habitus; Capital; Field; South Africa; Culture of teaching and learning; Classroom ethnography

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own 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.



Claire Biesman-Simons

28th day of September in the year 2023

## DEDICATION

For J, and for all you represent.

## PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS EMANATING FROM THIS RESEARCH

Biesman-Simons, C. (2020, September 19). What walls teach us: A reflection on Grade 5 learners' opinions of the use of walls within the school and classroom space. *There is No Frigate Like a Book: Literacy and Children's Literature in Contemporary Africa*. Literacy Association of South Africa (LITASA) Conference. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkGPyj_bKps&list=PLt6k79FoXzh9OV1x3lFq5b7O6LFqOJ6Jf&index=22

Biesman-Simons, C. (2021a, September 3). Teaching and learning practices: Creating the foundation for a Cape Flats school's culture of reading. *Connecting the Dots: Literacy and Home, School, Community, the World!* Literacy Association of South Africa (LITASA) Conference. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InDAaJEsc54

Biesman-Simons, C. (2021b). Tracing the usage of the term "culture of reading" in South Africa: A review of national government discourse (2000–2019). *Reading & Writing*, *12*(1), Article 314. https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v12i1.314

Biesman-Simons, C. (2022a, July 1). Interrogating the catchphrase "culture of reading": A discursive and decolonial analysis of its use over two decades in South Africa. *Reading out through Literacy: Enabling Advantage for All*. UKLA International Conference, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Biesman-Simons, C. (2022b, October 30). Divergent usage: A decolonial reading of "culture of reading" in South African government discourse. *Rethinking Literacy and Pedagogic Agency in the 4IR*. Literacy Association of South Africa (LITASA) Conference, Johannesburg.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| C2005 | Curriculum 2005 |
| CAPS | Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement |
| DBE | Department of Basic Education |
| DOE | Department of Education |
| DSAC | Department of Sport, Arts and Culture |
| DSD | Department of Social Development |
| ECD | Early childhood development |
| GGR | Group-guided reading |
| LiEP | Language in Education Policy |
| LoLT | Language of learning and teaching |
| NEEDU | National Education and Evaluation Unit |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| NLS | New Literacy Studies |
| OBE | Outcomes-based education |
| PIRLS | Progress in International Reading Literacy Study |
| SGB | School governing body |
| SMT | School management team |
| WCED | Western Cape Education Department |

## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| VERY | Capital letters indicate that a word that was spoken loudly, e.g. “He is VERY naughty in class.” |
| *Really* | Italics indicate emphasis on a word or phrase, e.g. “I *really* loved that book.” |
| (shrugs) | Explanations in round brackets are for gestures, expressions and reactions that are not clear through participants’ spoken words, e.g. “I don’t know (shrugs her shoulders).” |
| //…// | Two people speaking simultaneously. |
| […] | Square brackets include additional information, e.g. “I live here [in Saxon].” |

All data was transcribed verbatim.

# NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY

*Race and racialised terminology*

Despite being the terminology of the South African Apartheid state, the terms Black, White, Indian and Coloured continue to be used, and I have followed this convention.

*Parents*

I use "parent" to refers to guardians, caregivers and parents. I have done so because it is the term for caregivers most frequently used by educators and because I view parenting as a role that is assumed by adult household members who care for children within their homes.

*Naming government departments*

When government departments were first established post-1994, basic and higher education fell under the Department of Education (DOE). In 2009, this was divided into the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Higher Education and Training. In instances where I refer to the departments governing basic education from 1994 to present, I use DBE as the overarching term.

In 2016, the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) was combined with the Department of Sport and Recreation to form the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC). It is because of this that there are shifts in department names. I use DSAC as the overarching term.

*Reading ability and reading levels*

I use these terms in the context of schooled literacy practices, and how they are employed by the Department of Basic Education.

The DBE (2011a) explains that reading levels are observable by monitoring how learners manage to decode and comprehend texts and their reading fluency. For books to be at the appropriate reading level, they must contain content that interests the readers. Independent reading levels are the level at which learners can read a text with 95% accuracy. Reading ability is used in this same sense – that is, learners' success in decoding and comprehending texts (Department of Basic Education, 2011a).

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This two-part study emerged from my interest in how the term “culture of reading” has come to prominence in South Africa as a means of responding to poor reading performance at the basic education level. The direction of this research was further guided by the observation that despite the widespread use of the term, there appeared to be no clear shared understanding of the term “culture of reading.”

The first part of the study is a textual analysis of how the South African national government, with a focus on the Department of Basic Education (DBE), has adopted the term “culture of reading” in education discourse. It investigates how the government’s adoption of the term has functioned in shaping the country’s reading landscape. The second and larger component of the research is an ethnographic case study exploring the culture of reading at a no-fee primary school situated on the Cape Flats, 15 kilometres from Cape Town’s city centre.

In this first chapter, I present my motivation for conducting my research, my research questions and aims, and the significance of my research. I describe my reasons for framing my research in Bourdieu’s theory of practice and my decision to locate my approach in a socio-cultural perspective on reading and literacy. I reflect on my position as a researcher and how this may have influenced my research process. I conclude with a brief outline of the structure of this thesis.

## 1.1 Research rationale

Between 2013 and 2017, I worked in the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector. My work was mainly at primary school level and in literacy NGOs that were dedicated to creating and sustaining opportunities for reading in schools. This included partnering with schools in establishing and running libraries, training youth in reading with children and the distribution of resources. Throughout these four years, I encountered the phrase "culture of reading" on a regular basis at work, in informal conversations, and in the media. A consistent theme was the pervasive belief that the existence of a culture of reading would result in children improving their reading levels (as measured in school assessments) and in an associated improvement in South African education results.

Despite the prominence of the term and the apparent faith in a culture of reading as a solution to poor reading levels, there was no clear foundation justifying the promotion of a culture of reading or any apparent shared understanding of what would need to be in place for the establishment and maintenance of a culture of reading. In 2017, I raised this with a primary school principal I was working with closely. We discussed how the repeated use of the term had had no meaningful impact on reading levels and yet it continued to appear in government and education discourse. He said to me "Why don't you look at that for a PhD?"

As I started to consider this potential research topic, a quick review of the first two pages of results on Google using the search terms "culture of reading" and "South Africa" confirmed the ubiquitous use of the term "culture of reading" without clarity as to what the term signifies. The power assigned to the term by the national government was clear in that Read to Lead*,* a national reading campaign launched in 2015 and in existence when I undertook my research, was implemented to create a culture of reading so as to "improve the ability of all South African children [and] ensure that all learners are able to demonstrate age appropriate levels of reading" (Department of Basic Education, 2019c, para. 3). The faith of the minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, in a culture of reading being at the root of improving reading in South Africa was such that she claimed, "[o]ur children are not performing at the level they should merely because they lack a reading culture" (Department of Basic Education, 2017, para. 5). Motshekga's statement troubled me because of its simplistic explanation of a complex problem.

It was evident that, as the principal and I had discussed, there was a clear need to investigate the prolific use of the term "culture of reading" and explore how the uptake of this term had affected the field of education. The widespread assumption that the creation of a culture of reading would translate into improved reading levels was clear in the significant resources that South African corporations (as part of their social investment programmes), civil society and the government were devoting towards creating a culture of reading. I found myself questioning whether the promotion of a culture of reading offered a meaningful or valid solution in the South African context. However, with no indication of a potential shift towards promoting a wider range of literacy practices, understanding the positioning of a culture of reading and exploring how these acts to the benefit or detriment of learners' literacy development assumed importance. It was therefore necessary to explore how, within these constraints, schools can implement policies and strategies to the benefit of their learners' reading and educational development.

As I describe in Section 3.5, the current South African reading and education landscapes result from an interplay of complex historical factors and an entanglement of social, economic and political factors that have affected potential for improvements to a failing education system. Education and literacy have long been described as being in a state of crisis (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Chetty, 2019a; Fleisch, 2008; Muller & Hoadley, 2019; Nassimbeni & Desmond, 2011; Roodt, 2018; Spaull, 2013b) and overcoming this crisis is not reducible to *merely* a lack of a culture of reading.

## 1.2 Research questions and aims

I had two original research questions:

- What shapes a culture of reading in a South African no-fee primary school?
- How is this culture of reading reflected in the school's reading practices?

I soon realised that because Saxon Primary (pseudonym), the school where I conducted my fieldwork, exists in the broader field of education, I could not respond to these questions without first interrogating how the term "culture of reading" functions in the wider field of education and in national government discourse. Specific inquiry into how the South African government has adopted the term was necessary because it is the institutional body that

has the greatest influence on the education field. In order to investigate how the government's adoption of the term "culture of reading" has affected the field of education, an additional research question was required.

This resulted in three research questions:

- How does the term "culture of reading" function in South African national government education discourse?
- What shapes a culture of reading in a South African no-fee primary school?
- How is this culture of reading reflected in the school's reading practices?

In responding to my first question, my aim was to establish how the government's uptake of the term "culture of reading" over a 20-year period had affected children's reading practices, with a particular focus on school practices.

My second and third questions were structured around five research aims. Through an ethnographic case study, I aimed to establish:

- the effect of external factors and overlapping *fields* on the school's culture of reading
- school leadership's and educators' approach to reading and what systems/*practices* they have in place for developing their learners' ability to read for meaning and for generating interest in reading for pleasure
- children's attitude to reading and how this is reflected in their *practices*
- the conditions in the *field* that contribute to a culture of reading
- the interrelationship amongst *habitus, capital* and *field* that shapes a culture of reading.

My decision to research reading practices and not wider literacy practices was due to my interest in how the term "culture of reading" has achieved such prominence in basic education. Reading cannot be disconnected from speaking, listening and writing. In researching reading, I do not dismiss the importance of other literacy practices, and the need to explore the variety of literacy practices in place in the schools was clear as my research progressed.

## 1.3 Significance of the study

Since my original discussion with the principal I described above, this association between a culture of reading and improved reading results continues to appear in popular parlance, academia and government discourse (Government Communication Services, 2023; Scheckle, 2022; Shine Literacy, 2022; South African Government, 2023). With the ongoing use of the term, exploring what the term "culture of reading" represents and how it functions continues to assume importance. I address this gap in three ways.

Despite the prominence of the term "culture of reading" in South Africa and across the continent, there is no overarching definition of the term "culture of reading." In addressing this gap, I provide, for the first time, a definition for a culture of reading within the African context. This is drawn from an extensive review of more than 400 texts emanating from South Africa, Africa and globally that include the term "culture of reading" or "reading culture."[1] This definition is with reference to a culture of reading in the field of basic education. By formulating a definition of a culture of reading as appropriate to the African context, I offer a foundation for a clearer understanding of the term and of what elements constitute a culture of reading. With the many complexities and challenges associated with promoting reading, this clarity can be of benefit for planning and strategising across civil society, government and individual schools in their efforts to promote a culture of reading.

A second reason for my interest in the term "culture of reading" was to establish how the term has affected reading in basic education. With the financial and institutional power that the government holds, its understanding of a culture of reading and how this influences their distribution of resources and policy planning therefore shapes what is expected of schools and how schools are able to meet these expectations. Analysing how the government's adoption of the term relates to actual practices assists in identifying what has to be in place or rethought in order for individual schools and educators to respond to the government's demands.

Lastly, by conducting a single-site ethnographic case study exploring the culture of reading at one South African primary school, I was able to gain a rich picture of how the term

[1] I consider the terms "culture of reading" and "reading culture" to be interchangeable.

"culture of reading" translates from the macro-level of the field of education to the micro-level of a single school. Prinsloo and Street (2014) state "effective policy making should be based on a close understanding of what language and literacy are and how they are practised, not what we project on to them" (p. 65). By conducting an in-depth empirical study, I contribute to understanding how the government's approach to reading plays out at an individual school. This includes identifying how its policy making reflects an understanding of language and literacy in South Africa. I purposefully selected a school that operates in a context similar to that of many schools in South Africa and specifically in Cape Town. This is because, although case study findings cannot be directly applied to other sites, they establish a framework that can facilitate future research in similar contexts (Bassey, 1999).

Findings in one school are unique to that school. Yet, by identifying a no-fee school whose conditions are similar to many other schools, there was potential to draw "fuzzy generalizations" (Bassey, 1999, p. 12) from my research. These are generalisations that arise "from studies of singularities and typically claims that *it is possible, or likely, or unlikely that* what was found in the singularity will be found in similar situations elsewhere" (Bassey, 1999, p. 12, italics in original). My identification of Saxon Primary as a research site provides a foundation for a framework for future research that could contribute to understanding or the improvement of reading and other literacy practices in other South African schools.

## 1.4 Research site: Saxon Primary, the Cape Flats

Saxon Primary is located in Saxon, a neighbourhood on the Cape Flats. The Cape Flats is a large expanse of land located in the Cape Town metropole. Until the 1950s, it was a largely uninhabited dustbowl. In 1950, the Apartheid government passed the Group Areas Act. This act stripped the majority of South Africans of basic human rights by designating the neighbourhoods in which they were permitted to live according to race (Mabin, 1992). Any residents who were not White and were living in suburbs that the act designated for Whites only were forcibly removed and resettled in areas allocated to them by the government. As a result, from the late 1950s, thousands of Coloured South Africans living across Cape Town

were forced to relocate to the Cape Flats, an area that, due to this forced relocation, is colloquially referred to as a "dumping ground" of Apartheid.

The designation of where people could live resulted in long-established communities and extended families being torn apart, subjected to incredible trauma and dehumanised by the ruling government (Meyer & Chetty, 2017). Social and economic networks were destroyed, and the resources shared among relatives and communities disappeared (Pinnock, 2016). With families and communities separated, the resulting isolation worsened this trauma. Such dehumanisation and trauma increase the likelihood of societies to be marked by crime and violence as well as gangsterism (Chetty, 2019b).

The trauma of displacement, high levels of unemployment resulting from being a long distance from employers, and isolation from neighbours resulted in neighbourhoods devoid of a sense of community and with many residents living with little hope or purpose. The negative impact of this included increased levels of alcohol and substance abuse, violence in and outside of the home and a distrust of neighbours (Pinnock, 2016). As a consequence, individuals searched for a sense of belonging in groups that could provide this community and a sense of security (Dziewanski, 2018; Pinnock, 2016). As suspicion of others, and conflict and violence grew, many of these groups evolved into organised gangs who sought to obtain dominance in a specific community (Pinnock, 2016). Fighting in and across neighbourhoods was rife and as new members joined gangs, this way of living provided belonging and a sense of community inclusion.

The Cape Flats continues to be associated with gangsterism and violence. Efforts to introduce the military and increased policing have had no evident impact. Such efforts will not address the root causes of violence and gangsterism (Pinnock, 2016). Succeeding in this requires increased opportunities for socio-economic empowerment and creating communities where there are clear alternatives for youth seeking social and cultural inclusion. Currently, such possibilities are limited. Dziewanski (2018) argues that ongoing gang violence is largely attributable to the "chronic structural and symbolic subjugation that continues in the form of neo-apartheid" (p.32). Adding to this subjugation is that because a significant portion of the Cape Flats' population continue to receive a poor education, they have had few opportunities to improve their quality of life (Soudien, 2016).

The majority of Cape Flats residents continue to suffer socio-economic deprivation and inequalities that are the consequences of centuries of oppression (Hemson, 2016). Unemployment, trauma and poverty dominate the lives of many. High levels of unemployment and poverty are associated with violence, domestic abuse and drug abuse (J. Botha & Gore, 2020). As a result of these factors and of intergenerational trauma, violence and gangsterism have been socially reproduced and are entrenched in society and a reality across the Cape Flats.

In the midst of the Cape Flats is the neighbourhood of Saxon, and Saxon Primary. Schools are "microcosms of the broader communities in which they are located" and the "social ills prevalent in communities are known to permeate the school environment to various degrees" (Burton & Leoschut, 2013, p. 54). As they attend a school located on the Cape Flats, Saxon Primary learners are subject to these social ills and to how these ills negatively affect their education possibilities (Adonis, 2017; Bush, 2013; Chetty, 2015).

A drive around Saxon reveals a suburb similar to many others on the Cape Flats. Many of the learners live in multi-story blocks of flats, the areas in the neighbourhood where violence and gangsterism are most prevalent. Elsewhere, terraced houses are close together with informal structures and Wendy houses in the back yards. [2] The number of people on the street during the day indicates high levels of unemployment. Children walk in groups to and from school for their safety. A Grade 1 learner told me, "It's nice here [in Saxon] but I'm scared of the shooting. Because they always shoot here." Violence and gangsterism are feared but accepted as a reality of life. Although no longer legally demarcated, the geographical boundaries imposed by the Apartheid government are still reflected on any visit to Saxon.

### 1.4.1 Saxon Primary

Once I formulated my research topic, the first step was identifying a potential school. This was guided by three criteria. It was important that the school's language of learning and teaching (LoLT) was my home language, English. Conducting research in another language

[2] A Wendy house is a prefabricated wooden structure. Wendy houses are often erected in backyards to provide additional accommodation. This use of the term "Wendy house" differs from the original meaning of a Wendy house being a playhouse in the garden for children.

would have reduced the amount and accuracy of data I generated. Second, I contacted former colleagues in the NGO sector to seek recommendations for schools that they had interacted with where there was evidence of reading practices beyond those required by the curriculum. Finally, because the majority of South African government schools are no-fee schools, I wanted to be situated in a no-fee school. Saxon Primary met these requirements.

My motivation for selecting a school with strong reading practices was in order to explore how, despite the many challenges of operating in the South African education system, there are schools which succeed in constructing a field where reading practices flourish. By doing so, I hoped to identify practices that could help inform departmental and other schools' efforts to improve their cultures of reading. In my consultation with literacy NGOs and on my first visit to the school, Saxon Primary met this criterion.

Saxon Primary's designation as a no-fee school reflects the economic deprivation in the neighbourhood. The school has 16 classes, two per grade from Grade R (five- to six year-olds) to Grade 7 (12- to 13 year-olds). Class sizes are capped at 40 learners. The LoLT is English. I estimate 55% to 60% of learners are from the surrounding community[3], with the majority of these learners speaking Kaaps or otherwise English as a home language. Kaaps is a highly stigmatised variety of Afrikaans traditionally spoken by the Coloured population in the Western Cape. It is generally associated with being poorly educated or a lack of schooling (Hendricks, 2016; Rudwick, 2021). Despite Kaaps being spoken by an estimated 3 million South Africans (Le Cordeur, 2016), it is not recognised in the constitution or in any language policy. Most Kaaps home language speakers at Saxon Primary communicate well in English. However they and learners who speak English as a home language speak a variety of English that has been significantly influenced by Kaaps. It is a variety that, like Kaaps, is stigmatised and associated with a lack of schooling. Throughout my fieldwork, I interacted with only one learner who speaks Standard English (also known as White South African English), the variety of English that holds esteem in the education field.

About 30% to 40% of the learners are from townships in the Cape Town metropole and most speak isiXhosa as their home language. Their level of English when they enter the

[3] Here, "surrounding community" is designated to be within a two-kilometre radius.

school varies from learners who speak only isiXhosa at home to fluent English speakers. Although it was not a requirement I had set, Saxon Primary's multilingual learner body was a further motivator for conducting research at the school. With South Africa's rich linguistic diversity, many schools have multilingual learner bodies and this benefited my focus on being situated in a school that reflected the context in which many other South African learners are educated.

## 1.5 Bourdieu's theory of practice

My research draws on the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. This theory refers to the interaction between habitus, capital and field in shaping practices (Bourdieu, 1984). Habitus, capital and field are interrelated, and alterations to one affect the other. The shaping of specific practices therefore result from the interaction between habitus, capital and field. As I outline in Section 2.3.7, practices shape culture, and therefore Bourdieu's theory of practice was suited to exploring Saxon Primary's culture of reading.

Habitus is a set of durable dispositions that constitute our values, beliefs and ways of thinking and doing (Bourdieu, 1990b). These dispositions can be held by individuals or take the form of a collective habitus which results from a group of persons whose ways of thinking and being have intersected over a prolonged period in the same field (Grenfell & James, 1998).

Field refers to the context in which people operate (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Every field is structured around struggles for power where members of a field vie to improve their positioning and increase their influence in a field by amassing capital (power). A field may be physically bounded, with a school being an example of this, or occupy a social space, as is the case with the field of education.

Bourdieu (1986) presents capital in four forms: economic, social, cultural and symbolic. Economic capital refers to the traditional idea of capital where financial input provides access to specific profits. Cultural capital is divided into three forms. Institutional cultural capital is amassed through education qualifications, and professional knowledge and experience. Embodied cultural capital is cultivated from birth and continues to evolve throughout one's life. It is shaped by the dispositions of the mind and body. Objectified

capital refers to cultural goods such as artwork, books and instruments, that one has access to. Objectified cultural capital links to habitus in that the existence of objectified cultural capital requires the necessary knowledge and dispositions that allow for using these goods in a way that is beneficial in relation to a specific field. Social capital exists through our social interactions and the networks we occupy and how these afford access to other forms of capital. When the knowledge, resources and dispositions that one has accumulated are seen as worthy of recognition in relation to a specific field, they operate as symbolic capital. The accumulation of symbolic capital provides increased access to the benefits offered by a specific field and increases one's status or reputation in the field (Bourdieu, 1986).

In addition to habitus, capital and field, I have drawn on Bourdieu's notion of doxa. Doxa refers to core practices and beliefs in a field which are accepted as true and legitimate, without interrogating the validity of this assumed truth (Bourdieu, 1990b). The result is that events in a field and one's position in the field go unquestioned and are accepted without examination (Bourdieu, 1991).

## 1.6 Literacy as a social practice

Traditionally, literacy refers to the ability to read and write with reading and writing perceived as a neutral set of technical skills that are assumed to benefit any person holding these skills (Purcell-Gates, 2007; Venezky, 1990). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, this perspective of literacy was challenged (Scribner & Cole, 1978; B. Street, 1984). This shift in thinking marked a move towards a theory of literacy as a socio-cultural practice, and the establishment of New Literacy Studies (NLS). The founding members of NLS proposed that literacy serves multiple purposes and that literacy cannot be defined solely according to the technical skills considered necessary for successful reading and writing. NLS argued that literacy practices cannot occur independently of the context, that is, of the physical, socio-cultural, political and historical factors shaping the specific setting in which they occur (Bruce et al., 1989; Gee, 1990; B. Street, 1992). It recognised that we do not simply "practise reading and writing" (B. Street, 1992, p. 36), but that these practices are underpinned by the beliefs and ideas we hold regarding literacy.

Research under the umbrella of NLS has traditionally taken the form of small-scale ethnographic studies focused on reading and writing practices in a specific, localised context (B. Street, 2012). As literacy has come to encompass more than the traditional concepts of reading and writing, in large part due to the digital turn and multimodal literacies (D. Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Schultz & Hull, 2017), NLS's emphasis on reading and writing has come into question (Kress & Rowsell, 2019). A further critique of NLS is that its attention to small-scale studies dismisses that all literacy practices exist in broader society and cannot be considered outside of power structures and the wider fields that shape these practices (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Street (2017) addresses this, stating that a move towards a more encompassing focus on literacy as a social practice allows for building on NLS in offering a wider understanding of how literacy practices are shaped. Using the example of the classroom, he explains that adopting a wider perception of literacy as a social practice allows researchers to understand how literacy in the classroom is shaped both by the local context and the broader contexts of the home, community and beyond.

The perspective that literacy is a socio-cultural practice that cannot be separated from structures of power, the people interacting in a literacy event, and the context in which it is practiced links to Bourdieu's theory of practice. This shared attention to how practices are structured and produced complements an analysis centred on understanding what shapes reading practices and what works for or against these practices. The benefit that a combination of literacy as a social practice and a Bourdieusian approach offers as a theoretical foundation is highlighted by the extent to which Bourdieu's theory of practice has been drawn on in literacy studies in Africa (D. Botha, 2017; R. Davids, 2020; Gennrich, 2015; Makoe, 2009; Prinsloo, 2005) and globally (Comber, 1999; Compton-Lilly, 2014; Duckworth & Ade-Ojo, 2016; Grenfell et al., 2012; Luke, 2008b).

## 1.7 My position as researcher

From my earliest memories, reading was part of life. My parents read to my sister and me daily. We had a wide selection of our own books and supplemented these with books we chose on our much-anticipated weekly library visits. My uncle, one of the best storytellers I have ever known, would keep us captivated for hours as he told us stories of his childhood. I

remember my excitement when I learned to read and could "teach" my sister and younger cousins to read. Reading was something everyone in our extended family enjoyed. In describing children's development as readers in the Global North, Bloch's (2001) statement – "[s]lipping quite naturally into a reading culture, children have innumerable opportunities to literally wallow in books in their mother tongue" (no pagination) – reflects my experiences with reading from birth.

I attended a well-resourced girls' school that, under Apartheid, was open to White learners only. I entered Grade 1 at the end of the Apartheid regime. By Grade 12, seven years after the establishment of a democratic government in 1994, my school continued to espouse colonial thinking and values and had a student body that was more than 80% White. English was the LoLT and home language of almost all learners. Classes were capped at 30 learners. It was a context that varied significantly from Saxon Primary.

Like most young children, I assumed my experiences were shared by everyone. Then, I remember being in the car with my mother driving and listening to her attempt to explain to her six-year-old daughter that schools were racially segregated, and me repeatedly asking a question that had no answer: "But why?" In 1994, an election official broke protocol and allowed my sister and me the privilege of entering voting booths with our parents. I did not yet grasp the power of my mother's statement that "We were living history." The extent of divisions and discrimination South Africans had experienced could not be overcome in a short time and access to quality education remained limited for the majority of the population. I continued to receive an outstanding education. I am grateful for an upbringing that provided me with this education and instilled in me a passion for reading. However, I recognise that it was a childhood very different from the majority of South Africans' upbringing. As with any researcher, this upbringing and my beliefs will have affected my choice of topic and how the research was undertaken (de Carvalho, 2023), and this needs to be acknowledged at the outset of my research.

The question of whether White scholars from the Global North can conduct accurate, impactful research in the Global South and speak for the subaltern is debated in global and South African research (Auerbach, 2014; Crawford et al., 2021; Fúnez-Flores, 2021; Kramer et al., 2019). In South Africa, where legal racial discrimination was outlawed relatively

recently, and where social injustices remain widespread, the White population continues to benefit from significant cultural, social and economic capital amassed under colonial and Apartheid rule. Consequently, the positioning of White South African scholars should be subjected to this same scrutiny (Schmid, 2019).

As a White South African, is it possible for me to present others' stories without my background, race and upbringing affecting my analysis? The answer is unequivocally "No." It is not possible for any qualitative researcher to separate themselves from their own experiences and ways of thinking and doing, or to depict accurately the data that was generated (Blommaert & Jie, 2010; Bourdieu, 1990a). Any rigorous qualitative research demands that the researcher reflects on the research process and how their perceptions and own experiences shape their research approach (Bourdieu, 1990a). In ensuring rigor, it was critical that I consistently interrogated my own thinking, and remained cognisant of the effects of structural racism and colonialism. I do not presume that I can separate my upbringing, education and associated privileges from my research process. Nor do I presume that my voice holds the same value as an insider of the Saxon Primary community. As a White South African, my voice has historically held more power than my research participants' voices. With the inequalities and social injustices that remain from Apartheid, my voice continues to hold a level of symbolic capital that is not available to many South Africans. In undertaking my research, I recognise this capital and the responsibility this brings in presenting a fair narrative of the lived experiences of South Africans who have not had access to such capital.

From my initial decision to embark on this PhD, I have been cautious of imposing a Global North voice too strongly when "speaking in someone else's name and/or place and thus for them" (Griffin, 2018, p. 109). In Chapter 4, I discuss the ways in which I worked to navigate my position in the school. I pay specific attention to how I drew on Bourdieu's (1990a) notion of reflexivity, consistently returned to data, and carried out ongoing member checks with educators to mitigate the potential of speaking too strongly in someone's else's name or place.

In a conversation with two educators, I expressed concern about conducting research at a school that differed significantly from my own schooling experiences. They disagreed with

my concerns, stating that my outsider status may, instead, provide a new perspective. One of the educators added, “no one else is telling our story.” Throughout my research process, I have endeavoured to tell their stories and the story of Saxon Primary with appreciation and respect for all participants.

## 1.8 Outline of chapters

In Chapter 2, I present my theoretical framework and expand on my decision to employ Bourdieu’s theory of practice and to approach reading from a socio-cultural perspective. Chapter 3 reviews literature pertinent to my study and presents a definition of an African culture of reading that I arrived at after consulting more than 400 texts that used the term “culture of reading” or “reading culture.” In Chapter 4 I present my research design and research process. I first describe my steps in undertaking a textual analysis of government texts referencing “culture of reading.” I then explain my motivation for conducting an ethnographic case study and provide an account of the research process from my initial identification of a research site to writing up my analysis.

Chapter 5 responds directly to my first research question. It is a textual analysis of how the term “culture of reading” functions in government education discourse. In Chapter 6, I analyse how reading practices at Saxon Primary are influenced by external factors and overlapping fields. Chapter 7 analyses the school’s culture of teaching and learning. In Chapter 8 and Chapter 9, I present studies of the two classrooms where I conducted the majority of my observations. I conclude with Chapter 10, where I respond to my research questions, provide a discussion of my findings and offer recommendations relating to these findings. I highlight my contribution to South African reading scholarship and reflect briefly on my research process.

# CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I present the theory that has framed my research approach. The concept of literacy is understood in multiple ways, and its meaning and purpose have long been debated (Keefe & Copeland, 2011). In my research, I have adopted the perspective of literacy as a socio-cultural practice and I outline my reasons for this and how this has shaped my study. In the second half of the chapter I present Bourdieu's theory of practice and my rationale for using a Bourdieusian framework. I include a discussion of doxa, misrecognition and symbolic violence – concepts of Bourdieu's that are relevant in understanding the South African education field and the positioning of literacy in this field.

## 2.1 Traditional understandings of literacy

Traditionally, literacy was considered as the ability to read and write (Cambridge Assessment, 2013; Gee, 2015). From this viewpoint, literacy is a set of technical skills to be mastered (J. Street & Street, 1995). Mastering these skills was assumed to bring universal benefit with UNESCO stating that the ability to read and write contributes "to the liberation of man and to his full development" (UNESCO, 1975, no pagination). This traditional, reductionist conceptualisation of literacy as a universal good focuses on what literacy does *for* us and the associated expectation of socio-economic progression (Graff, 2010). Bloome (2019) problematises this perspective of reading and writing as the dominant and only set of literacy practices that enable achievement and equity in education and entry to society. He argued that this disregards "not only the literacy practices of non-dominant groups but also the people who use them" (Bloome et al., 2019, p. 24). This is a longstanding argument,

reflected in Street and Street's (1995) statement that "nonschool literacies have come to be seen as inferior attempts at the real thing, to be compensated for by enhanced schooling" (p. 72). The consequence of this dominance is that how we use literacy in its many forms what we do with literacy is backgrounded (Bloch, 2004; Larson & Marsh, 2005). It is this backgrounding of how literacy is used and understood at specific points in time and space that NLS and the wider theory underpinning literacy as a socio-cultural practice challenged (D. Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2000; B. Street, 1993).

## 2.2 Literacy as a socio-cultural practice

The theory underpinning literacy as a social practice emphasises that no encounter with texts (in any form) occurs in isolation of the context in which the text is used and what this context allows for (B. Street, 2017). Accordingly, literacy practices are shaped through interactions surrounding texts, by cultural and social ideologies regarding literacy and what literacy encompasses, and through ongoing struggles for power (Bloome et al., 2019).

It was in the late 1970s and early 1980s that attention to literacy as a socio-cultural practice gained traction. One of the first major studies in this field was Scribner and Cole's (1978) groundbreaking research of the literacy practices of the Vai people in Liberia which showed how the ways in which people acquire literacy skills and how they use these skills are embedded in the social and cultural context and wider society. The recognition that literacy events are contextually located increased with Heath's (1983) seminal text *Ways with words*. Her research in three different communities in the South-Eastern United States demonstrated how different groups of people and individuals use language and literacy in unique ways, and that this usage is deeply influenced by the social and cultural context in which it occurs. Her study highlighted how, although there is no one standard way of practising literacy and language, the widespread belief in a standard and correct form of language dominated how learners' home practices were received on entry to school.

In the mid 1980s and early 1990s this increased attention to literacy practices as contextually located led to the establishment of New Literacy Studies, a term coined by James Paul Gee (2012) who was an original contributor to this field of studies. NLS emerged from a group of interdisciplinary scholars and their argument for a more social and cultural

understanding of literacy. Founding members of NLS argued that reading and writing are always situated in a specific time and place, with the production of literacy practices connected to specific social and cultural groups of people and their beliefs associated with literacy (Bruce et al., 1989; Gee, 1990; B. Street, 1993). Incorporated in this wider attention to the implications of reading was a social justice imperative. This was particularly in the education context with attention to how the favouring of specific literacy practices served to exclude individuals whose practices differed from these dominant practices (Papen, 2023). This focus and the emergence of NLS is closely associated with Brian Street's (1984) presentation of the ideological and autonomous models of literacy.

Street's (1984) interest in literacy as a social practice was significantly influenced by his research in Iran in the 1970s. During this period, Street viewed a variety of community literacy practices that enabled meaningful participation in society. However, he observed that these practices did not hold the same prestige as traditional schooled reading and writing practices, and were associated with a lack of education (B. Street, 1984). Central to Scribner and Cole's (1978), Heath's (1983) and Street's (1984) studies was the problem of reducing literacy to a universal set of reading and writing skills. In challenging this thinking, Street (1995) proposed two models of literacy: the ideological and the autonomous.

The autonomous model of literacy represented the traditional conceptualisation of literacy as a set of neutral, technical reading and writing skills that are applicable to any context, and associated with educational competencies. From this perspective, these skills benefit cognitive development and increase access to economic success and wellbeing, regardless of the social and economic context (B. Street, 1999). The result of the dominance of this model is that these Western conceptions of reading and writing are imposed on other groups and cultures (B. Street, 2003). In explaining the ideological model, Street (1988) stressed that the model:

> does not attempt to deny technical skill or the cognitive aspects of reading and writing, but rather understands them as they are encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power. In that sense the ideological model subsumes rather than excludes the work undertaken within the autonomous model. (p. 60)

Street (1995) acknowledged that literacy practices require technical skills but emphasised that skills are only one component of literacy. He argued that literacy events cannot be isolated from the context in which they were produced and that literacy practices are "inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in a given society" (B. Street, 1988, p. 59). Street (2012) uses the terms "literacy event" to refer to what Heath (1982) describes as occasions in which "written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (p. 50). Building on Heath's notion of "literacy events," Street (2012) defines "literacy practices" as a broader concept than literacy events, stating that these practices refer to:

> both the activities of reading and/or writing in which people are involved in specific contexts and also to the ideas that such people have of literacy, involving the particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts. (p. 37)

This incorporates observable literacy events and the ideologies underpinning these events (B. Street, 1988). I have adopted the terms "reading event" and "reading practices" in this sense. I am cautious of drawing on these dated definitions in that they define literacy purely as reading and writing. However, with my research centred on reading, and because I draw on NLS, these definitions remain relevant to my study.

Referencing Heath's (1983) text *Ways with words*, Luke and Kale (1997) present a case study of a six-year-old, Elsey, a member of the Torres Strait Islander community, with developing English competency. In this study, Luke and Kale consider specifically how the commonalities or differences between out-of-school and school language and literacy practices affect how these practices are received by educators and schools. They state that before a child enters school it is possible to develop a "prognosis" for their education, a result of whether the specific rules and practices surrounding language and literacy in their home are privileged at school, and that this prognosis is not linked to cognitive ability or learners being more committed to learning. Luke and Kale (1997) argue that because Elsey's cultural background and her socialisation into language and literacy at home has not resulted in the production of these practices, her prognosis "is not good" (p. 26). They state that this holds for any child whose initial language and literacy socialisation has shaped a habitus that does not translate to embodied reading capital in the Australian (or any other)

field of education. Luke and Kale's (1997) analysis shows how any successful exploration of a school's culture of reading has to be framed by the ideological model of literacy. This is to account for the ways in which broader society influences school practices and for how educators' and learners' beliefs about reading and their established literacy practices contribute to shaping a school and individual classrooms' cultures of reading.

In the early 2000s, NLS's focus on how literacy practices are shaped by the society in which they occur was criticised for paying inadequate attention to external structures of power and how literacy practices have to be understood in a broader societal context (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Luke, 2004). In this regard, Brandt and Clinton (2002) referred to needing to move beyond the "limits of the local." They queried the extent of the division that NLS draws between literacy as locally situated and the global structures that affect practices in a specific, localised context, asking that if by placing such attention on how literacy practices are locally situated:

> might something be lost when we ascribe to local contexts responses to pressures that originate in distant decisions, especially when seemingly local appropriations of literacy may in fact be culminations of literate designs originating elsewhere? (Brandt & Clinton, 2002, p. 338)

It is in this vein that Warriner (2009) emphasises how any study of local and everyday practices has to identify how these practices intersect with and are influenced by history, ideologies, globalisation and structures of power. Responding to this criticism, Street (2012) acknowledged the need to move beyond the "limits of the local" to a wider focus on how literacy practices occur within broader power structures and in relation to society. He stated:

> We need to analyse and contest what counts as "literacy" (and numeracy): what literacy events and practices mean to users in different cultural and social contexts – the original inspiration for NLS – but also investigate the "limits of the local"; and how literacy relates to more general issues of social theory regarding textuality, figured worlds, identity and power. (p. 49)

It is in moving beyond the limits of the local that Bourdieu's theory of practice (1990b), presented in Section 2.3, offers particular benefit to literacy studies. This is because every

field exists in relation to other fields and each field is always structured according to its position in relation to the field of power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Exploring literacy practices therefore requires exploring how an individual's or a group's practices are constructed in accordance with the logic of the field but also in the context of broader society and how the external forces working on a field allow for or constrain specific practices (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009).

The development of a more encompassing theory of literacy as a social practice has resulted in a detailed consideration of not only how specific practices hold value in a localised context but how this value transcends physical boundaries, and what contextual factors need to be in place for this value to be realised elsewhere (Luke, 2004). The wider conceptualisation of literacy as a social practice looks at the negotiation and structuring of the meaning of literacy practices across communities and contexts (Rowsell et al., 2019). This conceptualisation attends to issues of power and how this structures practices, but there is a broadening of focus beyond NLS's traditional dedication to the exclusionary or transformative nature of literacy in relation to education (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). It is not only because of the need to move beyond the local that there was a shift towards a more encompassing theory of literacy as a social practice. NLS traditionally took the form of ethnographic studies that considered reading and writing practices, located in a single physical space. With the digital turn and the wider conceptualisation of literacy as more than reading and writing, the plurality of literacies had to be recognised (Mills, 2010; B. Street, 2016a). Studies underpinned by the theory of literacy as a social practice moved beyond NLS's initial attention to the written form and incorporated multimodal, visual and digital literacy practices (Burnett et al., 2014; Pahl, 2019; Rowsell, 2015). Included in this is how, especially with the growth in digital modes of communication, there is a greater flow of shared information across contexts and thus literacy events and interactions need not be restricted to a boundaried physical location (Burnett et al., 2014; Pahl, 2019; Rowsell, 2015).

Although the methodological perspective underpinning NLS is no longer "new" and the above critiques are legitimate, NLS continues to hold relevance to literacy research, including this study. As I show in Chapter 3, in the South African education field, the autonomous model dominates policy and curricula. The longstanding dominance of this way

of thinking about literacy has not achieved the stipulated outcomes of improved education results. NLS challenges the perspective that reading and writing are a set of value-free, skill-based practices that are assumed to bring universal benefit. Accordingly, it offers a framework for investigating the effects of imposing the autonomous model of literacy on schools and of the ongoing position of Western, schooled literacy practices as superior to any other literacy practices. This framework enabled a detailed analysis of how societal factors and the power exerted by the government affected Saxon Primary learners' construction as readers in an education field that privileges the linguistic and reading capital traditionally held by White middle-class, English-speaking children (bua-lit collective, 2018; Guzula, 2022).

The importance of a socio-cultural perspective is illustrated in Chetty's (2019a) study of ten educators working in primary schools in underprivileged communities in the Western Cape. His findings showed the benefit of approaching South African research from a social perspective. He stressed that all school literacy practices have to be considered in relation to the structures of power governing the education field. Chetty concluded that the DBE's foregrounding of cognitive skills and positioning of literacy as an ideologically neutral practice has failed South African learners and educators. He emphasised how the DBE's consistent favouring of literacy perspectives that reflect Global North literacy and language ideologies reproduces existing inequalities in education and literacy. The negative effect of this narrow conception of literacy on South African learners is further shown in the works of scholars such as Guzula et al. (2016), Makoe (2022), Prinsloo (2005) and Stein (2008). Across their research and attention to the many literacy practices South African children are involved in, these scholars present a common theme: the acceptance of Western ideologies of literacy as equating to the correct and only acceptable schooled reading and writing practices disadvantages South African learners who have not been socialised into these practices from a young age.

Of further relevance is how the theory that underpins literacy as a social practice complements Bourdieu's theory of practice. This is clear in Street's (2012) description of what underlies the construction of reading and writing practices. He stated that, "the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of

knowledge, identity and being" (B. Street, 2012, p. 29) - a concept that shares many similarities with habitus. Street's emphasis on literacy practices being contextually located links to Bourdieu's (1990b) assertion that practices cannot be understood without accounting for how conditions and the struggles for power (capital) in a field make certain practices possible or impossible.

## 2.3 Bourdieu's theory of practice

Pierre Bourdieu introduced his theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977) as a means of exploring the complex interplay between individuals and groups, their social environments (fields), and how these interacted in shaping practices. His theory of practice provides a means of understanding how, although individuals are agentive beings, this agency is restricted by the logic and rules governing a field. Bourdieu held particular interest in how, rather than providing access to equitable opportunities for social and economic progression, education acts to reproduce existing inequalities (Heffernan, 2022). This interest was driven partly by his own experience as a member of the working class who, in opposition to an expected life trajectory, established a career in academia yet, throughout this career, he experienced a lack of belonging in the elite academic field (Grenfell, 2008).

In outlining what motivated Bourdieu's work, Thomson (2017) states, "Bourdieu sought an [social] explanation that did not attribute blame to individuals or groups of people" but rather aimed to establish "how it is that social structures limit and frame an individual's capacities to act and make decisions" (p. 5), a statement that shows the benefit of employing Bourdieu's theory of practice in South Africa. This is because the South African education field is devastatingly unequal. However, policies and curricula misrecognise this inequality, which results in a reproduction of inequalities that restricts and frames learners' potential success at school and beyond.

In explaining Bourdieu's theory of practice, I present habitus, capital and field independently and then show how these three concepts interact in shaping practices (Bourdieu, 1990b).

### 2.3.1 Habitus

Our habitus constitutes our way of thinking, doing and being. Bourdieu (1990b) defines habitus as:

> systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (p. 53)

Dispositions have three distinct meanings. They are a "result of an organizing action" with a meaning similar to structure, "a way of being, a habitual state" (especially of the body) and a "predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 214). The dispositions constituting habitus are not innate but develop from birth. Our primary habitus is shaped mainly in the home and by our social and cultural experiences in our early years, and this habitus forms the foundation for all future habitus (Bourdieu, 1990b). In these early years, we develop certain ways of thinking, doing, being and knowing that shape the dispositions and, consequently, the primary habitus that we embody and carry throughout life (Maton, 2008). Habitus is therefore "embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 56). With habitus internalised as second nature, as we move between fields, we are predisposed to accept certain practices as possible and others as impossible without conscious thought, "without any intention of behaving meaningfully and without consciously obeying rules explicitly posed as such" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 76).

Habitus is structured by our past and present but is also structuring. It is structuring because it works in generating our current and future practices. This results from how the dispositions that constitute our habitus predispose us to certain ways of thinking, being and doing (Bourdieu, 1984). We thus structure our practices according to what is perceived as the best possible response to a specific field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

However, habitus is also structured. This is because the conditions (possibilities and constraints) in every field shape how habitus has to adjust in order to meet these possibilities and constraints (Maton, 2008). We occupy multiple fields and, as we move between these fields, we carry with us our habitus that predispose us to certain ways of being and doing that shape our practices (Bourdieu, 1990b). Understanding the relationship between habitus and field is crucial in understanding practices. Bourdieu (1990a) states:

> habitus realizes itself, becomes active only *in the relation* to a field, and the same habitus can lead to very different practices and stances depending on the state of the field. (p. 116, italics in original)

With dispositions emerging from "a present past that tends to perpetuate itself" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 54), but also susceptible to undergoing alterations in adapting to new fields, habitus provides a useful tool for exploring what has shaped participants' ways of thinking and doing about reading in and outside the school. The habitus one brings to a new field will result in subjective responses to the field and possibilities for reproducing or shifting practices. Yet these possibilities will be constrained by the internal and external influences that act on an individual and by whether the type and volume of capital they hold allows them to reproduce their habitus (Heffernan, 2022). While this makes the implementation of certain practices impossible and others improbable, there remains a limited range of available possibilities.

Jenkins (1992) and Giroux (1983) challenge habitus as being deterministic, arguing that Bourdieu's focus on habitus being reproduced dismisses that dominated individuals or groups can act agentively in their responses to the forces acting on them. Jenkins (1992) in particular criticised the extent to which the reproduction of habitus assumes that we lack the agency to shape our practices according to specific goals. Bourdieu (1990b), in fact, presented habitus as a means of countering this determinism. He described habitus as "durable" and stated that evolution in habitus will occur over extensive periods of time. Yet, because every field is a site of struggles, individuals or groups can reposition themselves in the field and respond in multiple ways to forces acting on them. Bourdieu's own life trajectory provides an example that demonstrates his argument that, although reproduction

of habitus is likely, it does not predetermine practices or one's position in a specific field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

***Pedagogical habitus***

As my research is based in a school, it includes a consideration of educators' pedagogical habitus and how their habitus shape their practices at school. In his research on initial teacher education and how educators' habitus interacted with their teacher training in developing their teaching competency, Grenfell (1996) built on the concept of habitus and introduced the notion of "pedagogic habitus," which he described as being shaped by the aspects of educators' habitus that most influence their practices in schools. Feldman (2016a) drew on this idea in researching shifts in South African educators' habitus following engagement in a professional learning community. She defined educators' pedagogical habitus as "their embodied, mental and corporeal pedagogical practices that have formed over time" (Feldman, 2016a, p. 30). This habitus will have developed from their initial entry into school as a child, throughout pre-service training and as result of their experiences as qualified educators. The ways in which this pedagogical habitus shapes educators' practices will depend on how the classroom and school environments enable their pedagogic habitus to operate as institutional or embodied capital (Feldman, 2016b).

***Reading habitus***

In my analysis, I refer to individual and collective reading habitus. This is not a term employed by Bourdieu. I consider reading habitus as the dispositions, beliefs and values an individual or a group holds surrounding reading. These are visible in how participants speak about reading, the activities they do associated with reading and their reaction to reading events and opportunities for reading.

### 2.3.2 Field

Bourdieu (1992) defines a field as:

> a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands

> access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (p.97)

Each agent who enters a field will assume a specific position in the field that will shift the distribution of power throughout the field. It is this distribution of capital that structures a field. A field is therefore a "*field of struggles* aimed at preserving or transforming the configuration of these forces" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101, italics in original). The extent to which an individual achieves this preservation or transformation and influences practices in a field depends on the volume and composition of capital they hold and how this translates to symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1985).

Every field has "its own logic, rules and regularities" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 104) that define the expected ways of being, acting and thinking in a field. These logic, rules and regularities likely result from a reproduction of the habitus held by the dominant group or individuals in a field who, as a result of the capital they hold, have the greatest influence on shaping possibilities in a field (Thomson, 2012). However, the successful operation of any field depends on individuals adhering to the logic, rules and regularities that govern the field. The investment that existing agents and new entrants to the field are willing to place in the field, that is, the extent to which they adhere to the rules of the field, will affect this operation. For this reason, if an individual or group act in contradiction to the logic and rules of a field, even if they are in a dominated position, this challenge or resistance to the expectation of a specific field can result in a restructuring of positions of power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

A school is bounded and occupies a demarcated physical area. However, because every field exists in relation to other fields and is subject to the external determinants placed on it, this boundary is permeable (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). While schools are subject to the specific expectations that the state places on them and the resources available to meet these expectations, these do not predetermine success or failure. In any field, determinants do not act directly on individuals in shaping practices but affect them only through "the specific mediation of the specific forms and forces of the field, after having undergone a *re-structuring*" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 105, italics in original). The fact that the field of education shapes but does not determine a school's practices is clear in how schools that

are located in the same communities and have the same level of government support all function in unique ways, with varying degrees of institutional success (Christie et al., 2007; Grant et al., 2010; NEEDU, 2017).

### 2.3.3 Capital

Bourdieu (1986) describes capital as an entity which accumulates over a long period and has the potential to produce profits. Capital has traditionally been defined as economic, where financial investment produces profits. In describing capital, which he equates to power, Bourdieu moved beyond capital as purely economic and contended that capital can present itself in four different forms: economic, cultural, social and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital derives from the resources that individuals can access by drawing on their social networks or relationships. Cultural capital exists in three forms. Embodied cultural capital consists of the long-lasting dispositions of the body and mind that we develop from a young age and carry with us through life. Institutional cultural capital is accumulated through education qualifications and professional experience. Objectified cultural capital is the value that is derived from specific objects which are products of economic capital, such as books and artwork.

Heffernan (2022) states that one's habitus is one's habitus at any specific period of time, regardless of other influences acting on an individual. Capital, however, only exists when the knowledge and dispositions shaping this habitus have the capacity to be used in relation to a particular field; it is this capacity that generates the value of practices and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1989). The existence and value of capital depends on it being recognised as legitimate by groups of people and the value of any identified capital is contingent on the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu (1985) refers to the various forms of capital that individuals have accumulated and the associated position of these individuals in a specific field, in accordance with this capital, as symbolic capital, "commonly called prestige, reputation, renown etc." (p. 724), stating that what is valued within one field may or may not hold value in other fields. For instance, educators' particular types of teaching experiences (for example, as an additional language teacher or in a prestigious school), can hold particular value in the field of education and these experiences will contribute to the symbolic capital that these educators possess.

However, these same experiences would not contribute to symbolic capital in other professional sectors. This distribution of capital and the relative positioning of individuals or groups in a field determine the possibilities and the specific profits that are available to these individuals or groups (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Learners' success at school is therefore shaped by how they respond to the demands imposed on them by the school and whether they meet educators' expectations of what constitutes effective learning and appropriate behaviour in a school environment. When learners meet these demands, this adherence is recognised by educators and results in learners amassing symbolic capital that positions them as having prestige and an esteemed reputation.

Education, as a field in its entirety, and schools, as smaller fields within education, have clearly defined levels of hierarchy. Identifying how these hierarchies play out in daily lived reality contributes to exploring a school's culture of reading. It was in his theoretical exploration of the inequalities in academic achievement and how these aligned closely to social classes that Bourdieu (1986) first conceptualised cultural capital. Breaking from the presupposition that academic achievement is neutral and attributable to natural aptitude, he argued that the home environment is the "socially most determinant" investment into education (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243) and that learners' success at school is significantly influenced by the transmission of cultural capital in the home.

In reporting on how the home literacy practices of two children of Puerto Rican heritage are valued in relation to American school and school literacy practices, Compton-Lilly (2007) defined capital with specific reference to reading. Economic reading capital refers to possessions that require financial investment that are expected to contribute to reading success. Examples include books, reading programmes and electronic devices. Social reading capital constitutes interactions surrounding reading, and being able to draw on networks and relationships to support one's success as a reader. Embodied reading capital includes dispositions associated with reading accomplishment, and talking about and participating in reading in ways that adhere to schooled literacy practices, i.e. decontextualised knowledge that is recognised in terms of performance and test results. Objectified reading capital involves the creation and use of products that reflect embodied reading capital. Examples of this include when learners contribute to classroom discussions about reading and produce

written texts that demonstrate reading competencies. Finally institutionalised reading capital includes qualifications and assessment results that serve as evidence of reading proficiency.

### 2.3.4 [(habitus)(capital)]+field=practice

In defining habitus, capital and field, it is essential to recognise the interrelation between the three concepts. Theoretically, they may be presented discretely, but because concepts exist in relation to other concepts within the theoretical system they constitute, they can only be defined in relation to each other (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This interrelationship is presented in Bourdieu's (1984) equation "[(habitus)(capital)]+field = practice" (p. 101). As I outline in Section 2.3.7, culture is shaped by a set of practices and, consequently, this equation provides a foundation for exploring a culture of reading.

Due to this interrelation, any shift in one of these factors will result in shifts in practices. The relations shaping a set of practices and therefore culture are thus dynamic and constantly evolving to address any contradictions between individual or collective history, and the established logic and history of a specific field (Maton, 2008; Schirato & Roberts, 2018). As reading is a social practice, investigating a school's reading practices has to account for the beliefs and dispositions (individual and collective reading habitus) that motivate reading, how the school context and environment (field) creates possibilities for reading, and whether individuals' positions within the structures of power (capital) in the school allow them to assume these possibilities.

### 2.3.5 Doxa and misrecognition

It was an apparent and widespread belief that a culture of reading offers a solution to reading levels and socio-economic development in South Africa that motivated my research. This acceptance is an example of doxa which Bourdieu (1984) explains as "the totality of opinions accepted at the level of pre-reflexive belief" (p. 567). Doxa exists when a set of beliefs, rules or practices come to be taken for granted and "are viewed as natural, normal, and inherently necessary." The impact of this acceptance is that "the arbitrary and contingent nature of these discourses are not questioned nor even recognized" (Nolan, 2012, p. 205). Nolan (2012) demonstrated this in her findings that even if prospective

mathematics educators recognise alternative ways of teaching mathematics, they tended to view a good mathematics educator as someone whose practices adhered to the logic of the field that they experienced as learners and that continues to dominate the Canadian education field. Doxa generally results from the dominant group of individuals who occupy the field of power imposing their rules and regulations on a field. In Nolan's study, because prospective educators were in the dominated position and subject to the demands of the education field and the expectations of established educators, they acted to meet these expectations, often doing so unconsciously. This example shows how those whose composition and volume of capital place them in the dominant position, (in this case, established educators), can introduce or reproduce practices associated with a specific set of beliefs and values without their actions being challenged (Bourdieu, 1998).

A consequence of this dominance is the potential for misrecognition. Misrecognition results when it is taken for granted that the benefits of a field and ways of accessing these benefits make investment into the field worthwhile (Bourdieu, 1998). The result of this belief is an unquestioned adherence to the rules and regulations that govern a field, which maintains a specific social order (Swartz, 1997). This was demonstrated by Thomson (2005) in her analysis of how education policies in the United Kingdom allowed the government to introduce or reproduce practices associated with their beliefs without their actions being challenged.

Doxa is a noteworthy concept in the South African education field, where many principles underlying the curriculum and expectations of schools appear to be taken for granted without interrogating the basis for this thinking. Of particular relevance is how the ideologies and beliefs that have shaped curricula since 1994 are founded in Western thinking and dismiss the South African context and the value of indigenous knowledge systems (Kumar, 2019; Le Grange, 2019; Mahabeer, 2020). In education, it is the government and specifically the DBE that occupies the field of power, and accordingly has the greatest influence on how the field is structured. As a result, the government is able to shape "what we know and how we come to know it—the limits of knowledge produced and what can be recognised or goes misrecognised" (Albright & Hartman, 2018, p. 8).

A further example of doxa in the education field is that the objective nature of assessments and testing is a measure of academic intelligence and represents a true picture of the state of education in South Africa (Prinsloo & Krause, 2019). This enables the government to justify policy decisions and mandates that promise to improve academic performance as measured in this way without having to account for contextual realities. Despite critique of this doxa and how it places educators and learners in an unjustified deficit (bua-lit collective, 2018), it continues to dominate much education discourse.

### 2.3.6 Symbolic violence

In defining symbolic violence, Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) states that "[s]ymbolic violence, to put it as tersely and simply as possible, is the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (p. 167). This non-physical and often invisible form of violence results from a dominant group of people imposing their expectations and ideals on dominated social groups. The consequence is a removal of agency that disallows for dominated groups' or individuals' practices to be structured in accordance with their habitus and associated beliefs and dispositions (Bourdieu, 1991).

The result of this symbolic violence is a doxa, where there is an acceptance of a natural order and individuals or groups do not question their position in this order (Nolan, 2012). In South Africa, the imposition of draconian laws and the removal of agency that were central to Apartheid and colonialism are clear examples of this form of violence, and many of the enduring effects continue to be reproduced. This is detailed by Christie and Monyokolo (2018), Guzula(2022), McKinney (2017) and Plüddemann (2015) whose research all demonstrates how this symbolic violence has been perpetuated in the education field through the existence of a curriculum that is shaped by Global North ideologies, the dominance of English and the unequal distribution of education resources.

### 2.3.7 Culture

While a review of culture does not link directly to Bourdieu's theory of practice, I include it here because I consider culture to be a set of practices. The meaning and purpose of the term "culture" is universally contested, with Bloome (2012) describing culture as multifaceted with "dozens, if not hundreds of definitions" (p. 10). Presenting a single

definition of such a complex concept is not easily achieved. This is because any conceptualisation or definition is influenced by and reflects individuals' and groups' ideologies and ways of thinking (Heath & Street, 2008). My research was conducted in the Global South but in an education system that remains dependent on Global North ways of thinking and doing. Therefore, in defining culture, I consulted Global South and Global North scholarship across disciplines that relate to my research focus. I identified commonalities across this literature that then constituted my definition.

Culture is described as constituting the "habits" (DuFour et al., 2008; Eagleton, 2016; wa Thiong'o, 1981) "values" (Buka et al., 2017; Swartz, 1997; wa Thiong'o, 1981), "traditions" (Peterson & Deal, 2009; Steyn & De Beer, 2021), "beliefs" (Eagleton, 2016; Goodenough, 1976; Spillman, 2001), "knowledge" (Rapport & Overing, 2000; wa Thiong'o, 1981), "patterns" (Bourdieu, 1971b; Rapport & Overing, 2000; wa Thiong'o, 1981) and "practices" (Kirkland, 2014; Sewell, 2005; wa Thiong'o, 1981) that are held by a specific group of people. Habits and regular practices in themselves do not constitute culture. It is when these habits and practices reflect one's ways of thinking and beliefs that they constitute culture (Shome, 2019). These practices are always evolving and undergoing restructuring (Collyer et al., 2019; Kirkland, 2014); any shifts in conditions in a field, redistribution of power (capital) among members of a field or alterations to beliefs and values (habitus) reconfigure practices (Bourdieu, 1984). With the inter-relationship between field and habitus, this restructuring of habitus will result in the restructuring of the field and consequently shifts in practices. Adding to this is that, whenever there is a new agent in a field, or someone exits the field the resulting redistribution of capital will affect practices.

Culture by its nature is, then, fluid and relevant to a specific period in time and context. I define culture as *the thoughts, behaviours, habits and set of values held by a group of people that result in specific practices. These practices are never static and are constantly evolving*. Due to its ever-evolving nature, Street (2008) cautions against accepting culture as a fixed notion. He instead presents culture "as a verb" (p. 7), calling for attention to what culture does, not what it is. In discussing this perspective, Heath and Street (2008) state that, because of the fluidity of culture, many ethnographers view culture as "unbounded, kaleidoscopic and, dynamic" (p. 7), a viewpoint I share.

### 2.3.8 Bourdieu: Education and literacy studies

It is Hardy (2012) who best highlights the value of drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice in combination with theory of literacy as a social practice in my research. She states that the principal usefulness of Bourdieu's theory of practice is that it demands that all activities be considered in relation to time and place. As a result:

> the teacher and their students are not treated as generalised, anonymous entities, bleached of biography, and background, but as individuals with particular habitus to be read in a generative structural sense and thus prone to pre-dispositions and changing dispositions. (Hardy, 2012, p. 171)

In the context of a study that considers what shapes a culture of reading, a research framework that allowed for identifying participants' ways of thinking and acting surrounding reading was essential and Bourdieu's theory of practice provided this. Without an understanding of what has contributed to the construction of participants' habitus, it would not be possible to generate the necessary insight into how their habitus have interacted with the school field in shaping their teaching, learning and reading practices.

As a practical example, Thomson (2017) presented an analogy showing how a middle-class Australian child, Vicky, the daughter of an educator, enters school predisposed and better positioned to succeed than Thanh, the son of refugee parents whose extended working hours reduced their free time with their son. As a result of her upbringing, Vicky enters school possessing the linguistic capital and with a reading habitus that operates as embodied reading capital in the classroom, immediately offering her greater possibilities for success at school than available to Thanh.

In emphasising the benefits of using a Bourdieusian framework, Albright (2008) argued that a Bourdieusian approach to literacy research benefits understanding that researching literacy practices includes identifying what knowledge is valued, how this knowledge is built upon, and in what ways. Davids' (2020) research, conducted on the Cape Flats, on parental involvement in children's literacy activities affirmed Albright's argument. Using Bourdieu's theory of practice and NLS, she analysed how educators' perceptions of parental involvement were framed by whether learners adhered to the literacy skills and practices valued in the school – practices that were not aligned to the majority of learners' home

practices. Davids' study was situated in a primary school on the Cape Flats, and contributes to my understanding how Saxon as a community and learners' home backgrounds work to benefit or disadvantage learners' school practices.

Botha's (2017) study of 12 experienced reading teachers in Johannesburg, South Africa, demonstrated the value of using Bourdieusian theory to understand how educators' practices come into being. She established that the educators' socio-cultural backgrounds and previous experiences as students themselves and as educators had a substantial influence on the capital they accumulated and on their teaching (pedagogical) habitus.

Gennrich's (2015) study of Limpopo educators' literate habitus confirmed the durability of habitus, but showed that shifts in habitus were possible. She drew specific attention to how shifting educators' habitus depended on a desire to change, the necessary cultural capital to enact these changes, and ongoing opportunities for implementing new literacy practices. These findings showcase how crucial the field is in shaping habitus and consequently the practices educators employ in developing their learners' reading practices. Importantly, the converse can apply. When educators do not have such opportunities, they cannot draw on their existing knowledge and their practices may be in contradiction with the beliefs and dispositions they hold about teaching and reading (Comber, 1993; Grenfell, 2019).

In education research, scholars have drawn widely on habitus and cultural capital in exploring how learners' education practices are significantly influenced by their backgrounds and the historical shaping of the field of education (see, for example, Compton-Lilly, 2007; Farkas, 2018; Luke, 2008a; Reay, 1995). My research is situated in a community where learners remain negatively affected by historical and current inequalities and daily exposure to violence. The extensive research on how learners' primary habitus, including their linguistic and reading habitus, operates as cultural capital in South African schools, has assisted in understanding how the education field and learners' own backgrounds affect school practices (see, for example, Fataar, 2015; Joorst, 2015; Larey, 2018; Paxton, 2015; Potberg, 2014).

## 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the emergence and continued role of NLS and have presented the theory of literacy as a socio-cultural practice. I have highlighted how this conceptualisation of literacy as a social practice is fundamental to exploring literacy and reading in the South African context, as is clear in the next chapter. I have outlined my rationale for using Bourdieusian theory to frame my research and shown how his theory complements approaching literacy from a socio-cultural perspective.

# CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review core research that has guided the undertaking of my research. With my research focused on a culture of reading, I begin with an overview of reading and then discuss the development of children's reading practices, in and outside school. In discussing children's reading, I highlight how these practices cannot be considered without attending to the shaping of reading habitus or paying specific attention to how reading practices are always contextually located. Based on an extensive review of literature on a culture of reading, I provide a definition of a culture of reading in relation to basic education in Africa.

In the second part of this chapter, I provided a contextual overview of the South African field of education. This is because reading practices are always embedded within wider society and without an understanding of the many complexities facing the South African field of education and how these translate to school level, it would not be possible to understand the factors influencing the positioning of reading in education or how the education field contributes to the shaping of a school's culture of reading. In the same way that it is necessary to understand the contextual factors in the field of education that influence reading practices, an individual school's culture of reading cannot be considered independently of how the school, as a field, influences reading practices. Central to this is how teaching and learning is positioned in the school and how this serves as the foundation for a culture of reading. In recognising this, in the final section of this chapter, I present a model for a culture of teaching and learning that I draw on throughout my case study.

## 3.1 Developing reading practices

With all practices historically and contextually located, any analysis of reading practices has to incorporate how and what led to the development of these practices (D. Barton & Hamilton, 2000), and consider what factors are in play in developing or sustaining reading practices. In presenting how reading practices develop, I provide a brief overview of the act of reading. This is followed by a discussion of how we develop reading practices across life, emphasising that reading practices do not develop in isolation from other literacy practices.

The act of reading is both a socio-cultural practice and a cognitive skill. It is a neurological process that has to be explicitly taught and learnt and requires the ability to decode and comprehend texts (Morrow et al., 2009; Oakhill et al., 2015). Decoding enables the fluent processing of texts but this must be accompanied by simultaneous meaningful comprehension of texts for reading to occur (Adams, 1990; Luke & Freebody, 1999). Reading comprehension necessitates drawing on external and internal knowledge sources to assist in making meaning of a text (Cain, 2016; Luke et al., 2011). The socio-cultural contexts in which reading occurs, how it is valued as a practice and the types of available texts will affect one's engagement with reading, success as a reader and how one makes meaning from a text (Compton-Lilly, 2006; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Rogers, 2016). Learning reading skills and one's development as a reader are best facilitated when accompanied by possibilities to use reading and writing in meaningful ways (Bloch, 2004; Woods & Comber, 2020).

### 3.1.1 Developing children's reading practices: Out-of-school literacy practices

The shaping of our reading habitus begins with the many literacy and reading practices we are exposed to from birth until we arrive at school (Ruterana, 2012b). I refer to out-of-school literacy practices and not out-of-school reading practices. This because children's engagement in a variety of literacy practices – not only reading practices – complement their development as readers (bua-lit collective, 2018). Examples of such practices include oral storytelling, rhyme, dramatic play and singing (Compton-Lilly & Gregory, 2013; Stein, 2008). These practices encourage engagement with and developing an interest in words and stories. This then contributes to promoting a love for words and stories, strengthening vocabulary, syntax and phonological awareness, and introduces sequencing. These elements

all contribute to emergent literacy and therefore to children's development as readers (Kunz & Brown-Dudley, 2022; S. le Roux, 2016; Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

The ways in which children's out-of-school literacy practices contribute to their school reading practices will depend on the recognition of these practices and whether educators are equipped to build on these practices, factors which are influenced by educators' pedagogical and reading habitus and the demands of the education field (Dixon et al., 2008; Nag et al., 2016; Sheridan et al., 2019). This is stressed by Compton-Lilly (2006) in her longitudinal study of eight learners' reading and writing practices over a 10-year period. She concluded that there are two factors underlying learners' success in school: first, how children's interaction with written texts outside the school reflected practices favoured by the education field and, second, if educators were aware of and legitimised the practices learners brought with them to school.

Based on her findings of how 33 British working and middle class mothers' participation in their children's education was viewed by schools, Reay (1998b) warned against assuming parents are uninterested in their children's education without considering how their economic capital and the cultural capital they have accumulated allows or prohibits them from supporting their children in ways demanded by the education field resonates here. Reflecting on 25 years of her research findings, Reay (2019) re-emphasised this and highlighted how the longstanding appreciation for the cultural capital that middle-class learners bring with them to school continues to act to the detriment of other learners. Similar perspectives appear in South African where many South African educators complain that, with the exception of middle-class and wealthier parents, parents lack interest in their children's education (Banda, 2003; Paxton, 2015). Munje and Mncube (2018) challenge this doxa arguing that, rather than criticising parents, schools have to account for contextual realities that parents face and work to establish two-way home/school collaborations. The recognition of home literacy practices and how these can be built on through collaborative interactions assumes much importance in South Africa where there is a rich tradition of other literacy practices, especially singing and oral storytelling (bua-lit collective, 2018), that can benefit schooled literacy practices. Sibanda and Kajee's (2019) research on home

literacy practices, located in NLS, highlighted how home literacy practices such as play, storytelling and digital literacy contribute to learners' reading and writing practices.

Sibanda and Kajee's study offered further value by showing how impactful interactions among siblings can be in promoting literacy practices, an under-researched area in South Africa. In one of the few South African studies that considers siblings' interaction surrounding literacy, Bizos (2009) reported on how six Grade 6 South African children's interactions around reading and storytelling with younger and older siblings in the home environment contributed to generating excitement around reading and to how the children constructed themselves as readers. These studies illustrate the potential benefit that siblings can provide to South African children's development as readers and demonstrate the importance of further research that could offer insight into how such interactions could be built on at school.

Guzula's (2019, 2022) case study on her use of multiliteracies and translanguaging in facilitating a weekly out-of-school literacy club with primary school learners showed how literacy practices such as play, art and storytelling offer powerful pedagogical resources that act in constructing learners' identities as multilinguals and as active participants in literacy. Guzula's findings challenge the colonial positioning of English (and other Western European languages) as superior, an ideology best explained by McKinney's (2017) notion of Anglonormativity – that all children should be proficient in English and are "deviant or deficient" (p. xvi) if they are not, an ideology that underpins South African education planning and policies.

The above studies highlight how literacy practices complement each other and can benefit reading. Yet, as Woods and Comber (2020) stress, the benefits that home literacy practices offer learners at school are dependent on whether educators draw on them and how the curriculum makes space for integrating these literacy practices with formal reading instruction. For these reasons, even if educators wish to introduce new ideas or activities to the classroom and build on out-of-school practices, this does not mitigate the challenge of having to simultaneously adhere to a prescriptive, full curriculum.

### 3.1.2 Developing children's school reading practices: School and classroom reading practices

Learners spend the majority of their time at school in the classroom. Every classroom exists as a smaller field within a school. Bloome (2012) stresses that although classrooms are physically separate from the rest of a school and daily life, they are socially and culturally connected to societal practices and expectations, and how the school as a field shapes what educators can achieve. Consequently, while educators have autonomy in how they promote reading, this autonomy exists in relation to the confines of broader society, the school and the demands placed on them by the wider field of education.

When learners enter school and their classroom, the physical environment immediately conveys the positioning of reading in the school and their classroom. The resources that are available, the organisation of furniture, the existence of a school and classroom libraries, the use of spaces such as walls and doors, and decisions about dedicating certain areas of the classroom to specific activities all shape possible interactions around reading and reading practices (Bloome, 2012; Kershner, 2000). Street (2017) states that our social practices are produced through personal and human interaction, in combination with how we perceive the purpose of specific objects in the classroom and are able to draw on these objects in enacting practices. Therefore, the value of how a physical environment has been constructed is only realised in relation to how educators and learners occupy this environment and how they make use of the resources that are available to them.

The structuring of time and establishment of routines facilitates specific interactions. The value of books, for instance, exists only when they are used regularly and if they contain content that appeals to learners (Hibbert & Crous, 2011). The existence of print allows learners to read incidentally, but it is only when educators purposefully draw on the print during teaching or classroom activities that it fulfils its potential (Roskos & Neuman, 2011). Guthrie and Wigfield (2017) stress the importance of allocating time for learners to discuss books – a practice that can contribute to strong communities of readers in classrooms (Cremin, 2019). Movement to different areas of a classroom shapes routines and designate specific practices (Mills & Comber, 2015). For example, moving between classroom mats and desks can show a transition from collaborative learning to a structured, individual work

session. Educators' bodily positioning of themselves in relation to learners and educators' movement throughout the day produce specific practices (McGregor, 2004). In stressing the need to identify how interactions among educators and learners affect practices, Street (2012) states:

> the ways in which teachers or facilitators and their students interact is already a social practice that affects the nature of the literacy being learnt and the ideas about literacy held by participants. (p. 30)

With the influence that educators hold in the classroom, the reading practices that they model and the ways in which they speak about reading all contribute to stronger classroom reading practices (Clements, 2017; Gambrell, 1996). Wright (2012) emphasises this in his research in rural Eastern Cape, concluding that, particularly in fields where learners may have had limited engagement with books or schooled literacy practices in their homes, educators who address this contextual reality and demonstrate their own authentic engagement with reading contribute to building learners' love of reading.

In many national education fields, the dominance of the autonomous model of literacy results in learners' reading identity being shaped in response to praise from their educators and assessment results. The impact of this is clear in Scherer's (2016) study of 58, six to seven and 10 to 11 year old learners in a multi-ethnic London school. She established that learners' embarrassment when they perceived their peers as "cleverer" created symbolic violence resulting in learners identifying themselves as less intelligent and seeking avoidance strategies in events related to reading. She stressed that "as long as policies with a strong leaning toward accountability and monitoring remain in place, so too will hierarchies of reading and children's emotional engagements with them" (p. 404), a finding relevant to South Africa where, in line with the autonomous model, success in reading and the existence of a culture of reading is measured through assessments (Department of Basic Education, 2016b; Motshekga, 2014).

Learners' development of reading practices and their opportunities for reading at school occur primarily within the classroom. However, because the classroom is a smaller field within the school, reading events elsewhere in school the contribute to shaping their reading habitus. With literacy practices always embedded in structures of power (Compton-

Lilly, 2014), the opportunities that learners have for reading, and their access to spaces and materials for reading for learning or for pleasure convey to learners what is expected of them as readers and how they are identified as readers. Hosting events such as World Read Aloud Day, assigning dedicated periods to reading for pleasure, regular library visits and ensuring learners have access to and can select books that interest them all create such possibilities (Awah, 2019; Huston & Bara, 2018; Kirchner et al., 2014; Serafini, 2011). Dedicating time to such events allows learners to develop their own opinions of what books they enjoy and establish their personal identities as readers, without the pressure of assessment. These events do not guarantee that learners will develop or strengthen their interest in reading as this will be influenced by their affective responses to reading. However, without these opportunities forming part of regular school practices, the possibilities for positive and sustained alterations to learners' reading habitus are significantly reduced.

Nkomo's (2021) implementation of an extensive reading programme for Grade 3 learners in two Eastern Cape primary schools shows how regular events centred on reading for pleasure contribute to shaping reading habitus. In addition to the weekly reading clubs which provided previously unavailable opportunities for regular reading, Nkomo attributed positive changes in learners' reading dispositions to providing them the agency to select books in English or isiXhosa and to learners being encouraged to speak in English and/or isiXhosa. Like Guzula's (2019) afterschool storytelling clubs, Nkomo's findings on the benefits of a bilingual programme demonstrate the need to create such opportunities for multilingual learners.

### 3.1.3 Reading instruction

The ability to read is not a prerequisite for regular reading practices. This is because reading events include shared reading, picture walks and pretend reading, all of which are possible without decoding, fluency or comprehension skills. However, as Luke and Kale (1997) explain, "school literacy instruction is an institutional practice always embedded in community matters of cultural identity, economic access and social power" (p. 12). Consequently, the ways in which reading is taught, who benefits from specific methods of instruction and how this dismisses or builds on learners' existing literacy practices influence

children's potential success in developing schooled reading skills. With learners' identity generally linked to school achievement, how children are taught and learn to read and their success in this regard, will result in specific attitudes to reading and consequent shifts in reading habitus. For these reasons in my analysis of Grade 1 learners' reading practices in Chapter 9, I present examples of a phonics lesson, group guided reading (GGR) and shared reading and learners' response to these events. I describe these practices here briefly.

***Phonics and phonemic awareness***

Phonemic awareness is the ability to break down and identify oral sounds (Wyse & Bradbury, 2022). Phonics is the process of decoding texts (Pretorius & Spaull, 2022). Learners are taught to break down words into individual letters or sounds and identify the relationships between written letters and spoken sounds (Adams, 1990). There is little argument that phonics is a critical component of reading but there is ongoing contestation over how phonics should be taught, its placement in the curriculum and whether decoding is necessary before reading for meaning is possible (Castles et al., 2018; Ellis & Bloch, 2021; Hoadley, 2018; Riley, 2020).

CAPS designates 15 minutes of phonics daily in Grade 1 (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). Designating a specific time solely to phonics positions decoding as a skill that can be learnt discretely and decontextualised from meaning-making. This has resulted in the DBE being criticised for its failure to acknowledge the process of meaning-making and engagement with whole texts, thereby favouring a technicist approach to reading in the early grades (bua-lit collective, 2018; Ellis & Bloch, 2021). By ignoring the complexities of reading, the DBE expects educators to manage the interplay of cognitive skills with the socio-cultural context and linguistic diversities in their classroom. This is despite many educators not having been provided access to the necessary institutional cultural capital to succeed in this role (Chetty, 2019a).

***Shared reading***

CAPS defines shared reading as a whole-class event where the educator reads to or with children from a text that is visible to all (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). It recommends that educators read the same book to learners two to four times over a one-

week period. On the first occasion, the book should be read for enjoyment. Thereafter it is to be used as a teaching resource. This can include a resource for teaching phonemic awareness, rhyme or other elements of literacy or reading skills. It could also be used as a resource linked to a curriculum topic or specific vocabulary. One of the key benefits of shared reading is discussing books with and among learners. Doing so successfully assists in increasing learners' participation with texts and driving the establishment of a community of readers (G. Barton, 2013).

***Group-guided reading (GGR)***

GGR is an approach to reading where learners are placed in groups of six to ten learners, typically organised according to their reading level (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). CAPS stipulates that educators should conduct GGR for 30 minutes daily and each learner should attend two 15-minute GGR sessions weekly (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). Educators and learners in the group discuss and read the same book, which the educator generally selects according to the group's reading level. GGR is lauded for its benefits in providing learners with individual attention and improving reading levels (Bridges, 2014; Clements, 2017; Land & Lyster, 2015).

GGR was a methodology developed in the Global North (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). In this context, classroom numbers are generally smaller, there may be teacher assistants present in the early years and in multilingual classrooms, there is a greater likelihood of language support – factors that all improve the potential for successful GGR. The difficulties associated with conducting GGR in South Africa, where such conditions are often not in place, do not mean that it holds no benefit and, despite the challenges of implementation, it provides the most time-effective means of assessing learners' individual reading (Hoadley, 2018).

## 3.2 Exploring a culture of reading

The impetus for exploring a culture of reading in a South African school derived from my interest in how, over an extended period, references to a culture of reading as the solution to South Africa's reading crisis have circulated in education and popular discourse. Despite the prominence of the term, there is no clear collective understanding of the term or

stipulation of what is required for a culture of reading to exist in South Africa. In responding to this gap, I provide a working definition of the term "culture of reading" which is appropriate to an African education context.

This definition forms the backbone of this study and the foundation for my analysis of Saxon Primary's culture of reading. I arrived at my definition after a review of texts published over the period 2000–2019 that referenced "culture of reading." The corpus of texts contained 331 texts referencing "culture of reading" or "reading culture" in relation to South Africa, 60 texts from elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa and 46 texts published in Global North regions.

The meaning assigned to any word or term is shaped by the context in which it is used, and the author or speaker's understanding of the term and how it is received by the audience (Gee, 2014). The concept "culture of reading" therefore acquires meaning only in relation to when, where and how the term is employed. With my research centred on school reading practices, I define a culture of reading with reference to the field of basic education and how the term has been taken up in this field. In focusing on a culture of reading in a specific field, I do not dismiss the many other literacy practices occurring in and outside of schools or how these literacy practices contribute to reading practices. Instead, my exploration of the term "culture of reading" responds to the need for a critical interrogation of how the term has been taken up in the field of education, and if its presentation as a solution to the literacy crisis is an appropriate response, from a national to individual classroom level.

The term "culture of reading" is used in two different contexts. These are with reference to the reading practices of all ages (Mda, 2017; Ruterana, 2014; Sisulu, 2004; South African Book Development Council, 2016; Stranger-Johannesen, 2014) and, more commonly, in discussing children's reading practices (Awah, 2019; Hibbert & Crous, 2011; Perry, 2008; PRAESA, 2017; Stine et al., 2018; Winburg & Botes, 2005). However, children's practices are not developed in isolation from other members of society (Mtshweni, 2003). Therefore, defining a culture of reading within basic education requires a wider understanding of a culture of reading across all ages and fields.

## 3.3 Defining a culture of reading

Research into reading has traditionally been located primarily in the Global North, and much sub-Saharan and South African scholarship on reading draws heavily on knowledge produced by and for the Global North. Of specific relevance to my research is that the term "culture of reading" originated in the Global North. From a brief preliminary review of literature prior to undertaking my research, it was evident that many of the ideologies and practices associated with a culture of reading in the South African and African context reflected a reliance on Global North scholarship. Literacy is "always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles" (B. Street, 2003, p. 77) and consequently an epistemological dependency (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) on Global North theories of reading and literacy may act to disadvantage South African and African children's development as readers. Defining a culture of reading in relation to the African context was therefore necessary to explore how the uptake of the term "culture of reading" functions in the South African field of education.

Over the past few decades, the term "culture of reading" has assumed discursive prominence locally and globally. The term appears to enter popular discourse in the Global North in the mid to late 1990s (Hayden, 1996; Knulst & Kraaykamp, 1998; McCormick, 1994) and soon thereafter in South Africa (Alexander, 2001; Bloch, 1999; IOL, 2000; Sisulu, 1999). The term's usage increased a few years later elsewhere in Africa (Commeyras & Inyega, 2007; Dent, 2006; Kachala, 2007; Magara, 2005).

With my focus on presenting a definition of a culture of reading relevant to the African context, I wished to consult as wide a body of texts as possible that reflected literature from across sub-Saharan Africa. Only seven of the South African and three of the sub-Saharan texts presented their own definitions of "culture of reading" (Ayoti, 2015; Chizwina, 2011; du Plessis, 2012; Gcilishe, 2015; Itenge-Wheeler et al., 2016; Joubert et al., 2014; Lotter, 2019; Mda, 2017; Molapo, 2016; Ruterana, 2012a). With a large corpus of texts available, I was hesitant to present a definition from only ten texts. I have instead scrutinised all texts and identified common themes and words referenced in connection with the term "culture of reading." These themes were (*a*) motivation to read, (*b*) reading for pleasure, *(c)* the importance of role modelling and promoting reading, and (*d*) the existence of opportunities

for reading. In presenting these themes, I cite specific examples that link to these themes and demonstrate how the expectations associated with these themes may play out differently according to context and region. Based on this review, I arrived at a definition for an African culture of reading.

My review included Global North texts. This is because Mgqwashu's (2019) observation that a tendency to favour and transport Global North ways of thinking and approaches was evident across many of the 391 African texts, where authors often drew on international definitions of "culture of reading" (for example, help2read, 2018; Motshekga, 2015; Reeves et al., 2008). Consequently, in defining the term "culture of reading," I critique the positioning and relevance of Global North literature to Africa. This is not a dismissal of Global North epistemology but rather rethinking how or whether drawing on this knowledge is appropriate to the African context.

### 3.3.1 Motivation to read

Practices are situated in beliefs. Therefore, when reading is valued and there is a belief that reading is useful or beneficial to oneself, there is increased motivation to read (Bloch, 2000; Chizwina, 2011; Gambrell, 1996; Joubert et al., 2014; Mda, 2017; Recinos, 2018; Tiemensma, 2009). Bloch's (2008) statement that a culture of reading and writing exists "where people read for enjoyment and come to have personal meaningful reasons to read and write" (p. 285) encapsulates the importance of valuing reading in establishing and maintaining a culture of reading.

### 3.3.2 Reading for pleasure

Kirchner et al.'s (2014) belief that "[t]he development of a reading culture is connected to affective processes while reading a book" where children have "the opportunity to experience that reading is not only to learn facts but that it is fun to read and a source of pleasure" (p. 257) is an opinion reflected in literature worldwide. This is evidenced in the repeated references to reading for "pleasure" (Chamberlain, 2016; Department of Basic Education, 2019b; Itenge-Wheeler et al., 2016; Lotter, 2019; Nassimbeni & Desmond, 2011; Stine et al., 2018; van Staden, 2010), "fun" (Currin & Pretorius, 2010; Hibbert, 2010; Liziwe & Moodly, 2018; Ruterana, 2012a; Vally, 2015) and "enjoyment" (Department of Education,

2008; DGMT, 2015; Huston & Bara, 2018; Lor, 2006; Merga & Mason, 2019) when discussing a culture of reading. This association with pleasure creates further motivation to read and consequently more frequent reading habits (Edwards & Ngwaru, 2012; Sisulu, 2004).

Reading for pleasure is often assumed to mean enjoyment of fiction. I consider reading for pleasure to be reading any text that appeals to the reader. This links to Clark and Rumbold's (2006) definition of reading for pleasure being "reading that we do of our own free will anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading" (p. 6). They state that this is supported by being able to access materials that reflect one's interests and having available time and place to enjoy these materials. Reading for pleasure includes reading for interest and information in order to broaden one's knowledge and not only the reading of fiction.

### 3.3.3 Role modelling and promoting reading practices

When influential adults model positive reading practices and demonstrate their enjoyment of reading and the value they attach to reading, children are likely to adopt similar dispositions and therefore practices (Mda, 2017; Stine et al., 2018).

Family members are children's first adult role models and therefore the first influence on shaping children's reading habitus (Liziwe & Moodly, 2018; Ruterana, 2012b). It is thus unsurprising that the importance of parental influence on motivating reading features commonly in literature (Bridges, 2014; Kirchner et al., 2014; Liziwe & Moodly, 2018; Magara, 2005; Moulton, 2016; Olifant et al., 2017; Ross, 2013; South African Book Development Council, 2016). In describing children's development as readers, Bloch (2001) draws attention to the contrast between Global North and South African home environments and how children in the Global North are more likely to be raised in homes and communities where reading is embedded in daily life.

With the extensive amount of time that children spend in a school and because many children's encounters with reading occur mainly in the school, it is to be expected that the role of the school and educators featured in literature on what is required for a culture of reading to exist (G. Barton, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2012; Kirchner, 2018; Matjila & Pretorius, 2004; Spaull & Hoadley, 2017). If educators are seen to enjoy reading and consistently

promote reading within their classrooms, they can increase children's interest in and motivation to read (Daniels & Steres, 2011; Klapwijk, 2015; Wright, 2012). With schools demanding specific reading practices that are more closely related to Global North, Global South educators often assume greater responsibility for promoting these practices than educators in the Global North (Commeyras & Mazile, 2011; Liziwe & Moodly, 2018; Lor, 2006; Wright, 2012).

### 3.3.4 Opportunities for reading

For any culture to exist, it is necessary that there are frequent opportunities to view and enact the practices constituting this culture. The existence of a culture of reading therefore requires ongoing opportunities for viewing, discussing and enacting reading practices (Clements, 2017; Nalusiba, 2010; Nkomo, 2017).

The link between a culture of reading and reading ability appears repeatedly (Department of Arts and Culture & National Council for Library and Information Services, 2014; Joubert et al., 2014; Mahala, 2010; Matjila & Pretorius, 2004). From a socio-cultural perspective, reading is possible without decoding skills or comprehension. However, reading comprehension allows for engagement with a greater selection of materials and therefore increased opportunities to read.

It is self-evident that without materials, reading is not possible. This is commonly stated in Global North literature (Clements, 2017; Kennedy et al., 2012; Paine, 2007). Yet attention to the language of texts and the relevance of the content of materials to children's interests is rare. This suggests an assumption that children have access to relevant, appropriate texts. The availability of materials is not sufficient (Edwards & Ngwaru, 2012; Machet & Tiemensma, 2009).

To facilitate the understanding and enjoyment of reading, materials must be in the appropriate language (Asmal, 2003; Bloch, 2008; Ruterana, 2012b) and relate to a reader's interest so as to allow them to build on their existing knowledge (Freebody, 1992; Ngulube, 2012; Titone et al., 2012). Furthermore, the written text and illustrations need to be at an appropriate reading level (Lor, 2006; Nkomo, 2017). Without such resources, individuals are less likely to read for pleasure or to increase their frequency of reading (Sisulu, 2004).

Offering learners the independence to select books, that is, allowing them to be active participants and decision-makers in reading, is particularly important when learners are first exposed to books, to generate as much interest in reading as possible, as often as possible (Edwards & Ngwaru, 2014; Olifant et al., 2017; Snyman, 2016). A detailed overview and analysis of reading materials and the publication industry is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, any discussion of a culture of reading in sub-Saharan Africa has to include attention to how access to books, especially in African languages, remains a significant barrier to creating opportunities for reading and an interest in reading. With my research located in South Africa, I focus on South Africa in particular.

Reasons for the lack of materials include the high cost of books, inadequate access to libraries, and materials not being present at school or home (Sandwith et al., 2018; Vally, 2015). A further constraint is that most books are published in English, written by Global North authors and have storylines that do not allow many children to draw on their existing knowledge (bua-lit collective, 2018; Edwards & Ngwaru, 2012). When books are published in an African language, these are often direct translations from English with the same unrelatable storylines.

In South Africa, the publishing industry is heavily dependent on the education sector with 61% of 2020/21 revenue being generated from this sector. The majority of these books are purchased via the DBE and constitute learner and teacher support materials for schools (E. le Roux et al., 2023). It is recommended that schools target 10% of their learning and teaching support material budget towards library materials and resources other than required texts (Western Cape Education Department, 2021). However, with textbooks and readers operating on a multi-year rotational schedule, this budget is often used to replace damaged or lost textbooks and readers. The DBE and provincial departments have made additional books available in specific, directed campaigns or projects such as QIDS-Up but this is limited to a small percentage of schools, with many schools struggling to secure alternative sources for resources.

As a result, literacy NGOs and external funders have assumed significant responsibility for providing books to schools from early childhood development (ECD) centres to Matric level. Literacy NGOs' efforts to promote reading and literacy have taken various forms, with

increasing access to reading materials, particularly in African languages, being a necessary and core focus (E. le Roux, 2017). The responsibility that NGOs have assumed in the absence of sufficient government provision of materials is such that le Roux (2017) contends that NGOs, "do the bulk of the work in enhancing literacy and improving access to books among schoolchildren in South Africa" (p. 10). Organisations such as African Storybook Project, Biblionef, Book Dash and Nal'ibali have provided millions of South African children access to newspaper supplements[4] and books, across all 11 languages. Their efforts have allowed children to enjoy the written and spoken word, create their own stories and materials, and participate in reading and storytelling clubs. Examples of this commitment include that in 2021, Nal'ibali distributed over 1 million supplements and reached over 40 million South Africans through their television and radio storytelling shows. Book Dash has distributed over 3.65 million children's books, half of which are in African languages. Puku Foundation and FunDza have both created possibilities and mentorship for emerging African writers to publish their work and consequently increased the availability of stories in African languages. In addition to the distribution of physical books, e-books and stories are available online and via cellphone apps, produced by organisations such as Book Dash, African Storybook Project and FunDza. These do, however, require an internet connection and can therefore not be accessed by all South Africans. FunDza's 2021 impact report provides a broad overview of many of these initiatives and how literacy NGOs have contributed to providing access to materials (FunDza Literacy Trust, 2021). The report stresses the need for the mentoring of African language authors to produce content that appeals to South African readers.

Currently, many of the evaluations of these efforts have been funded by NGOs themselves and may be directed at certain aspects of an organisation's offering. There is a consequent need for a clearer overview of the resources that are available in South Africa and which of these provides a more cost-effective and sustainable response to increasing possibilities for reading in and outside of school, whether for pleasure or as formal learning resources.

[4] These newspaper supplements, printed in all 11 languages, include written stories, activities, games and ideas for caregivers to support learners in reading, writing, play and storytelling.

Although there remains much to be done to ensure that a lack of access to materials does not act as a significant barrier to many children's reading practices, there are recent projects which indicate progress in increasing access to books. The Molteno Institute for Language has developed the Vula Bula series, a set of open-source, low-cost readers published in all nine official African languages for Grade 1 to 3 learners (Katz & Rees, 2022). In 2019 and 2020, the Eastern Cape Department of Education distributed 825 000 Vula Bula reading anthologies, that reached all foundation phase learners in the Eastern Cape (Spaull & Ardington, 2022). The 2023 launch of Ulwazi Lwethu is another example of progress in increasing access to materials. Ulwazi Lwethu is funded by the Zenex Foundation and has produced 1 430 titles across all 11 languages that will be distributed nationwide. The Ulwazi Lwethu books have been written, translated and edited by African authors with the intention of creating relatable levelled readers and readers for pleasure (West, 2023). These efforts have had the backing of national and provincial governments, but they have been driven by civil society, and cannot be relied upon as a long-term solution to the lack of reading materials.

Once children have materials, finding an environment that facilitates reading is essential. When there is a safe, quiet space to read alone or with peers, where children feel emotionally, psychologically and physically secure, a willingness to read is more likely (Molapo, 2016; Satgoor, 2015; Stine et al., 2018).

### 3.3.5 Culture of reading: a definition

Frequent, habitual practices are at the core of any culture. It is not necessary for all the elements I have referred to be in place for reading to be a regular practice. However, elements of each overarching theme I have identified have to be present.

With the complexities and innumerable conceptualisations of both culture and reading, a conclusive definition of a culture of reading is not possible. Consequently I present a working definition of an African culture of reading, in the context of basic education. As I stated in Section 2.3.7, culture is not static. Accordingly the beliefs and practices that constitute a culture of reading are constantly evolving. I define a culture of reading as

a specific set of beliefs and regular practices held by a particular group of people about reading. Influential role players in the group support children's reading practices in and outside of school. A sufficient number of materials, written in the appropriate languages and at a reading level accessible to children, is available. The materials contain content that interests children (and adults) and draws on their existing knowledge. There are available spaces and opportunities for children to engage with texts regularly. The ability to read and association between reading and pleasure can contribute to this culture.

## 3.4 The role of literacy NGOs

During Apartheid, there were many South African NGOs which occupied an important activist role in the fight against White minority rule and in providing basic healthcare, education and welfare services that the Apartheid government denied many citizens (Habib & Taylor, 1999). With the advent of democracy in 1994, NGOs whose primary purpose had been advocating against Apartheid evolved to assist in addressing the extensive trauma and inequalities that resulted from colonialism and Apartheid. This included attending to service delivery and addressing the extensive inequalities in the field of education (Chisholm, 2012; Habib & Taylor, 1999). Many of these pre-existing NGOs, as well as numerous NGOs established since 1994, have worked to provide resources, develop and improve infrastructure, upskill educators and provide learning, literacy and psychosocial support for at-risk learners (Volmink & van der Elst, 2019). In reporting on the role of education NGOs in South Africa, Volmink and van der Elst (2019) describe them as "essential to advancing the national education vision" (p. 5). They add that, if government is to meet its mandate of delivering education, it is reliant on NGOs assisting with the provision of capacity, skills, expertise and funding it is unable to offer (Volmink & van der Elst, 2019). The government's reliance on NGOs emerges in its consistent appeals to NGOs to assist in implementing reading strategies and campaigns, and its requests to schools to partner with NGOs to secure additional resources (Asmal, 2003; Department of Arts and Culture & National Council for Library and Information Services, 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2012, 2019c, 2019e; Department of Education, 2008; Xingwana, 2010). This reliance is also evident in Section 3.3.4 in the work NGOs have done in the production and distribution of materials.

The establishment and running of many school and community libraries have been driven by NGOs such as The Bookery and Room to Read. A significant amount of in-service teacher training is conducted by NGOs, acting independently of and in partnership with the DBE. Efforts such as these are evident at Saxon Primary, where the library is run in collaboration with an NGO, the school has received books from other education NGOs, and there are learners who receive individual assistance with reading and writing from external volunteers.

At Saxon Primary, the establishment and existence of the school library was made possible through the support of literacy NGOs. To be successful, a school library must provide opportunities to read for leisure and learning, contain appropriate and relevant books and have staff who are equipped to support educators and learners in using a library (Mojapelo, 2016; Paton-Ash & Wilmot, 2015; Silbert & Bitso, 2018). The DBE (2012) states that:

> [a] key function of the school library is to promote a culture of reading. The School Library and Information Service should provide access to material in all languages, especially those in use at the school. (p. 8)

Despite this statement, the DBE does not designate a budget for the establishment and running of school libraries (Equal Education Law Centre, 2022). Consequently, schools are reliant on alternative sources of funding or volunteers to run their libraries. Reporting on the number of functioning, stocked and staffed libraries but it is most commonly cited as 7% to 8%, a figure based on a 2010 publication produced by the NGO Equal Education (Equal Education, 2010; Hart & Zinn, 2015; Mojapelo, 2016; Nel et al., 2016).

## 3.5 The South African field of education

Barton and Hamilton (2000, p. 8) state that all literacy practices are "patterned by social institutions and power relationships." With the power that the DBE possesses in shaping the education field, any exploration of a school's culture of reading has to be considered within the overall structures of power governing the field of education and how these structures legitimise and make more visible certain literacy practices.

Under colonialism and the Apartheid government, formal education was used as a means of imposing control over South Africans. In 1948, the Apartheid government assumed power.

The passing of the Bantu Education Act in 1953 formalised an oppressive education system where White South African children attended well-resourced schools that were located in safer areas and had fewer learners in each classroom. All other children were taught in schools with inadequate resources and infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms and poorly-trained educators (Oyedemi, 2018), with a curriculum that prepared them for informal and unskilled labour such as domestic work and mining (Christie & Collins, 1982). This further favoured the position of White South Africans who were granted opportunities for accessing tertiary education and economic progression that were unavailable to other South Africans (Kumar, 2019; World Bank Group, 2018).

In 1994, the newly appointed democratic government consolidated the 19 different education departments that had operated at national level during Apartheid into the Department of Education (DOE) (N. Davids & Waghid, 2016). With the support of nine provincial departments, the DOE was faced with the overwhelming task of developing a strong, unified education system that met the needs of all South African children. In attempts to address the inequalities in basic education, the DBE allocates budget according to schools' perceived financial needs. 75% of schools are designated as no-fee schools (Department of Basic Education, 2023a). Schools are organised according to a quintile system. Quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools do not charge school fees. These schools are in poorer communities and receive more funding than Quintile 4 and 5 schools. Quintile 4 and 5 schools are fee-paying schools and receive lower government subsidies (Badat & Sayed, 2014).[5] The additional funding for Quintiles 1 to 3 schools is not sufficient for these schools to cover current daily costs and address the inequalities enduring from Apartheid education, and infrastructure and material resources remain inadequate (Christie, 2020). The income generated from fees at many Quintile 5 schools – many of which were designated for White learners under Apartheid – is higher than the budget the government allocates to Quintiles 1 to 4 schools. This income supports strong infrastructure, smaller numbers of learners per class, hiring of additional educators and the acquisition of resources beyond those provided by the DBE. Most Quintile 5 schools consequently outperform Quintile 1 to 4 schools

[5] There are schools, including Saxon Primary, that the DBE has designated Quintile 4 but that the provincial department has adjudged to be better identified as Quintile 1 to 3 schools. These schools have been designated no-fee schools with provincial government providing additional subsidies to supplement fees.

(Christie, 2020; Reddy et al., 2022). Schooling is no longer legally segregated by race. Yet the quality of education children receive is largely determined by parents' ability to pay school fees and wealth distribution remains closely aligned to race (Oyedemi, 2018).

The complexities and inequalities resulting from Apartheid cannot be overcome in a single generation, and this is demonstrated in the inequality that prevails in basic education. In describing how access to education has remained unequal since 1994, Fleisch (2008) referred to a bimodal distribution of achievement reflecting the historical inequalities of the past, a distribution that continues to hold true. Spaull (2013a) describes the South African education system as two tiered with 20 to 25% of learners occupying the higher tier and being taught in functional schools, and the remainder of learners being poorly educated. This distribution continues and is closely aligned to historical and current socio-economic inequalities, geographic location and the linguistic capital that learners' home language affords them (Department of Basic Education, 2023b; Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019; Spaull, 2019). This is apparent at Saxon Primary, the site of my ethnographic study, a school designated for Coloured learners during Apartheid.

There is no doubt that there is a need for directed efforts to improve South African learners' reading results, and to narrow this inequality. The 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) reported that 81% of South African Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning (Department of Basic Education, 2023b), an increase of 3% from the 2016 study (Howie et al., 2017). The ongoing inequality was clear in how learners who were tested in English and Afrikaans, which includes learners who attend schools that were specified for White learners under Apartheid, significantly outperformed learners who were tested in the nine African languages (Department of Basic Education, 2023b). PIRLS' results must be interpreted cautiously because the metrics employed do not account sufficiently for the linguistic diversity and lived classroom practices in South Africa (Prinsloo & Krause, 2019). However, they offer an idea of the ongoing struggle to provide South African children the level of education and opportunities for learning that they deserve.

It is easy to assign blame to an education department for learners' poor performance and for poor results in assessments such as PIRLS. Yet, any criticism has to be contextually and historically located. For centuries, colonial and Apartheid governments actively limited the

majority of South Africans from accessing any education, or otherwise subjected them to poor learning opportunities (Soudien, 2016; Van der Berg et al., 2016). More than 30 years since the racial desegregation of schools, it is therefore unsurprising that many of the inequalities that existed in the Apartheid education system remain, an inequality that has been widened by the school closures due to COVID-19 (Hoadley, 2023).

### 3.5.1 Curriculum development and implementation

Post-1994, the DOE was faced with the task of designing and implementing a curriculum that could redress decades of inequalities in access to education. The first post-Apartheid curriculum, Curriculum 2005 (C2005) (Department of Education, 1997a), was implemented in 1998. C2005 was an assessment-driven, outcomes-based education (OBE) system that aimed to address societal and education inequalities in South Africa (Soudien, 2015). In critiquing post-Apartheid policies, Christie and McKinney (2017) stated that in attempting to realise "an idealist vision of a transformed system," the policy narrative "glossed over the deep disparities in provision that were the legacy of apartheid and the colonial schooling system prior to that" (p. 15).

This was clear in that the expectations of C2005 conflicted with educators' training and understanding of successful literacy instruction (Hugo, 2010; Kumar, 2019). A review of C2005 identified these challenges and the *Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9* and the *National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12* (2002) were implemented. These maintained a focus on OBE but included more detailed content guidelines (Muller & Hoadley, 2019). These revisions remained contextually unsuited. In 2009, the curriculum was again reviewed and CAPS (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement), the current curriculum, was implemented in 2012.

CAPS is said be focused on "ensuring that the educational imbalances of the past are redressed" (Department of Basic Education, 2011a, p. 4) and on being "sensitive to issues of diversity such as poverty, inequality, race, gender, language, age, disability and other factors" (Department of Basic Education, 2011a, p. 5). This is not reflected in reality. CAPS is a prescriptive curriculum that provides in-depth detail of the content to be covered, curriculum pacing, and assessment requirements (Department of Basic Education, 2011a; Hoadley, 2018). CAPS is centred on the formal knowledge favoured by the Global North,

resulting in this form of knowledge being positioned as the dominant and preferred way of thinking, knowing and being (Le Grange, 2019). There is an apparent dismissal of the linguistic, cultural and literacy resources held by the majority of South Africans (Mahabeer, 2020; Prinsloo, 2021) with this dismissal leading to the reproduction of existing inequalities (Chetty, 2019a; Metcalfe, 2018). The result is an education field where rather than schooling being a "liberating force," it is "in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern" (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 32).

### 3.5.2 Language in education: Multilingualism in basic education

Like literacy, language is not an autonomous practice and its usage and reception is always embedded in ideologies and the beliefs and values held by the speaker and audience (Botsis, 2018; Prinsloo & Street, 2014). The result of this is visible in the distribution of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) where speakers of a specific language or a variety of a language are afforded benefits according to the prestige attached to the language or variety.

The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 stresses the equal value of all 11 national languages (Department of Education, 1997b). The policy states "the underlying principle is to maintain home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s)" (no pagination), in line with an additive approach to bilingualism. LiEP was developed in isolation from the curriculum (Heugh, 2013), as the contradictions between policy and practice indicate. In contrast to LiEP, since 1994 all curricula have favoured an early-exit model with learners expected to transition from home language to English (or less frequently Afrikaans) from Grade 4. As a result, the stipulation that English is the LoLT from Grade 4 acts as the de facto language policy which, as Plüddemann (2015) explains, promotes an assimilationist, Anglocentric agenda that contradicts the multilingual education learning specified in LiEP. This transition in Grade 4 is further problematic in that it is only after six years of learning an additional language that an individual will be prepared for learning in the additional language (Heugh et al., 2019). In its expectation that learners can transition successfully to English as the LoLT by Grade 4 and its disregard for multilingual classrooms, CAPS misunderstands the dynamics and social complexities of language, and shows no evidence of its promised sensitivity to linguistic diversity.

Further complexities exist for learners who enter school with no or developing competency in the LoLT, restricting learning potential. This is often due to parents electing to educate their children in English when it is not their home language due to the belief that learning in English will offer increased opportunities to access tertiary education and for financial security (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Mohohlwane, 2019). The choice made by isiXhosa-speaking parents to send their children to Saxon Primary is indicative of this second belief.

Flynn (2013, 2016) drew on Bourdieu's theory of practice in her research in England on how educators responded to teaching primary school children who entered previously monolingual classrooms, speaking little or no English. Flynn's research was conducted in a field where, like South Africa, educators are beholden to a centralised curriculum with prescribed national assessment standards that restrict their autonomy. Her research demonstrated how educators experienced an ongoing battle to create an inclusive environment in the confines of a standardised curriculum that limited the time available to support learners' English language development.

In South Africa, where the number of multilingual classrooms is exponentially higher than England, educators face such tensions daily, yet it is an area that remains significantly under-researched. While there is an established body of South African research on how the switch to English as the LoLT at Grade 4 level influences learners' literacy practices (Heugh, 2013; Mohohlwane, 2019), there is an urgent need for research on the consequences of learning in an additional language from entry to school, as is the case for many Saxon Primary learners.

### 3.5.3 Teaching in South Africa

The many challenges facing South African educators are well-documented (Carrim, 2019; Wessels & Wood, 2019). Briefly, these include a high learner-to-educator ratio (Buka et al., 2017), teaching with insufficient or inadequate resources (Vally, 2015), the effect of poverty on learning (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2016) and poor pre- and in-service training (Slonimsky, 2016; Van der Berg et al., 2016).

Despite these challenges, educators have been subjected to criticism for their lack of commitment or capability to their role (Armstrong, 2014; NEEDU, 2013; World Bank Group,

2018). In warning against assigning responsibility solely to schools for poor performance, Christie and Monyokolo (2018) stress the importance of acknowledging that the current conditions in the majority of no-fee schools limit potential achievements. They emphasise the need for "reciprocal accountability" (p. 260) where any demands that the DBE system places on schools are accompanied by an equal and reciprocal obligation from the government to provide schools the necessary individual and organisational capacity to fulfil the stipulated demands (Elmore, 2005).

## 3.6 Understanding a culture of teaching and learning

As with the term "culture of reading," there is a large body of literature on a culture of teaching and learning but little articulation of what the term signifies. Although published in 1998, Christie's argument that the term loses its value without sufficient clarity remains relevant. She stated:

> the term "culture of learning and teaching" has entered South African popular discourse with an ease that belies its theoretical complexity. It accords well with common sense about what is going wrong in dysfunctional schools, perhaps because its meanings are so malleable. However, if the term is to be properly explanatory, it needs clarification and delineation. (p. 285)

In analysing how Saxon Primary's culture of teaching and learning serves to inform its culture of reading, my starting point was therefore presenting a clear delineation of what the term "culture of teaching and learning" signifies. In South African and globally, there are two ways in which the term "culture of teaching and learning" is most commonly used. The first was in accordance with what constitutes an effective school (Hoadley & Galant, 2015; Kruger, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Weeks, 2012). The second refers to the breakdown of a culture of teaching and learning, with this usage especially prevalent in South African literature (Buka et al., 2017; Dixon, 2008; Le Mottee & Kelly, 2017; D. Ngidi & Qwabe, 2006; Schollar, 2018). As a result of these patterns of usage, my literature review drew on texts describing characteristics of effective schools and identifying the inverse of the factors said to lead to a breakdown in a culture of teaching and learning.

The literature indicated two distinct perspectives as to the elements necessary for a culture of teaching and learning to exist. The first perspective is that a school's culture of teaching and learning can be measured in terms of the institutional structures and systems that are empirically observable. Examples of this include punctuality, well-maintained infrastructure, attendance rates, and adherence to the timetable (Buka et al., 2017; Motshekga, 2009; Potberg, 2014). The second perspective, which I adopt, recognises institutional structures and systems as elements of a culture of teaching and learning but. extends to how the socio-cultural context shapes schools' institutional fabric and accordingly teaching and learning practices (Dixon, 2008; Schollar, 2018).

In this section, I detail the elements that constitute the core elements that contribute to a culture of teaching and learning. I then present a model for a culture of teaching and learning in schools (Figure 3.1). This model consists of eight internal elements and four external fields that consistently featured as influencing a culture of teaching and learning. Although I present these elements in a list format, they cannot be viewed as discrete. A culture is shaped by the interaction among habitus, field and capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Any shift in practices or alterations to one of these elements will therefore affect the overall teaching and learning practices.

### 3.6.1 Vision

An organisation's success depends on working towards a clearly defined vision and clearly defined goals centred on successful teaching and learning (Department of Education, 1995; Vos, 2020). Deal and Peterson (2016) stress that it cannot be expected that school leadership and educators all share the same vision. What is necessary is that, once there is a clear vision in place, it is respected by all staff and school leadership and colleagues collaborate in meeting this vision (Barth, 2006; Kruger, 2003; Zimmerman, 2017).

### 3.6.2 Leadership

What consistently emerges as fundamental in the literature is that a strong culture of teaching and learning depends on a committed leader who works towards a clear vision of teaching and learning (Bush, 2013; Christie et al., 2007; Kruger, 2003). There was particular emphasis on the principal and the school management team (SMT) demonstrating

commitment to modelling the importance they attach to teaching and learning, and to empowering themselves and educators to succeed in meeting the vision for teaching and learning (Claxton & Lucas, 2009; Department of Basic Education, 2015). This requires distributed leadership and a sharing of responsibilities among the principal, SMT and educators (Potberg, 2014; J. Sibanda, 2017). Underlying this success is that the leadership team is trained and provided with the leadership skills necessary to succeed in their role (Buka et al., 2017; Maringe & Chiramba, 2021; Mestry, 2017a).

### 3.6.3 Educators' role and responsibilities

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) state that equipping educators to meet their primary role of teaching requires that educators teach under conditions that are both motivating and enable them to meet their responsibilities. One of the key factors that enables educators to succeed in their role is the maintenance of their wellbeing – ensuring they have the "psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge" (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230).

Ensuring educators are able to fulfil their role and maintain wellbeing requires strong collegial relations, and clear lines of support to access mentoring and gain assistance with pedagogical and content knowledge and with concerns such as classroom management (Hoadley & Galant, 2015; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). When these conditions are in place, educators are better positioned to meet their responsibilities to learners (Mncube & Harber, 2013; Weeks, 2012).

### 3.6.4 A collaborative working environment

To succeed in working towards a school vision, a collegial environment that encourages collaboration is crucial (Adonis, 2017; Grant et al., 2010; Weeks, 2012; Zimmerman, 2017). This was emphasised by Potberg (2014) who, based on his research on school effectiveness in a disadvantaged Western Cape community, stressed the importance of such collaboration in creating an environment where school leadership and educators identify specific objectives and, together, plan for achieving these objectives.

Successful collaboration is facilitated by regular meetings where educators feel confident to share best practices and any struggles confident that these will be welcomed and accepted without judgement (Judd, 2017; Sailors et al., 2007).

### 3.6.5 The learning environment

Hornstra et al. (2015, p. 364) describe creating "a learning environment that enhances and sustains students' motivation and engages students in learning" as one of educators' most important tasks.

A positive learning environment exists when learners feel supported by their educators and peers and have the confidence to risk making errors in the knowledge that these efforts will be respected (Back et al., 2016; NEEDU, 2017). This is supported by clear classroom rules and expectations that place learning as the central focus. In such an environment, learners are motivated and are confident that their participation will be respected (Christie, 1998; Dörnyei & Muir, 2019).

### 3.6.6 Discipline and safety

To understand how violence affects teaching and learning in the school, defining school violence is necessary. School violence refers to any violence that affects school personnel and learners' school attendance and impacts teaching and learning. This includes threats to safety while travelling to and from school (Gopal & Collings, 2017; Le Mottee & Kelly, 2017). It further includes the effects on learners and educators who witness acts of violence because these acts affect levels of fear and therefore the ability to focus and learn (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Meyer & Chetty, 2017). In addition to physical violence, violence can manifest through verbal abuse and intimidation. Successful teaching and learning depends on there being a sense of order across a school and in classrooms (Back et al., 2016). This requires that educators and learners adhere to school and classroom rules and assume accountability for their behaviour. Importantly, there need to be strong, clear structures in place to manage poor discipline without threatening learners' wellbeing (J. Botha & Gore, 2020).

### 3.6.7 Infrastructure and resources

When entering a school, the first indication of the schools' culture of teaching and learning is revealed by the physical environment (Deal & Peterson, 2016), infrastructure and any visible resources. A well-maintained environment with sound infrastructure reflects order within the school and indicates that the school is valued as a learning space (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008). Bland et al. (2013) stress the importance of consulting learners about their perception of the school environment and their opinions about potential changes. They state that, with such consultation, learners' interests are represented and this assists in creating motivation to maintain infrastructure and resources.

In addition to the physical infrastructure, teaching and learning materials need to available and appropriate to the curriculum and learners' interests (Currin & Pretorius, 2010; Dixon, 2008). The benefit of these resources is realised when they are used effectively to stimulate knowledge acquisition and curiosity (Velissaratou & Blyth, 2017).

### 3.6.8 Institutional structures and routines

Christie (1998) asserts that a strong culture of teaching and learning depends on "proper and effective management systems and structures with clear procedures and clear lines of authority, powers, responsibility and accountability" (p. 291). These assist with maintaining order in a school and ensuring that educators and learners are aware of what is expected of them and the consequences of their actions. It is the principal who assumes primary responsibility for ensuring these are in place (Mestry, 2017b).

In addition, a strong culture of teaching and learning requires routines that are structured around regulated periods of time. From the first morning bell, the day is organised according to specific timetabling for each subject and for time spent outside the classroom during designated breaks (Christie, 1998; Dixon, 2008). Included in these routines are that educators and learners are punctual and present in classrooms during teaching times (Grant et al., 2010; Schollar, 2018).

### 3.6.9 Overlapping field: Education

For the overall field of education and government to contribute to a strong culture of teaching and learning, government needs to ensure that there is adequate infrastructure in

place and schools are provided sufficient budget and resources to maintain infrastructure and material needs. One of the emerging elements regarding government's role is that principals and educators receive strong pre-service training and ongoing professional development to strengthen their teaching and/or leadership capacity (Mestry, 2017a; T. Ngidi, 2020; Shalem & de Clercq, 2019). This includes regular district visits with officials equipped to support each school and its specific needs (NEEDU, 2017). Finally, staff and learners must have access to resources offering learning and psychosocial support to ensure academic progress and wellbeing.

### 3.6.10 Overlapping field: Civil society

In schools that wish to receive external support, strong relationships with NGOs and civil society assist in providing resources and upgrading infrastructure. Partnerships offer opportunities for upskilling educators and offering learners and educators individual support. As Volmink and van der Elst (2019) correctly stress, the success of such partnerships depends on close consultation and not on donors external organisations imposing programmes and resources on schools.

### 3.6.11 Overlapping field: Community

In reporting on an intervention to improve a school's culture of reading, Currin and Pretorius (2010) emphasised that because all literacy practices develop in a specific wider context, any school-based literacy practices need to be understood in relation to the family, the community and what the field of education allows for in specific schools. This argument applies to teaching and learning practices, which can also only be understood in relation to other fields. When partnerships and collaborations are nurtured with neighbouring schools, the surrounding community, NGOs and community organisations, and public libraries (Le Mottee & Kelly, 2017; Sailors et al., 2007), they offer access to additional resources, the sharing of knowledge, and the organisation of extramural and inter-school events.

With every school affected by the community in which it is situated, any threats to learners' wellbeing, such as violence, poverty and hunger, will affect their behaviour and ability to concentrate, to the detriment of the school's culture of teaching and learning (Bush, 2013; Meyer & Chetty, 2017).

### 3.6.12 Overlapping field: Home environment

When there are strong two-way partnerships in place between parents and educators, the resulting collaboration works to improve learners' education experiences (Mashishi, 2001; Meier & Lemmer, 2015). Such partnerships depend on mutual respect between schools and families, and on educators striving to build on learners' existing literacy repertoires (Compton-Lilly & Gregory, 2013; Vos, 2020).

### 3.6.13 A model for a culture of teaching and learning

The model presented in Figure 3.1 depicts the 12 elements that I identified as constituting a culture of teaching and learning.




**Figure 3.1 A model for a South African culture of teaching and learning**

With fields consistently undergoing restructuring, any alteration to any of these elements will influence the range of possible practices in a school (Bourdieu, 1984) and accordingly its culture of teaching and learning. It is because of this interrelationship that there are no clear lines or divisions between any of the 12 elements.

## 3.7 Conclusion

My literature review has focused on education, literacy and reading in the South African context. The body of literature I have presented in this chapter, and the formulation of a definition of a culture of reading appropriate to the African education context, serve as a foundation for exploring what shapes a culture of reading in a South African school. The development of a model for a culture teaching and learning provides a conceptual tool for understanding the internal and external forces acting on Saxon Primary's culture of reading.

# CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This chapter describes my methodological approach and research process. The methodological approach, methods and forms of data analysis I employed were guided by my research questions and the aims underlying my research. I had three research questions:

- How does the term “culture of reading” function in South African national government education discourse?
- What shapes a culture of reading in a South African no-fee primary school?
- How is this culture of reading reflected in the school’s reading practices?

This chapter is organised into two parts. In the first part, I detail my approach to responding to question one. In the second section, I report on my research design and the methods I used in answering questions two and three.

My analysis of all datasets was qualitative. Qualitative research is focused on understanding social phenomena and the reasons underpinning the existence of these phenomena (Okeke, 2015). It explores the ways of thinking, the beliefs held by individuals or groups and interactions among individuals and groups, with the aim of identifying how these beliefs shaped certain phenomena or practices (Bloome, 2012; Ritchie, 2003).

My first analysis chapter is a textual analysis of national government texts that addresses the question: “How does the term ‘culture of reading’ function in South African national government education discourse?” Bourdieu’s (1984) recognition that overlapping fields affect practices was beneficial in recognising that no study at an individual school can be conducted in isolation from the surrounding fields, including the field of education.

Therefore, I needed to identify how the ways in which the term functions in the overall field of education affects the efforts of individual schools – in this case, Saxon Primary. This required an in-depth exploration of the beliefs, ideologies and rationale underpinning the government's adoption of the term "culture of reading" and how this has translated to education and literacy policies. A qualitative analysis with its attention to understanding what shapes specific practices was therefore the appropriate form of analysis.

A qualitative analysis was also suited to answering questions two and three. By conducting a qualitative analysis, I was able to explore the reading practices that were in place and identify how these practices were shaped by individual and collective habitus, in combination with the surrounding social and cultural conditions (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Ritchie, 2003). I used thematic analysis in answering all three questions and include an explanation of this approach to analysis in Section 4.1.2.

## 4.1 Research methods and design: Answering question one

### 4.1.1 Data collection

My first research question was: "How does the term 'culture of reading' function in South African national government education discourse?"

To answer this question, I conducted an online search using Google and Google Scholar (an initial search was conducted on 4 November 2019 and a supplementary search on 30 January 2020) using the search terms "culture of reading" + "South Africa" and "reading culture" + "South Africa" for the time period 2000 to 2019, the year in which I conducted my fieldwork. I used 2000 as a starting date because, from my initial Google search on a culture of reading prior to embarking on my PhD, there were few references to a culture of reading in texts prior to 2000. I selected Google Scholar as the academic database because it includes grey literature and provides greater access to postgraduate research than other academic databases. The final dataset contained a corpus of 331 texts. I drew on this corpus in formulating the definition of "culture of reading" presented in Chapter 3. Of the 331 texts, 91 were produced by government at all levels. Of these 91 texts, 58 were produced by national government, and these were subjected to a thematic analysis. With my research

centred on basic education, once I had identified which of these 58 texts were associated with basic education, these were paid particular focus.

### 4.1.2 Data analysis: Exploring government discourse

My analysis took the form of a thematic analysis, with Bourdieu's notion of doxa serving as a means for exploring how the national government has adopted the term "culture of reading" in its policies and planning, and how this has impacted reading in the field of basic education.

#### *Thematic analysis*

In a thematic analysis, the researcher conducts a detailed review of data, identifying common themes or patterns that are generated from the data (van Wyk & Taole, 2015). Thematic analysis can be inductive or deductive. In a deductive or theoretical approach, themes are determined prior to data collection. The data that is coded relates directly to a specific research question or aim and all other data is excluded from analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In an inductive approach, the researcher undertakes their analysis without any pre-determined themes (Bakkabulindi, 2015), and any findings related to the area of research may be analysed. Aspects of data that relate to the research questions and aims are identified and coded. These are organised into broader patterns and a smaller number of overarching themes, each of which captures an important aspect or finding related to the research questions and aims (Braun & Clarke, 2013). My analysis took the form of inductive analysis. This was because I was exploring how the government adopted the term and could not anticipate what themes I would identify.

#### *Doxa*

The doxa that education progress can be measured through assessment is clear in the government's repeated reliance on assessment results to justify the promotion of a culture of reading. This belief underlies my choice of using doxa in Chapter 5 as a tool to analyse how the term "culture of reading" functions in the national government's education discourse.

In explaining the benefit of employing doxa as an analytical tool in education research, Costa and Murphy (2016) state:

> Doxa as a filter of analysis allows us to highlight the hidden assumptions that can only be made visible when we seek different ways of problematizing the reality presented to us, rather than taking such accounts at face value. (p. 58)

Using doxa as a tool, it was possible to analyse how the government, unwittingly or not, has shaped the doxa that a culture of reading is the solution to South Africa's reading crisis. By consistently interrogating the foundations for the claims associated with a culture of reading, I was able to identify possible reasons for the promotion of a culture of reading. Doxa as a filter of analysis was especially valuable in analysing whether the assumptions underpinning the themes I identified are contextually appropriate to the South African reality.

### 4.1.3 Process of analysis

My analysis process was composed of four phases, each of which I detail here. Importantly, a thematic analysis is not linear. It is a recursive process that requires consistently moving between data and the theory and literature informing the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

#### *Step 1: Data familiarisation*

I read all 58 texts numerous times to familiarise myself with their content. I made initial notes and highlighted ideas, pronouncements and themes that appeared frequently.

In my initial readings, I organised the texts in three different ways. I first grouped them according to the department or individual who had authored the text. This was to identify where the term was used most popularly. With the reception of a text being influenced by the speaker's position of power (Bourdieu, 1991), identifying a speaker's position in government assisted in determining the potential impact the respective texts may have had. Second, I identified what purpose the use of the term "culture of reading" served, for example in a policy document, a reading campaign, or a public event. In a final folder, I organised the texts according to date. This created a timeline to identify how the term "culture of reading" was used in different periods, and allowed me to identify if the usage of the term could be related to specific events or shifts in the overall education landscape.

In texts where authors referred to other education policies, events or assessment results, I searched for documents linking to these references to further understand the context of the text.

***Step 2: Searching for themes***

In my multiple readings of the documents, I searched for repeated phrases, words and ideas. I identified when these ideas and words were used and how the ways in which they were used revealed commonalities across time. Of particular importance was identifying the purpose that each text served in promoting specific ways of thinking about reading. This process was undertaken to trace how the term "culture of reading" has served as an ideological tool to progress the government's specific objectives.

***Step 3: Identifying themes***

After returning repeatedly to all texts, I arrived at five overarching themes associated with a culture of reading and the benefits it provides. These were:

1. The role of reading campaigns
2. Government's understanding of a culture of reading
3. Expectations of schools and educators
4. The need for infrastructure and resources
5. Family and community participation.

***Step 4: Conducting and writing up my analysis***

I analysed how these themes linked to my definition of a culture of reading, and the similarities and disconnections across literature. With my research intending to better understand a culture of reading and its position in the Global South, this included analysing how government's use of the term held relevance to the South African context.

It was while I was conducting my analysis that I drew on doxa as a tool. The national government occupies the field of power and, as a result, imposes on schools and society what is expected and considered of value and legitimate in terms of reading practices (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). With this dominant position, its structuring of the field of education and these expectations will likely result in a widespread acceptance of what

should be achieved (Schirato & Roberts, 2018). Drawing on doxa was especially valuable in understanding how the autonomous model of literacy has come to be widely accepted across the field of education and the implications of this acceptance.

I structured my analysis according to the five themes that I identified. However, each of these themes existed in relation to other themes and, because of this interrelationship, the different themes appear across sections.

### 4.1.4 Research limitations in sourcing texts

In analysing government discourse surrounding the term "culture of reading," I restricted my search to texts online. Due to time and logistical constraints I did not attempt to source archived government documents. This decision excluded any sources that were only available as hard copies or which are no longer online. Notably, some texts posted on the national government website in the early 2000s are no longer available online.

## 4.2 Research methods and design: Answering questions two and three

To answer my research questions, "What shapes a culture of reading in a South African no-fee primary school?" and "How is this culture of reading reflected in the school's reading practices?", I conducted an ethnographic case study.

Ethnography is a culturally and socially situated methodological approach where a researcher aims to gain an insider perspective on a social group in order to describe the daily cultural life of a specific social group (Kellett, 2014). In ethnography, a researcher locates themselves at a research site for an extended period, where they generate extensive data allowing them to gather in-depth insight into the beliefs and practices they observe during this period (Dixon & Janks, 2019). Over this period, the researcher employs a variety of data collection methods that allow for flexibility in data collection and for the researcher to "follow the data" (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 14) and adjust their methods if required. Data is then scrutinised for common themes that form the foundation for analysis (de Carvalho, 2023). I spent a total of eight weeks in the school. This was sufficient time to generate extensive data and answer my research questions. However, it was not adequate to fully immerse myself in the school. For this reason, I conducted an ethnographic study.

An ethnographic study draws on the principles, methods and modes of inquiry underlying ethnography (Bloome, 2012). This research design allowed me to explore "what actually happens" (B. Street, 2016a, p. 338) in terms of reading practices at Saxon Primary, but over a shorter period than an ethnography demands. With its focus on "what people are actually doing with reading and or [*sic*] writing in specific social contexts'" (B. Street, 2016b, para. 9), an ethnographic study was well-suited to investigating the beliefs and actions underpinning the school's culture of reading and identifying how these are reflected in reading practices.

To complement an ethnographic approach, I undertook a single-site case study. This is an in-depth study of practices or phenomena that is conducted in a demarcated physical boundary (de Carvalho, 2023; van Wyk & Taole, 2015). In a case study, the researcher is usually present at the site for a period of a few hours, days or weeks (Parker-Jenkins, 2018). A case study uses multiple data collection methods and sources that enable a detailed exploration of one or a limited number of sites (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

Single site studies are criticised for limiting opportunities for generalisation or for transferring findings to other sites (Yin, 2018). However, I selected a single research site because the complexity of culture is such that a longer period at a single school would provide a better foundation for exploring how historical and current phenomena have contributed to the school's reading practices (Thomson & Hall, 2017).

With the rich data that is generated from case studies and ethnographic studies, an approach combining the two methodologies – an ethnographic case study – facilitated an in-depth inquiry into the school's culture of reading. I was able to draw on ethnographic tools and modes of inquiry that generated rich data and therefore opportunities for more detailed analysis of core themes.

A single-site, ethnographic case study was suited to my research because:

- I operated within the boundaries of a single research site for a specified period of time.
- My focus was centred on describing and understanding the complexity of the school's reading practices and how these constitute its culture of reading, and this demanded extended time at the school.

- By studying practices at one school only, there were sufficient opportunities to identify the core reading practices at the school, and the systems and beliefs informing these practices.

I conducted my fieldwork across the school, in the library and in a Grade 1 and a Grade 5 classroom. The majority of my fieldwork was conducted in these two classrooms and through interaction with the respective educators and their learners. My decision to foreground two classrooms was to ensure that I had sufficient opportunities to generate data that would allow for detailed responses to my research questions.

Although practices in every classroom are unique, there are many contextual similarities and commonalities among classrooms in the same school, especially in terms of how the school's culture of teaching and learning and overlapping fields influence possibilities in the classrooms. It was because of this that I requested to be placed in a foundation phase class and in an intermediate or senior phase class in order to gain a greater sense of reading practices across the school.

### 4.2.1 Classroom ethnography

My research in the Grade 1 and 5 classrooms took the form of classroom ethnography. Bloome (2012) defines classroom ethnography as an ethnographic study that draws on the methodologies associated with ethnography. This definition is a misnomer in that the amount of fieldwork and time devoted to studying the classroom practices does not provide the amount of data generated from a traditional ethnography. Classroom ethnography is therefore better understood as an ethnographic study in a classroom setting. In explaining the benefits of a classroom ethnography for a single researcher or small research team, Bloome (2012) writes:

> As a practical matter, it is often difficult for a researcher or a small research team to fully research a classroom and the school, community, and society in which it is embedded. Thus, a classroom ethnography can be viewed as a matter of foregrounding the classroom and back-grounding the broader contexts; but such do not and should not obviate the inherent relationship between a classroom and broader social and cultural contexts. (p. 11)

It is because classrooms are embedded in a wider society and that classroom ethnography accounts for this, that it is well-suited to a study of reading practices. In exploring the classroom culture of reading, this culture cannot be isolated from the broader social groups and societies in which it is embedded. To do so would be to ignore the interrelation among fields and the power relations in relation to the school, the field of education and any other field that acts on a classroom and its members in shaping their ideologies and beliefs (Bloome, 2012).

Bourdieu's theory of practice lends itself to a classroom ethnography. This is due to Bourdieu's attention to power structures and how practices can only be understood in relation to internal struggles for power and in consideration of the external forces acting on a field and its members (Bourdieu, 1990b; Reay, 1998b).

### 4.2.2 Critiquing ethnography

There are many intricacies and complexities that shape a culture of reading. It was only with an extended period at Saxon Primary and by drawing on multiple methods of data collection that I was able to respond to my second and third research questions. An ethnographic case study was accordingly the appropriate choice for exploring the school's culture of reading. This does not discount that there are aspects of ethnographic studies that can be problematic.

Central to criticism of ethnography is the issue of subjectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2019). From the selection of a research topic and the first decision to undertake an ethnographic study, the research process is subjective. During data collection, it is not possible to observe all interactions and activities that take place. Nor is it possible to notice and record each gesture, expression or interaction among participants during an interview. The decision as to where to direct one's focus during observation, the structuring of interview schedules and composition of participants in interviews all affect the data that is generated. The data presented is therefore that which was generated from the researcher's perspective (Hammersley, 2018). Additionally, the choice of data that is presented is that which the researcher has identified as most relevant to the research topic. This, too, represents the perspective of the researcher who, ultimately, controls the narrative (de Carvalho, 2023). As I detail in Section 4.4.2, I have used Bourdieu's notion of reflexivity in addressing researcher

subjectivity, and the need to turn the gaze on myself as the researcher, specifically in considering how my social and cultural background affected the research process.

Every member of a field occupies a position in that field. Ethnography aims to gain an accurate picture of interactions and activities at a specific research site. However, every new entrant to a field results in a repositioning of the positions existing members occupy in the field (Bourdieu, 1990b). Therefore, when a researcher enters the research site, there are shifts in the field and consequently in practices that preclude an authentic picture of the subject under research (Bryman & Bell, 2019; Hammersley, 2018).

### 4.2.3 Approaching the school and the pilot study

I made initial contact with the principal, Mr Willemse (all names are pseudonyms), via email in July 2018. He invited me to attend a meeting with the SMT. At this interview, I outlined my research aims and detailed what my presence in the school would entail. I expressed to the SMT that the purpose of my research was not to criticise the school's practices, but to highlight the practices constituting the school's culture of reading. I told them that I approached Saxon Primary on the recommendation of my former colleagues. I explained that, before undertaking a large study, I wished to conduct a pilot study. This was because a pilot study would allow both parties to ascertain the feasibility of the study and to ensure the school was comfortable with my presence over an extended period (Foster, 2013; Yin, 2018). This was also necessary for me to test and refine my research instruments and methods, and to identify potential problems to conducting my research at the school (Maxwell, 2005).

Following our meeting, the SMT agreed to a pilot study. Mr Willemse reported that Grade 5 educator, Mr Seedat, and Grade 2 educator, Ms Petersen, offered to host me during my pilot study. Mr Seedat welcomed me into his classroom and encouraged his learners to participate in my study. I conducted three days of observations (27.08.2018-29.08.2018) and held interviews with 21 learners over the remainder of the term. These took the form of peer interviews (two learners) and focus group interviews. For some interviews I grouped learners randomly and, for others, Mr Seedat assisted me with selection. Learners appeared more comfortable when Mr Seedat recommended which learners to interview together. I

attribute this to his knowledge of classroom dynamics and ensuring that learners were placed among peers with whom they interacted well. Mr Seedat voiced his belief in the importance of school-based research and a willingness to host me the following year. He had, however, expressed dissatisfaction with school leadership and I was unsurprised when he resigned at the end of 2018 with immediate effect.

I spent two days in Ms Petersen's classroom (04.09.2018-05.09.2018) and conducted brief interviews with seven Grade 2 learners during break on those two days. When I entered Ms Petersen's classroom, I had trusted Mr Willemse's report that she had volunteered to host me. I did not discuss my research aims with her as explicitly as I had done so with Mr Seedat. On my second day in her classroom, Ms Petersen's discomfort at my presence was evident. I raised this with her and we agreed I would not continue observations. I had neglected the importance of research reflexivity and my responsibility as researcher to respect participants and ensure that I caused participants no harm or discomfort.

I conducted interviews only with learners during the pilot study. Following the pilot study, I added questions to my interview schedule for learners but because I had not interviewed any other participants, I made no edits to other interview schedules. In July 2019, I added further questions to my Grade 5 interview schedule to follow up on data generated in the first half of the year. These additional questions are included in Appendix D. I made no significant alterations to my observation schedule.

Reflecting now on my pilot study, I realise that one week in the school was insufficient to gain a clear picture of the research site and the impact of my presence, as I would discover in my fieldwork in 2019. University ethics require that researchers obtain the permission of the principal and educators directly involved in the research. As a result, I did not approach all staff directly to discuss my research approach or their willingness to have an outside in the school. Closer interaction with a greater number of staff during my pilot study would have alerted me to complex power struggles within the school that have resulted in educators who are cautious of being criticised for their practices or beliefs and, therefore of the possibility of being judged by an outsider. In particular, if I had had more in-depth interaction with staff members and conducted formal interviews with them during the pilot study, I would have been better prepared for a school with a poor culture of teaching and

learning, marked by poor relationships between educators and school leadership, as I report in Chapters 6 to 9.

### 4.2.4 Data collection

In line with an ethnographic case study, I used multiple data collection methods. These were interviews, observations, document reviews and photo elicitation. The use of multiple methods of data collection enables triangulation, thereby increasing research rigor. This is because data triangulation enables identifying similarities and contradictions in data that has been generated by different means (Chitiyo et al., 2015).

#### *Observations and field notes*

I conducted 21 days of observations in Ms Adams' Grade 5 classroom and 18 days in Ms Gabriel's Grade 1 classroom. These occurred over the periods 28.01.2019-08.03.2019 (Grade 5) and 08.04.2019-22.05.2019 (Grade 1). During all visits to the school, I observed interactions and events whenever I was outside of the classroom. Additionally, I attended two inter-school reading events. These were a read-aloud competition hosted at a nearby public library (02.05.2019) and an all-day interschool reading quiz hosted by Funda Fun (12.09.2019). I spent one day at the end of the second term in the library (10.06.2019) observing the re-organisation of the library by the library assistant, Ms Daniels, and her preparations for the following term.

I assumed the position of participant observer. In participant observation, the researcher interacts with participants and takes part in activities (Montgomery, 2014). Managing this position was complex. When invited by Ms Adams and Ms Gabriel, I would interact with learners during the school day. This was in activities such as paired reading or when educators were not in the classroom.

Observations allowed me to note verbal and non-verbal interactions among participants and how they related to one another (Chitiyo et al., 2015). I made field notes during classroom, school and library observations, and documented any informal interactions between consenting participants and myself. I only documented events and interactions, and photographed or recorded individuals who had consented (adults) or assented (learners following their parents' consent) to my doing so. I reviewed my field notes at the end of

each school day and added any further reflections. During my fieldwork, I sent my supervisor emails and WhatsApp messages detailing findings and observations. I incorporated these into my field notes.

Observations were valuable in triangulating data generated from interviews. In particular, the beliefs we express may not accord with our actions and a combination of interviews and observations allowed for improved data validity. This is not attributable purely to participants misrepresenting themselves in interviews but may result from participants being unaware of their own practices and behaviours (Hammersley, 2018). Furthermore, younger participants may not have the vocabulary to express their beliefs fully. Because I was at the school for an extended time, I was able to follow up with learners in interviews on practices I had observed.

***Interviews***

I conducted scheduled interviews with all 51 participants who had agreed to participate in my study. These took the form of individual interviews, peer interviews and focus group interviews. I provide a breakdown of the interview participants, and the number and types of interviews in Section 4.3. My interviews were semi-structured. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer asks specific questions but there is flexibility in how questions are sequenced. The interviewer can adjust or pose additional questions related to data that has been generated or ask participants to elaborate on responses (Brinkmann, 2018). Interviews were held during break, outside of scheduled teaching hours, or on days that educators were absent.

In undertaking this research, I prioritised participants' welfare and ensured that potential harm to participants was minimised. The majority of learners live in communities where violence, gangsterism and socio-economic challenges are accepted as daily realities. It was critical to ensure that learners' already vulnerable position was not threatened further. On several occasions, children shared information that could potentially harm their wellbeing and my ethical responsibility to minimise harm took precedence over incorporating this data. In minimising harm, there were events that I observed that I excluded from the dataset. There is no objective means of deciding what data to exclude. If I had any doubt, I excluded data. A second means of protecting children was instances where I incorporated

data but did not name specific children or include the date of interview: for example, I referred to “a Grade 5 learner.”

These responsibilities for participants’ wellbeing extended to adult participants. Educators at Saxon Primary operate in a challenging field. This is both with regard to the level of infrastructure and resources provided by the DBE and to a divided staff body and leadership structures that do not encourage sharing ideas or interaction among staff. A consequence of poor staff relations is the expectation that the sharing of ideas and opinions may be criticised or disrespected. (This is demonstrated in Chapter 7.) In respecting this and working to reduce such possibilities, there are instances when I have not specified the educator’s name or the date of interview. To protect the school’s anonymity, my overview of the surrounding community is purposefully general.

***Document and material reviews***

I reviewed the foundation and intermediate phase CAPS documents in order to identify how educators’ practices may have been shaped by the curriculum content and presentation.

Educators provided me with the worksheets and teaching and learning materials that they distributed. I reviewed learners’ schoolwork across learning areas (with their permission).

***Photo elicitation***

On one occasion (17 September 2019) I provided 13 Grade 5 learners with cameras and asked them, in groups of two or three, to take photographs throughout the school of anything that interested them. Photo elicitation assists in physically mapping a research site (Dicks et al., 2013). By asking learners to take photographs, I drew them further into the research process, allowing them to make meaning of images they had captured themselves (Lemon, 2019). By explaining their decision to capture specific areas of the school, learners expanded on what these images indicated to them.

## 4.3 Research participants

My request to the principal had been to observe two classrooms, ideally one foundation phase and one intermediate phase classroom. My placement in Grade 1 and Grade 5

classrooms was a result of educators' willingness to host me. I invited all learners in both classes to participate in the study and in interviews.

I interviewed educators who expressed willingness to take part in the study after having received a letter in which I invited them to participate. My classroom observations were only in two classrooms but it was important to interview educators across grades to gain a clearer picture of reading practices in the school and what shaped these practices.

In identifying potential participants whose involvement in the school resulted from partnerships or collaborations, I approached the two literacy NGOs which were operating within the school.

I interviewed each participant at least once. Participants' pseudonyms reflect their self-reported home languages. For example, Vuyelwa, which is an isiXhosa name, could be a pseudonym for Unathi, and Vaughan for Ryan. In this section, I provide detail about these participants.

### 4.3.1 Learners

I interviewed 23 Grade 5 learners. Of the Grade 5 learners, 12 were female and 11 were male. I conducted eight individual interviews, nine peer interviews and ten focus groups. I interviewed seven Grade 1 girls and eight boys. I conducted three individual interviews, three peer interviews and four focus groups. The types and numbers of interviews learners participate in are detailed in Table 4.1 to Table 4.4. I have organised the tables according to the participants' gender. This distinction was necessary because there were specific references to boys or to girls in data.

**Table 4.1 Grade 5 female research participants**

| Name | Home language | Individual interviews | Peer interviews | Focus groups |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anathi | isiXhosa | | 1 | 1 |
| Bianca | Afrikaans/English | | 2 | 2 |
| Bongi | isiXhosa | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Caitlin | English | | | 2 |
| Candice | English | | 1 | 2 |
| Cleo | Afrikaans/English | | 2 | |
| Khethi | isiXhosa | | | 5 |
| Kim | English | | 2 | 1 |
| Leigh | English | 1 | | |
| Nandi | isiXhosa | | 2 | 1 |
| Robyn | Afrikaans/English | 3 | | |
| Sofia | Afrikaans/English | | 1 | 1 |

**Table 4.2 Grade 5 male research participants**

| Name | Home language | Individual interviews | Peer interviews | Focus groups |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ashley | English | | | 1 |
| Jake | English | 1 | | |
| Jason | English | 1 | | |
| Gareth | English | | | 1 |
| Luthando | isiXhosa | | | 2 |
| Lwazi | isiXhosa | | 1 | |
| Mandla | isiXhosa | | | 2 |
| Marcel | English | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Ryan | English/Afrikaans | | | 3 |
| Warren | English/Afrikaans | | 1 | 2 |
| Xavier | English | | 2 | |

**Table 4.3 Grade 1 female research participants**

| Name | Home language | Individual interviews | Peer interviews | Focus groups |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amber | Afrikaans/English | 1 | | 1 |
| Courtney | English | | 1 | 2 |
| Megan | Afrikaans/English | | | 1 |
| Naledi | isiXhosa | 1 | | |
| Okuhle | isiXhosa | 1 | | |
| Nadine | English | | | 2 |
| Simone | English | | 1 | 1 |

**Table 4.4 Grade 1 male research participants**

| Name | Home language | Individual interviews | Peer interviews | Focus groups |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amir | Afrikaans | | | 1 |
| Anele | isiXhosa | | 1 | 1 |
| Ebrahim | Afrikaans | | 1 | 1 |
| Ethan | English | | 1 | |
| Faeez | Afrikaans/English | | | 1 |
| Luzuko | isiXhosa | | 1 | |
| Shane | Afrikaans/English | | | 2 |
| Tyrone | Afrikaans/English | | | 1 |

All learners are assigned guardian teachers. If their educator is absent, they spend the day in their guardian teachers' classrooms. On days when either Ms Adams (04.03.2019; 24.07.2019; 18.09.2019) or Ms Gabriel (03.06.2019; 13.06.2019) was absent, and if learners had not been assigned work, I was able to fetch learners from their guardian teachers' classrooms and conduct interviews. With the additional time available on these days, there was greater room for informal discussion and, in this context, learners were more open in expressing their opinions on reading, their peers and Saxon Primary. I conducted these interviews in Ms Adams' and Ms Gabriel's classrooms which caused no disturbance to educators and children in other classrooms.

During my pilot study, I realised that learners participated more freely in initial focus groups when their educators guided my selection of group members. Consequently, I requested Ms Adams' assistance in grouping Grade 5 learners. My initial interviews with Grade 5 learners were semi-structured, and followed the interview schedule provided in Appendix D. As the year progressed, if learners elected to participate in further interviews, I allowed them to group themselves. The amount of time I spent at the school enabled multiple interviews with participants, particularly Grade 5 learners, because I interacted with them over a longer period than with Grade 1 learners. In later interviews, I returned to my initial interview schedule and followed up on these questions if I realised there was potentially further important data. I also asked additional questions to obtain further insight to events or interactions I had observed. In these interviews, I provided learners greater leeway to guide discussions themselves. This resulted in interviews that varied between semi-structured and unstructured formats. These interviews provided opportunities to validate data and expand on previous interview data and events I observed. In particular, I asked questions relating to how interactions among learners shaped reading practices and on learners' out-of-school literacy practices, as these were findings from earlier interviews that I had not covered in detail.

Generating data from Grade 1 learners required extended periods of time. Many of the learners did not have the necessary concentration span to participate in structured question-and-answer sessions. I adjusted my interview approach and started interviews by reading a book together. I then gave learners the opportunity to read further with their

peers or independently, draw or practise writing, or said that “We can just talk.” Ms Gabriel recommended that I organised interview groups according to gender, because learners were more comfortable interacting with peers of the same gender. This comfort with each other proved especially important because I was able to observe interactions among peers while we were participating in various activities. During these activities, I informally asked them questions about books and reading that were in my interview schedule (Appendix D). Despite the less formal interviews, I was able to cover the questions in my interview schedule. This interactive approach provided an unanticipated benefit in that I could observe literacy practices outside of the teaching environment.

### 4.3.2 Principal

Mr Willemse has been at Saxon Primary since 1993. He taught Grade 6 and 7 before assuming the position of principal in 2000.

### 4.3.3 Educators

All seven educators I interviewed are female. To preserve anonymity, I use “Ms” as an umbrella term for “Mrs,” “Ms” and “Miss.” Table 4.5 outlines educators’ details. Because I was interested in the systems and structures in place for promoting reading, I adhered to my interview questions to gain an overall picture of what was in place that shaped or constrained reading practices in the school (Appendix D). Interviews with the principal and educators were scheduled and conducted individually. There was a brief overlap in interviewing Ms Gabriel and Ms Prince when Ms Prince arrived early for her interview. Ms Klaasen, a Grade 1 educator, is the deputy principal, a role she has held since 2017.

Five educators and Mr Willemse elected not to be recorded and I relied on interview notes. For this reason educator data often consists of short quotes and not longer extracts.

**Table 4.5 Participating educators and qualifications**

| Name | Grade | Year of employment | Qualification | Interview date |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adams | 5 | 2018 | BEd (Hons) Intermediate phase | 08.03.2019; 23.08.2019 |
| Gabriel | 1 | 2015 | BA (Hons) Afrikaans, teacher training college | 19.07.2019 |
| Klaasen | 1 | 2010 | BEd (Foundation phase) | 08.11.2019 |
| Lawrence | 3 | 2015 | BEd (Foundation phase) | 22.07.2019 |
| Lewis | LSEN* | 1991 | Not available | 12.06.2019 |
| Meyer | R | 2019 | ECD Level 5 | 19.10.2019 |
| Prince | 6 | 2018 | BEd (Hons) Inclusive education | 19.07.2019; 02.08.2019 |

*Learners with special educational needs

### 4.3.4 NGO representatives

I interviewed five NGO representatives. Their details are provided in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6 NGO representatives**

| Name | Role | Organisation | Interview date |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ms Daniels | Library assistant | Funda Fun | 12.06.2019 |
| Salma Arendse | Library support co-ordinator | Funda Fun | 11.06.2019 |
| Kate Smythe | Mfunqule centre manager | Mfunqule | 15.10.2019 |
| Carmen Hill | Mfunqule programmes manager | Mfunqule | 03.07.2019 |
| Jane Mitchell | Executive director | Mfunqule | 03.07.2019 |

Kate Smythe and Ms Daniels are based at Saxon Primary. Ms Daniels is employed by Funda Fun and assumed the position of library assistant in 2018. She has received introductory librarianship training from Funda Fun, an NGO that partners with schools to establish and run libraries. In addition to being library assistant, she fulfils many of the roles held by educators. In such instances, I identify her as an educator.

Mfunqule, under the management of Kate Smythe, provides at-risk Grade 2 and 3 learners with reading and writing support and therefore did not form a significant part of my dataset. However, Kate Smythe is frequently referred to as contributing to shaping the school's culture of reading and her perspective was included in this analysis.

Salma Arendse, Carmen Hill and Jane Mitchell work at their respective NGO head offices. Although they are not based at the school, they have worked extensively in the NGO sector and they provided insight into how the NGO sector contributes to the country's reading landscape and individual school practices.

### 4.3.5 Coding data sources

Table 4.7 presents the codes I used for data sources.

**Table 4.7 Codes for data sources**

| Data source | Code |
|---|---|
| Individual interview (adult participants) | LL |
| Peer interview (adult participants) | PP |
| Informal discussion (adult participants) | DD |
| Individual interview – Grade 5 | LLA |
| Peer interview – Grade 5 | PPG |
| Focus group interview – Grade 5 | FGA |
| Informal discussion – Grade 5 | DDA |
| Grade 5 classroom field notes | FA |
| Individual interview – Grade 1 | LLB |
| Peer interview - Grade 1 | PPB |
| Focus group interview - Grade 1 | FGB |
| Grade 1 classroom field notes | FB |
| School field notes | FS |
| Library field notes | FL |
| Pilot study field notes | FP |

In instances where I did not identify participants, I used the codes in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8 Unnamed participants**

| Participant | Code |
|---|---|
| Grade 5 learner | AX |
| Educator | EX |

The following examples demonstrate my coding process. An individual interview with Grade 5 learner Anathi conducted on 3 February 2019 would be coded as

LLA/Anathi/03.02.2019. Field notes of Grade 1 classroom observations on 8 April 2019 would be represented as FB/08.04.2019. References to an individual interview with an educator I have not named would be LL/EX. I do not include dates if I do not name a participant.

## 4.4 My position as researcher and ethical responsibility

I received ethical approval from the university's ethics committee (protocol number: 2018ECE008D) and the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) (reference number: 20180801–4873). All participants older than 18 years signed consent forms agreeing to participation. As minors, learners' participation depended on parental/guardian consent. All learners whose parents/guardians provided signed consent elected to participate in the study. Grade 5 learners completed assent forms and provided verbal assent. (Information letters for participants, and consent and assent forms, are presented in Appendix E.) Grade 1 learners were not able to complete assent forms and provided verbal assent.

In initial interviews I stressed to participants their right to review data pertaining to them and to withdraw from the study at any stage. I explained to adult participants that other participants may be able to identify them but that I would preserve their confidentiality and privacy to the greatest degree possible. I started learners' interviews by asking, "What is a secret?", and said that I would not use their names in my writing.

Obtaining formal ethics approval from the WCED and the university is only a small part of being an ethical researcher. There are other principles and values that must be adhered to in human research. Notably, ensuring respect for persons, beneficence and justice are critical for ethical research (Sotuku & Duku, 2015). Central to this respect is recognising that, as a researcher, I was not a natural member of the school community and that my presence would cause shifts in the field and influence participants' practices.

### 4.4.1 Entering the school in 2019

Without host educators, I was unsure whether to continue my fieldwork at Saxon Primary in 2019. At the beginning of the school year in 2019, I emphasised to Mr Willemse the importance of staff being comfortable with my presence in the school. I did not have an

opportunity to address the staff body and to articulate my research objectives and convey that I was not at the school to criticise the school, educators or their practices. Instead, in a school briefing at the beginning of 2019, Mr Willemse distributed a letter I had written inviting educators to participate in the study. My continued presence in the school was discussed. Mr Willemse related to me that educators were comfortable with my presence and that Grade 5 educator Ms Adams and Grade 1 educator Ms Gabriel had agreed to host me. I approached these two educators directly to confirm this. Based on Mr Willemse's assurance, and because I had two classrooms I could observe, I assumed, perhaps naively, that although other educators may have been hesitant to host me in their classrooms, they did not object to my conducting research elsewhere in the school.

Saxon Primary does not have a staffroom or central meeting place. It was therefore not easy to interact with educators. I introduced myself and chatted to educators whenever I had the opportunity. This included during break-time, before and after school, or at events such as assembly. I was greeted cordially by all staff members and formed relationships with some of them over time.

It is not possible to erase the inevitable dynamic that, as an adult, I would assume the position of power in interaction with learners. I anticipated that, in addition to the authority resulting from being an adult, my presence in the classroom might position me as an authoritative figure such as an educator. I aimed to situate myself as an adult who was interested in learners' practices and ideas but who was not there to teach, assess or criticise learners. When I entered Ms Adams' classroom, she positioned me as such. The Grade 5s quickly accepted this and rarely approached me during teaching and learning time. I avoided classroom management.[6] Grade 5 learners appeared more relaxed with me than with any educator. As the year progressed, learners grew more open with me and the interview data generated in the third term was richer and more personal.

[6] This is with the exception of intervening if learners were damaging school or peers' property and when physical fights appeared imminent. For my physical safety, I did not attempt to break up any fights between physically strong learners. At no stage did I discipline learners.

In contrast to Ms Adams, Ms Gabriel introduced me as "Teacher Claire," positioning me in an authoritative, educator role. Addressing learners on my third day in her classroom, she stated:

> Miss Claire will sit at the back of the classroom and write notes and if you are naughty, she will write down your names and then you can go to Mr Willemse and then you can go to another school. Do you want to go to another school? (FB/10.04.2019)

This was the only occasion where she explicitly positioned me in an authoritarian role. Fortunately, learners were enthusiastic in welcoming me and appeared comfortable in my presence, despite this positioning. It is inevitable that any new entrant to the classroom would shift practices (Bourdieu, 1984). Ms Gabriel and I had anticipated that learners might initially be distracted by my presence but had expected that this would subside with time. However, learners consistently approached me for assistance or general conversation, occasionally disrupting teaching and learning. Ms Gabriel had reported struggling with classroom management prior to my observation and this poor discipline continued. Beneficence demands that a researcher is consistently aware of how their presence may have a negative effect on the research site (Kellett, 2014). I approached Ms Gabriel about the potential disruptions my presence caused. We agreed to discontinue observations. My observations in her classroom totalled 18 days.

At the end of the second term, three educators told me that a number of their colleagues had expressed hesitancy or had argued against my research in the January 2019 briefing when Mr Willemse distributed my letter inviting educators to participate in the study. This was reportedly due to a fear that I was there to judge and criticise them. These educators stated that an educator voiced that my background did not provide me with necessary insight to conduct research at Saxon Primary. By mid-year, it was evident that my entrance into the school had been problematic. This failure was primarily my responsibility. By accepting Mr Willemse's report on staff's response to my fieldwork, I failed to demonstrate the reflexivity demanded of a researcher. Included in this was ensuring that educators understood my research objectives and the position I aimed to assume in the school. My original intention was to conduct further school and Grade 5 classroom observations in the third term and to continue with interviews. However, once I became aware of some

educators being uncomfortable with my research, I decided to stop observations and only continue with interviews. I had originally anticipated continuing with observations in the third term. Although this was not possible, I was able to generate sufficient data for analysis.

### 4.4.2 Reflexivity

Any research is affected by a researcher's beliefs, background and motivation for research (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; de Carvalho, 2023). From my initial decision to undertake doctoral studies to the completion of my research, I have formed part of the research process and analysis. Throughout my research, I have drawn on Bourdieu's notion of reflexivity, as a means of managing the subjectivity inherent to research.

Reflexivity is a methodological concept that demands an ongoing reflection on research aims and the research process, and consistent attention to one's position while undertaking research (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Reflexivity requires not only reflecting on the research object but recognising and aiming to mitigate the effect of one's own relationship with the research object. This necessitates an interrogation of the pre-reflexive elements of one's research approach, methods and analysis and of one's social and academic positioning and the subsequent influence on research (Deer, 2012). As a researcher, it was my responsibility to consistently turn the research gaze on myself and to interrogate how my own interests, positioning and experiences may have influenced the research process (Grenfell, 2012; Schirato & Roberts, 2018).

Saxon Primary has an educator body with 13 Coloured and two Black educators, and a learner body comprising Coloured and Black learners. I entered Saxon Primary aware of my position as a White researcher and that I would consistently need to reflect on and acknowledge how past and present injustices may affect my research and reception at the school. My upbringing, due primarily to my race, relates more closely to childhoods associated with the Global North and "Westerners." As such, I acknowledge the validity of Street's (2012) statement that:

> a critique of the ethnographic approach in general, and of its use in NLS in particular, has been that the researchers have tended to be "westerners" and that, in effect, they were still imposing an outsider view on their subjects. (p. 40)

The recognition of the possibility of imposing my view on subjects does not remove this possibility. It does, however, assist in aiming for deeper reflection on each decision during research and in implementing measures to counter subjectivity. In promoting reflexivity reduce subjectivity, Street (2012) states:

> Through reflexivity, we can be aware of the reason for undertaking the research in the first place, of the experience, beliefs and values which we bring to the task… The researcher must go back and forth – enter the situation and then retreat to consider before re-entering again. Ethnography should be considered as cyclical, with forward and backward movement. (p. 40)

This paragraph demonstrates the complexities of reflexivity. It is not a simple matter of identifying our experiences, beliefs and values but of consistently challenging them and returning to the reasons for undertaking the research (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). During this retreating, consideration and re-entering, I have undergone a learning process that has required admitting to mistakes during data collection, questioning how my Whiteness and own schooling experience framed my research process and repeatedly subjecting my own beliefs about reading to rethinking. This required continually returning to datasets, reviewing findings in light of new understandings of the field and being honest about misunderstanding experiences within the school and to having misinterpreted data. I constantly grappled with meeting my responsibility to produce an honest and fair account of the school and its culture of reading, while maintaining respect for participants who exist in a challenging school environment, as I expand on in Section 4.5.4.

In striving for reflexivity, I asked adult participants, colleagues and friends who were more familiar with Saxon, the Cape Flats and teaching conditions at schools on the Cape Flats for insight to understand my data and for ideas on how to improve my undertaking of fieldwork. I established close relationships with four educators who were a valuable resource in communicating honestly with me about how my Whiteness and privileged upbringing may have influenced my research process. The high school I attended had a relationship with Saxon Primary as part of their outreach programme and there were educators who had visited my high school. We discussed our own experiences of schooling and how these compared to Saxon Primary. This promoted discussions about how historical

and current conditions favour certain children and how this continues to be along racial lines. I asked about the surrounding community and we spoke about how the state of the community affected Saxon Primary's operations. Our conversations around race were frank and we debated whether my race influenced participants' responses to me. Educators did not believe that this affected learners' interactions with me but were honest in saying that, although not always explicitly stated, my Whiteness and privilege were potentially a reason for some of their colleagues resisting my presence. Throughout these conversations I reflected on how I could best ensure that, when analysing data, I minimised any potential harm to participants or the school. I shared papers and conference presentations I wrote during my doctoral studies with these educators, asking for any feedback that would assist me in writing up my final analysis.

## 4.5 Process of analysis: the school's culture of reading

With the complexities of culture and literacy, a thematic analysis that allowed for an in-depth, detail focus on identifying patterns and trends over a period of time was appropriate (Grenfell, 2012). I conducted an inductive thematic analysis. My research was an exploration of practices and it was not possible to theorise or identify the dominant patterns or themes in the dataset prior to data collection. My analysis consisted of four steps. As I stated in Section 3.1.3, a thematic analysis is a recursive and not linear process.

### 4.5.1 Step 1: Data familiarisation

My first step was familiarising myself with the data.

I listened to all interview recordings at least once. These recordings included learners' reporting on the photographs that they had taken and I compared these photographs to the relevant interviews while I was listening to recordings.

Due to the extensive number of interviews, I did not transcribe all data. Instead, I transcribed data that I deemed most beneficial to answering my research questions. I made extensive notes on all interviews and referred back to recordings, transcripts and notes repeatedly.

During my fieldwork, I wrote field notes of classroom, library and school observations. I returned repeatedly to these notes throughout data analysis and focused in particular on common threads throughout observations. Reflecting on these practices provided thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the culture of reading in the two classrooms and across the school.

### 4.5.2 Step 2: Searching for themes

While familiarising myself with data, I noted key words, phrases and chunks of data related to my research aims. I coded this data and organised it into categories. I then returned to the first step and reviewed the data again to ensure I had not omitted relevant data and that the categories I established were a fair reflection of the data. There were 30 final categories.

In thematic analysis, frequent words or phrases are often identified and counted in working towards naming categories (Bryman & Bell, 2019). This was not appropriate to my study. This is because participants spoke a number of languages and varieties of these languages. Additionally, at a young age, children's vocabulary is not as developed as that of adults, and this could have restricted their choice of words.

### 4.5.3 Step 3: Identifying themes

Once I had established these categories, I identified common patterns, beliefs and trends. I collapsed these into seven overarching themes that, combined, best responded to my research questions and aims.

These categories and themes are presented in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9 Identifying themes**

| Overarching themes | Patterns and categories |
|---|---|
| The impact of overlapping fields | Parental involvement, school library, inadequate learning and psychosocial interventions from government, large class numbers, curriculum, learners' transferred behaviours |
| Teaching and learning conditions | Educator wellbeing, violence and discipline, absenteeism, leadership support, isolation among staff, a struggle for power |
| The physical environment | Neglect and damage, access to materials, learners' contributions to the environment |
| Attitudes to reading | Reading levels, academic progression, get "far in life," excitement, fear |
| Opportunities for reading | Availability and accessibility of books, independence to select books, reading spaces, time for reading |
| Language as a barrier to learning and reading | Multilingualism and the curriculum, learning to read, "hidden" reading habitus |
| Peer influence | Hostility, social motivation, classroom participation |

### 4.5.4 Step 4: Writing up my analysis

Writing up an analysis demands strong theoretical knowledge of the research topic being explored and critique of and reflection on data (Morse, 2022). Before data collection, I had reviewed literature and theories related to culture, literacy and reading, and the field of education. Throughout writing up my analysis, I referred back to this literature and, where required, reviewed further literature related to the themes that were generated.

My analysis of the school's culture of reading is divided into four chapters. Every school is embedded in wider society, and although the focus of this study is on the school practices and especially the Grade 1 and Grade 5 classrooms, gaining a clear picture of the factors shaping a school's culture of reading had to occur in relation to other fields. Chapter 6, the

first of my four chapters that explore the school's culture of reading, responds directly to my first research aim to establish the effects of external factors and how overlapping fields affect the school's culture of reading.

It is not possible to enter a research site without preconceived notions and ideas, whether conscious or not, of potential findings. With the dialectical relationship between habitus and field (Bourdieu, 2005), I anticipated that the school's culture of teaching and learning would influence the school's culture of reading. The extent to which this occurred was greater than I had expected. As a result, Chapter 7 is dedicated to exploring the school's culture of teaching and learning, before I analyse the culture of reading in the Grade 5 and Grade 1 classrooms in Chapters 8 and 9 respectively.

In a school beset by the difficulties Saxon Primary faces, maintaining a balance between negatively critiquing practices and being mindful of the context proved challenging at times. I was conscious of having presented my research aims to the school leadership team as being to identify strong reading practices in the school to highlight what is possible in a school facing social and economic constraints. My findings indicated that, although there are pockets of excellence in the school, there appeared to be a poor schoolwide culture of reading and little evidence of collaboration among staff to work to address this. When I was conducting and writing up my analysis, I wanted to adhere to what I had communicated to the leadership team in our initial meeting in terms of identifying strong reading practices. However, as with any individual in a field, the range of possibilities available to me and my ability to adhere to the objectives I had presented to the SMT were constrained by the field (Albright & Hartman, 2018). An analysis centred only on strong reading practices would preclude an accurate account of my findings. Navigating how to represent data fairly but with respect for the research participants, and mindful of the aims I had put forward to Mr Willemse and the SMT, presented a level of complexity in my analysis process that I had not foreseen.

This complexity manifested particularly in analysing educators' and school leadership's practices and their perspectives on what has led to the poor culture of teaching and learning. In revising early drafts, I noted examples of being too quick to pass judgement without questioning my preconceptions or fully accounting for the Saxon Primary context.

On other occasions, I queried if I had presented data too favourably for fear of passing unfair criticism. This required numerous reviews of early drafts, asking Saxon Primary educators for input on my work, consultations with my supervisor and drawing on a colleague's personal experiences of being raised on the Cape Flats and her knowledge as an academic involved in community development on the Cape Flats.

## 4.6 Research limitations and considerations

There were two factors that may have limited my research process. These were communication with learners, and the impact of COVID-19.

### 4.6.1 Communication

I speak a variety of English favoured by the education system and that is often viewed as standard South African English. The majority of learners from Saxon community speak other varieties of English or Kaaps at home and in social interactions with peers. Kaaps is a variety of Afrikaans I understand, but there are potentially nuances that I have missed during observations and interviews.

It is through language that we convey our thoughts and articulate knowledge (Heath & Street, 2008). Saxon Primary is a multilingual school. In Ms Gabriel's classroom, there were isiXhosa home language learners who arrived at school with limited English communication skills. I was unable to fully understand and converse with learners during interviews and observations. As a result of my limited isiXhosa, learners were unable to communicate what they know and their thoughts as effectively as if I were a fluent isiXhosa speaker. Consequently, there are possible gaps in data collection.

### 4.6.2 The impact of COVID-19

In 2020, I realised there were several instances where I would have benefited from additional visits to the school and interviews to build upon or verify data. However, this was not possible with school closures. Once school visits were possible, there had been a turnover in the deputy principal and other staff members, in addition to the impact of school closures on education. Therefore, data generated at this stage would not have been consistent with the original research context.

### 4.6.3 Research considerations

My decision to focus on reading and not literacy practices was because my research was motivated by an interest in the prominence of the term “culture of reading” in basic education. My data collection accordingly focused on reading practices in the school. While this was appropriate in responding directly to my research questions and aims, it precluded detailed exploration of other literacy practices in the school and of out-of-school literacy practices. This created a false divide between reading and literacy, in that reading can never be separated from other forms of literacy. I discuss the repercussions of this on my research findings in my final chapter.

## 4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented my methodological approach and explained how this approach complements the theory underpinning my study. I have detailed the reasons for selecting this approach, outlined my research process and presented potential limitations to my data collection and analysis.

# CHAPTER 5: CULTURE OF READING: AN ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT DISCOURSE

Every field exists in relation to other fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Therefore, any analysis of a culture of reading at an individual school has to be situated within the broader socio-cultural, economic and political context. The more autonomous a field, the more freedom members of the field have to enact practices that adhere to their beliefs and thinking (Albright & Hartman, 2018). Saxon Primary has limited autonomy in relation to the wider field of education. This is because, as a no-fee school, it is reliant on the DBE for budget and has to implement and adhere to government policies and the curriculum. As a result of the influence that the government has on school practices, any exploration of the school's culture of reading had to be framed within the government's conceptualisation of a culture of reading and how this translates to expectations on individual schools.

This chapter responds to the first research question, "How does the term 'culture of reading' function in South African national government education discourse?" In answering this question, I conducted a thematic analysis of 58 texts[7] produced at national government level over the period 2000 to 2019 that reference the terms "culture of reading" or "reading culture." I employed Bourdieu's notion of doxa as a tool to complement the thematic analysis. Bourdieu (1998) describes doxa as "a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view" (p. 57). With

[7] "Text" refers not only to the written word but to speeches, video or any other form of media.

national government assuming the dominant position in the field of education, doxa provided a useful tool for exploring how the government's adoption of the term "culture of reading" as the solution to the country's reading crisis has come to be widely accepted and influenced the field of education.

## 5.1 Identifying texts

My online search of texts in South Africa that referenced "culture of reading" or "reading culture" generated 331 texts. Of these 331 texts, 58 of them were produced by national government. Throughout the corpus of 331 South African texts and the 58 government texts, the association between a culture of reading and improved reading levels is evident. It is thus unsurprising that 29 of the 58 texts government were produced by the DBE. My exploration of the term "culture of reading" in South Africa is in relation to basic education, and my analysis in this chapter is accordingly focussed on these 29 texts.

Table 5.1 Tracing individual and departmental references to "culture of reading" (2000-2019) provides a breakdown of the dates when government texts were produced and of the department or individual who mentioned the term. This breakdown enabled identifying patterns of use that show continuities and shifts over time. By differentiating between departments and individuals, I could better identify the context in which the term was used.

**Table 5.1 Tracing individual and departmental references to "culture of reading" (2000-2019)**

| Date (5-year cycles) | DBE | DSAC* | GCIS** | President | Deputy President | Government Gazette | Correctional services | International relations | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2000-04 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| 2005-09 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| 2010-14 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 9 |
| 2015-19 | 16 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 32 |
| Total | 29 | 18 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 58 |

*Department of Sport, Arts and Culture

**GCIS (Government Communication and Information Systems)

For ease of readability I have not named government officials individually. All individuals I quote in this chapter have served at the level of deputy cabinet minister or higher. There were texts produced by less senior officials. However, because "[t]he power of words is nothing other than the *delegated power* of the spokesperson" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 107, italics in original) texts presented by higher-ranking government officials hold more authority and influence on practices and policies. Importantly, the texts presented by these officials reflect the institution or department that they represent, rather than their personal perspectives.

I arrived at five overarching themes from my review of the texts. These are *(a)* the role of reading campaigns, *(b)* the government's understanding of a culture of reading, *(c)* the expectations of schools and educators, *(d)* a need for infrastructure and resources and *(e)* family and community participation.

The data shows that, since 1994, there have been three major reading campaigns or strategies centred on improving reading levels in South Africa. All three have presented a culture of reading as integral to improving reading levels. These three campaigns are Masifunde Sonke, the National Reading Strategy and Read to Lead. In reviewing government texts, these three reading campaigns/strategies presented an entry point for my analysis.

## 5.2 A culture of reading and reading campaigns

### 5.2.1 Masifunde Sonke

In the early 2000s, the term "culture of reading" was predominantly used in relation to the promotion of the reading campaign, Masifunde Sonke (Let us read together).[8] Of the eight texts produced from 2000 to 2004, five referred to "culture of reading" in relation to Masifunde Sonke (Asmal, 2003; Department of Education, 2001; IOL, 2000; Mangena, 2003; Pandor, 2004). Soon after his appointment as, Kader Asmal launched Masifunde Sonke. The campaign was launched by then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, in 2000 and presented

[8] "Let us read together" is the English slogan for the project. The direct translation of *masifunde sonke* from isiZulu to English is "let's all read."

as a one-year campaign. Without explanation, this was extended into a multi-year campaign.

Masifunde Sonke aimed to "promote and build a culture of reading and writing among all South Africans" (Department of Education, 2001, p. 1) to "address the challenges of illiteracy, and to promote a love of reading" (Government Communication and Information System, 2003, para. 3). It sought to "engage the whole nation in a dynamic effort to build a sustainable culture of reading and writing that affirms South African languages, history, values and development" (Pandor, 2004, no pagination).

References to "let **us** read **together**," "**all** South Africans" and "the **whole** nation" [emphasis added] demonstrated efforts to promote reading and improve literacy across generations. It was the one reading campaign that stressed how sustainable reading practices are contingent on a nationwide adoption of regular reading practices and not purely on reading at basic education level. Asmal (2003) emphasised the need to address that, for some adults and children, reading has negative associations as an academic or formal practice and is connected to events such as official death notifications and notices of relocation under the Apartheid government. Consequently, he stated that efforts to encourage reading must "allow for unstructured reading, for the sheer joy of doing so, and without any obligations except to stimulate your own imagination" (no pagination). Asmal's perspective of reading reflects a socio-cultural perspective, and a realisation that reading practices are embedded in beliefs and the value attached to them (D. Barton & Hamilton, 2012).

The assertion that Masifunde Sonke would "build a culture of reading and writing among all South Africans" to address illiteracy and promote a love of reading was not accompanied by explanations of how it would be implemented, maintained or evaluated. There were references to events such as readathons, author readings, publishing and translation of texts into the nine indigenous languages, but insufficient attention to how these would result in sustained reading practices (Asmal, 2003; "Helping to Build a Nation of Readers," 2005). The campaign was referenced as late as 2007 (Government Communication and Information System, 2007) but there was no formal conclusion to the campaign. With little public description or reporting on the campaign, its effectiveness remains unclear.

### 5.2.2 National Reading Strategy

There is no evidence that Masifunde Sonke's efforts to build a culture of reading and writing translated into improved reading levels (Bharuthram, 2006; Chizwina, 2011; Sisulu, 2004). Yet the DOE again referred to the importance of a culture of reading in its implementation of the National Reading Strategy in 2008. The intended outcome of this strategy was that:

> all learners must be able to read basic texts by the end of Grade 3. After that, all learners will develop reading and comprehension skills according to the requirements of each grade level. (Department of Education, 2008, p. 11)

This outcome positioned reading as a technical skill, with successful reading being measurable by learners reaching specified assessment criteria. One of the core campaigns within the National Reading Strategy was Drop All and Read, introduced "to meet the crisis of reading" (Department of Education, 2008, p. 15). This strategy called for the implementation of a daily 30-minute Drop All and Read period that would create:

> a culture of reading in the classroom and in the school. Everyone – from learner to teacher, principal and support staff – can be seen reading for enjoyment for half an hour a day. If learners enjoy reading, this will raise literacy levels and improve the ability of learners to learn. (Department of Education, 2008, p. 15)

This campaign contradicted Masifunde Sonke's emphasis on a culture of reading being contingent on reading for multiple purposes and on reading being perceived as a valuable practice, in and outside the field of education. There was no clarity as to how assigning 30 minutes of daily reading could be implemented in an already packed curriculum, and the DBE assumed no accountability for ensuring schools had the budget to source the necessary materials. Reference to "everyone" in a school acknowledges that all members of a school community contribute to a culture of reading. However, the specific attention to children's literacy levels demonstrates a shift away from Masifunde Sonke's focus on South Africans of all ages reading for multiple purposes.

The claim that prescribing 30 minutes of daily reading would result in enjoyment disregards that opportunities in themselves cannot generate enjoyment. It is only when there is value attached to reading and necessary conditions are in place that a designated period can generate enjoyment. I do not dismiss the potential impact of Drop All and Read. However,

Drop All and Read presupposes *(a)* the availability of appropriate resources in readers' preferred language, *(b)* in higher grades where independent reading is assigned, an ability to comprehend texts and *(c)* that providing opportunities to read for enjoyment transfers into reading enjoyment (National Reading Panel, 2000). In classes in younger grades, where Drop All and Read may occur through story time it can contribute to developing skills towards learning to read (Land & Lyster, 2015; van der Woude et al., 2009). In classrooms where Drop All and Read takes the form of independent reading, if learners are not yet able to decode or comprehend texts, or find texts too difficult, their participation in Drop All and Read will not result in enjoyment or improved literacy levels.

Drop All and Read is a strategy that originated in the Global North (Campbell, 1988; Walmsley & Walp, 1989). Its implementation relies on contexts that respond to the three suppositions outlined above, and these remain more frequent in the Global North. By not drawing attention to the potential contextual challenges to implementing Drop All and Read, if schools are unsuccessful in implementing the campaign or show no improvements in reading levels, the DBE is able to present the narrative that it is not policies that have failed but that schools have failed to implement the necessary processes to achieve intended outcomes. There was no apparent follow-up on the campaign's implementation and outcomes and, as with Masifunde Sonke, no evidence of meaningful contribution to improved reading levels was presented publically.

### 5.2.3 Read to Lead

Read to Lead was launched in 2015 under the minister of the DBE, Motshekga. Since 2014, Motshekga has repeatedly positioned the creation of a culture of reading as central to efforts to improve the country's reading levels. This occurred first with her contention that "[d]eveloping a culture of reading amongst our learners remains a key driver in improving literacy skills such and [*sic*] reading and writing proficiency" (Motshekga, 2014, no pagination).

The following year, in explaining her decision to refocus on a culture of reading to improve reading achievement, Motshekga (2015a) referenced previous reading strategies and initiatives such as the National Reading Strategy and Drop All and Read and the need to rejuvenate and build on past programmes. She stated:

> After the release of the National Education and Evaluation Unit (NEEDU) report on the State of Literacy Teaching in the Foundation Phase, the Ministerial Reading Audit Report and the 2011 Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS), I was convinced that the Sector needed to rejuvenate its reading initiatives. (no pagination)

In this statement, the association between a culture of reading and reading achievement is evident. The 2012 NEEDU report on literacy teaching in the foundation phase and metrics such as PIRLS do not account sufficiently for the lived realities of teaching and learning across South Africa. The consequence of presenting such reports as justification for refocusing on a culture of reading contributes to the doxa of a culture of reading resulting in improved reading results. This justification further reinforces the narrative that blame can be apportioned to educators for poor reading achievements without the DBE adequately acknowledging contextual realities. In 2015, many of the challenges to the education system that were present when previous initiatives to promote a culture of reading were implemented were still present. Yet no explanation was apparent as to how past initiatives that had not achieved the desired outcomes would now succeed.

The association between reading levels and the existence of a culture of reading was again confirmed with the DBE's launch of Read to Lead in 2015. The campaign, originally scheduled from 2015-2019, remains in existence in 2023. The campaign aims to:

> improve the reading abilities of all South African children whilst the main aim of the campaign is to ensure that all learners are able to demonstrate age appropriate levels of reading by 2019… The Campaign calls on a variety of partners and stakeholders to engage in developing and maintaining a reading culture. (Department of Basic Education, 2016b, no pagination)

For decades, the majority of South African children have been taught in an education system with undeniable systemic inequalities and inadequate attention to linguistic diversity. It is incomprehensible that, in just four years, these inequalities could be addressed, especially when many of the areas of focus of the campaign have been previously unsuccessful in previous campaigns and strategies.

In presenting Read to Lead's main objective as improving the reading abilities of all children, there is a further shift away from Masifunde Sonke and its focus on South Africans of all

ages reading. Read to Lead refers to the importance of parents, communities and educators' own reading practices, but this is in relation to contributing to children's reading practices and achievements (Department of Basic Education, 2019c).

In 2015, Motshekga (2015b) reinstituted Drop All and Read under the umbrella of Read to Lead. This was despite the lack of any evidence of the 2008 campaign succeeding in its effort to "raise literacy levels and improve the ability of learners to learn" (Department of Education, 2008, p. 15). The 2015 campaign was again in response to poor reading levels. It referenced adults' reading practices but this was in terms of parents' contributions to reading and not all adults. Drop All and Read was implemented by the DBE to address that "South Africa does not have a reading culture." At the campaign launch, Motshekga (2015b) stated:

> we hope [the] Drop all and Read Campaign will help children and adults to rediscover the joys of reading while raising awareness for those without access to education… At the heart of this campaign is that all our schools have been advised through a circular to observe at least 30 minutes per week of mandatory reading as part of this programme… Our ultimate prize is to make Drop All and Read Campaign a regular established part of both children and parents' daily routine. (no pagination)

In this extract and with the re-introduction of Drop All and Read, the need for government to reflect more critically on its reading strategies emerges. Any culture depends on regular practices (wa Thiong'o, 1981). The suggestion that the "ultimate prize" of "reading being a regular part of children and their parents' routine" can be achieved from 30 minutes of reading per week demonstrates a lack of insight that, for a culture of reading to exist, it would need to be embedded in more regular school and home practices. Furthermore, although the "ultimate prize" was parents and children strengthening their reading practices, there is no elucidation of how a weekly 30-minute reading period during the school day would translate into improved parental reading practices. Additionally, with the "heart of this campaign" being in schools, the hope that the campaign will "rais[e] awareness for those without access to education" (Motshekga, 2015b) is fundamentally flawed. If the campaign is situated primarily in schools, anyone without access to schools is immediately excluded.

In expanding on the rationale for reinstituting Drop All and Read, Motshekga (2015b) described the weekly campaign as "the most important operation in the basic education sector" (no pagination). It is untenable that such value is attached to a weekly 30-minute reading campaign when, seven years previously, the implementation of a daily 30-minute Drop All and Read campaign provided no clear benefits. Of further concern is that, in order to meet this "most important operation," a circular sent to schools by the DBE was the only guidance or training received. There is no guarantee that distributing a circular will result in all educators being informed of the campaign and no reference to what materials are to be used for the campaign. With only a single document, schools received no obvious ongoing support in implementing the campaign. In this example, the need for the DBE to offer improved, targeted in-service teacher training is highlighted. The DBE's decision to re-implement Drop All and Read*,* despite it having previously achieved no evident impact, and despite the clear restrictions schools face in implementing the campaign, portrays the DBE as unable or unwilling to evaluate or identify contextually appropriate responses to teaching and promoting reading in South Africa.

In tracing the three campaigns and the shifts in reading discourses, there is a lack of evaluation of previous efforts and an absence of critique as to how the policies and strategies put in place translated into reality. Masifunde Sonke, National Reading Strategy and Read to Lead were implemented under the three ministers of education who have served in that position since 1999. The risk resulting from all three ministers' promotion of a culture of reading is that, because of the economic and institutional capital held by national government, this rhetoric comes to be unquestioned and unexamined, existing as a doxa (Bourdieu, 1991).

This doxa is evident in how a focus on a culture of reading has assumed prominence as a solution to reading levels across society, including in the media and academic scholarship (Bharuthram, 2017; Currin & Pretorius, 2010; Ebrahim, 2018), and in the vision and objectives expressed by many NGOs and in the media's explanations for poor reading performance by South African children. This has resulted in the extensive attention to a culture of reading being legitimised, allowing for the government to continue to position a

culture of reading as central to policies and strategies with limited criticism for not meeting its stipulated outcomes.

In further demonstrating this attention to reading levels, in the second part of this chapter I refer to specific examples that illustrate the government's consistent promotion of a culture of reading. As a starting point, I problematise the government's articulation, or lack thereof, of what constitutes a culture of reading and its reasoning as to how the existence of a culture of reading would function to the benefit of the South African reading landscape.

## 5.3 A government definition of "culture of reading"?

In 2015, Motshekga (2015a) provided a detailed explanation for the promotion of a culture of reading where she referred to international research on the establishment and existence of a culture of literacy. This was the first instance of any department or official providing a detailed explanation of a culture of reading. It is problematic that, since 2000, the government had devoted considerable resources and time to promoting a culture of reading without defining the term or explaining how this informed its rationale for its consistent promotion of a culture of reading. When Motshekga (2015a) explained the rationale for promoting of a culture of reading, it was drawn from:

> a huge body of research that concludes that the main thrust of literacy development is the promotion of a school-wide reading culture which encourages learners to become engaged and motivated readers. (para. 17)

The seven bodies of research she referred to in this speech were all produced in the Global North. For example, the definition she presented of a culture of literacy emanated from research conducted by the IRA (International Reading Association), IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) and CAL (US Center for Applied Linguistics) – bodies located in the Global North. Presenting a definition of a culture of literacy based on Global North literature and applying it to South Africa does not account for centuries of colonialism, linguistic diversity and the beliefs held by South Africans about literacy. Problematically, by drawing on Global North practices and epistemologies, the government replicates reading strategies developed in contexts largely different from the South African education field.

In his extensive research on a culture of reading in Rwanda, Ruterana (2012b) concluded that literacy development and a culture of reading cannot "be logically separated from the particular social, cultural and historical milieu in which they take place" (p. 28). His finding demonstrates that, if the DBE is committed to being "sensitive to issues of diversity," (Department of Basic Education, 2011a, p. 5) as CAPS states, a greater willingness to draw on contextually appropriate research and experiences is crucial. By not doing so, the criticism levelled at the DBE for continuing to perpetuate colonial ideologies and narratives, and not considering alternative approaches within the field of basic education (Christie & Monyokolo, 2018; Mahabeer, 2020; Mgqwashu, 2019) is substantiated. The result of this is explored further in Chapter 6.

With the absence of a definition or clear explanation of the term "culture of reading" as it relates to the South African context, the government has been able to repackage campaigns and efforts to promote a culture of reading without clearly evaluating what has previously been achieved or justifying a continued focus on a concept that has provided no clear outcomes. The fluidity of the term "culture" is such that it is to be expected that there will be many meanings attached to "culture of reading" and shifts in these meanings. Consequently, where the creation or existence of a culture of reading forms part of policy and strategic planning, a definition localised to that context that then informs how these strategies and policies are to be implemented and carried out is necessary.

In reflecting on government's articulation and promotion of a culture of reading, I present specific examples that demonstrate its understanding of the reading landscape and its efforts to address the country's literacy crisis.

## 5.4 The role of the school and educators

It is repeatedly asserted by the government that educators' and schools' promotion of reading practices is essential for a culture of reading. With the amount of time that children spend in school, this is not disputed, and it is the role of the school to create a field that best facilitates learners' reading practices. However, in Section 5.2 I highlighted how the extent to which educators and schools are expected to assume responsibility works as misrecognition, creating a doxic narrative that allows for unfair apportioning in the level of

blame that is placed on the majority of educators in terms of the field in which they are teaching.

Since 2014, the government's centring of a culture of reading as measurable by improved academic performance and reading levels has increased in frequency (Department of Basic Education, 2016a, 2017, 2019b, 2019e; Motshekga, 2015b; Nyathi, 2019). This is indicative of the shift to focusing primarily on children's reading practices in relation to education. This is illustrated by Motshekga (2014) in her statement that:

> developing a culture of reading amongst our learners remains a key driver in improving literacy skills such and [*sic*] reading and writing proficiency. The department is developing reading and writing norms and standards that will provide guidelines on the quantity of writing to be done per grade and what is expected in terms of reading ability, for example how many words read per minute to determine fluency per phrase. (no pagination)

Motshekga positions reading as a technical, autonomous practice. This positioning is again clear in a later speech when Motshekga (2015a) described the piloting of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)[9] as part of the DBE's "efforts to promote a culture of reading in schools" (no pagination). Designating such measurements as a sign of successful reading directs attention to instructional practices and assessments focussing only on skills developed in early years. This indicates a misunderstanding of reading as recursive and ongoing.

This position of being able to assess a culture of reading quantitatively situates reading as a neutral, measurable skill-set and misunderstands the complexity of culture. By presenting reading as a universal technical skill that is measurable in age or grade-appropriate levels, and according to reading and writing norms and standards (Department of Basic Education, 2016b; Department of Education, 2008; Motshekga, 2014), the skills associated with reaching these levels become the dominant, universal standards against which all progress can be measured (Stein, 2008; B. Street, 2016a). This has occurred without elucidation of

[9] EGRA is a diagnostic reading test administered to foundation phase learners to test progress in learning to read. It assesses alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension (USAID, 2015).

how providing directives and norms and standards will capacitate educators and schools to achieve such results.

Hardy (2012) states that if a department of education presents literacy as a neutral and scientific practice, it allows for misrecognition of the challenges of addressing inequality in education. By favouring an autonomous model of literacy as a measure of progress, the DBE is again able to minimise the role of social, cultural, and economic factors that influence learners' development as readers. This allows for deflecting responsibility to schools and educators without the DBE necessarily assuming reciprocal accountability (Elmore, 2005) for ensuring that educators have sufficient training, cultural capital and resources available to achieve what is mandated to them.

## 5.5 The need for infrastructure and resources

The DBE's operations are inextricably linked to the annual budget they receive from the national government. With the inequalities that the education system faces, overcoming these inequalities requires a level of economic capital that is not available to them. This does not absolve the DBE from all criticism of not having directed these funds appropriately. Yet the economic pressure on the DBE cannot be ignored. The DBE is honest in the need for partnerships and assistance, as is clear in its calls on civil society, communities and corporates to assist in offering learners the best possible education (Asmal, 2003; Department of Basic Education, 2012, 2014, 2019a). However, it is not possible for all schools to establish such partnerships and there remain many schools unable to access the assistance required to secure additional resources.

In my analysis of Saxon Primary's culture of reading, the role of the library features prominently. For this reason, to demonstrate how the government's and the DBE's calls for a culture of reading reveal this disconnection of contextual realities from what is expected of schools; I use the government's emphasis on school libraries as an example. In promoting a culture of reading, government has consistently stressed the importance of school libraries and of children having access to books, particularly in their home languages (Asmal, 2003; Department of Education, 2008; Government Communication and Information System, 2018).

The DBE's (2012) *National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services* stipulate:

> A key function of the school library is to promote a culture of reading. The School Library and Information Service should provide access to material in all languages, especially those in use at the school. (pp. 8-9)

Such stipulations require an array of resources and securing these resources is a major challenge facing many schools. The DBE has not provided all schools with library infrastructure or access to sufficient resources to support library and information services, and acquisition of such resources requires accessing alternative funding sources (Equal Education Law Centre, 2022). In continuing to stress how schools can promote libraries, the *National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services* (Department of Basic Education, 2012) advise that, where centralised school libraries do not exist, classroom libraries can contribute to the school's culture of reading. The guidelines state:

> the teacher must be trained to manage the resources, trained in information literacy to ensure the meaningful use of the resources and the development of information literacy skills, and also be trained in literature promotion. Classrooms obtain their material from various sources, e.g. the DBE, the provincial Departments of Education, NGOs, donations, etc. (p. 13)

Training all educators in a school in this regard is a major undertaking. It is not stipulated how this can be achieved and there is no clear designation of who is responsible for this training. The absence of provision for this training provides an example of how, without educators receiving adequate in-service training, learners' opportunities to benefit from resources can be curtailed. Additionally, the statement "classrooms obtain their material from various sources" highlights an unsubstantiated assumption that schools can obtain resources. There are schools who are able to source materials from external partners such as NGOs if the DBE and provincial departments of education do not provide these materials. Such collaborations with NGOs are critical but there are insufficient materials and financial resources available for all schools to be adequately resourced. Ten years since publishing the *National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services* (Department of Basic Education, 2012), such resources remain absent from many schools and schools are reliant on class readers, textbooks and DBE workbooks for their materials. Where these are the

only materials present, the link between reading and academic performance is emphasised and the potential enjoyment derived from regularly being able to read books that appeal to learners is threatened.

This expectation that schools must establish libraries and, where this is not possible, classroom libraries, is repeated in Read to Lead with requirements such as "in the classrooms there should be evidence of… plenty of books on display in the reading corner" to promote a culture of reading. Included in these expectations was a repetition of the statement "classrooms obtain their material from various sources, e.g. the DBE, the provincial Departments of Education, NGOs, donations, etc." (Department of Basic Education, 2019e, no pagination). It is not only the presumption of available materials that is problematic. Expectations that "plenty of books on display" contribute to a culture of reading are not accompanied by recognition that books alone are not sufficient for a culture of reading to exist. This is because the existence of a culture of reading depends on having access to texts that are in the appropriate language, at a level accessible to children, and with content that evokes their interest (Nkomo, 2017; Ruterana, 2012b). The government's ongoing emphasis on the importance of school and classroom libraries loses value when it has not offered the majority of schools the necessary support to establish and maintain libraries. Consistently returning to the school's role in securing materials draws attention away from the DBE's progress in providing suitable resources. Family and community participation

## 5.6 Family and community participation

The role of parents in encouraging children's reading practices has circulated in South Africa over the previous two decades (Asmal, 2003; Department of Arts and Culture & National Council for Library and Information Services, 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2019d; Department of Education, 2008; Mthethwa, 2019). Motshekga's call (Department of Basic Education, 2017) on parents at a community event in 2017 is an example of this. She stated:

> Adult people should be role models as avid readers to inspire young people to develop a passion for reading… We have to stand up and promote reading in our homes to help our

> children to read books daily. It is critical that our children read for pleasure and for information to improve their literacy skills. (no pagination)

It is when an individual is exposed to and adopts the beliefs and practices held by a specific culture that they are inculcated into this culture. Parental role modelling from a young age is valuable in developing their children's reading habitus (Mda, 2017; Ruterana, 2012b). The government's and Motshekga's calls on adult family members to promote reading in the home reflect an awareness of this. Yet these statements rely on unsubstantiated, universal assumptions of the availability of resources, parents' own reading levels, that parents have been provided opportunities to develop reading practices valued by the curriculum, and that parents have the time necessary to provide support when economic survival often dominates daily existence (Chetty, 2019a; H. Hofmeyr, 2018; Witten & Makole, 2018). Motshekga's speech (Department of Basic Education, 2017) included one of the few instances of the DBE acknowledging that not all parents can read. She advised these parents to have their children read to them. What remained absent, however, was attention to the many other community and home literacy practices such as oral storytelling, imaginative play and rhyme, which can contribute to strengthening school-based reading practices (S. le Roux, 2016; R. Sibanda & Kajee, 2019).

These normative assumptions that parents should enact such reading practices in their homes, regardless of contextual realities, minimises the many other ways in which parents can contribute to their children's literacy practices. Of particular importance is how oral storytelling assists with developing a love for stories, evoking the imagination and introducing children to sequencing, practices that all contribute to one's development as a reader (Bloch, 2008; S. le Roux, 2016; Sisulu, 1999). There is a strong tradition of oral storytelling in South Africa and encouraging parents to draw on this tradition offers much benefit to children. By giving inadequate recognition to other literacy practices and their value, school literacy practices may "spill over and partly colonize the literacy practices" at home (Prinsloo, 2005, p. 24). The result is that parents are placed in a deficit position and criticised for their lack of dedication to their children's education. The consequent risk is that, rather than home-school-community collaborations flourishing, disconnection among stakeholders decreases the possibilities for South Africans of all ages to strengthen their literacy and reading practices.

## 5.7 Conclusion

For 20 years, the government has recycled and repackaged time and cost-intensive initiatives centred on an assumed, shared understanding of the practices that need to be in place for a culture of reading to exist. In the early years of democracy, a focus on creating a unified state was evident across all sectors and throughout government discourse. This was reflected in Masifunde Sonke, where the promotion of a culture of reading functioned to encourage all South Africans to unite in efforts to increase literacy levels and read for the purposes of formal learning, enjoyment and knowledge acquisition. Since then, there has been a narrowing focus with a culture of reading functioning as a means of addressing poor reading results at basic education level. References to adults' reading practices have shifted to how they can contribute to their children's development as readers, rather than to how their reading practices may contribute to their own daily lives. Throughout these shifts in how the term functions, the government has relied on the assumption that the programmes and initiatives that they have put in place are crucial to establishing a culture of reading that will in turn strengthen basic education. This is despite there being little to no localised evidence that these efforts have translated into improved academic performance.

The constant dependency on a culture of reading, a term originating in the Global North, demonstrates a government and an education department that have failed to delink (Mignolo, 2007) from Global North epistemologies and ways and thinking of doing. Instead, the government relies on assumptions about the presence of materials, economic resources, home-school-community relationships, community cohesion and practices outlined in Global North scholarship (Bridges, 2014; Fletcher et al., 2012; Kennedy et al., 2012; Phillips et al., 2017) that do not always hold in the South African context.

This chapter has demonstrated how, due to its institutional capital, the DBE's longstanding focus on a culture of reading has resulted in a doxa across the field of education that any efforts towards a culture of reading will act to the benefit of South African learners. This is despite the absence of a common understanding of a culture of reading that relates to the South African context. This doxa results in misrecognition where the government's narratives surrounding a culture of reading conceal the realities of the South African field of education and the government's role and responsibility in shaping this field. As a result,

learners nationwide remain disadvantaged by an education system that has not sufficiently acknowledged the historical and current social and economic conditions that shape their development as readers.

In the second part of this thesis, I analysis how the strategies and policies that the DBE has formulated with regard to reading and education translate from the national field of education to the contextual realities of implementation in an individual school. By exploring Saxon Primary's culture of reading from a socio-cultural perspective, I demonstrate how the school's reading practices cannot be isolated from the local context in which they occur or from the structures of power in the education field that impose specific demands on the school. By analysing Saxon Primary's reading practices in relation to the broader field of education, I show the negative effect of the DBE's favouring of policies and strategies that are better suited to education fields in the Global North.

# CHAPTER 6: THE INFLUENCE OF OVERLAPPING FIELDS

No practice can be understood in isolation from where it occurs and the factors leading to the practice. As Bourdieu (1990b) explains:

> Practices cannot be deduced either from the present conditions which may seem to have provoked them or from the past conditions which have produced the habitus, the durable principle of their production. (p. 56)

It is because of this that analysing practices requires examining the interrelationship of "the social conditions in which the habitus that generated them was constituted, to the social conditions in which it is implemented" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 56). Every school is situated in broader society. A school's autonomy and its agency to act in implementing specific practices that align to the beliefs and ideologies held by school members exist only in relation to what the broader society and overlapping fields allow for (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Hartman & Albright, 2018). Any response to my second research question – "What shapes a culture of reading in a South African no-fee primary school?" – must therefore meet my research aim of establishing the effects of external factors and overlapping fields on the school's culture of reading. This chapter is centred on how four overlapping fields shape learners' reading practices and consequently the school's culture of reading. However, because a school's culture of reading is affected by its culture of teaching and learning, I include, where relevant, how overlapping fields affect teaching and learning.

My model for a culture of teaching and learning presented in Chapter 3 (Figure 3.1) identified the four overlapping fields that most influence teaching and learning: (*a*) the

overall field of education, (*b*) civil society, (*c*) the surrounding community and (*d*) the home environment. My data analysis indicated that it is these same overlapping fields that affect the culture of reading. I discuss each overlapping field individually in this chapter. This does not negate that these four overlapping fields influence each other, but it provides a clearer structure for the chapter.

## 6.1 The larger field of education

With the advent of democracy in 1994 came dreams of a single education system that would provide high standards of education to all children. The ongoing divides in the South African education system demonstrate that these dreams remain unmet and the bimodal education system that Fleisch first referred to in 2008 continues to exist (Christie, 2020; Fleisch, 2008; Köhler, 2022; van der Berg & Gustafsson, 2019). Saxon Primary is a no-fee, school designated for Coloured learners under Apartheid, and its academic results reflect this bimodal distribution. According to the deputy principal, Ms Klaasen (LL/08.11.2019), Saxon Primary results typically average below 30% in Grade 3 and Grade 6 provincial systemic literacy and mathematics assessments.

The overhaul of an education system or any alterations to this system cannot succeed without accounting for the socio-cultural realities in the field of education and the historical events that shaped this field (Bourdieu, 1971a). This requires that curriculum designers, educators and evaluators account for learners' linguistic diversity and the literacy repertoires that learners bring to school. In Chapter 5, I drew attention to how successful reading policies and strategies have to account for reading being inextricably connected to the social, cultural and power dynamics in which these practices occur (B. Street, 1988) and I demonstrated how the government has fallen short in addressing the contextual realities of a multilingual and divided education system. This dismissal of contextual realities is apparent in how the policies and curricula that the DBE has implemented since 1994 have failed to respond to the context in which most South African teaching and learning occurs (bua-lit collective, 2018; Muller & Hoadley, 2019). This dismissal has reproduced the symbolic violence enduring from Apartheid and language, race, and socio-economic

background continue to shape potential success at school and access to quality education (Guzula, 2022).

The negative outcome of this dismissal is evident in Bourdieu's (1974) writings on the school acting as a "conservative force," a description that holds for an education field in its entirety. He contends:

> To penalize the underprivileged and favour the most privileged, the school has only to neglect, in its teaching methods and techniques, and its criteria when making academic judgements, to take into account the cultural inequalities between children of different social classes. In other words, by treating all pupils, however unequal they may be in reality, as equal in rights and duties, the educational system is led to give its *de facto* sanction to initial cultural inequalities. (pp. 37-38, italics in original)

This is clear at Saxon Primary, where learners remain affected by many of the inequalities and social consequences inherited from Apartheid that continue to dominate their lives, as I demonstrate in detail in Sections 6.3 and 6.4. This is in terms of how their parents' own education has shaped their involvement with their children's schooling and how poor socio-economic living conditions negatively affect learners' wellbeing and consequently success at school. Added to this is how many learners are taught in English even though they are still developing competency in the language. In describing the challenges that they face in implementing the curriculum and how this prohibits effective teaching, educators referred specifically to CAPS being a curriculum that provides no space for teaching multilingual classes and that is not socially or culturally appropriate to their learners (LL/Ms Adams/08.03/2019; LL/Ms Daniels/12.06.2019; LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019; LL/Ms Prince/02.08.2019). Their complaints align to the extensive critique that CAPS represents Anglonormative and Western ideologies that act to disadvantage learners' success at school (Chetty, 2019a; Christie, 2020; Schollar, 2018).

The South African LiEP assigns responsibility for individual schools' language policies to school governing bodies (SGB) (Department of Education, 1997b). This decision has to meet national departmental laws that require learners take at least two languages, the LoLT and one other official language, and that learners need to pass both these languages as a requirement for grade promotion. School language policies often reflect the language

spoken by the majority of learners at the school. However, there are schools who elect to adopt English as the LoLT from foundation phase level even if it is spoken as a home language by no or a minority of learners. This is frequently an economic decision to increase enrolment numbers and attract parents to the school due to the linguistic capital parents believe their children will derive from being taught in English (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Mohohlwane, 2019).

This was a decision made by Saxon Primary's SGB. Until 2000, the LoLT was Afrikaans with English taught as an additional language. Due to the pressure to increase enrolment numbers to obtain additional departmental budget, a switch to English as the LoLT was introduced. This was to attract isiXhosa-speaking learners whose parents wished to educate them in English from the foundation phase. English is now the LoLT with Afrikaans taught as a first additional language. There is no provision for isiXhosa in the timetable.

Saxon Primary educators demonstrated respect for learners' various home languages and a desire to create a linguistically inclusive field. However, as Ms Gabriel, Ms Klaasen and Ms Meyer expressed, they struggled to manage the tension between their belief that learners should not be excluded due to their language and their professional responsibility to complete the curriculum and equip learners with the necessary English skills for them to succeed academically LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019; LL/Ms Klaasen/08.11.2029; LL/Ms Meyer/18.10.2019).

Most learners who speak Afrikaans as a home language speak Kaaps. They enter school expected to assimilate into a linguistic field that requires speaking and writing in so-called Standard English. The Kaaps-speaking learners I interacted with generally communicated well in English. However, the variety of English that they speak is often interspersed with Kaaps phrases and linguistic aspects that differ from Standard English. Dyers (2016) criticises the government for language policies that "may emphasize multilingualism but are in fact based on monolingual models which give no acknowledgement to the linguistic hybridity and languaging of ordinary people, like the speakers of Kaaps" (p. 69). This lack of acknowledgement of linguistic hybridity is a constraining factor on Saxon Primary educators who are teaching a curriculum that is directed to speakers of Standard English. At Saxon Primary I observed only one learner who spoke Standard English as a home language, yet all

learners were expected to learn in this variety. With educators struggling to manage the tension between the languages and language varieties that learners spoke and Standard English, before learners even begin their education they are placed in linguistic deficit. With their clearly being many factors at play that influence learners' reading practices, in this field, learners' poor academic performance cannot be attributed purely to inadequate cognitive skills, poor teaching, or a lack of interest in learning or reading.

The DBE acknowledges that when learners are denied opportunities for learning as a result of language policy, grasping basic literacy and numeracy skills is difficult and results in ongoing learning struggles as they move to higher grades (Motshekga, 2017). This acknowledgement has not translated to adequate provision for educators to support learners at foundation phase level who are taught in an additional language. This constraint, in addition to educators feeling unable to support learners with other learning needs, results in many learners not receiving necessary assistance to overcome gaps in learning. At Saxon Primary, the number of learners who do not meet end-of-year assessment criteria for promotion to the next grade is normally higher than the number of learners who can repeat the grade if classes are to be capped at 40 learners. Consequently, annually, numerous learners are progressed to the following grade without having met promotion requirements (LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019; LL/Ms Lawrence/22.07.2019). [10] Ms Adams (LL/08.03.2019) referred to the "problem of learners going to the next grade without the necessary intervention or skills because you can't have 25 kids repeating" and there is "not really a chance [to address this]." Ms Adams added that when this occurs, it becomes "too overwhelming for teachers in higher grades to support all struggling children."

As a result of the tensions between CAPS and the realities of teaching at Saxon Primary, educators report consistently battling to cover a packed curriculum with content that holds little interest to their learners. Ms Adams (LL/08.03.2019) and Ms Lawrence (LL/22.07.2019) complained that they are forced to rush through the curriculum and focus on preparing learners for assessments. This provides insufficient time to foster independent learning skills or assist individual learners, possibilities that are available to educators based in better-

[10] The term "learner progression" refers to learners who are promoted the next grade without having met the requirements for promotion.

resourced schools. Ms Adams' and Ms Lawrence's complaints demonstrate that the ways in which educators feel forced to implement classroom practices may be at odds with the dispositions that shape their pedagogical habitus. The result is a restructuring of their pedagogical habitus that prohibits them from drawing on their institutional capital in ways that could better benefit their learners' development as readers and their academic progress.

Adding to these challenges is that, due to financial pressure, Saxon Primary is required to accept any learners who apply to the school. This is because the government's distribution of budget includes a subsidy for each learner (Taylor & Hoadley, 2018). Mr Willemse explained that as Saxon Primary has historically had low enrolment and a reputation as a *skollie*[11] school, parents living in Saxon prefer to enrol their children at more academically successful schools in the community. These schools can be "more selective" when accepting learners, while Saxon Primary "will accept anyone" to increase government subsidies. He believes this is a major reason for Saxon Primary struggling to recruit educators and underperforming in comparison to neighbouring schools (DD/Mr Willemse/08.03.2019).

The shaping of any field occurs through "a critical mediation between the practices of those who partake of it and the surrounding social and economic conditions" (Wacquant in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 105). Although there are undeniable constraints placed on Saxon Primary by the field of education (as well as by other overlapping fields), this mediation offers numerous ways in which Saxon Primary can respond to these constraints. These multiple possibilities are apparent in the 2007 and 2017 *Schools that Work* reports (Christie et al., 2007; NEEDU, 2017) which revealed that, nationwide, there are no-fee schools that are high-performing and have responded successfully to the many potential constraints and difficulties the current field of education places on them. These schools operate in contexts that are similar to or potentially worse than Saxon Primary. Although the reports focus on high schools, the schools' successes showcase that there are various ways that schools can mitigate the challenges presented by the education field.

It remains the case, however, that any government school is bound to the curriculum and has to adhere to government policies. Until there is a closer link between the contextual

[11] Skollie: gangster/thug (translation from Afrikaans).

reality and the expectations placed on schools, many schools, including Saxon Primary, are poorly positioned to succeed in field of education. This is articulated by Christie and Monyokolo (2018) in their warning against assigning responsibility too heavily on schools for poor performance. They state:

> while schools and teachers are often held responsible for poor learning outcomes, reciprocal accountability surely requires that the education department and its curriculum and assessment policies are also seen as having some responsibility for inequitable student outcomes. It is important to recognise that there are limits to what can be achieved under current conditions in the majority of (fee free) schools. (p. 260)

This need for the government to assume reciprocal accountability was shown in Chapter 5 in how the expectations that the DBE placed on schools in their calls for a culture of reading to improve literacy and language performance (Department of Basic Education, 2016b) were unrealistic in relation to the South African context. Prinsloo (2021) criticises the DBE for all curricula since 1994 being created in a "policy bubble disconnected from the realities of classroom practice" (p. 2). This is apparent at Saxon Primary where the resources available to the school, the multilingual learner body, and the lack of governmental support to meet learners' social and additional needs place unrealistic pressure on educators and learners to succeed in meeting the teaching and learning requirements stipulated by the DBE. While there are a variety of ways in which schools can respond to the field of education, ultimately, the current field of education fails to address the many limitations as to what no-fee schools such as Saxon Primary can achieve.

## 6.2 Civil society

During Apartheid, NGOs played an activist role in fighting against White minority rule. Since 1994, there has been a marked increase in the number of NGOs dedicated to service delivery and to addressing the impact of centuries of rule that denied the majority of the population access to basic human rights (Habib & Taylor, 1999; Volmink & van der Elst, 2019). Many of these NGOs operate in the field of education. These NGOs and other members of civil society have contributed to creating potential for improvements in education in many ways, including establishing infrastructure such as computer laboratories

and libraries, introducing new resources into schools, placing volunteers or additional staff in schools, and upskilling educators.

There are three schools in the nearby wealthy southern suburbs which have partnered with Saxon Primary as part of their outreach programmes. There are NGOs that have involvement in the school in areas such as creating food gardens and leadership development. The two partnerships that are relevant to my research are with Mfunqule, a literacy NGO that supports at-risk Grade 2 and Grade 3 learners twice a week with reading and writing, and Funda Fun, an NGO that establishes and assists schools in running libraries. Both of these NGOs have a fulltime staff member employed at the school. Educators consistently referred to the role that these two NGOs have played in promoting reading.

Mfunqule is appreciated by educators because the individual attention it offers is not possible in a classroom of 40 learners (LL/Ms Klaasen/08.11.2019; LL/Ms Lawrence/22.07.2019; LL/Ms Lewis/12.06.2019). The contribution Mfunqule adds across the school results from the centre manager Kate Smythe's dedication to creating possibilities for reading across the school. Mr Willemse (LL/01.08.2019) considers her to be a key reading champion in the school, both in her official role as centre manager but also in additional contributions she makes to the school. Most notably, she spearheaded the establishment of the school library in 2017 and was responsible for connecting the school and Funda Fun. She undertook this because she, with the backing of Mfunqule:

> just saw a huge need to have a library, to access not just reading for pleasure but for instruction and stimulation, and so we helped to get funding and collaborated with Funda Fun to get a library, a functioning library in the school. (LL/Kate Smythe/15.10.2019)

The DBE (2019e) states that schools should ensure that "[t]he school library is at the **heart of the school's reading culture**" (no pagination, emphasis in original). As I detailed in the previous chapter, the DBE cannot provide all schools with the necessary resources required to establish, stock and staff libraries, and it falls to schools themselves to establish and staff libraries. However, no-fee (and many fee-paying) schools do not have sufficient economic capital to do so. It is only with assistance and funding from external organisations that Saxon Primary's library's existence and the hiring of a library assistant is possible.

Funda Fun employs a library assistant to work in each library it establishes. This is necessary for the library to be open during teaching time because the DBE does not provide a budget for a fulltime library staff member. Ms Daniels, the library assistant, is responsible for managing the library and all learners attend weekly 30-minute library periods that she conducts. She does not hold a librarianship or teaching qualification but received introductory librarianship training and attends monthly workshops facilitated by Funda Fun.

There are approximately 4 000 books in the library, of which at least 95% are in English. The school was not consulted in selecting the books and this was led by an employer at the organisation's head office. The result of this lack of consultation was that when Ms Daniels (LL/12.06.2019) assumed her role "there was a lot of those books not suitable for the kids." By not engaging with schools in selecting books, the potential for books to operate as objectified capital is threatened. The books that are available respond to a wide range of interests but reflect the dominance of the Global North book industry and that Funda Fun relies heavily on book donations from overseas organisations. The impact of Funda Fun's dependency on these donations and its lack of selection processes has resulted in many library books going unread. The consequence of this is that if learners struggle to find books that relate to their interest, they are less likely to use the library and the benefit that the library could provide is reduced. In stipulating to schools the number of books they will receive, rather than focusing on consulting the schools and providing a more select but appropriate selection of books, the colonial ideology that under-resourced schools should be grateful for any assistance is perpetuated.

In discussing book selection, I asked Salma Arendse (LL/11.06.2019), the library support co-ordinator for Funda Fun, if at Saxon Primary "where all three of the major Western Cape languages are spoken, is there an effort to bring Afrikaans books in and Xhosa books in?" Her response was indicative of the widely-reported struggle by schools and organisations to access books in languages other than English. She responded, "We do try. Unfortunately there is a shortage of Xhosa books." Since Funda Fun was established in 2010, this has been an ongoing, major struggle. They have held strong partnerships with Book Dash, Nal'ibali and Biblionef but, these resources cannot reach all libraries. Funda Fun has worked hard to address this but, as Salma (LL/11.06.2019) concluded, "We do have a shortage of other

languages that we are trying our utmost to fix but unfortunately to no avail at this moment." Ms Daniels (LL/12.06.2019) states that there are a few children that do take Afrikaans and isiXhosa books home. Yet the number of books available to learners, especially isiXhosa books, is very limited. In discussing what books they prefer reading, I asked Bongi and Khethi:

> Do you ever read books in isiXhosa?
> Khethi: No. There no books in Xhosa [in the classroom]. There are also Xhosa books in the library.
> Claire: And do you take any of those?
> Khethi: NO!
> Bongi: No, no, no.
> Claire: Why not?
> Bongi: They are boring! (FGA/24.07.2019)

For this reason, most learners prefer to select English books as there is a wider choice of books. Figure 6.1 is a picture of the Afrikaans and isiXhosa books available, indicating the limited choice of books in both languages. The social capital of English is magnified by the number of English resources that enable access to a wider range of materials that meet various interests and reading levels. This dominance of English books perpetuates the privileging of English and the devaluing of the linguistic capital that isiXhosa and Afrikaans speakers have accumulated outside of school.




**Figure 6.1 Afrikaans and isiXhosa books**

The construction and stocking of a school library will not, in itself, influence reading practices. A library's full benefit will only be realised when it is used regularly, library users are able to access support from a librarian or assistant, and all educators and learners can browse, read and borrow books. A significant constraint on learners accessing resources is that only Grade 3-7 learners are allowed to borrow books because Ms Daniels (LL/12.06.2019) anticipates younger learners will damage books. It is through encounters with various texts that we develop specific reading dispositions and that the possibility for accumulating embodied reading capital exists. By restricting Grade R to 2 learners' access to books, potential for library books to serve as objectified capital and contribute to learners' accumulation of embodied reading capital is lost.

Ms Daniels' exception to this decision is that she allows Grade 2 learners she identifies as strong readers to borrow books. When learners return books Ms Daniels will ask questions about the books. This is because:

> I don't want them to take books out then not understand what they reading or sometimes just look at the pictures and close the book. They must take books our for their own benefit, books that they want to read, maybe ask their parents to help them but it's for them. (LL/Ms Daniels/12.06.2019)

This requirement dismisses the variety of ways in which learners engage with and draw meaning from reading materials (Freebody, 1992), and situates reading as an academic activity. Ms Daniels' decision to allows a select group of Grade 2 learners to borrow books is indicative of how identifying someone as a reader often aligns to school reading levels. Literacy practices are always embedded in structures of power. Ms Daniels's decision to grant only some learners access to books reinforces the traditional Western hierarchical structure that identifies learners who meet certain reading levels as "better" readers (Scherer, 2016; J. Street & Street, 1995) and more deserving of further possibilities for reading. The impact of this is that, from early grades, there is already a divide drawn between children who are identified as weak and strong readers. In Section 8.2.1, I show how detrimental it is to learners' reading identities and dispositions when they identify themselves as "bad" readers, based on their achievement in class.

Outside of library periods, there are no set opening hours. At break, learners are expected to play outside. Ms Daniels is not required to open the library before or after school but explained that she often does so to provide learners an opportunity to take out books (LL/12.06.2019). This is not according to a formal schedule and learners cannot rely on it being open or organise to remain after school to visit the library. Additionally when it is open, many learners either rely on transport that leaves immediately after school or have to walk home with peers for safety reasons.

Although Ms Daniels reported opening the library outside of school hours, on the four occasions before school and two occasions after school that I attempted to visit the library in 2019, it was locked. Learners complained that in 2019, the library was open much less frequently than in 2018 (FGA/Bongi/26.02.2019; PPA/Cleo/27.02.2019). Robyn's (LLA/27.02.2019) complaint – "I used to go but now, nowadays when I always go then Ms Daniels is always not there, at the end of the day" – showed this decreased frequency. There were learners, however, who referred to visiting the library outside of school hours (FGA/Mandla/24.07.2019; FGA/Sofia/19.02.2019; FGA/Xavier/19.02.2019) indicating that, although not as frequently as previously, there remain opportunities to visit the library. Ms Adams (LL/23.08.2019) confirmed this, stating that learners enjoy attending the library and "lots [of her learners] seem to go to the library in the morning." If Bianca (PPA/04.03.2019) arrives early for school, "sometimes I go by Ms Daniels then I fetch books for me then my mommy like read to me like if I go to bed." This statement draws attention to how, for learners who can access the school library, its existence has created possibilities for reading outside of school that may not previously have been available.

A culture of reading depends on regular reading events. The library's establishment and educators' dedication to ensuring learners attend library periods has created a weekly opportunity for reading outside the classroom and in a less academic field. In their library periods, Grade 1s listen to Ms Daniels read stories, and this story time is often followed by drawing activities related to storylines. Learners do not handle books but it provides a regular reading event, outside of the classroom and that is not centred on reading instruction.

The Grade 5s are split into two groups for library periods, with Group A learners being higher-achieving readers. Activities for Group A and B are often different. All Group B learners I interviewed were enthusiastic about library periods. One of the most common reasons that Group B learners provided for their enjoyment is that they were able to listen to someone read to them (FGA/Mandla/11.02.2019; FGA/Ryan & Warren/04.03.2019; PPA/Lwazi, & Xavier/19.02.2019). Unlike when learners are in the classroom, library periods are not focused on academic performance. Books are a resource that can be discussed and enjoyed in an unpressurised space. The establishment of the library has offered learners a regular reminder that reading does not need to be feared and ensures that conversations around reading exist outside of the classroom.

During library periods, Group A learners often read independently or in pairs. During one library period I observed, they were allowed to browse the shelves and select books independently or with peers (FL/27.02.2019). This event provided a 30-minute period where the library, as a field, provided opportunities for reading and an agency to select books that were not necessarily available to learners. I witnessed a community of readers whose conversations around books presented an example of social reading capital where their interactions created social motivation to read. Albright and Hartman (2018) state that habitus can be expressed through agency in that, in any field, individuals' habitus provide them with a set of specific possibilities that can maintain, constrain or transform their practices. In this library period, learners were provided a set of possibilities that allowed them to realise their enjoyment for reading. The extent of learners' positive reaction to this event is indicative of what I term a "hidden" reading habitus, a reading habitus that only emerges when a field allows for it.

Allowing learners to select books and enjoy them individually or with peers showed the possibilities for the books to serve as objectified capital. While learners were allowed to select books to read during the library period, they were not provided an opportunity to borrow any of these books to take home. This library period was an event that indicated how the resources that have been available since the library's establishment undoubtedly can provide opportunities for learners to access to a wider range of materials. However,

with the library closed at break and with many learners unable to visit the library outside of school hours, these possibilities are reduced.

The benefit of learners selecting their own books was highlighted in the contrast between Group A learners' response to the library period that I have just described and the previous week's session. The previous week, Ms Daniels distributed books to learners with the instruction, "Every one of you is going to get a book. On the note in the book it tells you what pages you are going to read" (FL/20.02.2019). Girls received books from the Rainbow Magic series written by Daisy Meadows and boys received chapter books related to sports. Candice and Bongi (FGA/26.02.2019) were angered that books were prescribed to them, with Candice complaining, "I don't like when she tells you 'Read this'. I don't like fairies, it's not interesting." Bongi agreed stating, "I don't like books about fairies… those books are for Grade 2 and 1." For learners who did enjoy their books, there was no time assigned to take them out so, as with the previous example, they could not build on this enjoyment unless they could visit the library outside of school hours. Later in the year, Candice (FGA/24.07.2017) again expressed her frustration with not being able to choose books at the library, saying: "Actually I don't like to go to the library because you can't pick your own books to read." Her response reveals how detrimental not offering learners the independence to select books can be.

The positive response to the library comes through in learners' descriptions of why they enjoy visiting the library. As someone who stated that she does "not yet" have a favourite book, Bongi is provided with an opportunity to read more widely by the library. She described the library as an "exciting place because it have books to read" (FGA/26.02.2019). Kim (LLA/16.09.2019) appreciates that it is "quiet with lots of books. A person can concentrate on reading." Leigh (LLA/16.09.2019) expressed a similar sentiment saying, "it's quiet, it's very nice" and, because of this, there are "no headaches" while you read. The existence of the library and library periods has ensured that learners across all grades are exposed to books and reading outside of the formal curriculum and classroom. The positive manner in which learners have responded to the library was echoed during interviews with educators who consistently referred to the role of the library in improving learners' interest in reading (LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019; LL/Ms Klaasen/08.11.2019; Ms Prince/19.07.2019). It

has come to be integrated into the school day but, because it receives no funding from the DBE, its survival depends on external partnerships.

Ms Lawrence's statement (LL/22.07.2019) that a culture of reading "wasn't established when I got here [in 2015], there was no culture… It's only now since Funda Fun that things are happening" highlights how introducing a major resource to a field can shift practices over a short period of time. It is only through a partnership between NGOs and the school that the library has been able to makes this contribution. Through this partnership the importance of civil society, as an overlapping field which contributes to possibilities for schools to strengthen their culture of reading, is evident.

There are clear restrictions that decrease the possible extent of the library's impact on learners' reading practices and the school's culture of reading. Notably, Ms Daniels does not have formal librarianship training, access to books is limited and the opening hours prohibit many learners from visiting the library. Silbert and Bitso (2018) state that in the absence of a school librarian, "the placement of library assistants in school libraries enables a level of library functionality, and inculcates into the school environment the possibility of a culture of reading" (p. 149). Ms Daniels' contribution to encouraging reading confirms Silbert's and Bitso's (2018) argument. Despite the restrictions facing the library, its existence has undoubtedly contributed to improved reading practices. This is not only due to a physical structure and the resources it contains but also to the excitement it has generated for many learners. For many learners, the existence of the library has, for the first time, provided them with a safe, quiet field that allows them to engage with books for enjoyment and learning, all elements that can contribute to a culture of reading.

## 6.3 The surrounding community

Saxon is a community that reflects the conditions of many Cape Flats neighbourhoods and the ongoing inequalities that have resulted from centuries of oppression. These include high levels of crime and violence, gangsterism, substance abuse and low employment levels (Pinnock, 2016). Educators' repeated references to how learners' home and community experiences are reflected in the high levels of violence and ill-discipline at school is indicative of Burton and Leoschut's (2013) opinion that schools are microcosms of

communities and that learners will arrive at school carrying the traumas that they have experienced at home and in their communities.

Educators attribute learners' poor discipline and violent behaviour at school largely to learners' exposure to violence and abuse at home and in the community, which has resulted in them adopting similar behaviours (LL/Ms Adams/08.03.2019; LL/Ms Gabriel/12.04.2019; LL/Ms Prince/02.08.2019). South African literature on factors that contribute to the high levels of violence and poor discipline in schools reflects this opinion (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Meyer & Chetty, 2017). As one's first socialisation occurs in the home and surrounding community, if violence is common in these fields, violence can become normalised and an accepted means of responding to any conflict or situations in which learners feel insecure (Meyer & Chetty, 2017; Sliep et al., 2016). These tendencies towards violence will then be transferred to other fields (Zuze et al., 2016). In Section 7.5, I expand on how this has manifested in learners' behaviour.

School violence includes any threats to safety that learners experience when travelling to and from school (Gopal & Collings, 2017). In an interview with Candice and Khethi (PPA/24.07.2019), they described their daily trips to and from school. Candice explains that she never goes to the library before school because she waits for her friend to leave home "because I don't want to walk alone." Khethi related the fear she experiences on her daily 600 metre walk from the nearest bus stop:

> Khethi: I walk alone through the blocks.[12] I'm scared, but I am *actually* scared…
> Candice: Yho *(disbelief)*! Do you know it's dangerous *(raises voice)*?
> Khethi: I know. What other choice do I have? (PPA/Khethi/24.07.2019)

Khethi's rhetorical question "What other choice do I have?" reflects an acceptance of the fear she experiences on a daily basis without any expectation of change. Candice's reason for not visiting the school library shows how community violence restricts possibilities for learners to visit the library or be involved in extra-mural activities. Candice is, however, able to access books from the Saxon Public Library as it is in walking distance of her home and her mother accompanies her and her brother there.

[12] The blocks are blocks of flats in what is considered the most dangerous part of Saxon.

The number of Grade 1 and Grade 5 learners who visit the public library with their parents and who have library cards is an indicator that there are many parents who strive to create opportunities for reading for their children. There were various reasons for visiting the library. These included borrowing or reading books in the library, using the computers to search for topics that interested them or for schoolwork, and as a quiet space to study.

At the end of an interview Cleo (PPA/20.02.2019) said to me:

> I wanted to tell Miss Claire, I went to the [Saxon] library yesterday. I took out other books for working on maths, history, life skills. Then I was sitting on the couch and reading with my friend. She asked me how you read in Afrikaans so I read to her in Afrikaans and helped her with the words that she struggled with. Then she read to me *Frozen* in English.

Throughout my fieldwork, Cleo spoke enthusiastically of reading and was quick to read in any spare time. Her description of this reading event shows how the public library served as an enabling field that allowed for her and her friend's reading habitus to operate as reading capital. The access to a comfortable reading space and to books that appealed to them provided social reading capital and they could enjoy books together. Additionally, the institutional reading capital that Cleo had accumulated from her extensive reading in and outside of school presented her friend the possibility to gain assistance with reading in a non-threatening environment outside of school. Robyn's (LLA/27.02.2019) description of the library showed how it presents an alternative space for learners who struggle with disruptions due to noise at home. She explained:

> It's nice and quiet there, because at home there's like TV on, they banging here, they doing this and that here, go to the library, there's no more [noise]. And sometimes the library people can also help you to work, on your projects.

In addition to how the library offered an alternative space in a community where spaces for reading may be restricted, the library has provided children living in Saxon with possibilities to gain help with projects and to access resources. Learners' appreciation for Saxon Public Library and its staff presents an example of how impactful libraries can be in creating alternative safe spaces for reading, and in providing access to reading materials, especially for children who do not have access to materials at home or in school. Learners' discussions

of library visits and reading library books show the potential benefits of the DSAC investing further resources to strengthening existing and establishing new libraries.

While any habitus is founded in an individual's history, it is also shaped by the collective history of one's family, socio-economic background, gender and the community in which one lives (Albright & Hartman, 2018). Accordingly, learners' reading habitus cannot be understood without considering how the home and community fields in which they were raised has influenced this habitus. Ms Lawrence (LL/22.07.2019) demonstrated this importance in her statement that the reasons that many learners struggle with reading are "more than cognitive. It's a social, cultural barrier." She stressed that the impact of multi-generational injustices and of children's socio-economic background on their reading practices must be recognised. It is because of this impact that a lack of parental involvement cannot be attributed purely to limited interest in reading but may result from:

> social-cultural barrier and practices. [Saxon is] a society that lacks reading culture. Not because they are lazy, just restricted due to past prohibition. We can date it as far back as the 1800s where literacy was withheld from non-Whites in order to keep them enslaved. Many communities still struggle because it was passed down to their children. (LL/Ms Lawrence/22.07.2019)

For this reason, Ms Lawrence warns against a blanket judgement of parents whose involvement in their children's education does not support school reading practices. Her opinion demonstrates an understanding that reading is not purely a cognitive practice and that reading practices are shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which they are produced (Gee, 1999; B. Street, 2016b). Her attention to how societal and home factors act on learners' reading practices is supported by Bourdieu's (1986) emphasis that any dismissal of the hereditary transmission of cultural capital and how this prepares learners for schooling sanctions the reproduction of the status quo of the field of education.

Ms Lawrence (LL/22.07.2019) stressed that historical injustices do not absolve parents of their role in their children's education and she believes that some parents, particularly those based in Saxon, are "too concerned with their lifestyle of drugs and gangsterism." In expanding on how learners' upbringing affects their education, Ms Lawrence contends that because of parental substance abuse (including when learners were in utero) and the

emotional and physical abuse that many learners have been exposed to, their progress in learning may be affected. She stressed that Mr Willemse has to be more aware of how learners' socio-cultural backgrounds affect their learning and understand that responsibility for poor-performing learners cannot be placed solely on educators (LL/Ms Lawrence/22.07.2019).

Like Ms Lawrence, Mr Willemse warns against criticising parents too harshly for a seeming lack of attention to their children's education and reading. He voiced a struggle to engage effectively with parents who can be "caught up in their lives" (LL/01.08.2019). Yet for the most part he believes parents "want the best for their kids," reporting that "some parents are very loyal to the school" but that there are many parents who, because they struggle with maths or reading, believe that they do not have the necessary skills to help their children. He explained that if "parents are in survival mode," "working very hard," "struggling financially," "have little education" or are "young and overwhelmed mothers," managing homework can "appear impossible to them" irrespective of their dedication to their children's education (LL/Mr Willemse/01.08.2019). Adding to these restrictions is that many parents' own education did not equip them to transmit to their children the institutionalised reading capital that would benefit them on entry to the education field. Here, the validity of Reay's (2019) assertion that "while parental involvement in education helps a child's development, no amount of parental concern can counteract the worst impact of poverty on children" (no pagination) is highlighted.

The effect of generational injustices was illustrated by Kate Smythe's account of the annual parent reading workshop she hosts. She recounted:

> the scary thing is we discovered a lot of parents were illiterate… Every year Mr Willemse asks me to come speak to the new Grade R, Grade 1 parents so I do that every year, promoting reading and how to help your children identify letter sounds so we do that, um, it's difficult to, it's difficult to get the parents motivated. I don't think they really understand, most of them, the value of books, of reading. (LL/15.10.2019)

For many parents, this workshop may be their initial and only exposure to how they can assist their children with homework and reading. However, a single workshop cannot redress the impact of longstanding inequalities and equip all parents to support their

children in developing the reading practices demanded by the field of education. The hosting of this workshop offers an example of Mr Willemse's efforts to involve parents but this collaboration is centred on instructing parents in how to assist the school in developing their children's reading practices. There is no attention to how the school can assist parents to extend existing home literacy practices in ways that can strengthen children's school practices, and the potential benefits of a consultative, two-way partnership are not leveraged.

The experiences and insights presented by Ms Lawrence, Kate Smythe and Mr Willemse are not unique to Saxon Primary. There is extensive research documenting how parents from poorer socio-economic backgrounds face constraints that may affect their parental involvement to a greater degree than that of those from wealthier backgrounds (Chetty, 2019a; Currin & Pretorius, 2010; Munje & Mncube, 2018; Potberg, 2014). These constraints cannot be equated solely with a lack of interest in children's education and this was repeatedly highlighted in learners' descriptions of their and family members' literacy practices in their home environments.

## 6.4 The home environment

In describing out-of-school practices, I refer to literacy practices and not reading practices because of the positive effect that literacy, in its many forms, can have on children's school-based reading practices (Ribbens, 2008; R. Sibanda & Kajee, 2019). Habitus is a "product of history" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 54) and established habitus will underlie future habitus. Consequently, learners' reading practices at school are not consciously enacted but rather result from how they "are *already predisposed* to act in certain ways, pursue certain goals, avow certain tastes, and so on" (Comber, 1999, no pagination, italics in original). Consequently, each learner who enters school brings their own ways of thinking and dispositions (Grenfell, 2019) that, in interaction with the school environment, act as a starting point for their school-based reading practices. This habitus will have initially been shaped at home and in interaction with family members.

The importance of parents' role in children's development as readers is highlighted in Mda's (2017) statement that a "culture of reading can be cultivated at any age, though, like all

habits, good and bad, it is best instilled early in childhood" (no pagination), an opinion shared by all educators. In analysing the impact that the home environment has on Saxon Primary learners' reading habitus, Bourdieu's (1974) statement that "each family transmits to its children, directly rather than indirectly, a certain *cultural capital*" (p.32, italics in original) is noteworthy. It is not purely the amount of cultural capital that parents transmit to their children that prepares them for reading at school but also whether this form of cultural capital is valued by the school (Bourdieu, 1986; Reay, 1998a) and the education field (Potberg, 2014).

In South Africa, it is the reading habitus that is associated with White middle-class homes that is privileged by the education field (Mgqwashu, 2019). For learners who have been socialised into reading in this environment, their reading habitus operates as embodied reading capital when they enter school. For other children, including many Saxon Primary learners, the literacy repertoires they bring with them to school are deemed to offer little benefit (Prinsloo, 2021). When there is a mismatch between learners' out-of-school literacy practices and those valued by the education field, educators are under pressure to ensure all learners successfully master specific ways of doing reading and writing that they not may have had little exposure to. In this context, it is unsurprising that Saxon Primary's educators' opinions of how parents contribute to their children's reading development were framed with reference to school reading practices.

### 6.4.1 Educators' perspectives: the importance of the home environment

South African parents, especially those who were denied a high standard of education, are frequently criticised for not prioritising their children's education or their development as readers (Meier & Lemmer, 2015; Munje & Mncube, 2018). There are researchers who have spoken out against such criticisms and argued for building on existing home practices, with the reminder that not all families are in a position to support their children's education to the degree they wish to and/or in the ways demanded by the field of education (bua-lit collective, 2018). The dominant discourse, however, is that of uninterested parents, with the proviso that this does not apply to middle-class parents. This is reflected in Saxon Primary educators' opinions that too many parents do not value their children's education or development as readers. Educators acknowledge that there are some parents who are

dedicated to their children's home environment and that parents' involvement may be curtailed by socio-economic factors and limited awareness of how best to support their children. Nevertheless, they believe that these factors cannot justify the extent of parents' lack of engagement in their children's schooling. Complaints included high absenteeism levels without reason, parent/teacher meetings that are often attended by five or fewer parents, meeting requests being ignored, parents offering little assistance with homework and that, even in instances where children request it, there are parents who do not read with their children (LL/Ms Adams/23.08.2019; LL/Ms Daniels/12.06.2019; PP/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019; LL/Ms Klaasen/08.11.2019; LL/Ms Lawrence/22.07.2019; LL/Ms Lewis/12.06.2019; LL/Ms Meyer/18.10.2019; LL/Ms Prince/19.07.2019).

When I asked Ms Klaasen "What contributes to a culture of reading?" she responded, "creating love for reading" (LL/Ms Klaasen/08.11.2019), adding that Saxon Primary educators have to assume additional responsibility for nurturing their learners' interest in reading. This is this because "[y]ou're demonstrating it [reading] to them. They don't get it at home so school is the only place that they will get it." In assuming that school is the "only place" that some learners can come to love reading, the risk of disregarding many other ways in which children can develop a love for words that they can then build on when reading at school is significant.

With the pressure they face, it can be expected that educators benefit when children are from homes where they are apprenticed into the forms of literacy valued by CAPS (Farkas, 2018). The favouring by educators of this form of cultural capital may be assumed as dismissing other literacy practices. Yet, with educators under pressure to cover a prescriptive curriculum that provides little space for a range of literacy practices, this favouring may, instead, be because it alleviates pressure on educators. This is highlighted by Fataar (2015) who argues that the strict regulations governing the South African education field presents educators "little to no space for working with identity constructions of difference and the attendant lifeworld-acquired knowledges that students carry with them to school" (p. 162). These strict regulations provide an example of the symbolic violence that learners experience as a result of being taught in an education system that is structured according to colonial ideologies and subject matter.

### 6.4.2 Learners' out-of-school literacy practices

Learners' descriptions of their out-of-school literacy practices demonstrated a range of literacy practices including and beyond the traditional forms of reading and writing valued by schools. Their many accounts of various practices preclude a detailed discussion of each of these practices. As a result, I provide an overview of the forms of literacy practices present in many homes and then refer to other specific examples that highlight core shared themes that I identified in analysing learners' reporting on their out-of-school literacy practices.

Out-of-school literacy practices that I did not analyse individually include reading and discussing scriptures (FGA/Luthando/19.02.2019; FGA/Candice & Bongi/27.02.2019), conducting homework with the assistance of older siblings or parents, and parents telling stories to their children and singing songs and lullabies (FGA/Kim/11.02.2019; FGB/Megan & Simone/09.05.2019). These activities contribute to associating literacy with enjoyment, developing vocabulary, parent-child interaction and understanding sequencing in stories (Bridges, 2014; Hibbin, 2013; Lehrl et al., 2013; Miller & Pennycuff, 2008; Stine et al., 2018), all of which are practices that support a culture of reading.

#### *"It's very fun to read at home"*

Learners spoke enthusiastically about reading with their parents (FGA/Ashley/24.07.2019; PPA/Anathi/24.07.2019; PPA/Nandi/24.07.2019; PPA/Xavier/19.02.2019; PPB/Courtney & Simone/07.05.2019; PPB/Luzuko/15.07.2019). This is an enjoyable and regular event for many children. Simone's mother reads to her daily and "when she read me a story in the night then I feel happy" (PPB/Simone/07.05/2019). In a later interview, Simone (FGB/09.05.2019) repeated this association between reading and happiness stating, "it's nice when you read it [books] then you feel so happy." In response to my question, "if I say the word 'reading', what does it make you think?" Kim replied, "excited, exciting." This excitement surrounding reading is promoted in her home. She and her sister visit the public library on Saturdays where they "go fetch books and then we ask him [their father] if he can read to us. Or sometimes we read on our own" (LLA/04.03.2019), and she enjoys that her mother tells her stories at bedtime. On every occasion that parents devote time to reading with their children, they convey that reading is worthwhile and valuable activity. With the

influence that parents have on their children's practices, when such events occur regularly, they create an environment that encourages a love for reading (Marais & Evans, 2017).

In a conversation with Nadine, Courtney and Megan (FGB/9.05.2019), they each spoke about reading with their mothers and visits to Saxon Public Library. Megan referred to her enjoyment of reading at home and the process of selecting books at the public library. She related:

> I like to read, I like to read because it's very fun to read at home. My mommy take me to the library… somebody who gives the book for you what you want to read then you must just pick what book you want to read.

Megan is an enthusiastic reader who is always asking Ms Gabriel for opportunities to read and for shared reading. She has been surrounded by reading from a young age. She loves that "my whole family read to me" and that, every evening, "my mommy tuck me in the bed and then she sing songs to me and then she read a story to me" (FGB/09.05.2019). Describing her literacy practices with her grandmother, Megan stated:

> My grandma teach me how to, to say the words then I must write it and then I have a book…
> Claire: *Ja*, and you write in that book?[13]
> Megan: Yes, I paint in it also, then I do finger paint. (FGB/09.05.2019)

I have described Megan's home literacy practices because, in addition to how these practices and routines are reflected in her reading habitus that she has arrived with at school, her account demonstrates that creating such an environment for children depends on more than parents being able to read and valuing schooled literacy practices. Bourdieu (1990b) describes the dispositions underlying potential practices as being "durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions" (p. 54). The literacy practices Megan has been exposed to from an early age were possible because her family members have time to interact with her and she has consistent access to books. Megan's descriptions of what has shaped her reading habitus is a clear example of how literacy practices that are generally more closely associated with middle-class families privilege learners at school.

[13] Ja: yes (translation from Afrikaans).

Because “the habitus that someone possesses is linked to the capital they possess and have to offer” (Heffernan, 2022, p. 67), Megan entered school with a reading habitus that operates as embodied reading capital and places her in a strong position to succeed in the confines of the school curriculum.

### *“We play teacher, teacher”*

South African research on children’s home literacy practices has traditionally concentrated on adult-child interaction, and the benefit that siblings close in age can have on home literacy practices has been largely ignored. Gregory’s (2001) research in England draws attention to this role, referring to siblings acting as “mediators of literacy” (p. 305) whose interaction around reading enables scaffolding and collaborative learning.

Interactions around literacy with siblings and cousins were a common theme in interviews. This interaction took the form of older siblings encouraging learners to read (FGA/Mandla/11.02.2019; PPB/Courtney/07.05.2019; PPB/Warren/20.02.2019), reading to and with younger and older siblings and cousins (FGA/Bongi/26.02.2019; FGA/Luthando/19.04.2019; FGB/Amir & Tyrone/04.06.2019; PPA/Nandi/20.02.2019; PPB/Okuhle/27.05.2019) and gaining assistance with homework (FGA/Bongi/26.02.2019; FGA/Ryan/04.03.2019; FGA/Warren/11.02.2019).

Amber’s enthusiasm when recounting how she and her cousin, both seven years old, read together provides an example of how collaborative and imaginative play contribute to literacy development. Amber and her cousin live together. I asked:

> Have you ever read just you and one person before [at home]?
> Amber: Yes, my cousin.
> Claire: How old is your cousin?
> Amber: Seven. She’s in Ms Klaasen’s class. (LLB/03.09.2019)

Amber and her cousin receive the same reading materials from their educators and read them together. (These are photocopied handouts of readers that are discussed further in Chapter 9.) In addition to reading these stories together for homework, these handouts form part of one of their favourite games. Responding to my question “What games do you and your cousin play?” Amber replied:

We play “teacher, teacher.”

Claire: When you play “teacher, teacher” what do you do?

Amber: They must read, try to read. They must read out of their minds. They must look at the stories. (LLB/03.09.2019)

This form of play is invaluable in generating excitement for emerging readers in an unthreatening environment (Prinsloo, 2005). If Amber and her cousin are unable to decode, they use illustrations to imagine their own story, a practice that promotes storytelling and familiarity with text. There is no pressure to perform for assessment and, instead, by dramatising school and reading practices, they draw an association between reading and enjoyment.

Cleo’s descriptions of her out-of-school practices offer another demonstration of the contribution of drama and play in developing literacy practices and of how cousins (like siblings) act as literacy mediators in generating enthusiasm for reading. In describing her interactions with her older cousins, Cleo related proudly that, “I must read aloud to my cousins like I am acting” (PPA/Cleo/20.02.2019). Her cousins, in Grade 6 and 8, then assist with reading. In expanding on her reading practices, Cleo related a story of how “Yesterday, I was playing with others in my block [of flats]. We were playing assembly.” During assembly, “two friends had to read” and ”after, all my friends wanted me to read. So I read them *Angelina Ballerina* and then gave bread and juice to them” (PPA/Cleo/20.02.2019). The impact of these literacy events is that in a community where children often feel unsafe, reading offers a fun group activity that can be enjoyed together and is a source of entertainment.

### *“It’s a free paper”*

Newspapers were often mentioned when I asked learners about who they see reading at home and their own reading at home. Learners mentioned reading *The Voice* and free weekly community newspapers such as *Saxon News*, *People’s Post* and *Vukani News*. The enthusiasm with which learners discussed reading these newspapers and their re-telling of articles they had read showed how these newspapers served to evoke curiosity and interest. Learners referred to seeing their parents reading newspapers (FGA/Ashley/20.02; FGA/Lwazi/19.02.2019; FGB/Megan & Simone/09.05.2019; LLA/Robyn/27.02.2019;

PPA/Bianca/04.04.2019; PPA/Sofia/19.02.2019; PPB/Courtney/07.05.2019), discussing content with family members (LLA/Robyn/27.02.2019; PPA/Cleo & Candice/27.02.2019), and reading newspapers themselves (FGA/Lwazi/19.02.2019; LLA/Robyn/19.02.2019; PPA/Cleo/27.02.2019). When parents read newspapers or discuss newspapers with their children, they model reading practices to children and draw attention to the role of reading in increasing their knowledge base.

Lwazi's account that the only paper text he reads at home is *Vukani News* is indicative of reading practices being constrained by limited availability of resources. He and his mother get the newspaper when they visit the shops and he "like[s] reading the newspaper that I get at the shops. It is a free paper – last time I read, read about protests" (PPA/Lwazi/19.02.2019). Lwazi had recently moved neighbourhoods. His previous home was close to a public library which provided access to books. This resource is no longer available to him and he cannot visit the school library because of transport constraints. His weekly reading of *Vukani News* and his disappointment that there is no library he can visit points to his home reading practices being constrained by access to resources and not by a lack of motivation or interest in reading.

***"We were reading recipe books"***

Bianca's account of reading recipes with family members provides an example of how engagement with written texts and interactions around reading can occur in numerous forms. I asked her when she had last read with anyone at home and she replied, "'Yesterday, I was reading recipe books with my *ma*[14] because we are preparing for a wedding" (FGA/Bianca/26.02.2019). Later in the same interview when she was explaining why reading helps people she referred to how reading is integral to cooking stating that "My *ma* reads recipes, how to cook food and she will read them with me sometimes." Her descriptions of reading recipes provide an example of how there are various literacy practices in the home that contribute to drawing children to reading and interactions surrounding reading, and that the traditional idea of reading storybooks with children is only one way of creating opportunities for reading in the home.

[14] Ma: grandmother (translation from Afrikaans).

***"I have a dictionary on my phone"***

Soon into conducting my interviews, I realised that learners immediately associated reading as engaging with traditional forms of print materials. It was only when I specifically asked about the use of cellphones, tablets or computers that learners expanded on associated literacy practices. Social media and computers are blamed for a lack of interest in reading and presented as threats to a culture of reading (Ramaphosa, 2015). In contrast to such criticisms, learners' responses revealed how digital devices created alternative possibilities for reading. Learners stated that they used Facebook, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger for communicating with friends. Candice (PPA/27.02.2019) stated that "You have to read for Messenger, Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter so you can get information." This was in terms of communicating with people and reading news. In responding to questions on how they source information for school projects Khethi (FGA/04.02.2019) responded that on her weekly visit to the public library, "I search other, like, other subjects on the computers so that when I come to school, I understand even more." When Cleo (PPA/27.02.2019) visits Saxon Public Library, "I go on the computers. I search for, um, lot of things, normally I like maths so I search for that." These examples both demonstrate the contribution that public libraries make in offering community access to resources and that this contribution extends beyond access to traditional paper materials. Bongi (FGA/ 26.02.2019) answered that "I have a dictionary on my phone" or "I'll ask someone" when she needs assistance with schoolwork. These are all examples of literacy practices that are integrated into learners' daily lives. They may not reflect traditional notions of reading but, on each occasion that they and they peers use digital devices, they are engaging with texts and each event presents an opportunity for reading and writing that would otherwise not occur.

In presenting home literacy practices, the variety of activities learners reported on indicate that there are rich literacy practices in place in many homes. The potential value of these practices has not been realised at school. Poor collaboration between educators and parents, as reported by educators, has reduced possibilities for better awareness of what practices exist and can be built on, and for educators and parents to strengthen each other's capacity to develop children's interest in reading. Moreover, educators described being under significant pressure to complete the curriculum and meet assessment demands, and

this has resulted in them feeling limited in their ability to include activities that do not directly respond to curriculum objectives.

## 6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the impact of the four overlapping fields I identified as influential in shaping school reading practices. I have drawn widely on the perspectives of research participants and their accounts of out-of-school practices. The significant role that each of these fields has on the school's practices is clear, as is the potential for the school to collaborate more closely with members of overlapping fields to strengthen reading practices.

The failure of the government to create an education field that best benefits South Africa's children was a constant theme in answering all three of my research questions. Any analysis of the South African education field has to first acknowledge the enormity of the task that faced the new government in 1994 and that this is not something that can be overcome in one generation. This enormity does not absolve the DBE from assuming reciprocal accountability (Christie & Monyokolo, 2018) when criticising educators and schools for poor results or lack of progress in meeting policy or curriculum mandates. In particular, there is a need for the government to interrogate the mismatch between the expectations it places on schools and the resources available to schools to meet these expectations. This mismatch is immediately visible in how the school benefits from partnerships with Mfunqule and Funda Fun, possibilities that are not available to all schools nationwide. Statements such as "it is only now since Funda Fun" (LL/Ms Lawrence/22.07.2019) that a culture of reading is apparent confirm how beneficial a library is to a school and how there is foundation to the DBE's repeated pleas for schools to work with civil society in establishing libraries. However, although such collaborations are beneficial and provide crucial resources, reliance on NGOs is not sustainable. The risk of this reliance is clear in Salma Arendse's (LL/11.06.2019) statement stated that when Funda Fun no longer funds library assistants, "then the library [often] just stays dormant" unless schools can source alternative funding.

Barton and Hamilton (2012) state, "[s]ocial institutions and power relationships pattern literacy practices, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others" (p. 12). The power held by government in the education field and their construction of literacy and reading as autonomous practices reflects the doxa circulating discourse on a culture of reading – that reading is a neutral, cognitive skill that anyone can master. While this dominance is common in many national fields of education, its is particularly detrimental in South Africa. Writing in 2008, Stein stated:

> Gaining access to dominant literacies and languages is an ongoing struggle for the majority of children in South Africa, who speak home languages which are not privileged in mainstream schooling, and who have access to ways of knowing which are different from those privileged in schools. (p. 33)

This chapter demonstrates that little has been achieved in alleviating this struggle. Firstly, the attention that educators drew to the detrimental impact of learners learning in English and not their home languages confirms the desperate need for learners to be taught in their home languages. This impact is explored further in Chapter 9. Secondly, the consistent privileging of certain ways of knowing is clear in how educators criticise parents for a lack of interest in their children's education, and focus purely on schooled reading practices.

In Section 5.6, I challenged the assumptions made by the government that children's success at school depends on their parents enacting and modelling Western reading practices. The government's presentation of home reading practices that align to Global North practices as fundamental to learners' reading development at school was echoed by educators. The neglect that CAPS, and reading policies and strategies show for how other out-of-school literacy practices can contribute to reading practices and be drawn upon at school was shared in educators' perspectives of how parents failed to support their children's development as readers. Educators acknowledge the challenges families face in promoting education and reading within the home but maintain that, despite these challenges, families could contribute more positively to their children's development as learners and readers. At Saxon Primary, the lack of a two-way consultative partnership has prohibited learners from drawing on other literacy practices that they bring with them to school.

Learners' descriptions of literacy practices at home and their positive discussions of these practices underscore the potential contribution of out-of-school literacy practices to strengthening children's reading habitus. They spoke enthusiastically of opportunities to dramatise stories, events such as "teacher, teacher," reading recipes, reading Bible verses with their family members and using Google as a means of gathering knowledge, for their own interest and for schoolwork. The benefits of these practices and learners' enthusiasm when discussing them present a challenge to the positioning of a culture of reading as offering the solution to many of the failures in the field of education. The consistent attention to reading, especially when reading is conceptualised as the structured act of reading books, leaves little space for building on the advantages that can be derived from other literacy practices.

It is because of the indisputable influence that these four overlapping fields have on the school's reading practices that I have presented these findings in the first analysis chapter of my case study. In continuing to explore what influences the school's culture of reading, the next chapter analyses how the school's culture of teaching and learning shapes the culture of reading.

# CHAPTER 7: THE SCHOOL'S CULTURE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

An exploration of Saxon Primary's culture of reading demands, as a starting point, exploring its culture of teaching and learning. This is because every field is governed by "its own logic, rules and regularities" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 104) and therefore the logic, rules and regularities governing the school as a field will shape what reading practices are possible at Saxon Primary. A month into my fieldwork I sent my supervisor a WhatsApp saying:

> I'm realising more and more how the overall culture of the school is going to play a big part in my research… It really highlights how unrealistic government's expectations of our teachers are and why reading etc. cannot be addressed until systemic issues are addressed. (FS/28.02.2019)

Throughout my fieldwork, the impact of the overall culture, and more specifically the culture of teaching and learning, remained apparent. As with the impact of overlapping fields, an analysis of the school's culture of teaching and learning was required to understand what influenced reading practices in the school. This is because literacy practices can only be successfully understood when accounting for the field in which they occur and how this field, in this case, Saxon Primary, shapes these practices (Leung & Street, 2014). In exploring the school's culture of teaching and learning, I consider how the rules and regularities governing the school, and the distribution of capital among members of the school community have resulted in challenges or adherences to the configuration of the school as a field. I use the model I developed in Chapter 3 (reproduced below in Figure 7.1)

to show the ways the elements of the model interact in shaping the culture of teaching and learning at Saxon Primary.




**Figure 7.1 A model for a culture of teaching and learning**

As noted earlier, any alterations in a field create shifts in possibilities and practices within that field (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, the factors constituting a culture of teaching and learning are entangled and cannot be analysed independently. They are presented individually here to provide a structure for this chapter. The impact of the four overlapping fields, as explicitly presented in the previous chapter, are threaded throughout this chapter.

## 7.1 Vision

A school's success in promoting and instilling teaching and learning practices depends on a united staff working towards clear objectives and a defined vision (Judd, 2017). Without this, educators will work in isolation towards their individual understandings of what constitutes and is required for effective teaching and learning. At any school, leadership and educators will not all share the same vision of a school's culture of reading. As Bourdieu (1989) explains:

> there will be different or even antagonistic points of view, since points of view depend on the point from which they are taken, since the vision that every agent has of the space depends on his or her position in that space. (p. 18)

For a school to operate successfully, the difference in individuals' viewpoints need to be respected and welcomed. Ultimately, however, agreement on a specific vision for a school and what is required to achieve this vision is needed. This is not in place at Saxon Primary. The lack of a shared vision guiding educators was indicative of one of the consistently mentioned threats to the school's culture of teaching and learning – individuals working separately in a battle to survive in a field that undermined many of their ideals and forced on them practices that were disconnected from their habitus.

Ms Klaasen (LL/08.11.2019) stated that the school shares the WCED's vision of providing "quality education for every child" but that there was no strategy in place for meeting this vision. In my interactions with educators and school leadership, an individual commitment to teaching was clear. This did not however translate to working collaboratively to the benefit of their learners. Educators usually work in isolation or only with the other educator in their grade (FS/28.01.201919.09.2019). Ms Adams' response to my question about staff collaboration highlighted this. She stated that educators seldom interact because they "have their own strategies, own personalities" (LL/23.08.2019), adding that there was no apparent effort to encourage collaboration. This absence of a shared vision and limited collaboration was also apparent in the lack of a united effort to strengthen school reading practices. As a result, instead of creating a field where educators could build on their colleagues' institutional cultural capital to best benefit learners' learning and reading practices, educators' practices were based on individual understandings of how best to succeed in their role.

## 7.2 Leadership

Mr Willemse, with the support of his SMT, is responsible for overseeing and guiding teaching and learning in the school, while simultaneously adhering to departmental and school governing body requirements (Bush, 2013; Mestry, 2017b). Succeeding in this multi-dimensional role requires an extensive skill-set, but many South African principals have not

been provided the opportunity to develop these skills (Buka et al., 2017; Naidoo, 2019). As Mestry (2017a) argues:

> principals experience great difficulty in coping with numerous changes, partly because they are inadequately prepared for their leadership position, or simply lack the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to lead and manage schools effectively and efficiently. Fundamentally, principals should be empowered to effectively deal with challenges facing them in the 21st century. (p. 1)

Mestry's criticism is validated by the limited opportunities provided to Mr Willemse to succeed in his role. Mr Willemse was an intermediate phase educator at Saxon Primary for seven years before being appointed principal. He had not previously held a leadership role and he received no leadership training. He assumed principalship at a time when the WCED was debating the school's closure due to its non-functionality, with his primary responsibility being to ensure the school's survival – a task he achieved. During his 20-year tenure, Mr Willemse has managed the transition of the LoLT from Afrikaans to English, a transition that was decided on before he assumed his position, presenting a difficult task for even an experienced principal. He has overseen the implementation of new curricula, and increased learner enrolment.

With the DBE providing inadequate training and not meeting their own mandate to "provide the necessary training and guidelines, not only in the professional duties of principals but also in their personal development" (Department of Basic Education, 2015, p. 22), Mr Willemse is unlikely to develop his full managerial or instructional leadership potential. This failure on the behalf of the DBE is particularly problematic for principals such as Mr Willemse who started teaching during Apartheid, in an autocratic education system where educators had little involvement in decision-making (J. Sibanda, 2017; Slonimsky, 2016). Any habitus is grounded in past experiences (Bourdieu, 1990b). With Mr Willemse's exposure to this autocratic system, the result is a potential reproduction of relations of domination due to Mr Willemse not questioning his leadership style because it is "how things have always been done" (Thompson, 1990, p. 69). Even if Mr Willemse is aware of alternative leadership styles that promote shared decision-making and consultation, these may appear more time consuming, or as undermining a principal's authority and being harder to adopt. In

describing Mr Willemse's hesitancy to welcome new opportunities, Kate Smythe (LL/15.10.2019) commented:

> One of my biggest frustrations with Mr Willemse, I respect him and I do have a lot of time for him but I really think it's tragic that he lets so many incredible opportunities pass by because of being very, very stubborn.

She attributes this to a fear that his authority would be undermined, offering Mr Willemse's unwillingness to consider the introduction of teacher coaches as an example of this fear. She believes that consequently the school has lost out on opportunities that could benefit its growth and success. Her concern with leadership was clear when I asked if she would recommend that NGOs partner with Saxon Primary. She responded:

> I would call it a school in major crisis and I wouldn't think it's a good time to try come in. I know it sounds terrible but I don't think there's the infrastructure and I don't think there's the leadership to maintain and strengthen and build relationships. I wish there was. (LL/Kate Smythe/15.10.2019)

In discussing the school's poor performance and reputation, all but two educators attributed this to weak leadership. In an informal conversation with two educators, an intermediate phase educator (DD/EX) stated:

> It's sickening because what is different between [a neighbouring school] and us. It's the type of management. It's the same community but [the neighbouring school] offers strong role models and guidance – values, principles and morals are instilled.

Her colleague quickly indicated agreement (DD/EX). After almost 20 years with Mr Willemse as leader, the school's poor performance cannot be attributed solely to the weak culture of teaching and learning he inherited. The neighbouring primary schools are perceived to be academically superior and have stronger reputations. This results in these schools being considered as holding greater institutional capital. Mr Willemse (LL/01.08.2019) believes that, until Saxon Primary can overcome the stigma of being a *skollie* school, the struggle to draw parents to the school and attract a larger group of learners will continue. Even if the school's performance is affected by external factors, this does not detract from the fact that Saxon Primary has the capacity to act and assume agency in how they respond to this

negative reputation and to the social context in which the school operates (Thomson & Hall, 2017).

Mr Willemse is not solely responsible for the school's culture of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, it remains his responsibility to encourage collaboration, effect necessary changes and facilitate educators' efforts to improve teaching and learning conditions in the school (Department of Basic Education, 2015; Mestry, 2017b). Educators' reports on interaction with Mr Willemse indicate a belief that he has not achieved this (DD/Ms Gabriel/30.04.2019; LL/EX; LL/EX; LL/Ms Prince/19.07.2019). Other than weekly staff briefings, the educator body meets infrequently. Educators report that weekly briefings are dominated by fundraising needs and addressing poor discipline. There is little attention to strengthening academic performance, sharing teaching methodologies, or to staff wellbeing (LL/EX; LL/EX). Roffey (2012) asserts that it is "[i]n communities with high levels of social trust [that] individuals are more likely to openly exchange information and be caring towards each other" (p. 10). This social trust, and the consequent social capital, is not in place. Educators expressed hesitancy to participate in briefings because Mr Willemse's responses are "often sarcastic" (LL/EX) and they anticipate that any contributions will be ignored (DD/Ms Gabriel/30.04.2019; LL/EX). Without this social trust, educators remain unaware of their colleagues' practices and cannot harness the potential to learn from these practices. As I demonstrate throughout my analysis, there are many educators at the school whose commitment to teaching, and the ways in which they understand and approach reading are similar. However, with few possibilities for collaboration, the value of the knowledge and extensive experience educators have amassed remains untapped. Possibilities for strengthening their institutional cultural capital through stronger social networks are denied.

Mr Willemse expressed placing value on collaboration and the sharing of ideas. Yet his accompanying statement, "[w]e need to welcome everything and be receptive to new ideas but within the boundaries of observing protocol" was vague in explaining how this would occur (LL/01.08.2019). His follow-up statement that "it is due to lack of organisation by any staff members" that there are few extra-mural activities and that it is only when an educator "is very passionate can something really get going" (LL/01.08.2019) validates

educators' complaints that they are expected to assume full responsibility for implementing new ideas (DD/EX; LL/EX; PP/Ms Prince/19.07.2019). Here, the repercussion of educators feeling constrained by a field is illustrated. Ms Gabriel was particularly critical in this regard. She expressed anger that "We get nothing… Any idea that you present [to Mr Willemse] he will say, 'you do it' ." She added that, as educators, "we try to promote reading but it's difficult if you are a lone voice" and, consequently, initiatives "often do not take off" (LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019).

As with their descriptions of interactions with Mr Willemse, educators reported receiving insufficient support from the SMT. The SMT comprises the principal, deputy principal, the head of foundation phase (Grades R to 3) and the head of intermediate and senior phases (Grades 4 to 7). In discussing the SMT's role, educators' opinions were couched in an understanding that was absent in their criticism of Mr Willemse. Their criticisms of the SMT were often prefaced by acknowledging the pressure Ms Klaasen and the two heads of phases face in managing a full teaching load and SMT responsibilities (LL/Ms Daniels/12.06.2019; LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019; LL/Ms Prince/19.07.2019). I asked Ms Lawrence what support there was from management to encourage learning and reading. She replied that the SMT "don't have time, if you bring something up, you must run with it" (LL/22.07.2019). Ms Gabriel conveyed a sense of discouragement that the SMT "is not promoting reading" but attributed this to the pressure of managing discipline. Consequently, she hesitates to approach the SMT because she does "not want to burden them" with ideas or requests for assistance (LL/19.07.2019). This data reflects the interaction among different elements of a culture of teaching and learning and how challenges to one of these elements (in this case poor discipline) detracts from the SMT's success in meeting other responsibilities. Furthermore, the breakdown in relations among staff and Mr Willemse is highlighted in how educators acknowledge the pressure the SMT faces but not the many demands and challenges Mr Willemse has to manage as the school's principal.

I relied heavily on spoken data in exploring the school leadership's role. The data generated across interviews differed significantly. This was especially in terms of Mr Willemse and educators' comments on welcoming and attempting to implement new ideas or initiatives.

What was indisputable was the disconnection between Mr Willemse, the SMT and educators in working towards a clear vision of the school's culture of teaching and learning. Kate Smythe drew attention to this. She praises educators for their commitment to their role and voiced respect for Mr Willemse but is frustrated that poor relationships among staff and Mr Willemse affect the school negatively. She stated, "it's incredible, incredible the misunderstand [between Mr Willemse and educators] and to the huge detriment to the school" (LL/Kate Smythe/15.10.2019). With this misunderstanding and poor communication among staff, there is little likelihood of leadership and educators working closely to assist each other with their respective roles.

## 7.3 Educators' role and responsibilities

In a school with a strong culture of teaching and learning, conditions facilitate educators to meet their primary responsibility of creating a classroom environment where learners can thrive, and effective teaching and learning is possible (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Educators' approach to their role is grounded in their pedagogical habitus and how this interacts with the teaching environment in shaping their practices. My interaction with educators indicated that their pedagogical habitus prepared them to succeed in many schools. This was in terms of the institutional cultural capital they have accumulated and their dedication towards their role. However, although habitus remains constant, the knowledge and experiences that have shaped this habitus only operates as capital in a field where one is able to draw on this knowledge and experience (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As a field, Saxon Primary did not allow educators to draw fully on their amassed knowledge and experiences. Educators spoke specifically of how they felt restricted by the pressures exerted on them by the field of education, as presented in the previous chapter, and by the school's poor culture of teaching and learning. This was especially with regard to a lack of faith in leadership and managing learners' behaviour, a factor that they attribute to learners' upbringing and their home environments.

There was an evident assumption that many learners were unlikely to succeed at school as a result of their upbringing, as was clear in Ms Gabriel's (DD/30.04.2019) statement, "You can't be expected to control kids easily considering the circumstances that they come from."

Her sentiment reflects a shared opinion that as a result of negative parental influence, learners arrive at school unprepared to adhere to classroom regulations. Speaking of how she feels constantly under pressure and the stress to "survive" the lack of respect learners show for their educators and peers, Ms Adams (LL/03.08.3019) stated, "it's parents' responsibility as well, kids must know that they have to focus at school and that lesson has to come from the parents" and added that this rarely happens at Saxon Primary. My classroom observations and various educators' descriptions of their struggle to fulfil their responsibilities did not indicate a lack of commitment. Rather, they showed that an entanglement of external and internal pressures has resulted in a constant struggle for educator to maintain their position of power and a restructuring of their pedagogical habitus in order to meet their responsibilities. Ms Klaasen's explanations of threats to reading in the school confirmed this. Her response to my question, "What [do you think] about Saxon's culture of reading?" was, "I wish we could do better [but] we are hugely constrained by pressures and classroom sizes," a response that reflected a shared sentiment that the school's culture of teaching and learning was a major constraint on its culture of reading. Ms Klaasen's awareness of how the school field acts negatively on educators' practices was again clear when she stated that the main challenge to reading in the school was not a lack of interest or inspiration from educators and that "teachers have brilliant ideas. The pressure just dampen that [translating ideas to practice]. It's difficult to implement and carry through with them." Mr Willemse (LL/01.08.2019) believes that, even when accounting for the difficult circumstances in which they teach, many educators fail to meet their responsibilities. He attributes poor reading practices to educators' unwillingness "to change their mindset" or welcome "new ideas" (LL/01.08.2019). He acknowledges the difficulty of promoting reading when learners have "so many issues" that educators "need to first attend to" before "mak[ing] them understand why reading is important," but he maintains that there are educators who are "not listening to learners" (LL/Mr Willemse/01.08.2019). In these statements, the conflicting opinions expressed by Mr Willemse and educators in terms of a willingness to welcome new ideas and the poor relationship between Mr Willemse and educators that Kate Smythe (LL/15.10.2019) referred to are demonstrated.

With the many challenges Saxon Primary educators report that they face, ensuring their wellbeing becomes critical for them to succeed in their role. Threats to staff wellbeing were apparent in many observations and interviews. At Saxon Primary, there were high levels of educator school absenteeism. I do not attribute this to poor work ethic or disinterest in their learners' progress, criticisms that have been made of South African educators (Armstrong, 2014; NEEDU, 2013; World Bank Group, 2018). Rather, I observed educators who were exhausted by their struggle to teach effectively in a school where there were insufficient means of accessing support, and where their preferred practices were constantly restricted by the field of education and by poor partnerships with parents.

The results of psychological and social pressure on staff wellbeing is clear in statements such as "I like a challenge but it's just too much for me" (LL/Ms Adams/23.08.2019) and "the poor teachers must just stay and be verbally and physically abused" (DD/Ms Gabriel/16.04.2019). Reflecting on a conversation with three educators, I wrote:

> I spoke to teachers after school before in-sen[15] meeting. [A] clear shared feeling that school is in serious trouble – 'It's like Valkenberg'[16] said one teacher… There is clearly a lack of interaction between the principal and staff and [a sense of] not feeling supported. The teachers generally seem to be at breaking point and [it's] impossible for them not to be. (FS/26.02.2019)

The desperation with which these educators spoke and my observations of threats to Ms Gabriel's and Ms Adams' wellbeing during my fieldwork all emphasised the shared challenges that educators continuously felt under pressure to manage. The impact of this desperation and exhaustion, in combination with educators' perspective that their ideas or recommendations will not be appreciated, has resulted in a field where educators feel disempowered, resigned to being expected to implement any ideas without support, and isolated in their efforts to succeed in their roles.

[15] Intermediate and senior phase meeting
[16] Valkenberg Hospital is a psychiatric hospital in Cape Town.

## 7.4 A collaborative working environment

The value of teaching in a school that supports educators in working towards a strong culture of teaching and learning is articulated by Barth (2006), who contends:

> a precondition for doing *anything* to strengthen our practice and improve a school is the existence of a collegial culture in which professionals talk about practice, share their craft knowledge, and observe and root for the success of one another. (p. 13, italics in original)

There is little evidence of such a culture across Saxon Primary. I was constantly struck by the lack of structures in place for educators to access support from leadership or to collaborate with colleagues. Ms Adams stated that there was "not really" any interaction among educators and there was no apparent attempt to encourage this (LL/23.08.2019). She, along with Ms Lawrence and Ms Prince, reported collaborating with their colleague in their own grade but seldom did so with other educators (LL/Ms Adams/23.08.2019; LL/Ms Lawrence/22.07.2019; LL/Ms Prince/02.08.2019). As a result, educators across grades do not share their respective institutional cultural capital, accumulated over many years, across continents and in various socio-economic contexts in South Africa. The direct effect of poor collaboration on the school's culture of reading was expressed by Ms Gabriel. In expressing frustration at the lack of reading in the school, she stated, "Children need to see teachers working together to promote reading. The team effort will show importance [of reading] but this does not occur" (LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019). She attributes this largely to a lack of leadership directive that has resulted in a divided staff body where educators lack confidence any efforts will be recognised.

Educators do not have any free periods and, as a result, informal interactions outside of teaching time assume additional importance. Such interactions generally occur in school staffrooms. A staffroom offers a space for educators to gather informally and formally, and provide each other with professional and social support (Holland et al., 2007; Hunter et al., 2011). There is no staffroom at Saxon Primary. A staffroom does not guarantee collegiality or teamwork but the lack of a staffroom reduces the potential for strengthening staff relations and interactions. Two educators reported that Mr Willemse does not encourage staff engagement outside of formal meetings and prefers that educators remain in their individual classrooms at break (LL/EX; PP/EX), further adding to physical and social isolation

among staff. Without frequent interaction, educators continue to rely on their existing knowledge and pedagogical approaches. The benefit of the potential to strengthen pedagogical practices and ensure that there is a consistent approach to teaching and reading across grades is lost.

In addition to limited interactions affecting educators accessing assistance with teaching practices, this lack of collegiality and support impacts staff wellbeing, a factor that appears frequently in literature on school effectiveness and culture (Daly & Stoll, 2018; Day et al., 2011; Roffey, 2012; Wessels & Wood, 2019).

Although Mr Willemse prefers educators to sit in their individual classrooms, there are some educators who meet in small groups in a classroom at breaktime. In my second term at the school, when I was not conducting interviews during break, I sat in Ms Gabriel's classroom. There were six educators who met there regularly. They discussed challenges with classroom management and the pressure they experienced to fulfil responsibilities beyond teaching, such as fundraising and administrative tasks. The social capital this offered allowed them to create a small cluster of support, but this could not counter the overall pressure they experienced and the divisions among the staff body. Their disillusionment with the school was clear. Their exhaustion was evident, and they recounted stories of discipline and teaching challenges they faced daily. By August 2019, four of the six educators who had met during break in Ms Gabriel's classroom in April had resigned.[17]

The current isolation of educators at Saxon Primary limits the collegiality that Barth (2006) describes as necessary and a precondition for strong school practices. This is particularly because educators seldom share their knowledge, opinions and experiences amongst one another. Any culture depends on a group of people who hold a specific set of beliefs and practices that will shape the specific culture (Prins et al., 2019). As I stated in Section 7.1, educators will not share the same beliefs and approaches to improving learning and reading, but there is a need for a clear vision and a collective and structured set of objectives that shape school practices. When, as at Saxon Primary, this unity is limited, educators operate

[17] One of these four educators resigned because her husband was transferred to a new city.

without sufficient guidance or collaboration and without the established systems necessary to allow them to best fulfil their role.

## 7.5 Discipline and safety

It was my observations of the negative effect of violence and discipline that first underscored that any study of the school's culture of reading would need to incorporate an exploration of the school's culture of teaching and learning. Throughout observations in and outside of classrooms, the consistently poor discipline and instances of violence among learners resulted in ongoing disruptions to school activities. Educators are expected to ensure that their classrooms provide an environment where their learners feel safe and can learn effectively. However, the ongoing poor discipline has resulted in many educators feeling unable to manage classroom behaviour, with learners' behaviour consequently disrupting and negatively affecting classroom practices. It was in analysing how discipline and safety in the school affect practices that Bourdieu's contention that it is possible for individuals or groups who hold less power to affect conditions within the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) was most apparent.

In describing how she manages teaching at Saxon Primary, Ms Adams (LL/08.03.2019) stated, "to survive, I must be there to do my bit, and that's that… [because] you can't break iron with your hand." Her statement "you can't break iron" reflects her perspective that learners' behaviours are so embedded that, although it is possible, these behaviours will not easily be altered (LL/Ms Adams/08.03.2019). In the third term, she again expressed how challenging the teaching environment is, saying that she had previously worked at schools where there were discipline problems but not "rudeness at this level… [I'm] trying to make a difference… [I] like a challenge but it's just too much… [it's a] really tough environment. I can't handle the noise" (LL/Ms Adams/23.08.2019). This environment is worsened by the poor relationship between educators and leadership which I detailed earlier in the chapter, with Ms Adams (LL/08/03/2019) complaining that if she approaches management for assistance with discipline, there is "no follow-up from management in terms of consequences." In a situation where Ms Adams is fighting for survival and that she finds "just too much," the absence of clear procedures to obtain assistance leaves her isolated,

and throughout the year she was unable to counter poor discipline which continually disrupted teaching and learning.

The effect that high levels of noise have on disrupting teaching and learning has been widely researched (Fisk et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2005; Naude & Meier, 2019). High levels of noise have a negative effect on learners' abilities to hear their educators, to process content and follow instructions, and noise disrupts their ability to focus, read and learn (Connolly et al., 2019; Schneider, 2002), complaints made by numerous learners (FGA/Bongi/04.03.2019; FGA/Candice/26.02.2019; PPA/Anathi/24.07.2019; PPA/Bianca/04.03.2019; PPA/Nandi/24.07.2019). Khethi is angered that "noisy children are disturbing us to learn" and Bongi (FGA/26.20.2019) complained that that noise disrupts learners from "understanding[ing] the book that you're reading, because when it's noisy you can't get to understand it." This was further confirmed by my observations of how this excessive noise resulted in multiple disruptions to teaching and learning every day (FA/FB/FS, 01.2019-09.2019). Adding to the disruptions to learning caused by learners' poor behaviour inside the classroom is that learners, across grades, leave their classrooms without permission and make noise in the corridors. Ms Adams (LL/23.08.2019) explained that because of this:

> negative influences comes from outside. This one running around, this one doing [voice fades, sentence unfinished]… Even if I manage my class well, external influences will affect learners and I can't control another teacher's learners.

Ms Prince (LL/19.07.2019) considers poor discipline a direct threat to the school's culture of reading. She stated, "We can have a much better culture but it's not, and I think discipline also plays a big role because now you want to read and they not interested." Ms Adams and Ms Prince were not alone in expressing how discipline and noise affected teaching and learning negatively, with four of their colleagues referring to discipline as an obstacle to teaching (LL/Ms Daniels/12.06.2019; LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019; LL/Ms Lawrence/22.09.2019; LL/Ms Meyer/19.10.2019). In commenting on the effect of poor discipline, Ms Klaasen (LL/08.11.2019) stated that educators are "doing their best. Their heart is right, [they are] willing to assist the learners," but she prays that "discipline will improve" so educators "can teach learners in the school" without constant disruptions due to "crowd control." She explained that the time lost from these disruptions places educators

under further pressure to complete the curriculum and to provide learners the level of assistance that they require (LL/Ms Klaasen/08.11.2019).

The consequence of ongoing disruptions due to violence and poor discipline extends beyond the loss of teaching and learning time. This is because such disruptive behaviour affects the psychological and emotional wellbeing of learners who participate in or witness such behaviour (Sliep et al., 2016), negatively affecting their ability to learn (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). This was illustrated by Kate Smythe's (LL/15.10.2019) description of what she had observed in a foundation phase classroom. She related:

> There are terrified children in that class because they're sitting there, and I can see they're terrified, while other kids are punching each other, screaming and running around on the tables, and the teacher[18] standing there like a, a deer caught in lights of a car.

It is not learners alone who are subjected to violence. On one occasion, I witnessed an intermediate phase educator cowering while learners surrounded her, and on another occasion, I saw a ten-year-old learner hit an educator while saying, *"Ek gaan jy met 'n mes steek"* (FS).[19] Educators' car windows are occasionally smashed by learners and during my fieldwork an intermediate phase learner was suspended for hitting an educator over the head. Such experiences of abuse and high levels of stress affect wellbeing and educators' capacity to fulfil their role is reduced.

Educators believe that violence and disruptive behaviour are so entrenched in the communities in which the majority of learners live that their individual efforts to shift how this behaviour manifests in learners are unlikely to succeed. Rather, they accept poor discipline as something to be endured and managed to the greatest extent possible. The principal and leadership acknowledge this crisis but, other than pleas from Mr Willemse and Ms Klaasen to learners during weekly assembly, I observed no attempts to improve the learner body's general discipline. Even if there were clear consequences in place to address discipline, this would not be adequate to overcome poor behaviour. This is because violence and disruptive behaviour often manifest as a result of emotional and social difficulties

[18] This educator no longer teaches at Saxon Primary.
[19] "I am going to stab you with a knife" (direct translation from Afrikaans to English). My perception of this statement was that of a ten-year-old learner who spoke in anger and was not physically threatening the educator. This does not detract from the negative effect on an educator's wellbeing.

children face and their exposure to violence in and outside of school (J. Botha & Gore, 2020; Meyer & Chetty, 2017). Educators are not trained or equipped to provide psychosocial support (Buka et al., 2017). For many learners, professional psychosocial support is essential to address trauma and associated aggression and behavioural problems (Sliep et al., 2016). The government provides a part-time social worker but she does not have adequate time to meet with all learners requiring support. When learners do not receive the necessary psychosocial support, their wellbeing and behaviour are affected. Consequences of this include a reduced ability to focus and learn, and disruptive behaviour (Sliep et al., 2016). Educators who are already under pressure assume responsibility for learners' wellbeing. Working within these conditions is emotionally taxing, and this has resulted in exhausted and, at times, demoralised educators, whose teaching methods are structured by their struggles to maintain the necessary power in their classroom, often at odds with the pedagogical habitus they brought to their classrooms. Educators' continuous fight to survive in a field where they fulfil multiple roles without the required support, knowledge or training is a further example of how government and the DBE continue to place pressure on educators to perform additional responsibilities outside of their ambit as educators.

## 7.6 The learning environment

As my model demonstrates, the elements that constitute a culture of teaching and learning are entangled. Consequently, alterations to one element will shift the range of possible practices in the school (Bourdieu, 1990b). This entanglement is clear in that all other elements of the culture of teaching and learning affect the learning environment. In addition to these elements that I have discussed elsewhere in the chapter, there were two core findings as to what shaped the learning environment. These were hostility among peers and educator absenteeism.

Although not to the same extent as educators and families, peers have a significant effect on one another's learning experiences, with Farkas (2018) referring to how negative relations among peers "can create a culture antithetical to school achievement" (p. 30). Throughout observations, the significant negative effect that hostility among learners had on learners' participation emerged repeatedly (FS/01.2019-09.2019).

The most common reason provided for this hostility was how learners' poor discipline detracted from peers' possibilities for learning. This was firstly in terms of disrupting and decreasing time for learning. Secondly, the hostility among peers manifested in mocking any attempts to participate in lessons. Such hostility decreases learners' confidence and willingness to participate during teaching and learning (Dörnyei & Muir, 2019), detracting from learning opportunities." The consequence was that it was not possible for learners to enact their preferred reading and learning practices and, instead, their practices were restructured in accordance with how they anticipated their contributions would be received.

The challenges of teaching in such an environment were highlighted by learners' acknowledgment of the pressure on educators as well as in their responses as to how they would react if they were a Saxon Primary educator. When Bongi and Khethi (FGA/04.03.2019) were complaining about how their peers' behaviour disrupted their learning, I asked:

> Can you imagine having to be the teacher every day?
> Bongi: YHO!
> Claire: What would you do?
> Khethi: I'd just take my bag and go home.

Anathi (PPA/24.07.2019) complained that "the naughty children don't want to work" and she "would not stay here" as an educator. The extent of breakdown was clear in a Grade 5 learner's claim that, if she were an educator "I'd kill the children. The children would be my enemy" (PPA/AX). Such animosity results in a clear division in the classroom field marked by the undermining of peers' practices. The impact of this is articulated by Dörnyei and Muir (2019) in their assertion:

> If learners form cliques and subgroups that are hostile to each other and resist any cooperation, the overall climate will be stressful for teachers and students alike and learning effectiveness likely to plummet. (p. 721)

Adding to educators' struggles with classroom management is that educators have additional learners placed in their classrooms if a colleague is absent. Because educators do not have free periods, there are no educators who can substitute for their colleagues.

Instead, learners are placed with their guardian teachers who assume responsibility for two to four learners from a class when their educator is absent. Visiting learners are generally seated on the floor and frequently distract other learners. If absent educators have prepared work for their learners, the completion of this work is often undermined by the lack of physical space learners have to do work and their guardian teachers not being able to provide necessary guidance for them to undertake their work. Guardian teachers occasionally provided learners with activity worksheets or books to read but, generally, there was no assigned work for visiting learners. Courtney, Megan and Simone's spontaneous complaints (FGB/09.05.2019) about being in their respective guardian teachers' classrooms demonstrated how these are wasted days. Courtney stated, "Yho Miss Claire but we do boring stuff in that class. You must just be quiet. You must just sleep that's all," and Megan interrupted her, saying "When we come to Ms [educator's name] class you must just sleep, sleep, no work." Adding to this, Simone complained, "We must just put our heads down and sleep."

On occasions where more than one educator is absent, there are often five or more additional learners in a classroom and the resulting disruption prohibits successful teaching and learning (FS/01.2019-09.2019). When this occurs, the "kids are bored so become disruptive" and the "day is wasted" (DD/Ms Gabriel/09.04.2019). On a day when Ms Gabriel had nine extra learners in her class, I noted, "five Grade 6 kids in class, four Grade 7s joined before first break. Chaos in the class. Teaching not possible" (FB/25.04.2019). This then places increased pressure on present educators who cannot adhere to their daily schedule.

The negative consequences of these disruptions stood out as a disabling feature in the school's culture of teaching and learning. Bourdieu (1990a) states that any habitus realises itself only in relation to a specific field, and therefore "the same habitus can lead to very different practices and stances depending on the state of the field" (p. 116). This is a pertinent argument in considering why, as a result of the constraints placed on educators, their knowledge, experience, and the beliefs embodied in their pedagogical habitus may not translate into the practices that they strive to achieve. Throughout my data, Reay's (1998b) perspective that teaching practices are affected by "the forces acting upon them" (p. 59)

was evident in educators' descriptions of how they adjust their practices in response to the classroom teaching and learning environment.

## 7.7 Infrastructure and resources

A school's physical environment and the resources available to learners convey the beliefs and values the school attaches to education and learning (Velissaratou & Blyth, 2017). Saxon Primary is fenced and entered through an electric gate staffed by a community safety officer. The gate leads directly to the parking lot. The front entrance to the school is opposite the gate. It has a small foyer with the secretary facing the door, seated behind a barred window in an office that is accessed through a security gate. This instantly reflects the vulnerability of the school in terms of crime and safety. Classroom windows are heavily barred, creating an environment that reflects a prison rather than a classroom.

After one has entered the school, if one turns right and follows the corridor to the foundation phase classrooms, paintings of cartoon characters and murals with content relating to reading and mathematics decorate the walls. Figure 7.2 is a photograph of the walls surrounding a Grade R and a Grade 3 classroom.



**Figure 7.2 Exterior walls of Grade R and 3 classrooms**

This colourful and engaging print is limited to walls outside five classrooms. In contrast, when one turns left and towards the intermediate and senior phase classrooms, the walls are bare, as evident in Figure 7.3 and there is a clear neglect of the physical environment.



**Figure 7.3 Exterior walls of Grade 6, Grade 7 and Grade 5 classrooms**

In and outside classrooms, there is widespread littering, vandalism and disregard for property. There are broken windows throughout the school, either broken purposefully in anger or damaged during activities such as soccer. Xavier's and Marcel's frustration in this regard (PPA/24.07.2019) was clear:

> Claire: How does this school look?
> Xavier: Crazy, children are going on.
> Marcel: Bad, because they draw on the walls.
> Xavier: They break the windows.

Bianca and Kim made similar complaints. In referring to a wall with pencil scribbles, Bianca stated that it "looks very ugly… They [other learners] must take pride" (PPA/Bianca/19.09.2019). Kim (PPA/18.09.2019) does not anticipate any alterations to her peers' behaviour because "they don't care for the school." As pride is a crucial motivating behaviour in establishing practices (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Dörnyei & Muir, 2019), this disrespect for the school environment is unlikely to change.

In conversations about physical space, learners often referred to the presence of print in school corridors. The existence of print provides consistent exposure to reading and indicates value is attached to literacy (Reeves et al., 2008). In order to best utilise walls as

spaces for learning, learners must be aware of these resources, recognise their value as learning tools and draw on them regularly (Comber & Cormack, 1997; McMahon & Wells, 2007). Interviews with Grade 5s suggest that there are examples of spaces that are well utilised, but they complained that these efforts are limited to certain areas of the school and centred on learning content appropriate to the foundation phase. Cleo and Candice complained that it is only younger learners who benefit from print. Candice explained, "[i]t's this A, B, C, D. What is that? That's the alphabet" (Figure 7.2) with Cleo voicing agreement (PPA/27.02.2019).

It is not purely the creation or transformation of physical spaces that promotes reading and learning. For this to occur, these spaces need to reflect learners' interests and contain relevant content (Parnell et al., 2008). This is best achieved through consultation with learners and their involvement in creating such spaces (Blackmore et al., 2011). Such consultation does not appear to be in place. Much of the print around the school, particularly painted on walls, was produced by learners from former Model-C schools[20] and private schools as part of their outreach programmes. This angers Grade 5 learners who have been excluded from contributing to the physical school environment (FGA/Khethi/18.09.2019; PPA/Kim/18.09.2019; PPA/Marcel/18.09.2019). Robyn (LLA/18.09.2019) complained bitterly:

> This is *actually* our school but they can paint but we can't paint on our school. It's unfair you see… because this is *our* school and we're supposed to be painting.

Speaking separately, Bianca also mentioned the word "unfair," stating, "It's unfair because it's our school" (DDA/18.09.2019). Their usage of the possessive adjective "our" in describing how it was "unfair" that others were allowed to paint "our school" conveys their anger at outsiders being allowed to assume power in constructing the physical environment. Positioning outsiders as essential to the construction of their learning environment perpetuates the colonial ideology of having to rely on and be grateful to those from more socially and economically privileged backgrounds. The consequent symbolic violence is indicative of Bourdieu's (1974) opinion that children from more socio-economically

[20] The term Model-C school refers to schools that admitted only White learners until 1991, after which they were permitted to admit learners from all demographic groups.

privileged backgrounds remain likely to maintain this hierarchical position, with those lacking this privilege continuing to occupy dominated positions (Schirato & Roberts, 2018). The result is that Saxon Primary learners are positioned in deficit to learners from more privileged schools. This denies them their rightful agency to contribute to an environment that best responds to their interests.

For a school to create a sense of belonging among learners, an inclusive environment that draws on learners' ideas and agency facilitates such belonging, which provides motivation to maintain the environment (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (US), 2018). By restricting learners' ability to share ideas in the construction of this field, motivation to respect and maintain the physical environment is decreased.

As influential figures, educators' behaviour and attitudes towards the physical environment will affect learners' actions (Bourdieu, 1986). Staff members criticised learners for the poor state of the school. However, there were numerous examples of staff who showed little respect for infrastructure and resources, thereby failing to model appropriate behaviour to learners. I observed damaged or unused furniture blocking passages. Storerooms were in chaos. A child's bicycle, in a state of disrepair, was balanced on a pile of broken chairs in one storeroom throughout my fieldwork. A pile of about 100 new textbooks was left on a corridor floor outside a storeroom for a week (FS/17.02.2019-21.02.2019). Khethi (FGA/18.09.2019) criticised ground staff and educators who "just shove things… never put in ordinary manner. Some people, I'm not naming names, show it, they don't care… Mr Willemse does nothing, doesn't say anything." Bongi took the picture in Figure 7.4 complaining that this is an example of how disorganisation "makes a school dirty" and that "they [educators] should move it because it doesn't look so nice" (FGA/18.09.2019). Both Khethi and Bongi stressed that one cannot be proud of a school that looks like that.

As a lack of attention to improving the physical field is apparent throughout the school, motivation to succeed in the environment may be reduced, as such conditions are suggestive of a staff body that pays insufficient attention to encouraging learning. The disorganisation across much of the school, the neglect of property by both staff and learners, and a resigned acceptance that the environment will not be improved result in a

space that does not promote productivity or the creation and maintenance of a strong culture of teaching and learning.



**Figure 7.4 Chairs and desks outside library (17.09.2019)**

## 7.8 Institutional structures and routines

In Chapter 3, I referred to the perspective that a school's success in achieving a strong culture of teaching and learning can be empirically observed through factors such as time spent on teaching, punctuality, low absenteeism levels, and adherence to the timetable (Buka et al., 2017; Motshekga, 2009). The existence of these factors does not guarantee a strong culture of teaching and learning but they create a foundation for clear routines, patterns of behaviour and meeting curriculum requirements (Christie, 1998). In this final section of this chapter, I describe the routines in place in the school and how these are disrupted at times. This is often as a result of the poor discipline and high levels of absenteeism that I have referred to earlier in the chapter. There are also clear institutional threats to the school's culture of teaching and learning. This was especially in terms of the lack of systems in place for educators to gain assistance, either from the school or from the DBE and the Department of Social Development (DSD). Educators' perception that they do not have the support of the school's leadership and that they are unsure of how to gain assistance further display these threats.

Educators are punctual, few learners arrive late and the day begins with learners lining up and entering the classroom soon after the bell. Frequently, though, at least one educator is absent. Teaching and learning is then disrupted across the school as the absent educator's learners are sent to their guardian teachers' classrooms. Without an obvious alternative to managing educators' absenteeism, this immediately offsets the daily rhythm and adds a further challenge to classroom discipline, reducing the time spent on learning.

Educators' absenteeism could not be linked to specific times or days of the week. In contrast, learners' absenteeism peaked around specific dates and events. These were during the last two weeks of each term, around public holidays, and on days where there were school events such as sports days or Valentine's Day celebrations (FS/28.01.2019-19.09.2019). These high levels of absenteeism are longstanding and educators see no means of overcoming them. During the week of the 1 May public holiday there were about ten Grade 1 learners absent on two days. I noted, "About ten kids absent so [Ms Gabriel] couldn't do much teaching" (FB/30.04.2019) and "because so many kids are absent, can't do anything [work] new, Ms Gabriel gets hugely frustrated by this" (FB/03.05.2019). I would estimate these high levels of absenteeism result in a minimum of 15 days of significantly reduced productivity annually, which requires that educators cover the already substantial amount of content over a reduced number of teaching days. This barrier to teaching is not easily surmountable. Schools can have absenteeism policies formulated and ensure an attendance register is maintained but, practically, they are reliant on parents ensuring their children attend school and educators cannot control learners' attendance.

Christie (1998) states that a positive culture of teaching and learning requires "proper and effective management systems with clear procedures and clear lines of authority, powers, responsibility and accountability" (p. 291). The lack of such systems has been demonstrated throughout this chapter. Notably, the absence of faith that educators will receive assistance or feedback from leadership structures results in hesitancy to approach leadership.

In describing the pressure of her role, Ms Adams (LL/23.08.2019) said, "At the end of the day, they [the SMT] just want us to produce, produce." She related that educators are criticised for not adhering to the timetable and for learners' poor discipline but that there is "no support from management really" (LL/Ms Adams/23.08.2019). Ms Adams stated that

there are no scheduled times for intermediate and senior phase department meetings and that they only occur if the head of department arranges a meeting. This lack of support and scheduling of routine meetings is a major threat to educators' teaching and restricts potential for team planning and knowledge sharing. Ms Adams (LL/23.08.2019) stated, "I'm not sure how teachers can go about getting support if they have a problem." Her comments demonstrate once more how the disconnect among leadership and educators, and the resulting isolation which educators experience, ultimately undermines the culture of teaching and learning.

Much is needed to improve the school's structures and systems. Some of this can be achieved within the school. However, this depends on certain structures and systems being provided by government. Clear structures must be in place for learners to gain the academic and psychosocial assistance they need. In working to achieve this, the influence of the overlapping field of education and the government's role are evident. There are insufficient structures in place at Saxon Primary for learners who require additional learning support and with educators have to decide which learners most need learning support. This is because there is only a part-time learning support educator and she is responsible for providing additional language and learning support for learners across all grades.

## 7.9 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Saxon Primary's poor culture of teaching and learning results from a complex interplay between historical injustices, external demands, overlapping fields, power struggles and educators' battles to create an effective teaching and learning environment in light of these challenges. Notably, the negative impact of weak relationships among staff members and leadership, and poor learner discipline, constrained the strengthening of the culture of teaching and learning.

My analysis of the school's culture of teaching and learning stemmed from my realisation that the school's culture of reading could not be analysed without first exploring how the culture of teaching and learning constrains or promotes reading practices. The impact of the school's culture of teaching and learning on its culture of reading is evident in the next two chapters, in my exploration of the classroom cultures of reading in Grade 5A and Grade 1B.

# CHAPTER 8: THE GRADE 5 CLASSROOM

In responding to my second and third research questions – "What shapes a culture of reading in a South African no-fee primary school?" and "How is this culture of reading reflected in the school's reading practices?" – I focused on the culture of reading in a Grade 1 and a Grade 5 classroom. My foregrounding of these two classrooms does not dismiss that a classroom exists within the larger field of the school and broader societal context (Bloome, 2012) or that classroom practices occur in relation to these external influences. As Hardy (2012) explains, every classroom is socially constructed with practices that are heavily influenced by the social and cultural factors at play. This is in terms of ideologies, positioning of members of a classroom community and how classroom practices are shaped by external forces, specifically political forces. In this chapter, I explore the culture of reading in Grade 5A, Ms Adams' classroom. Because no field exists in isolation (Bourdieu, 1990b), the classroom culture of reading will have been influenced by what the school's culture of teaching and learning allows for and by how the DBE's curriculum and policy mandates translate to classroom level. Although each Saxon Primary classroom has these same influences acting on it, each classroom's culture of reading is unique. This is because, like any field, each classroom has its "own way of doing things, rules, assumptions and beliefs; in sum, its own legitimate means" (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 20). This way of doing things is a result of how classroom members' habitus have been restructured in response to the classroom field and by how their position of power, especially in terms of the reading capital that they have accumulated, allows them to strengthen existing practices or implement new ones. This restructuring can, however, act negatively when there are

struggles for power and conflict that do not allow for individuals' reading habitus to operate as reading capital.

Throughout my fieldwork, there were undeniable tensions and conflicts in the Grade 5 classroom. Many of these were discussed in detail in Chapters 6 and 7 and their impact on reading specifically is clear in this chapter. One of the results of these tensions is that Ms Adams has been required to adopt a utilitarian and curriculum-focused approach to reading, associated with the autonomous model of literacy. As a consequence, there are reduced opportunities for learners to develop meaningful reasons for reading, especially if they entered the classroom with negative dispositions towards some or all forms of reading.

However, despite the tensions in the Grade 5 classroom, ultimately it is a space where there are opportunities for reading and for learners to engage with and discuss reading outside of the curriculum. In this chapter I demonstrate how, despite the restrictions imposed on Saxon Primary classrooms, especially in terms of the culture of teaching and learning and by the field of education, strong reading practices do exist in pockets in the school. With all practices being shaped by an interaction between habitus and field, I begin this chapter by examining Ms Adam's and learners' reading habitus, which provides a foundation for exploring how learners respond to opportunities for reading.

## 8.1 Shaping reading habitus

Bourdieu (1990b) refers to habitus as a "product of history" (p. 54). For this reason, each Grade 5 learner enters Ms Adams' classroom with an established reading habitus, founded in previous experiences with reading and literacy in and outside of school. The ways in which learners' reading habitus influences their practices will depend on the possibilities that the Grade 5 classroom offers for reading. Ms Adams, too, enters the classroom with an established habitus that will predispose her to certain approaches to teaching, reading instruction and promoting reading (Feldman, 2016a; Gennrich, 2015).

The development and maintenance of a culture of reading depends on influential figures who support children's reading practices (Wright, 2012). As a result of her position in the classroom, understanding Ms Adams' conceptualisation of a culture of reading and how she works to achieve this is a starting point for exploring the classroom culture of reading. Every

interaction surrounding reading between Ms Adams and her learners is a social practice that will affect how reading is taught, learnt and taken up in the classroom (B. Street, 2012). This is because practices are all affected by the power structures in the field and by how the dispositions held by the respective members of the field play out in relation to the specific field (Luke & Freebody, 1999). As the educator, Ms Adams is responsible for constructing a field that best facilitates strong individual and collective reading practices, as legitimised by the wider field of education. Ms Adams' own practices and the ways in which she approaches and speaks about reading will influence learners' beliefs about reading and accordingly their reading practices.

Ms Adams (LL/23.08.2019) stated that a culture of reading exists when there is "a love, passion and drive for the written word." She described culture as being transmitted from "generation to generation" and stressed that a drive for the written word must "be instilled from a young age… before the kids are even a year old." She emphasises that even at this young age, parents should read and discuss picture books with their children in order to "develop a sense of curiosity" and interest in reading. She added that, because children learn habits from their parents, "whenever parents are reading, newspaper or anything, then they must draw attention to it, they must model reading habits" (LL/Ms Adams/23.08.2019). Her definition of a culture of reading and our discussions of reading indicated an understanding that reading is both a cognitive and a socio-cultural practice, with reading practices influenced by the field in which they occur. Her description of reading draws a clear divide between traditional schooled reading practices, such as reading books and newspapers, and other literacy practices. This is clear in her belief that if learners are not exposed to reading at home, they arrive at school with a considerable disadvantage and it can be "difficult" for them to "immediately develop a strong culture of reading" (LL/Ms Adams/08.03.2019). The phrase "immediately develop" suggests an assumption that if learners have not been exposed to written texts such as books and newspapers, they enter school with no reading habitus. Such a viewpoint reduces the possibility of building on other literacy practices in the home in strengthening learners' development as readers.

Although she stated that it is "difficult" for learners to develop a culture of reading with no prior exposure to reading, she believes practices can alter or develop. She explains that this

is because culture is shaped by "what is known, what he [a child] sees in everyday occurrences, school, home, community and TV" (LL/Ms Adams/23.08.2019). This perspective demonstrates insight that alterations to practices are not easily achieved (Bourdieu, 1990b) but that, in her position of influence, if Ms Adams ensures children are consistently exposed to reading at school and its value is emphasised, alterations to their reading habitus are possible. Her commitment to convey to learners the importance she assigns to reading is driven by her beliefs that "if learners can understand the value of reading, then that's half the battle won" and "that learners need to want to read and make it a habit" (LL/08.03.2019). This determination was evident from my first day in the classroom.

### 8.1.1 The physical field

Literacy practices are embedded in the specific field in which they occur (Rowsell et al., 2019). These practices result from interactions among members of the field, the members' individual and group literacy habitus and what the physical environment conveys about literacy, and how it facilitates or prohibits different practices. While the physical set-up and organisation of a classroom may not link directly to a culture of reading, it provides an indicator of how an educator positions learning and reading (Kershner, 2000), and shapes potential classroom practices. My immediate impression on entering the Grade 5 classroom was that Ms Adams had created a classroom that promotes learning and reading. The classroom consisted of learners' desks, one bookshelf, Ms Adams' desk, and a cupboard and a table at the front of the classroom where learners' exercise books and textbooks are stored.[21] There were two files on top of the bookshelf that contained worksheets with activities such as crosswords and word searches. These were for learners to select from when they had finished any assigned work, a clear indicator of her ongoing efforts to provide learners with resources that create opportunities for reading. Although it was a limited collection, there was a bookshelf of books owned by Ms Adams that were available

[21] I was seated in the back left corner of the classroom, very close to a group of four learners. We seldom interacted during teaching time or when learners were working.

for learners to read. These were books that had belonged to her children or that she had purchased herself.

Learners were seated in groups of four to encourage collaboration and group learning. Figure 8.1 depicts the classroom setup. Learners' written work and artwork were on display and there was a world map and a range of posters related to the curriculum on the walls.



**Figure 8.1 Grade 5A classroom**

The ways in which this physical environment benefits reading and learning result from how the educator and learners engage with this environment (Sailors & Hoffman, 2010). Learners' comments on how they drew on print for learning and their awareness of what print was on display (PPA/Ashley/20.02.2019; FGA/Candice/26.02.2019; LLA/Nandi/24.07.2019; PPA/Xavier & Marcel/27.02.2019) indicate that Ms Adams succeeded in meeting her objective of creating a classroom space that was "eye-appealing, something for them to take note of" (LL/Ms Adams/23.08.2019). Roskos and Neuman (2011) state that "the effective teacher of reading uses walls as *texts* that tell the story of what students know, what they are learning, and where they might go next" (p. 112, italics in original). Ms Adams' success in this regard came through in that learners frequently expressed appreciation for how the print on display assists with their reading and learning. Bianca (PPA/04.03.2019) provided an example of how print reinforced what had been taught when I asked:

> How do you like the walls to look in a classroom?
>
> Bianca: Just like this.
>
> Claire: Why do you like the walls like this here?
>
> Bianca: If, for, if they like ask us from a country or something we can just look on the wall.

Her use of the word “just” illustrates how the presence of print regarding curriculum topics creates quick access for revising knowledge. This reinforcement of knowledge was apparent when Leigh (LLA/04.03.2019) explained that the print on walls helps because “when we do tests, then we know that we must practise that work.”[22]

During lessons, Ms Adams referred to posters relevant to the topic being covered and reminded learners how information on the walls could assist with revising their work. She used the walls as spaces to consolidate content she had been teaching and to showcase learners’ work. Figure 8.2 and Figure 8.3 demonstrate her use of wall space in presenting social sciences subject matter, and how she changed displays according to the current topic.

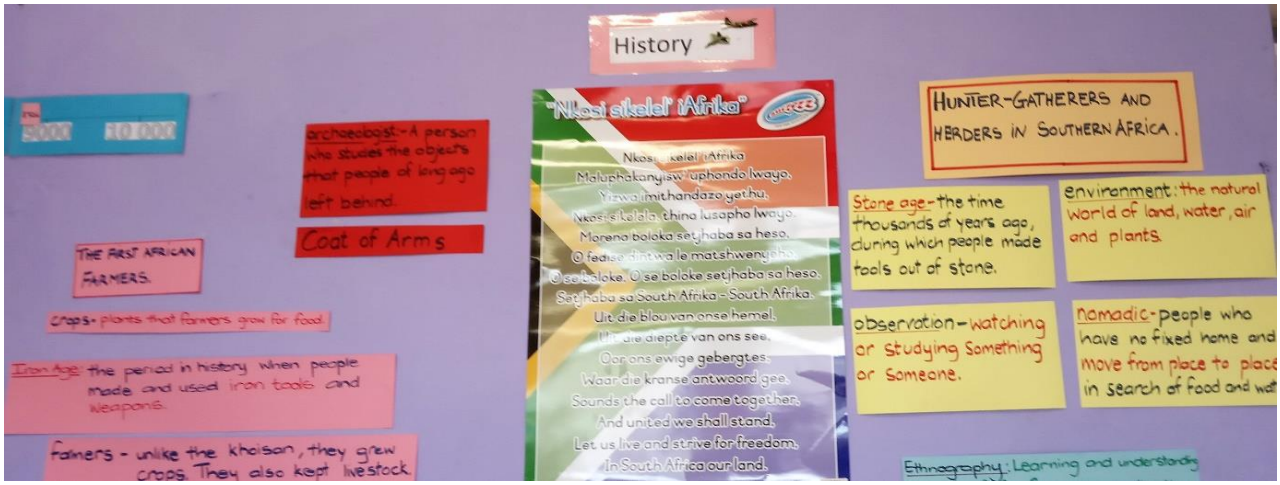



**Figure 8.2 Social sciences display: Hunter-gatherers and herders in South Africa**

[22] Posters are covered or removed if they relate to an assessment task.

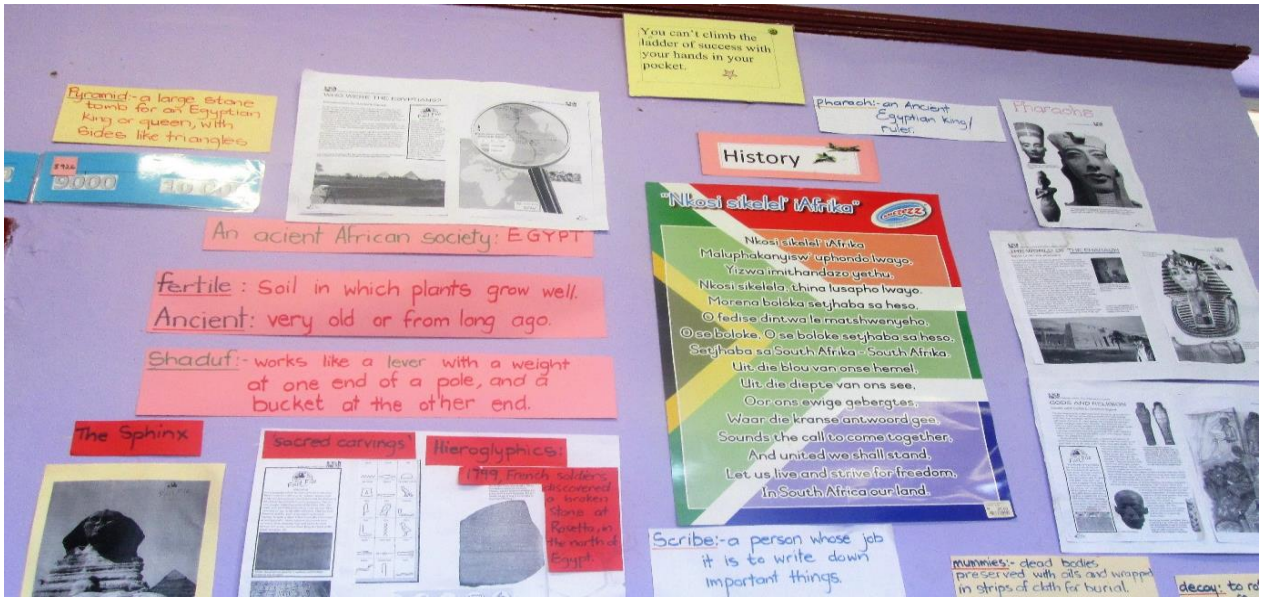



**Figure 8.3 Social sciences display: Egypt, an ancient African society**

Ms Adams' classroom environment promotes knowledge and is a space where learners are always surrounded by print. The positive manner in which learners react to it provides a strong foundation for her efforts to promote curiosity and learning and to incorporate reading throughout daily practices.

### 8.1.2 Positioning reading in the classroom

Practices result from an interaction between habitus and capital in relation to a specific field (Bourdieu, 1990b). As the educator, it is Ms Adams' responsibility to guide, respond to and manage any interactions in the manner that best facilitates strong reading practices and constructing a classroom field that motivates reading. With a culture of reading consisting of a specific set of beliefs and practices, a starting point for Ms Adams promoting reading is how she positions reading in the classroom and how she conveys the benefits of reading to learners and encourages reading.

Although Ms Adams' descriptions of a culture of reading reflected insight that reading is both a cognitive skill and social practice, the ways in which Ms Adams constructs, positions and teaches reading in her classroom were frequently more indicative of the autonomous model of literacy. This is largely as a result of having to negotiate a school with a culture of teaching and learning that she felt restricted by and of working in an education field that enforces a prescriptive curriculum that she, like many of her colleagues, criticised for being

unsuited to Saxon Primary, as detailed in Section 6.1. The apparent opposition between Ms Adams' beliefs surrounding reading and her classroom practices are indicative of how educators' pedagogical habitus are restructured in accordance with the field in which they teach and whether this field allows them to draw on their institutional cultural capital to the benefit of their learners (Feldman, 2016b).

Despite these restrictions, Ms Adams remained committed to promoting and creating opportunities for reading for the purposes of learning and pleasure. She incorporates reading in daily classroom discourse across learning areas, and, wherever possible, provides opportunities for reading beyond curriculum requirements. After just four days in Ms Adams' classroom, I noted her "often stressing importance of reading and why, [integrating] reading across subjects, constantly bringing in aspects as to when reading is helpful" (FA/31.01.2019).

Examples of her efforts to encourage learners to read include reminding learners that books provide knowledge, with statements such as "[t]hese books that you have here are resources. That means it's a tool you can learn from" during a social sciences lesson (FA/08.03.2019), stressing the importance of improving reading to be able to read maps and follow instructions (FA/31.01.2019) and, in a mathematics lesson, reminding learners that reading is necessary in all subjects to understand questions and instructions and complete exercises successfully (FA/21.02.2019). She encourages learners to visit the library when they have projects through statements such as "[y]ou can go to the library, get more information, be original" (FA/29.01.2019) to supplement textbook content. Here, without explicitly stating so, Ms Adams draws a connection between books and knowledge, emphasising how learners can extend their knowledge through reading. While these examples may all link to reading as a source of academic knowledge, they all contribute to ensuring that there is consistent attention to reading in her classroom.

Ms Daniels spoke highly of Ms Adams and how she promotes the library to learners as an important resource in the school. She referred to Ms Adams as being the educator who most frequently approaches her when she assigns projects for her Grade 5s, stating "she comes and speaks to me, I'm doing this project, can you touch base so they have an idea?" (LL/Ms Daniels/12.06.2019). This demonstrates how Ms Adams' promotion of reading is

reflected not only in her beliefs and words but also through her practices. Ms Adams' request to Ms Daniels provides an example of how, when educators seek out collaboration in their efforts to promote reading, the resulting social reading capital acts to the benefit of learners' reading practices.

In the same interview in which Ms Daniels referred to Ms Adams asking her to assist learners, I asked her what motivates learners to visit the library outside of visiting for assistance with academic tasks or to attend library periods. She responded:

> I think because of the teachers. I think if I look at Mr Carrim, he's Grade 6B, and Ms Prince who's Grade 6A, I think they encourage the learners more… There is a few Grade 5s now, like I only experience them from Ms Adams' class. A lot of children in Ms Adams' class that wants to come to the library and read. (LL/Ms Daniels/12.06.2019)

The establishment of the library resulted from Mfunqule introducing Saxon Primary to Funda Fun. Compton-Lilly (2007) states that social reading capital includes connections that advantage people with reading. The Grade 5 learners' use of the library, for both learning and pleasure, illustrates the value of drawing on social connections in enabling increased possibilities for reading. For learners who visit the library frequently, they have more possibilities for reading at school and access to additional reading resources, two elements of a culture of reading. The success of the library confirms the crucial role that NGOs play in South Africa (E. le Roux, 2017) in creating opportunities for reading in schools that face resource and infrastructure constraints.

Ms Adams' determination to instil the importance of reading in learners was illustrated in an English lesson on newspaper articles (FA/11.02.2019). Rather than using the prescribed article in the textbook, she selected an article published in the *Cape Times* ("Mobile Libraries Turn Pages of Literacy," 2019) that reported on the donation of two mobile libraries to an NGO and how these mobile libraries enabled reading for pleasure and increased literacy levels (Appendix A). Before reading the article, Ms Adams asked, "Is it important to read?" and "What does reading do for us?" Learners' responses referred to it being important to "go to the next grade," "get information," "help you to pass Matric" and "be clever." Once they had read the article, they again discussed the value of reading with Ms Adams emphasising that reading was necessary for employment and "inspires you to a better

lifestyle." This activity provides an example of working within the confines of the curriculum. By selecting an article other than the one in the textbook, Ms Adams was able to convey the value of reading to learners while simultaneously meeting CAPS requirements (Department of Basic Education, 2011b). Her promotion of reading was recognised by learners who were unequivocal in stating that Ms Adams viewed reading as important and necessary for learning, daily life and their future (FGA/Khethi & Marcel/04.02.2019; FGA/Leigh/04.03.2019; LLA/Robyn/27.02.2019). Sofia's description of why Ms Adams wants learners to read aligns to Ms Adams' statement (FA/11.02.2019) that reading inspires a better lifestyle. Sofia (FGA/19.02.2019) stated:

> Ma'am [Ms Adams] say "*jy moet leer om te lees*."[23]
> Claire: Do you think she is being angry [when children do not want to read] or do you think she just thinks it's important to read?
> Sofia: She, um, she not angry, she push us.
> Claire: She pushes you. She pushes you in a good way or a bad way?
> Sofia: In a good way… Because Ma'am, she want us to come far in life, and all that. Ma'am want us to get good jobs, not like the people here [in Saxon], on, in the road //Claire: *Ja*.// Ja, Ma'am wants us to get good, good jobs.

Her reference to Ms Adams motivating learners because "she wants us to come far in life… not like the people in Saxon" links closely to Ms Adams' belief that although one's upbringing affects one's future, it does not have to determine it. She expressed this in her statement to me that learners' perspectives of themselves "will mould you [learners] into the type of person they want to be. That's the crux" (LL/Ms Adams/08.03.2019). This is a theme that was highlighted through examples such as her stressing to learners "we [Saxon Primary educators] believe in you… stop keeping yourself blocked in… *Gaan julle hier gangsters wees*?"[24] (FA/26.02.2019).

Because a culture of reading consists of a set of beliefs, learners' dispositions toward reading and the values that learners associate with reading will shape their reading practices. Understanding learners' motivation to read was, therefore, a discussion across interviews. While learners stated that they are motivated to read when there are

[23] You must learn to read (translation from Afrikaans).
[24] Are you going to be gangsters here? (direct translation from Afrikaans)

possibilities for enjoyment, their reasons for prioritising reading reflected a viewpoint that reading is primarily for instrumental reasons with measurable outcomes. During interviews, there were two common responses as to how they believe reading contributes to their lives. These were that reading enables academic success at school and access to tertiary education (PPA/Ashley/20.02.2019; FGA/Caitlin & Marcel/05.02.2019; LLA/Robyn/27.02.2019; PPA/Candice/27.02.2019; PPA/Cleo & Nandi/20.02.2019) and that it provides access to employment and financial security (FGA/Bianca & Bongi/26.02.2019; FGA/Gareth & Sofia/19.02.2019; FGA/Marcel/05.02.2019; FGA/Sofia/19.02.2019; PPA/Cleo/27.02.2019).

The benefits that learners mentioned as offering value outside of the school environment were frequently in terms of reading offering a pathway to employment and financial security. As children, they have not yet entered the job market and their perspective as to what reading enables or prohibits beyond schooling is thus based on others' opinions. Such beliefs may be parroting educators, family members or peers and cannot be fully validated because they refer to a field that learners have yet to enter. However, their reasons for these beliefs were often accompanied by examples, adding credibility to these opinions.

Robyn (LLA/27.02.2019), for example, referred to how one cannot succeed as a lawyer, the profession she wishes to pursue, without reading. She stated:

> If you're a lawyer… and you have people now that's there, now they give you pages that show evidence of this stuff, and then you're not going to be able to read it and you're not going to be able to understand, what do they mean. Are you going to earn money? No.

Robyn's perspective will have been largely shaped through interactions with adults who hold this perspective. This illustrates how influential role players, both in and outside the school, can influence the dispositions learners hold towards reading (Bourdieu, 1977) and, consequently, the development of their reading habitus.

Learners' responses to reading offering a pathway to employment and financial security reflects the literacy myth – that is, that being able to read ensures employment and improved socio-economic wellbeing (Graff, 1979). Indisputably, reading is required to secure employment in many sectors. However, what Graff stressed is that reading does not equate to guaranteed employment. Additionally, reading cannot guarantee access to

tertiary education, as there are many other forces at play that determine these opportunities. Comber and Cormack (1997) warn against the uncritical acceptance of this myth, stating that "many other factors, such as gender, race, ethnicity, geographic location, class, and socio-economic status, determine the opportunities people have to capitalise on what they learn in school" (p. 23). This warning applies to Saxon Primary learners, many of whom will be disadvantaged by some or all the factors that Comber and Cormack (1997) reference. These factors do not remove all possibilities of success beyond schooling, but they show the many constraints that Saxon Primary learners have to overcome as a result of the enduring socio-economic inequalities in South Africa (Turok et al., 2021).

If, as learners expressed, their beliefs surrounding reading are that it is an empowering practice that benefits them in their current and future lives, this predisposes them to responding positively to opportunities for reading that would offer this empowerment. It was, however, apparent that despite these positive attitudes towards reading, there were numerous factors that restricted the frequency with which learners could read or felt comfortable reading and therefore how they responded to opportunities for reading.

## 8.2 Responding to opportunities for reading

A culture of reading consists of regular reading practices. However, even if Ms Adams creates opportunities for regular reading, this does not guarantee that these will be positively received by learners or that they will take advantage of these opportunities. Because "the ways in which people address reading and writing are always rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being" (B. Street, 2012, p. 9), how learners conceptualise reading will influence how they take up available opportunities for reading.

### 8.2.1 The impact of reading levels on reading identity and motivation

One's reading identity is not shaped independently but is moulded in relation to interactions with other people (Compton-Lilly, 2006) and, in the case of schools, how learners are positioned as strong or poor readers by their educators, peers and assessment results (Scherer, 2016). To be considered a successful, strong reader at school, learners are expected to meet the predetermined grade levels outlined by the DBE, that are based on Western assessment scales for English home language speakers. The consequence is that

practices associated with academic performance are legitimised as the dominant practices and signs of a successful reader (Bloome et al., 2019). This was evident in interviews where learners' perspectives of what constitutes a reader were ideologically constructed such that success as a reader is measurable according to assessment results (PPA/Ashley/20.02.2019; FGA/Caitlin & Marcel/05.02.2019; FGA/Sofia/19.02.2019; LLA/Robyn/27.02.2019; PPA/Cleo & Nandi/20.02.2019).

This association between academic reading performance and one's identity as a reader was especially apparent in interviews with learners who struggle to comprehend texts. Ashley (FGA/24.07.2019) explained that he avoids reading because he does not understand the words. Yet, in the same interview, he spoke of how he loves being read to, especially when readers "make the moves, make the funny sounds" and that if he finishes his work early "I go fetch a book [from the classroom bookshelf]" (FGA/Ashley/24.07.2019). The contradiction between Ashley saying that he is not a reader and his actual practices demonstrate a reading identity that is structured in relation to academics. When I asked Leigh, "How does reading make you feel?" she responded, "I don't like it because Ma'am I don't understand the words, it's too hard to spell them out[25]" (LLA/Leigh/04.03.2019) while Gareth (FGA/19.02.2019) stated that he does not like reading "because it take too long."

Leigh, Gareth and Ashley all described enjoying shared reading, looking at illustrations, paging through picture books and library visits' descriptions that were validated by my observations. However, because they have constructed their reading identities in relation to what is valued by the education field, their immediate responses to discussions of reading were negative and linked to academics. In her research on primary school children's identities as readers in England, Scherer (2016) stressed how restrictive education policies – such as South African reading policies and CAPS – offer few opportunities for educators to adjust to their learners' needs, research that holds true to Ms Adams' efforts to promote reading. Throughout Ms Adams' attempts to create a field that supports a range of reading practices, she was constrained by a hostile classroom environment and a prescriptive curriculum that did not allow for this.

[25] "spell them out" can be understood as "decode."

Despite the challenges Ms Adams faced in promoting reading, she remained committed to empowering her learners and overcoming these gaps in learning. This was apparent in that she invited 10 learners to attend free weekly afterschool classes in attempts to close gaps in their learning. When Kim's mother approached Ms Adams, because she was concerned with Kim's schoolwork, Ms Adams agreed to provide Kim and her best friend weekly afterschool lessons at an alternative time, as Kim could not attend the scheduled lessons (LL/Ms Adams/08.03.2019). These classes, combined with the encouragement and support Kim received at home, had a significant influence on her academic results and, from finishing in the bottom third of the class at the end of the first term, she completed Grade 5 as a top ten learner in her class. The benefit this offered to Kim demonstrates that when there are resources in place, it is possible to address gaps in learning. Yet, this relies on an educator's willingness to offer additional lessons and it is not possible to provide such attention to all learners who would benefit from this assistance. Kim's mother and Ms Adams' interaction provides an example of how relations between parents and schools can create social reading capital that benefits learners' reading practices.

The contrast between learners who are identified as struggling and strong readers highlights how academic achievement influences their reading identity. Scherer (2016) states that in the education field:

> Children have a role to play to indicate they can 'do' the skills that policy dictates, and as long as policies with a strong leaning toward accountability and monitoring remain in place, so too will hierarchies of reading and children's emotional engagements with them. (p. 404)

Learners who performed schooled literacy practices successfully and met assessment criteria were quick to position themselves as superior to their peers. Statements such as "We, we can read better than them… they can't read" (PPA/AX) and the positive emotions these learners associate with reading clearly indicated how when learners " 'do' the skills that policy dictates," they are better positioned succeed in relation to the field of education. The objectified reading capital that they have amassed by achieving well in assessments has contributed to a pride in reading and positive dispositions towards reading that encourage further reading.

Candice, Bongi and Bianca are all near the top of the class academically. I asked, "How do you feel when you read?":

> Candice: I feel confident that I can read. I can do this.
> Bongi: Calm and I feel proud.
> Bianca: Excited. (FGA/26.02.2019)

Candice and Bongi's descriptions of feeling "confident that I can read" and "proud" are indicative of identities whose construction has been shaped by reading achievement. Unlike learners such as Ashley, Gareth and Leigh who immediately associated reading with failure, when I asked learners with higher reading levels what they think of when I say the word "reading" their responses linked to positive emotions to reading with descriptions such as "I feel excited" (LLA/Robyn/20.02.2019), "I think of something that makes you feel comfortable," and "it makes me calm" (FGA/Khethi & Marcel/04.03.2019). These emotions motivate further reading and subsequently contribute to their academic success and to strengthening their already positive dispositions towards reading (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Edwards & Ngwaru, 2012).

### 8.2.2 Reading for pleasure

In explaining to me what is required to strengthen reading practices, Ms Adams emphasised how critical it is that learners enjoy reading because they then "want to read and make it a habit" (LL/08.03.2019). This statement provides evidence of her insight into the association between enjoying reading and wanting to read more frequently was evident (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018; Trudell, 2019). Ms Adams (LL/23.08.2019) reported feeling under pressure to complete the curriculum. In spite of this, because of her determination to develop interested, habitual readers, she created opportunities for reading, outside of the curriculum. On such occasions, she offered them the agency to "decide what you want to read" (FA/29.01.2019) and encouraged them to read "purely for enjoyment" (FA/31.01.2019). She allowed learners to read alone or with friends which created possibilities for the development of communities of readers.

Her encouragement of reading for pleasure was exhibited on an occasion when learners were reading when they were supposed to be completing a maths exercise. Rather than expressing anger she stated:

> I see some of you reading, that's brilliant but unfortunately we need to work now – once you have finished, then you can read for enjoyment. You take out your reading books when you have finished your book [exercise in DBE workbooks], then you get your reward. (FA/27.02.2019)

Stating that "unfortunately" learners need to do their maths exercises is problematic in suggesting maths is not enjoyable. However, what this short extract does show is her promotion of reading. She called learners' interest in reading "brilliant" and associated reading with enjoyment. Her association between reading and a reward again indicated that reading is a fun activity to look forward to. Instead of reprimanding learners, she encouraged learners' interest in reading, adding to her ongoing promotion of reading.

A significant factor that reinforced hierarchies is that because learners who are academically stronger generally completed work faster, they had more time available to read for pleasure. This increased opportunities to build on the excitement, comfort and pride that many of these learners already associated with reading. For learners who did not have access to this same "reward," these possibilities were limited, creating a further divide between learners, based on academic performance.

### 8.2.3 Access to resources

For many schools nationwide, the only reading materials that are available are those prescribed by the DBE. Yet, the DBE stresses that supplementary books must be available and on display in all classrooms (Department of Basic Education, 2019e), and that schools libraries, which are "at the heart of the school's reading culture" (Department of Basic Education, 2019e, no pagination), should be stocked with materials in all languages in use at a school (Department of Basic Education, 2012, 2019e). There is an undeniable contradiction between what the DBE stipulates as contributing to a culture of reading and how the resources that they provide for schools enable them to meet these stipulations. The access to materials that appeal to readers is critical for the existence of a culture of reading. With the DBE not providing adequate resources to sustain a culture of reading, in exploring how reading materials contribute to a culture of reading, I discuss how learners responded to additional reading materials being introduced to their classroom.

When I entered the Grade 5 classroom, there were approximately 30 books on the bookshelf (belonging to Ms Adams) for learners to read once they had completed work or during periods Ms Adams devoted to reading (FA/28.01.2019). Early in the term, there were learners who had read all the books that appealed to them. There were some learners who I observed reading books that they had borrowed from the library but this is not a resource available to all learners. When Ms Adams assigned time to reading for pleasure or encouraged learners to read if they had completed their work, she suggested that learners who had read the classroom books and did not have books from the library read the CAPS-aligned prescribed reader. Based on my own reading of the classroom reader (L. Hofmeyr, 2012) and the data generated in my pilot study in 2018, I anticipated that this book would not interest many learners, an opinion confirmed by learners (PPA/Bongi & Nandi/24.07.2019; PPA/Khethi/24.07.2019). During my pilot study in 2018, the Grade 5 educator, Mr Seedat, had about 200 books he provided for learners to read. As many of his learners were clearly interested in selecting and reading these books (FP/27.08.2019-29.08.2019), I was interested in observing what the impact of additional materials would be on Grade 5A learners' reading in 2019.

With Ms Adams' permission, I added 36 books to the classroom library. There is extensive research on how providing learners' opportunities to select and access content that appeals to their interests, across a range of reading levels, contributes to a culture of reading (Itenge-Wheeler et al., 2016; Kirchner et al., 2014; Nkomo, 2017) and this guided my decision to introduce additional books. My decision may not be typical of recommended ethnographic method because it increased my impact on the research site further. Yet, it held benefit to my data collection as it offered additional insight into learners' reading habitus.

Learners could read the books when they had completed assigned work or during periods Ms Adams allowed for reading. In selecting books, I sourced a combination of picture books, chapter books and non-fiction books that varied in difficulty and covered a range of content that I knew responded to many learners' interests. With the exception of one Afrikaans book, all books were in English. The choice of books and the language of books was determined by the availability of books on sale at a significantly reduced price at a book

depot. (Appendix B lists the books.) This lack of books in languages other than English provides an example of the limited availability of books in other official languages. The following extracts portray learners' reception of these books on the day I donated them:

> *Ms Adams tells learners who have completed their maths exercises that they can read until first break. Several learners browse the bookshelf and select books to read. Candice chooses a chapter book and approaches me. She asks if these books will remain permanently in the classroom. I say yes and she thanks me saying, "Because of Miss Claire's books I don't need to go to the library anymore."*
>
> *After first break, I notice learners reading when they should be working. These are weaker learners whom I have not seen read voluntarily before who are reading picture books. These are mainly boys who are reading books on sports. (FA/26.02.2019)*

Candice did not visit the library outside of library periods. She explained this was because Ms Daniels can be prescriptive as to what books Candice should read or will query her choice of books (FGA/26.02.2019; PPA/24.07.2019). Her reaction indicates how, when learners have easier access to materials that appeal to them and that they can self-select, this increases their enthusiasm for and likelihood of reading more frequently (Clark & Phythian-Sence, 2008; Trudell, 2019).

In this second extract from later the same day, Candice was reading aloud to peers from a book that she chose from the new selection of books.

> *When learners return from second break, they are split between the classroom and computer lab. I remain with half the learners in the classroom. As Ms Adams leaves the classroom, she encourages learners to read the new books. Candice picks up a book and begins reading it aloud. Soon, she is surrounded by six peers (Figure 8.4). She reads with expression and confidence, showing the illustrations as she goes. For ten minutes, she holds their attention. The book completed, the seven learners choose new books and continue reading in smaller groups or individually. Candice and Bongi select a few books and read the blurbs together, trying to decide which books to read next. (FA/26.02.2019)*



**Figure 8.4 Grade 5s participate in shared reading (26.02.2019)**

During this reading event, a temporary, non-threatening space was created where interested learners could gather and participate in the story. In this example, the benefit of reading aloud was clear. The children listening to the story were at different reading levels, including one learner who could not comprehend written texts, but they all responded enthusiastically to the story and discussed it together. As in Section 6.2, where I showed learners' positive response to selecting books in the library, there were aspects of learners' reading habitus that had previously been hidden to me. The possibility for this habitus to emerge is particularly beneficial at Grade 5 level where there is no time allotted in CAPS to shared reading that does not link to academic tasks (Department of Basic Education, 2011b).

By providing an informal opportunity for learners to read, Ms Adams created a space where learners could share their mutual enjoyment of reading. Candice and Bongi's discussion about book selection once Candice had finished reading aloud (Figure 8.5) and learners' response to Candice reading aloud offer examples of how peer interaction contributes to

generating interest in books and creating a community of readers in a classroom (Cremin, 2019).

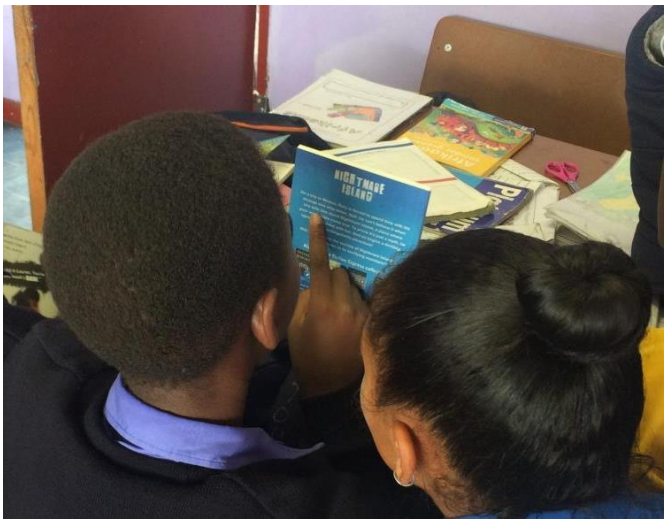


**Figure 8.5 Bongi and Candice discussing books (26.02.2019)**

In an interview after school on this same day, Candice's animated account of how she and Cleo interacted over the new books again highlighted how the benefit of providing learners possibilities to select books and consult and read with peers contributes to developing a community of readers. In an interview with Candice, I asked "What about how, if your friends tell you about a book?" She responded with an account of an interaction she and Cleo had had earlier in the day:

> I told Cleo, "um, you gonna read that book if you want to." She said "yes." Because I brought two books! I'm going to read that book and then she gonna read that book. And I told her when you done with the book then you must tell me what it's about and then I'm gonna tell you also. (FGA/26.02.2019)

The discussions among Candice and Cleo, and Candice and Bongi were similar to those I had witnessed in the library period I presented in Section 6.2. The excitement that learners expressed in being able to share recommendations for books and discuss stories serves as social reading capital where their interactions created social motivation to read.

In the period when some learners were at the computer lab, Ms Adams could have assigned learners work to do under my supervision. Instead, by providing an unscheduled time for learners to read and enjoy books, she conveyed that this is a practice deserving of attention. Learners' responses to the new books show how, when there are appropriate resources in

place and when learners are provided time and space to explore these texts, a reading habitus that is constrained by school practices and texts emerges.

My rationale for introducing books was validated in my observations of numerous boys, whom I had not previously seen read voluntarily, choosing to read independently and with peers. These boys' enthusiastic responses to non-fiction sports books, particularly three books on soccer, demonstrated the importance of content in encouraging reading (Hibbert & Crous, 2011). My selection of sports' books was influenced by a comment from Ashley (PPA/20.02.2019) that his favourite activity with his friends at the public library was searching Google for the soccer star Lionel Messi. My observations of Ashley and his peers reading these three books included watching them debate soccer player statistics, discussing pictures and arguing over their favourite soccer teams. Such mutual interaction and excitement encourages further interest in reading with peers (Cremin, 2019). Their enthusiasm provided an example of how knowledge of literacy practices outside of school (in this instance their favourite activity at the public library) can be built upon in the classroom. Again, a hidden habitus emerged as a result of having access to books of interest and available time to read them.

## 8.3 Peer influence

All fields are structured around struggles for power. While these struggles may introduce a competitive element to a field, the extent of this competition can be mild or aggressive (Heffernan, 2022). Similar to how the hostility among learners was to the detriment of the culture of teaching and learning, the effect of poor relations among learners and how they frequently undermined each other influenced the classroom culture of reading negatively.

In considering how peers influenced one another, this often aligned with the divisions learners drew amongst themselves according to their reading levels, as measured in assessments and fluency when reading aloud. Again, the fact that learners constructed their identities according to academic reading performance emerged. Stronger readers drew a divide between themselves and poorer-performing learners, especially in terms of discipline and disrespect (FGA/Khethi/04.03.2019; FGA/Kim/11.02.2019; FGA/Marcel/28.02.2019; LLA/Robyn/27.02.2019). They were, at times, vitriolic in describing peers' behaviour This

division among learners was highlighted in the use of “they” and “we,” which were terms used by both stronger and weaker readers in their complaints about their peers’ disrespect for them. Statements such as “they stupid, they don’t understand” (PPA/AX) and “They laugh for nothing. We, we can read better than them but I don’t know why they laughing if they can’t read” (PPA/AX) illustrate this.

Themba (PPA/28.02.2019) provided the opposing view, saying that it is because “they [his peers] can read” that some learners laughed when peers made mistakes, an opinion expressed by other poorer-performing learners. This has led to Themba and other learners who consider themselves poor readers electing not to participate in reading in front of peers. When learners feel that the risk of participation in any classroom reading event is too high, their identity as a non-reader is reinforced. The associated embarrassment results in symbolic violence where their non-participation denies opportunities to strengthen school reading practices.

Ms Adams (LL/08.03/2019) described this hostility, evident in that “[l]earners are constantly breaking down each other” (LL/Ms Adams/23.08.2019) and poor discipline as two of the biggest threats to the classroom culture of reading. Hostility among learners erodes confidence as readers and poor discipline decreases the time available for reading. She expressed frustration that this hostility breaks down learners’ confidence and decreases participation (LL/Ms Adams/08.03/2019). She encouraged learners to read with statements such as “the more you do something the better you become at it” (FA/Ms Adams/29.01.2019) and “[i]f you feel shy, don’t, you are here to improve yourself” (FA/Ms Adams/20.02.2019). These attempts did not result in increased participation. This is unsurprising because, throughout my fieldwork, there were learners who continued to disrespect peers, and such conflict will reduce motivation for participation.

The tensions among learners and the impact that this has had on their classroom reading practices are indicative of how members of a field influence others’ practices. The hierarchical structure described by all learners was that of better-performing readers assuming a dominant position. Wacquant (1992) describes a field as “a space of conflict and competition” (p. 18) where struggles to assume the position of power in the field result in the restructuring of a field. The blame circulating among learners and disrespect for one

another was a consistent source of conflict throughout my fieldwork and worked to undermine the classroom culture of reading.

Grade 5 learners have attended school together for as many as six years. They have occupied the same classroom spaces and had similar opportunities to develop reading habitus. There are two classes per grade but because classroom composition changes annually, most of the learners will have been in the same classes on several occasions. Habitus is acquired in relation to others and to the field in which we are situated. There are multiple members in a field, and if these members come to share similar beliefs and dispositions, a collective habitus can be expected (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1990b). In considering this, a collective reading habitus may be expected in a classroom consisting of learners who have had this extended interaction. Compton-Lilly (2014) states that all practices, including literacy practices, are a result of the negotiation, interactions and adjustments of habitus in relation to what a specific field permits. This was confirmed in the Grade 5 classroom. Although I witnessed many positive reading practices in the classroom, the conflict and struggle for power among learners resulted in a divided classroom where the potential for a stronger culture of reading was affected by a hostile and disruptive environment.

## 8.4 Conclusion

Reading assumed a central position in the Grade 5 classroom. Learners were encouraged to read and they recognised their educator's efforts to create opportunities for reading. In their interaction with Ms Adams, learners felt supported by her with the knowledge that she valued their participation and was dedicated to their success and promotion of reading. Ms Adams created a classroom where reading was foregrounded in daily discussions and events, and was a regular, valued practice. In her influential position as educator she imparted this value to learners. She was driven to create opportunities for learners to read outside of curriculum demands, albeit that she did not achieve this to the degree she wished. Across the classroom, there was an ongoing focus on reading. All learners I interviewed were adamant that reading formed a critical part of learning and that it was necessary for future academic and economic success.

When learners were offered opportunities for reading, their responses were positive and they spoke enthusiastically of reading books that interested them. This enthusiasm was confirmed in my observations, with the examples presented in Section 8.2.3 highlighting this. This enthusiasm was also evident in Ms Adams regularly having to guide learners back to other tasks and schoolwork when they were distracted by reading. However, Bourdieu's (1992) statement that every field is a "*field of struggles*" (p. 101, italics in original) was clear in how, despite the positive dispositions that most learners demonstrated towards reading for the purposes of pleasure and learning, and despite Ms Adams' commitment as an educator, there were ongoing restrictions to the strength of the classroom culture of reading. This was partially due to a subversion of power where a small group of disruptive learners prohibited the existence of a stronger classroom culture of reading. This subversion provides credence to Bourdieu's (1993) argument that, although those who occupy the position of power in a field can use this dominance to their advantage, the extent of this dominance can be reduced by the resistance of dominated agents. This restructuring of power and the challenges with leadership that Ms Adams referred to have resulted in her operating in a classroom and school where she holds limited social capital and where to survive "I must just do my bit."

From my first day in her classroom, Ms Adams' ongoing battle and efforts to shift these conditions and create a space where a culture of reading could thrive were evident. Ultimately, responsibility for guiding the restructuring of the classroom field to create a more positive learning environment lay with Ms Adams. However, as I described in Section 7.5, Ms Adams struggled to achieve this, and the consequences hereof manifested in ongoing disruptions and threats to learners' motivation to read and reading practices throughout my fieldwork.

In this already challenging context, Ms Adams faced further restrictions in having to adhere to a curriculum that is ideologically situated in Global North thinking and Anglonormativity. Ms Adams' pedagogical and reading habitus are indicative of an educator who is committed to her learners and reading. Her understanding of reading as a social practice aligned to the ideological model of literacy. Yet, her efforts in the classroom were more characteristic of a technicist and utilitarian understanding of a culture of reading reflective of the ideologies

underlying the autonomous model of literacy that have underpinned the development of the curriculum and education policies.

Instead of Ms Adams being able to draw on her amassed institutional capital, she was restricted by a disruptive classroom environment and by teaching a group of learners who were in need of various forms of support and individualised attention which she did not have the necessary capacity to provide, nor did she have access to necessary external resources to assist her in offering this support. The effect of how these restrictions and tensions among learners in the Grade 5 classroom have negatively influenced Ms Adams' practices is illustrated by Comber (1993), in her opinion that, when there are constraining factors in place, the result is:

> contradictions between the discourse of what teachers want for the literate student and what teachers need to do in order to make the classroom unit behave as a class should. (no pagination)

Despite these contradictions, at the end of my first term observations, I left the classroom impressed with what Ms Adams had managed to achieve in accounting for the external and internal forces working against her. She had created a field where, despite division, there was a clear classroom culture of reading. Nevertheless, she remained frustrated that she had been unable to build on this further.

# CHAPTER 9: THE GRADE 1 CLASSROOM

In the previous chapter, I wove Ms Adams and learners' voices through the chapter, drawing on interview data and observations in analysing the classroom culture of reading. This chapter reports primarily on Grade 1 classroom observations. I pay specific attention to how the environment in which Ms Gabriel teaches has contributed to shaping her teaching practices and the opportunities that she creates for reading.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section shows how Ms Gabriel has constructed a classroom space that presents many possibilities for a culture of reading. Drawing from a vignette of my first day in the classroom, I show how there are many resources and practices in place that create these possibilities. However, I demonstrate that there are simultaneously threats to the potential strength of the classroom culture of reading.

The second half of the chapter discusses the most noticeable threats to the classroom's culture of reading. The chapter concludes with an analysis of my last two days in the classroom. During the period of observation, there was a clear breakdown in the culture of teaching and learning in the classroom and this inevitably affected all other classroom practices. The breakdown that I witnessed ultimately led to Ms Gabriel and I deciding that I would discontinue classroom observations. I demonstrate the impact of this breakdown through a juxtaposition of my first and final two days in the classroom. In doing so, I show how an educator's will and skill (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), embodied in their pedagogical habitus, cannot operate effectively as capital, in any form, when they are consistently subjected to forces inside and outside of the classroom that reduce their capacity to draw

on their will and skill in a way that reflects their pedagogical habitus and commitment to reading.

## 9.1 Possibilities for creating a culture of reading

Ms Gabriel has taught at Saxon Primary for five years. She has extensive teaching experience, having taught in South Africa and three other countries over a 30-year career. When Ms Gabriel first expressed a willingness to host me, Mr Seedat (LL/27.09.2018), whose classroom I had observed during the pilot study, stated that I was fortunate that she had invited me into her classroom. This was because of her reputation for using innovative teaching methods, especially with regard to reading and phonics. Ms Gabriel's Grade 1 colleague Ms Klaasen (LL/08.11.2019) echoed this stating that Ms Gabriel "brought incredible ideas into the school, what she had learnt from experiences overseas" and that she had adopted many of these ideas herself. Ms Gabriel's willingness to share these ideas offered Ms Klaasen access to social reading capital which contributed to how she approached reading in her classroom.

Underlying Ms Gabriel's classroom practices is her pedagogical habitus, and how her identity as an educator and her ways of thinking about and approaching teaching and reading have been constructed through her own education and teaching career (Feldman, 2016a). In our discussions about teaching pedagogies and reading, Ms Gabriel's knowledge was clear and extensive. She was adamant that inculcating a love for reading from an early age is essential for learners' successful education and that educators play an essential role in achieving this. Throughout my observations Ms Gabriel demonstrated determination to succeed in this role. She frequently incorporated references to the value of reading into daily discourse through statements such as "the more you read, the cleverer you get" (FB/20.04.2019), "We are reading, we love reading" (FB/24.04.2019) and "Reading is so important, if you can read, you can do anything" (FB/23.04.2019), a repetition of her statement to me that, "If they can read, they can do anything" (DD/Ms Gabriel/10.04.2019). As influential figures, educators' modelling of reading and the attitudes they display towards reading play a critical role in shaping learners' reading habitus (Recinos, 2018). Ms Gabriel's

evident energy and enthusiasm during any reading event therefore offers much potential benefit to strengthening learners' reading habitus.

My first impression of the classroom was of a physical space containing colourful resources that would visually appeal to young learners and simultaneously promote learning and reading Figure 9.1. There is a large classroom mat which acts as the central point for reading, teaching and learning. This draws learners together and allows Ms Gabriel to observe their behaviour. Learners' desks are organised in mixed ability groups of four to six but they are seldom seated at their desks unless they are doing some form of writing or drawing. Her deliberate grouping of learners by mixed ability serves to generate social capital that enables learners to acquire support from peers. This seating arrangement is linked to her philosophy of "each one, teach one" – where any learner who has the required knowledge can share this knowledge with and "teach" a peer. She implemented this philosophy to respond to a multilingual classroom with learners who have a wide range of English and learning levels. It assists her in meeting the individual needs of learners and enables learners to translate for each other. Her purposeful construction of the physical space and arrangement of bodies in a way that supports interaction indicates her efforts to create an inclusive classroom and to strengthen relations among learners.

On my first day, I was surprised that, unlike all other foundation phase classrooms I visited, there was no reading corner or classroom library, and no evidence of books that did not relate directly to the curriculum. The construction of Ms Gabriel's classroom indicated careful and conscious use and placement of print, and the absence of books appeared to contradict these efforts.




**Figure 9.1 The Grade 1 classroom**

### 9.1.1 The first day

*It is my first day in the Grade 1B classroom. At 08.00, 39 learners line up noisily outside the classroom and enter one by one. Ms Gabriel welcomes them with warmth and hugs as they move towards the classroom mat. "Good morning my beautiful children, how are you today?" she greets them once they are seated on the mat. "Good morning my beautiful teacher," they respond.*

*Greetings over, she calls two children to the front of the classroom (an example is shown in Figure 9.2). "How's the weather?" one of the learners asks. The learner holds up a picture of a cold winter day that is stored below the blackboard and she can easily reach. "Is it cold outside?" "No!" her peers respond in unison. She chooses another picture. "Is it windy outside?" "Yes!" Next, it is days of the week and the date. "Today is Monday,* Maandag*, Monday. Tomorrow is Tuesday,* Dinsdag*, Tuesday. Yesterday was Sunday,* Sondag*, Sunday," learners chant together.*[26]

[26] Maandag, Dinsdag, Sondag: Monday, Tuesday, Sunday (translation from Afrikaans).

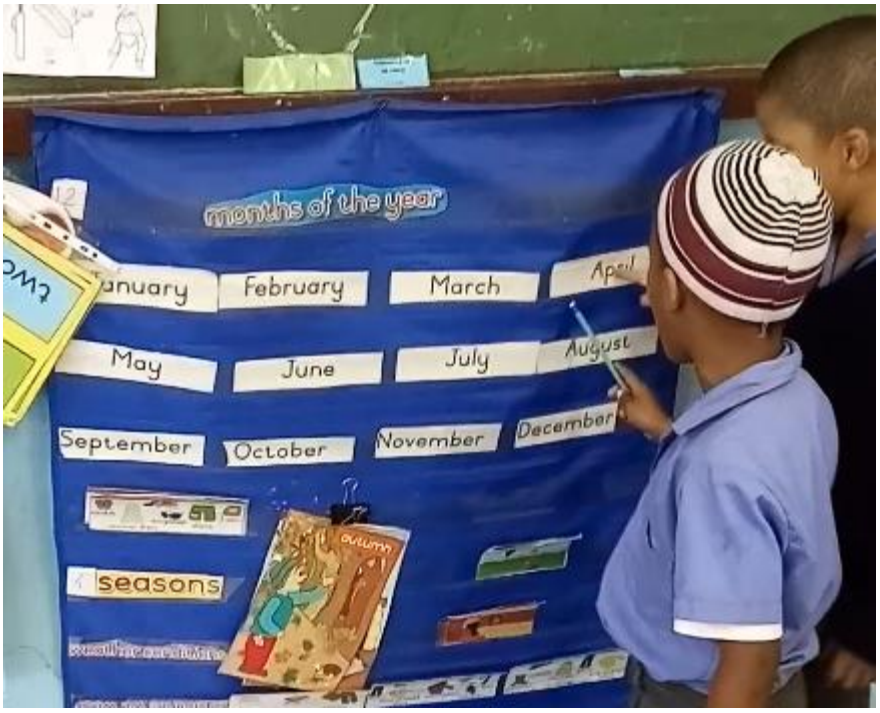



**Figure 9.2 Grade 1 boys demonstrate morning routine (09.05.2019)**

*Learners and Ms Gabriel stand for songs. They step backwards and forwards, counting from 1 to 20 and then practice counting in 2s and 5s as a learner points to the number chart on the wall. There is dancing and accompanying actions as they sing songs about numbers and shapes. These are songs they know and, led by a smiling and energetic educator, they all participate. There is friendly laughter.*

*At 09.30, it is time for maths. They remain on the mat while Ms Gabriel teaches. There is a 20-minute disruption when about half the class visits the kitchen for feeding scheme. Ms Gabriel uses the opportunity to revise colours in English and Afrikaans. "Yellow, yellow,* geel, geel, geel, geel*, yellow, yellow," learners chant as she points to the large colour chart displayed at the front of the classroom. "Black, black,* swart, swart, swart, swart*, black, black"*[27] *and they continue through the colours. Their peers return from the kitchen and they all move to their desks. There are six Grade 3 and Grade 4 learners in the classroom because their educators are absent and Ms Gabriel asks them to distribute the DBE mathematics workbooks. Learners open their books. After Ms Gabriel reads the instructions, she asks, "Can you*

[27] Geel: yellow; Swart: black (translation from Afrikaans).

*do it on your own?" to which her learners reply "No." Quickly she responds, "Don't say no, say I will try."*

*Learners start working. She plays songs with basic English vocabulary – animals, food, shapes – in the background. She encourages learners, "I want you to listen and sing while you work. I want your English to become better and better." Ms Gabriel turns to the Grade 3 and 4 learners who are seated at the back of the classroom and asks them to be quiet and not disturb her learners. The bell rings and learners go out for their 20-minute first break. They return and continue with maths for a further hour.*

*Maths over, she asks learners to bring their reading files with them to the mat. She instructs learners to turn to the alphabet charts she has printed for each of them, which they have placed in plastic sleeves. She plays a phonics alphabet song she has downloaded from YouTube and learners sing along while pointing to letters on their chart. There is no Wi-Fi in the classroom. Learners briefly revise blends and digraphs and this revision is consolidated with songs* (Hartmann, 2017). *Continuing the lesson, she states, "Today we're doing the /ag/ family. How many of you know words with the /ag/ family?" and they shout out words that she then writes on the blackboard. She plays a song about the /ag/ family from the same YouTube channel. They then gather closely as she reads a story displayed on the laptop screen, which incorporates the blends they have covered.*

*After 30 minutes of phonics, she transitions to writing. While learners practise writing, she sits on the mat and conducts GGR with three groups of learners. All groups read readers that they have previously read. They share amongst themselves because there is a shortage of readers due to damage. In the last five minutes before break, Ms Gabriel stands in front of the class. She rubs her ears, taps her forehead and asks learners to name the body parts. Learners join in and laugh at her expressions and actions.*

*When learners return from break, Ms Gabriel announces that it is story time. They rush to the mat and jostle for a position close to Ms Gabriel. Ms Gabriel starts singing and learners join in, "Story time is here today, yip, yip, yah! Story time is a happy*

*time, yip, yip, yah!" She holds up a picture book and begins by reminding them of the importance of book care. "Front cover, back cover, title, spine," they shout together as Ms Gabriel shows them different parts of the book. "Title:* Daisy and the Egg,*" Ms Gabriel adds, pointing to the title. She asks learners what they think the story is about based on the cover. She reads with expression, adopts different voices for each speaker and uses gestures, pausing to ask occasional questions. Learners respond with enthusiasm and laughter. They move closer and closer to her as she reads. At the end of the story, she asks further questions and they discuss the story.*

*She thanks learners for working hard and tells them it is "sleeping time." Learners can rest at their desks, lie on the mat or do colouring in. Before the final bell, learners gather on the mat. "Good afternoon my beautiful children," she greets them, reminding them to be careful and get home safely. She stands at the door as they leave the classroom giving them each a final hug for the day. (FB/09.04.2019)*

From my first moments in the Grade 1B classroom, I sensed I was in a classroom where learners felt comfortable and secure. Ms Gabriel's efforts to create a fun, inclusive and caring space were apparent throughout the day. From her initial individual greetings to her final farewell of the day, she consistently demonstrated to learners that they were respected members of her classroom. In her morning and afternoon greetings of "my beautiful children," the possessive adjective "my" highlighted inclusivity, and describing learners as "beautiful" affirmed that they were valued within her classroom. Such positive reinforcements build learners' confidence and sense of belonging, which are critical for a supportive and productive learning environment, a crucial element of a strong culture of teaching and learning.

The morning routine is the one event that Ms Gabriel never omitted. In addition to educational benefits, it served to create an ordered environment, a routine that assumed particular value for learners from less structured home environments (LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019). The resources Ms Gabriel had created were colourful, clear and visible to all learners. By drawing on these materials, she integrated reading into the routine and ensured learners were continuously engaging with texts. Ms Gabriel facilitated how these resources were used but it was learners who read the print on the posters, asked and

answered questions, and guided their peers in singing songs on topics such as the weather and dates and times. Our identities as readers develop in interaction with others (Compton-Lilly, 2006). The interactions among learners, partially driven by learners, created connections among them that contributed to accumulating social reading capital, and possibilities for developing vocabulary and confidence in the classroom to the further benefit of their reading practices.

In observing this routine, I was struck by Ms Gabriel's enthusiasm and her creation of a space that encouraged fun and interaction. This was evident in how she placed herself in the classroom physically and in her actions, language and expressions when interacting with learners. From when learners first entered the classroom, there was little physical separation between Ms Gabriel and her learners. When learners sat on the mat, she seated herself on a chair, but it was a learner's chair and placed her at a similar level to learners. Whenever learners stood for actions and to dance, she joined them. The morning routine was centred on learning and fun, and led by learners and not an authoritative figure. Throughout my six weeks of observations, it was a part of the day I always enjoyed. I appreciated how it drew learners into the classroom and how, by incorporating music, dance and song, Ms Gabriel created an environment where all learners were able to participate, irrespective of their language competencies.

The ways in which learners are apprenticed into reading at school will influence their reading practices and therefore their reading habitus. With the amount of time devoted to reading instruction, the ways in which reading is taught and how this affects learners' perception of the written word will contribute to shaping their dispositions towards reading (Luke & Baker, 1991) and therefore the classroom culture of reading. While learners' enthusiasm for reading was clear during shared reading, as I show below, it was not these dispositions that held value in the classroom. Instead, when learners were well behaved and attentive during reading lessons and performed well in oral reading and written assessments, this operated as objectified reading capital, with these learners establishing reputations as esteemed members of the classroom. As I showed in Chapter 8, Grade 5 learners associated reading and being a "reader" with strong academic performance and this shaped their confidence and reading habitus. As a result of the attention to reading as

an academic activity, the teaching of reading and the ability to read must feature when considering the Grade 1 classroom culture of reading. For this reason, I include descriptions of the three reading lessons I observed on my first day.

***The phonics lesson***

When learners are taught to read through curriculum-mandated approaches that foreground skills such as phonemic awareness and phonics, teaching practices that generate enthusiasm surrounding learning the skills can contribute to encouraging an interest in reading. Ms Gabriel's attention to creating a fun environment that drew learners' attention was apparent during this first and in subsequent phonics lessons.

On the first day, Ms Gabriel devoted 30 minutes to phonics, which is double CAPS' recommended time (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). This extended time on phonics occurred throughout the term. She explained to me that a major reason for this was that in a multilingual class, not all learners were able to follow her teaching or to identify English phonemes. Ms Gabriel was concerned that the additional time devoted to phonics may have resulted in learners with stronger phonics skills being bored. However, from my observations, she maintained the interest of learners of all levels. This was mainly through her use of various media. Songs, videos and rhymes support different forms of learning and contributed to the fun environment she sought to create. Of further benefit was her incorporation of various modes of teaching. As I describe below, she provided learners with handouts that acted as books, often linked to specific letter sounds or blends. Learners coloured in the pictures in these books, which created a sense of ownership, and they were quick to show me the books and how they had coloured them in. Other activities included making collages in the shape of alphabet letters (FB/15.04.2019), finger painting (FB/09.04.2019), teaching actions associated with words and letters (FB/10/04.2019) and rhymes that assisted with learning sight words (FB/16.04.2019). These practices and modes of teaching reflected Mr Seedat's and Ms Klaasen's praise for Ms Gabriel's use of innovative ideas during reading lessons.

Ms Gabriel's phonics lessons covered all the content outlined in CAPS. Despite this, four months into the year, there were learners who were unable to identify the letters of the alphabet (FB/22.05.2019). Ms Gabriel offered three explanations for this. First, she

expressed frustration that limited parental involvement restricts learners from having additional opportunities to build on what they were taught in class, stating that you can "see the difference" in learners' performance based on the support they get with homework (DD/Ms Gabriel/12.02.2019). Second, Ms Gabriel (PP/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019) was hugely critical of CAPS and its lack of sensitivity to linguistic diversity in classrooms. She explained that the amount of content she had to cover reduced her possibilities for supporting multilingual learners. The consequences of this were voiced by Ms Adams (LL/08.03.2019) and Ms Lawrence (LL/22.07.2019) in their reporting on how this restricted their learners' progress as they moved to higher grades and placed unrealistic pressure on educators to teach to multiple levels in a restrictive curriculum. Finally, Ms Gabriel complained that the limited value that some learners placed on reading resulted in a lack of interest when they were assigned work to complete (DD/Ms Gabriel/11.04.2019). She believed that these restrictions contributed significantly to learners' poor performance.

***Group-guided reading***

CAPS guidelines stipulate that each learner should have two sessions of 15 minutes each of GGR weekly (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). During GGR, Ms Gabriel worked with six groups comprising six to eight learners. For every learner to attend two sessions, she needed to conduct an average of 30 minutes of GGR daily. Learners and Ms Gabriel gathered in a circle on the mat for GGR. During GGR, she worked quietly with each group and encouraged participation. Her promotion of multilingualism was evident in that when she asked learners to discuss books amongst themselves, they could do so in the language of their choice. This provides an example of how she promoted multilingualism and drew on learners' linguistic repertories.

Throughout all sessions, Ms Gabriel had to interrupt the reading group to address other learners, either due to poor discipline or because learners were unable to complete their work unassisted. These disruptions resulted in her rushing to complete GGR. The consequence was that the GGR period was often a wasted and unproductive time for many learners. The benefits associated with GGR in terms of educators having time to assess learners' individual reading levels and identify gaps where they can assist learners (Land & Lyster, 2015) were reduced by this shortened time that she had with learners. The

disruptions due to poor behaviour are an example of the detrimental effect a poor culture of teaching and learning has on reading practices.

***Shared reading***

In line with CAPS' guidelines (Department of Basic Education, 2011a), Ms Gabriel conducted shared reading using the same book at least three times a week. She also performed story time at least twice a week where she read books that she did not incorporate in reading and writing tasks linked to CAPS. Shared reading allows learners to enjoy and develop positive dispositions towards reading, ensuring they do not perceive it as purely an academic task (Land & Lyster, 2015). Additionally, regular shared reading is associated with increased vocabulary, word recognition and cognitive development (Ledger & Merga, 2018; van der Woude et al., 2009), all of which benefit learners' reading development. During shared reading and story time, learners were seated on the mat and started with a song that celebrated reading. By including the cheer "yip, yip, yah" and describing reading as a "happy time," Ms Gabriel positioned reading as an exciting practice to be celebrated.

My first day in the classroom was a Monday, and Ms Gabriel introduced a new book. The book was read for enjoyment with no associated academic tasks. From the start of every story, Ms Gabriel's gestures, postures and use of voice reflected her commitment to generate excitement around reading. The competition among learners to locate themselves physically near Ms Gabriel immediately demonstrated their enthusiasm for stories. They were quick to react with laughter and expressions of surprise, and to volunteer to answer questions about the illustrations and the story. Although there were learners who struggled to understand English, Ms Gabriel's focus on illustrations and her actions, voice and gestures captured their attention. This engagement with the text resulted in learners becoming text-participants and increased their understanding of the story (Freebody, 1992). Learners' response to shared reading and their consistent requests for Ms Gabriel for storytime demonstrated that it was one of the classroom events they most looked forward to. Any visitor to the class during shared reading would immediately perceive the classroom as one with a strong culture of reading, marked by an enjoyment of reading.

***Identifying threats to a culture of reading***

On first impressions, this was a classroom with a dedicated educator, enthusiastic learners and, with the exception of a lack of available books, a physical set-up that responds to the interests of Grade 1 learners and curriculum content. Reading assumed a central position in the classroom. Ms Gabriel taught a phonics lesson that kept learners' attention and used multiple resources. There was a clear structure to the lesson and her use of music and song encouraged whole-class participation, and maintained the attention of learners of all levels. From the initial GGR session, the disruptions that resulted from poor learner discipline were visible. Ms Gabriel presented a model example of shared reading that entertained me and her learners. Throughout Grade 1 observations, I continued to observe a classroom where, from the start of the morning routine, reading was incorporated throughout the day. This was apparent in Ms Gabriel's ongoing encouragement for learners to read and learners' enthusiasm during reading activities. Statements from learners such as "when you read it [any book] then you feel so happy. Because it's funny [fun to read] and I love reading" (FGB/Simone/09.05.2019), and that learners could see that Ms Gabriel considered reading important "cos she likes reading always" (FGB/Courtney/09.05.2019), demonstrate enthusiasm for reading and an appreciation for Ms Gabriel's efforts to convey to learners the importance and joy of reading.

However, from my first day, it was apparent that there were numerous disruptions to the daily routine. This was first with regard to Grade 3 and 4 learners being in the classroom and distracting the Grade 1 learners by poor behaviour, a challenge I reported on in Chapter 7. Secondly, the school does not have the capacity to feed all learners during break, which results in disruptions to the timetable. For learners who arrive at school hungry, until they receive food through the feeding scheme, their concentration levels will be negatively affected (Schollar, 2018). This is a result of the poverty in which some learners live and is an example of how overlapping fields affect practices. Additionally, learners' visits to the kitchen resulted in about a 20-minute disruption to the timetable. During this period, Ms Gabriel was quick to implement a classroom activity for the remaining learners to ensure productivity. On this first day, her focus on English and Afrikaans vocabulary revealed an attention to language enrichment. On other occasions, she revised maths concepts, sang phonics songs and consolidated work, generally through song and movement. This practice

did not counter the time lost but it did reflect a productive response to a constraint that was beyond her control. The final significant disruption to the routine and timetable was that, because the majority of isiXhosa learners travel long distances to school, they were often up from as early as 5 a.m. The result was that, by lunchtime, their levels of tiredness reduced productive learning. This loss of productive classroom time is an example of how the symbolic capital of English and Anglonormativity results in parents making a decision to send their children to a school where English is the LoLT. Ironically, rather than advantaging their children's education, it acts to their detriment, as I expand on in Section 9.2.2. In my model for teaching and learning, I identified the importance of clear routines and adherence to the timetable. These threats all worked against Ms Gabriel feeling able to adhere to the timetable. Any disruptions to teaching and learning place further pressure on educators to meet curriculum demands. One of the potential consequences of this is reduced time spent on reading.

In addition to observing how these threats to a culture of teaching and learning, and accordingly the culture of reading, on my first day I was surprised by the lack of a dedicated space for reading and the absence of books other than prescribed texts. The effect of this was not directly evident on my first day. I anticipated, though, that with the extensive literature on the role of access to reading materials and the benefit of a classroom library (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Gambrell, 2011; Itenge-Wheeler et al., 2016), this presented a challenge to the opportunities available to learners to engage with a variety of books.

## 9.2 Challenges to a culture of reading

### 9.2.1 The importance of reading materials

The only books I viewed on my first day in the classroom were prescribed readers, workbooks and the book Ms Gabriel read during shared reading. Later, I realised that the cupboard at the back of the classroom had about 200 fiction and non-fiction picture books belonging to Ms Gabriel, as well as containing classroom readers and big books (Figure 9.3). The presence of books for learners to browse and read independently or with peers plays an integral role in shaping positive attitudes towards reading, thereby motivating more regular reading (Krashen, 2018; Recinos, 2018). Ms Gabriel (LL/19.07.2019) voiced this perspective.

She believes that providing time for children to select and handle books, and discuss books with their peers, is critical in developing and sustaining a love of reading. Nevertheless, she felt unable to provide such opportunities stating that there was a general lack of respect for books among her learners and she anticipated that learners would ruin her books (DD/Ms Gabriel/30.04.2019).

Albright (2006) describes literacy classrooms as "spaces for the negotiation of what counts as literacy, in terms of what texts and textual practices are valued" (p. 110). When learners, as happens in Ms Gabriel's classroom, are not provided opportunities to engage with books independently and for pleasure, their identity as readers in the school environment is then based on academic performance. This reduces the likelihood of their developing positive dispositions towards books and more regular practices. This is especially true for learners who have only recently been exposed to books, with their initial handling of and interaction with books then centred on academic tasks. If they do not easily grasp such tasks, books are then associated with high levels of stress (Ramadiro, 2019).




**Figure 9.3 Books in closed cupboard, Grade 1B classroom**

As an alternative to allowing learners the opportunity to browse, select or handle books, Ms Gabriel created and provided learners with their own "books" (Appendix C is an example of these books). These "books" were photocopied handouts she had printed that were adapted from online readers (Grandt, 2014; Little Fox, 2014). Learners read the handouts in class and could take them home. For these handouts to serve as objectified reading capital, learners must want to read them. On all occasions when she distributed new handouts or where they were reading a handout in class, Ms Gabriel's efforts to generate enthusiasm for the handouts were evident, as is clear in the following three extracts.

When she gave learners their first two "books," she assigned them as homework that evening. The next day she asked:

> *Who read [your books]?*
> *Majority of learners: Yes.*

*Ms Gabriel: Your mommies must be so proud. What did your mommies say?*
*Learners (collectively): Gooood!*
*Ms Gabriel: Now you have two books, Teacher Claire is making some more. (FB/18.04.2019)*

I noted "encourages kids to read at home with family members. Much praise if learners say this happened" (FB/18.04.2019). Five days later, she provided learners with a third book. She held up the three books and said:

*Now, look how many books you are reading (holds them up individually)?*
*Learners: One, two, three.*
*Ms Gabriel: Isn't that wonderful? And tomorrow I've got four books here and Teacher Claire is still busy with the others. We're going to have 20 books.*
*Learners (collectively): Ooooh! Aaaah! Wow! (FB/23.04.2019)*

By the following week, each learner had seven books and she again encouraged them to read their books at home:

*Ms Gabriel: You see how nice you are reading? How many books do you have now?*
*Learners: Six/seven (shouting various numbers)*
*Ms Gabriel: Right, who's practising all their books?*
*Learners: Meeeee, Meeeee! (shouting)*
*Ms Gabriel: Every day at home?*
*Learners: Yes!*
*Ms Gabriel: Wonderful! (FB/29.04.2019)*

Learners received their own copies that they could colour in and read at home and at school. Learners were proud of their "books" and often named one of these handouts as their favourite book. After an interview with five learners and reflecting in general on the handouts I wrote:

> The "books" they received from Ms Gabriel seem to be very well used and for a number of the kids, the only access that they have to any form of books. (FB/13.06.2019)

Learners' statements that these are the only "books" available at home is an example of the difference between the Global North and Global South contexts in terms of access to books. The consequent divide in socialising children into reading at home is best demonstrated by Bloch's (2001) in her statement that "slipping quite naturally into a reading culture, children

[from the Global North] have innumerable opportunities to literally wallow in books in their mother tongue," opportunities not available to many South African learners. These handouts do not offer the same advantages as a wider selection of books, but providing them has ensured some access to materials in and outside of school. Because learners received multiple handouts there is some, albeit limited, choice in selecting reading materials. Notably, learners' accounts of reading the handouts at home indicated an interest in reading when materials were available. This benefit was illustrated in Chapter 6 in my account of how Amber and her cousin read these handouts when they play "teacher, teacher" (LLB/03.09.2019). It also reflects my analysis of how Grade 5 learners' interest in reading was heightened by additional resources.

Ms Gabriel's distribution and promotion of these handouts demonstrate a creative response to what she perceives as a significant constraint on learners' reading practices. Her use of these handouts provides an example of how the interaction between her pedagogical habitus and field is relational and has resulted in practices adapted to meet a specific classroom context (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This access may be limited, but learners' responses to having their own "books" showed a positive reception to this alternative. By introducing these resources, she created possibilities for learners to read in and outside of school. However, the handouts relate closely to learning to read and phonics, so any reading of these handouts is, whether consciously or not, linked to schooled literacy practices. These handouts assume objectified reading capital because they are the only "books" other than workbooks and exercise books that learners are allowed to handle in the classroom and because they are the only texts that learners can take home. This is because Grade 1s are not allowed to borrow books from the school library and there is no classroom library. While these handouts assume some value, they are photocopied pages held together with a single staple, and do not have the durability of books. With weak storylines – aimed primarily at including words with specific letter blends – they are unlikely to maintain learners' interests for extensive periods of time.

In describing the challenges she faces in improving learners' reading performance and preparing them for Grade 2, Ms Gabriel (DD/Ms Gabriel/11.04.2019) complained that the lack of value some learners placed on reading was a major restriction to classroom

practices. While this complaint may have validity, the limited opportunities for learners to develop further interest in reading and value the practice were clear. In Ms Gabriel's classroom, learners were not provided a chance to be socialised into many ways of reading. It is this socialisation that creates a field with possibilities for positive alterations to reading habitus that then operate as embodied reading capital. Stein (2008) emphasises that with literacy inseparable from the field in which practices occur, issues of power and access are central to shaping literacy practices and to how members of a field identify themselves in relation to literacy practices. By denying learners access to a range of resources, especially when Ms Gabriel has explicitly stated to them that this is because she does not trust them to care for books, they were positioned as deviant and were not provided possibilities to challenge this narrative. Without providing access to materials other than classroom readers and their handouts or offering time to engage with such materials, learners' identities as readers at school comes to be based in academic performance.

Ms Gabriel's expectation that learners are unable to care for books is widely shared across South Africa. Yet, in her research on Grade 3 learners in two Eastern Cape primary schools, Nkomo (2017) indicated that, if foundation phase learners are taught to and come to realise the value of books and their importance, this results in respect for and care of books. Nkomo's research findings were confirmed by the books that learners could read in Grade 1A, Ms Klaasen's classroom. Ms Klaasen (LL/08.11.2019) is adamant that books should be constantly available to learners and finds it "very sad if there aren't any [books]" in a classroom. Ms Klaasen has a dedicated reading mat that learners visit regularly. Figure 9.4 shows her well-organised, classroom library that provides a safe, inviting space for learners to read. She regularly changes the books on display and learners are allowed to open the cupboard and select from approximately 200 books.




**Figure 9.4 Reading corner in Grade 1 educator Ms Klaasen's classroom**

Ms Klaasen explained that, as a result of her modelling of book care and her emphasis on respecting books, learners "know that they have to take care of them" if they want to be able to read them in the future (LL/Ms Klaasen/08.11.2019). After a visit to Ms Klaasen's classroom, I sent my supervisor a WhatsApp message saying:

> Ms Klaasen has about 200 books kids have access to – with very little damage. Her readers look brand new (whereas Ms Gabriel's kids' readers had pages sticky taped in). So, brilliant example of how kids don't damage books. (FS/08.11.2019)

Ms Klaasen encourages her learners to visit the classroom library once they have completed their work and to read the books in reading periods. This social reading capital provides learners' possibilities to share their interest in reading with peers, and because peers' practices influence one another, this provides social motivation to read (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2017; Neugebauer & Lia, 2018). When this occurs, reading is more likely to become a regular activity, enjoyed by an increasing number of learners. This contributes to reading forming part of daily classroom discourse and to a strengthened collective reading habitus. By adopting this approach, Ms Klaasen offers learners' regular opportunities to choose and read books themselves. From as soon as learners enter her classroom, they are identified as readers and provided consistent possibilities to build on this identity.

I have included this description here because it provides an example of how there are numerous ways in which educators can manage comparable situations. This highlights Bourdieu's (1984) contention that every field offers a range of possible responses to perceived restrictions. Ms Gabriel's and Ms Klaasen's varying approaches to providing books to their learners demonstrate how two experienced educators, who are both driven to develop a culture of reading, have responded in differing manners to comparable circumstances.

Although Ms Gabriel's learners spoke positively of the handouts, these handouts were used primarily for academic purposes and teaching phonics. This foregrounds reading as a skills-based practice. In my interactions with Ms Gabriel, she voiced the importance of learners being able to select, handle and engage with books that are not workbooks or graded readers. Her decision that, despite this belief, it is not possible to provide learners such opportunities is an example of educators feeling forced to act in contradiction to their beliefs in response to their perceptions of what is possible in a specific classroom environment. Ms Gabriel's decision not to offer learners additional reading materials is founded in past experiences. Her response has facilitated some access to materials, and this has been well-received by learners and benefited their school and home reading practices. Her response does not, however, provide learners the same opportunities to engage with a variety of books in the way Ms Klaasen's learners can.

### 9.2.2 A multilingual classroom

In describing the effect of learning in an additional language, I wrote in my fieldnotes, "so much of developing a culture of reading at the school depends on developing language, particularly in terms of isiXhosa speaking kids who don't understand English by April" (FS/18.04.2019). A culture of reading is not restricted to one language. However, it is only if a field provides regular opportunities for reading and discussing reading in multiple languages that the potential for a culture of reading which encompasses multiple languages can exist. Saxon Primary's language policy and the resources available to the school impede possibilities for this to occur regularly. The school's language policy and parents' choice to enrol their children in an English school is beyond the control of the DBE. Yet, the DBE's lack of provision of multilingual reading materials and the fact that many educators have not

been equipped to support multilingual classes all act to the detriment of a school's success in responding to the DBE's calls for a culture of reading.

The school's decision to transition from Afrikaans to English as the LoLT to attract learners from further afield was necessary for economic survival (LL/Mr Willemse/01.08.2019). The increase in the number of isiXhosa-speaking parents who enrolled their children at Saxon Primary enabled this economic survival. However, the arrival of isiXhosa home language learners resulted in educators, most of whom do not speak isiXhosa teaching classrooms composed of English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa speaking learners. Of the 39 learners in Ms Gabriel's classroom, 12 speak isiXhosa as their home language. By April, three months into the school year, 11 of these learners relied on peers for help with translating instructions and completing work, which limited their engagement in classroom activities (FB/08.04.2019-22.05.2019). Gee (2015) emphasises how school-based literacy is sensitive to oral vocabulary, and that learner's vocabulary on entering school contributes to their reading development. When learners enter school unable to speak or with developing competency in the LoLT, they cannot draw on their vocabulary in developing foundational reading skills. Further, their possibility for meaningful engagement in reading events is limited. This is especially evident at Saxon Primary where I observed no reading events where isiXhosa or Afrikaans were the dominant languages. Throughout my research process, I was repeatedly angered by how the education field has failed so many learners through its restrictive language policies, yet the effect on learners who are taught in an additional language from entry to formal schooling has received limited attention.

The negative impact of the dominance of English was more visible on isiXhosa-speaking learners than on Kaaps-speaking learners. I was only aware of one Kaaps speaker who struggled to understand English without assistance. In teaching and conversing with learners, Ms Gabriel spoke Standard English, and occasionally added Kaaps phrases. As a language variety, Kaaps was largely silenced during teaching time. With no learner speaking Standard English as their preferred language or variety, all of Ms Gabriel's learners enter school already at a disadvantage in comparison to Standard English-speaking learners who, despite being a minority group in South Africa, hold linguistic capital that better prepares them for success at school.

From my first hour in the classroom, Ms Gabriel's incorporation of Afrikaans in the morning routine demonstrated awareness of classroom multilingualism. A few weeks into the second term, she introduced isiXhosa into the morning routine (FB/29.04.2019). In informing learners of this, the emphasis that she places on valuing languages was apparent:

> The more languages you know the more friends you going to have... If Naledi is talking Xhosa to her friends and the other children that's learning Xhosa, you going to know what Naledi's saying. We're going to learn, we're going to learn together. Tell your mommies and daddies you going to learn more languages then you going to make more friends. (FB/25.04.2019)

Ms Gabriel and Ms Klaasen had attended an afterschool workshop to prepare them to introduce isiXhosa in the classroom. It was a once-off session hosted by the DBE with no follow-up training scheduled, an example of the inadequate training that the DBE offers in relation to the expectations they place on educators. With her limited isiXhosa, Ms Gabriel called on isiXhosa learners to help her and their peers. These learners responded quickly and proudly to her requests for assistance. In a country where English is associated with intelligence and economic success, her showcasing that she values isiXhosa speakers' linguistic capital highlights her determination to ensure that no learner is considered inferior due to the language they speak. She encourages learners to speak in any language when they interact with peers and offers compliments such as "I hear a little bit of Xhosa talking. That's very nice. I like it" (FB/Ms Gabriel/10.04.2019). Her approach further demonstrates how, even in classrooms where educators do not speak their learners' home language, it does not preclude incorporating learners' home language in daily classroom practices.

In an effort to strengthen learners' English, she plays English songs while learners work because she believes that "music, rhyme, stories and visuals are so important" (LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019) in developing learners' vocabulary and, consequently, their reading skills. The importance she places on integrating music and rhyme across classroom practices is strongly supported by research on how music is valuable in improving language skills and teaching phonics (Hocanson, 2019; Kulset, 2017; Winters & Griffin, 2014). Ms Gabriel (LL/19.07.2019) complained that it is "unfair to expect kids to follow in a language other than their own" and that, in addition to how learning in English disadvantages many of her learners, it places additional pressure on already overwhelmed educators. Her belief that

children learn best when they are taught in their home language is confirmed by local and global literature (Heugh et al., 2019; Hoadley, 2016).

While Ms Gabriel is frustrated by the negative impact of the symbolic capital associated with English, she recognises that the de facto language policy outlined in CAPS demands that she leverages any possible opportunities for improving learners' English. By using background music and songs as an ongoing resource Ms Gabriel contributes to language learning without drawing specific time away from an already packed timetable. In putting such practices in place, her insight into the need to introduces practices that respond to a specific classroom field emerged. Her practices offer an example of her drawing on the institutional capital that she has accumulated in her experience as an English additional language educator and of how educators' pedagogical habitus can privilege them when they enter a different education field and school environment.

The South African LiEP states it aims to "counter disadvantages resulting from different kinds of mismatches between home languages and languages of learning and teaching" and "to develop programmes for the redress of previously disadvantaged languages" (Department of Education, 1997, no pagination). Yet, CAPS makes little provision for scaffolding language learning or for educators to find time in the curriculum to adjust their practices to support multilingual classes. Ms Gabriel (LL/19.07.2019) was angered by the lack of possibilities this offered her to adjust her teaching practices to meet the needs of learners who speak English as an additional language. She understood that parents' decisions to educate their children in English result from the doxic belief in the power of English and the lack of awareness that children benefit from learning in their home language (LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019). This did not reduce her frustration that, as a consequence of this belief, parents unwittingly disadvantage their children's education. Even if, as Ms Gabriel does, educators recognise the legitimacy of other languages, this cannot counter the monolingual habitus that has been clear in all iterations of the curriculum since C2005.

***Hidden reading habitus***

The following extract is drawn from an interview with Luzuko and Anele (PPB/15.07.2019), two isiXhosa home language learners. It demonstrates how there are possibilities for multilingual reading practices in the school:

*I start my interview with Grade 1 learners Luzuko and Anele unsure if we will be able to communicate successfully. They are two of the weaker-English-speaking learners and my isiXhosa is limited. Like all Grade 1 interviews, I begin with shared reading. We read two books and we start each with a picture walk.*

*I suggest that we conduct the picture walks in isiXhosa but explain that they will need to help me and translate the story from isiXhosa to English. There is time to page through the books together, unhurried. Luzuko smiles, happy that he can speak in his home language. We translate the stories as we conduct picture walks. With my limited isiXhosa, I can describe some of the illustrations and discuss what we are reading. They fill in the gaps for me. Their enthusiasm is infectious and we laugh as we page through the books, particularly when I attempt to speak isiXhosa and they correct me. They speak over each other in excitement, vying to tell me the story. Anele's voice speeds up as he describes events on each page. Luzuko is no longer the shy boy I observe during class time. Anele tells me the books we are reading are fun because "*ndiyathanda ukufunda iincwadi//yi-story"[28] *Luzuko adds. The bell rings and the interview ends. Anele asks to stay for longer because he is having fun and wants to read more.*

This extract depicts one of the most memorable and enjoyable events in my research. It was also one of the most poignant moments. It is emblematic of how language policies constrain possibilities within the classroom, and it offers a strong example from which to explore how learners' school reading practices are shaped by the linguistic context. It is also, however, an event that showed the possibilities for translanguaging and for learners to use their home languages, even if the facilitator (in this case me) has limited proficiency in the learners' language.

All reading events are inextricably connected to questions of power, culture and access (B. Street, 1995). As Anele and Luzuko did not speak English before they arrived at school, they had already been denied access to meaningful participation in many reading events. Anele, Luzuko and many of their peers are subject to language policies that continue to perpetuate colonial linguistic ideologies and that expect learners to assimilate into an education field

[28] I love reading books//and stories (translation from isiXhosa).

that promotes a monolingual habitus, and where successful participation depends on one's familiarity with and use of Standard English. This holds true for all learners who transition from their home language to English in Grade 4 and the negative effects this has are well documented (Department of Basic Education, 2023b; Heugh, 2013). Anele and Luzuko's assimilation was forced on them even earlier as a result of their parents electing to educate them in English from Grade 1. Instead of this decision acting to their advantage, by July, Anele and Luzuko's progress in reading was constrained. This was not due to a lack of interest or cognitive skills or their home and community literacy practices. Rather, as a result of being taught in English, their possibilities to strengthen their reading habitus and learn foundational reading skills were reduced. Such restrictions and the effect on Anele's and Luzuko's reading practices and assessments can negatively affect their confidence, their sense of belonging and their identity as readers.

In contrast to classroom reading events, when I was reading with Anele and Luzuko, they were the knowledgeable participants in a reading event. As a result of a temporary shift in the field brought about by their being able to draw on their linguistic capital, two confident personalities emerged and their enthusiasm for reading was indisputable. The changes in Luzuko's body language and facial expressions compared to his timid demeanour in daily classroom life reflected his positive dispositions towards reading. Anele's and Luzuko's identities as readers will have been founded in their past experiences, and how these have shaped the reading habitus they bring with them to a new field (Compton-Lilly, 2007). Anele and Luzuko undoubtedly have literacy and linguistic resources available to them, and their enthusiasm for reading was undeniable. However, these resources were rendered largely invisible by the school language's policy. In our interaction, Anele and Luzuko's hidden reading habitus emerged. This was a result of my having time to spend with only two learners, a challenge that Ms Gabriel faces in teaching a class of 39 learners. The institutional cultural capital that Ms Gabriel has acquired in her many years as an educator loses value in a field where she feels constrained from drawing on this capital. Here, Bourdieu's assertion (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), that capital is only effective as it relates to a specific field, is clear.

In addition to highlighting the possibilities for drawing on multiple languages, our interaction affirmed the benefit of engagement with picture books, a resource that Grade 1 learners seldom had access to. Through our picture walks and discussions of the illustrations, we constructed storylines in isiXhosa and this event generated much excitement surrounding reading. This engagement between Anele and Luzuko is an event that can be replicated in a multilingual classroom environment where learners are provided resources and have time to interact with peers in a language of their choice.

## 9.3 The breaking point

In this final section, I reflect on the events of my last two days in the classroom. On these two days, a learner who was frequently absent was in attendance at school. She was clearly uncomfortable at having to be at school and this disrupted teaching and learning on both days.

> *At break, I listen to Ms Gabriel and her colleagues discuss the problem of repeated absenteeism and how it disrupts teaching and learning. Educators speak of interacting with social workers but, like educators, social workers are overburdened and cannot devote sufficient care to the many learners in need of their assistance. I have observed Ms Gabriel discouraged and angry on numerous occasions but there is a hopelessness I have not previously encountered. She turns to me and asks how educators can be expected to meet their responsibilities when they are consistently presented with challenges beyond their control. It is a rhetorical question. She appears to have no expectation of change. I wonder if the many South Africans who are quick to criticise educators for learners' poor results would survive working in this context.*
>
> *When I leave the classroom at the end of the day, little effective teaching and learning has occurred. Already under pressure to complete the curriculum, Ms Gabriel loses a full day of teaching. In my daily reflections I write "Ms Gabriel so frustrated and upset with people putting pressure and blame on the teacher…Think this is the most upset that I have seen her. Hugely understandable."*

*The next day learners are particularly poorly behaved during the morning routine. In response their behaviour, Ms Gabriel says to them:*

You come here to learn, if you don't want to be here then stay home. I'm teaching now for 30 years, I'm tired, I don't have time for this nonsense.

*I write in my fieldnotes "serious struggle with discipline. Knock-on effect of yesterday?" Throughout the day, learners are again distracted by their peer's distress at being at school. Ms Gabriel pleads with learners to concentrate but she is unable to maintain their focus.*

*Learners shout and swear at each other. The general pushing and shoving among boys is more than usual. Six Grade 4 learners join the classroom because their educator has had to leave school unexpectedly. The already noisy classroom gets louder. As with yesterday, no learning is possible. (FB/21.05.2019-22.05.2019)*

Practices are consistently undergoing change with shifts in relationships among members of a field being a primary reason for this (Hardy, 2012). In my early encounters with Ms Gabriel, I was impressed by her energy and commitment to learners. Her frustration with the school's culture of teaching and learning was apparent but she was successful in encouraging reading and learning in her classroom. Throughout our interactions, Ms Gabriel spoke of her concern that Mr Willemse did not prioritise his educators' wellbeing, was unresponsive to requests for assistance and was unlikely to consider their suggestions or ideas. As the second term progressed, there were increasing tensions between Ms Gabriel and the principal. Ms Gabriel held no expectation of resolution to these tensions and the worsening relations decreased her already limited confidence in leadership. The result was that Ms Gabriel (LL/19.07.2019) felt isolated in a field where "nobody backs you as a teacher."

It is when educators can draw on their social capital and share knowledge and ideas with colleagues and school leadership that they are best equipped to create an environment that stimulates learning and reading (Kools & Stoll, 2016; Weeks, 2012). Ms Gabriel's description of her working environment contradicted these requirements. She was under increasing pressure as the term continued and felt alone in having to manage worsening discipline and the negative effects on her wellbeing. The transformation in Ms Gabriel's pedagogical

habitus in response to these shifts in the field is demonstrated in the above narrative. Without context, it is easy to criticise Ms Gabriel for statements such as “stay home” and “this nonsense.” However, after 18 days of classroom observations, my immediate response was empathy. I had watched Ms Gabriel fight against ongoing disruptions to teaching and learning, many of which were a result of external factors beyond her control. I had seen her frustration at teaching a curriculum which she, like many educators and researchers, criticises for imposing unrealistic expectations on educators and learners in many South African schools. I had observed her failed efforts to engender respect among learners and curtail the anger and violence learners exhibited towards peers and herself.

In these final two days, in a classroom where Ms Gabriel already struggled with poor discipline, an additional distraction added further to discipline problems and learners’ response to observing these events increased disruptions and poor behaviour. The immediate alterations in learners’ behaviour reflect research on how children who are raised in hostile and violent homes are likely to transfer this behaviour to situations where their sense of safety is threatened (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Meyer & Chetty, 2017).

In my discussion with educators at break about high levels of absenteeism, educators’ disillusionment at being expected to manage such situations without any realistic means of addressing absenteeism or the trauma learners bring from home was undeniable. Their capacity to meet their teaching responsibilities is threatened both through how such events reduce teaching and learning time and from the exhaustion they feel at having to manage such events. The school and its educators cannot and should not be expected to manage such high levels of absenteeism and trauma without consistent, external assistance from the DBE or the DSD. This is not in place, with Ms Adams stating later in the year:

> There is not nearly enough support for all the kids who need assistance nor do the kids see the social workers frequently enough. It’s tiring. It can’t all be put on teachers. (LL/23.08.2019)

Educators are not trained to manage children’s trauma or significant threats to their wellbeing (Hemson, 2016; Venter & Jeffries, 2019). Ms Adams’ statement, the sense of hopelessness Ms Gabriel expressed, and the anger and frustration that their colleagues

shared with me all demonstrate how the field of education has failed educators by expecting them to manage events beyond the ambit of their designated role.

Throughout my observations, Ms Gabriel's dedication to her learners and commitment to instilling a love for learning and reading was evident. On my first day I wrote "lots of focus on making sure the kids value themselves" (FB/08.04.2019). This focus remained throughout observations but the detrimental effects of the pressure she was experiencing and her associated frustrations emerged more frequently as the term progressed. I observed this and she spoke frankly of it in informal conversations. She expressed anger to me that she saw no means of addressing these breakdowns in teaching conditions, explaining that without stronger leadership involvement, educators would continue to be disempowered (LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019).

In any classroom, the educator is assumed to hold the position of power but this level of power varies in relation to other forces imposed on and in the classroom. With any field being a "field of struggles" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101), there is potential for external forces or learners' behaviour to restructure the classroom field. The desperation with which Ms Gabriel spoke to learners over the two-day period described above and her evident hopelessness was reflective of an educator whose wellbeing had been eroded, as a result of her working environment. The resulting shifts in her practices reflect Bourdieu's (1984) formula "[(habitus)(capital)]+field = practice" (p. 101). Ms Gabriel's evident experience, the extensive institutional capital she has developed and the undeniable value she placed on reading were undermined by the field in which she was operating. These two days showed how the accumulation of this level of stress had led to an experienced educator struggling to survive in a school because of the conditions under which she was operating.

As I stated in Section 4.4.1, Ms Gabriel and I decided that, in consideration of disciplinary problems, I would stop classroom observations. I continued to visit the school to conduct interviews. Ms Gabriel and I spoke regularly and her levels of stress and frustration increased visibly as she saw no possibilities of improvements in the school. Throughout my Grade 1 fieldwork and interactions with Ms Gabriel, I was consistently reminded of a discussion I had had earlier in the year with educators where I reflected:

> There is clearly a lack of interaction between the principal and staff and [a sense of] not feeling supported. The teachers generally seem to be at breaking point and [it's] impossible for them not to be. (FS/26.02.2019)

Two weeks into the third term, Ms Gabriel reached this breaking point and resigned with immediate effect (FS/26.07.2019). There was no single reason for her resignation. Instead, it resulted from an entanglement of factors where the interaction among the pressure transferred from overlapping fields, her lack of faith in leadership, and an overall poor culture of teaching and learning ultimately culminated in a hostile working environment where, exhausted and angered by poor leadership, she no longer felt equipped to perform her job to the best of her ability.

## 9.4 Conclusion

Bloome (2012) stresses that every classroom exists within broader social groups and structures. He describes a classroom as "one institution among many within a community and the broader cultural contexts in which the people in a classroom participate" (Bloome, 2012, p. 10). This was exemplified in my study of Ms Gabriel's classroom. In analysing the data I generated from my time in the Grade 1 classroom and interviews, the importance that I have assigned to the influence of the impact of overlapping fields and the effect that a culture of teaching and learning has on developing or sustaining a culture of reading in a classroom was amplified.

Ms Gabriel's disillusionment with her working conditions, and her frustration with a lack of collaboration and support among educators and leadership were undeniable. She was exhausted by a daily fight to manage discipline in her classroom and to maintain learners' attention, especially in a space with ongoing distractions and disruptions. She felt encumbered by an education field and curriculum that accommodates neither her teaching context nor learners' socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The linguistic capital associated with English has resulted in many parents inadvertently restricting their children's access to learning by enrolling them in a school where they do not speak the LoLT. Multilingual classroom environments are a reality across the South African field of education and Ms Gabriel's classroom offered a localised example of this and how this requires

educators to adjust their pedagogical habitus to best support a multilingual classroom within the constraints of the South African curriculum.

As I analysed my data, I constantly grappled with how to answer my second and third research questions in relation to the Grade 1 classroom. My understanding of a culture of reading is centred on positive dispositions towards reading and ongoing opportunities to read for multiple reasons. In this sense, the ideal answer to my second research question "What shapes a culture of reading in a South African no-fee primary school?" would be that the overall field of education facilitated Ms Gabriel in creating an environment where learners could read for multiple reasons, draw on their linguistic capital and have access to a multitude of reading materials that appealed to them. The ways in which Ms Gabriel spoke about reading reflected this ideal. However, when I was analysing what shapes a culture of reading in the classroom, the dominant discourse circulating in the wider field of education that a culture of reading is visible in adherence to the curriculum, the acquisition of cognitive reading skills and reading performance was apparent in Ms Gabriel's practices and her classroom. The apparent contradiction between Ms Gabriel's beliefs and what she felt forced to focus on in her classroom demonstrated the effects of grappling with the complexities of teaching at Saxon Primary and the external forces acting on the school that I have outlined in this and earlier chapters.

I entered the Grade 1 classroom with the aim of exploring the classroom culture of reading and answering the question "How is this culture of reading reflected in the school's reading practices?" I exited the classroom with no doubt that Ms Gabriel is committed to reading and dedicated to creating a field that conveys this commitment. There is some evidence of her success in achieving this and of a collective enthusiasm for reading. However, throughout my field work, it was repeatedly apparent that Ms Gabriel's efforts to put in place the elements she associates with strong reading practices were undermined by a poor culture of teaching and learning and her battle to operate in a difficult field.

Capital only exists when the dispositions and knowledge constituting habitus can be used and hold benefit in a specific field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). When this occurs, habitus operates as capital and the competencies derived from this capital result in practices that hold value in that specific field. For Ms Gabriel, the institutional cultural capital that she has

amassed over 30 years of teaching and her awareness of what needs to be in place for reading practices to flourish were not enough. The constraints of the overall culture of teaching and learning, the restrictions imposed by government policies and the responsibility of teaching a curriculum that is better suited to middle-class, English-speaking learners prohibited her learners from fully benefiting from her accumulated institutional capital and from her preferred approaches to reading in the classroom.

# CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I present a summary of my research process. I begin by answering my research questions. This is followed by a discussion of my findings and the implication of these findings. Based on these findings and implications, I offer recommendations to the South African field of education. I provide a brief reflection on my research process and comment on how my research contributes to South African literacy scholarship. I conclude with suggestions for future research.

## 10.1 Responding to my research questions

### 10.1.1 A culture of reading in government education discourse

*How does the term "culture of reading" function in South African national government education discourse?*

My first question sought to investigate how the term "culture of reading" has functioned in South African national government discourse over the period 2000 to 2019 with the aim of establishing how this affects reading at basic education level and how it reflects the government's understanding of reading in the South African context.

Over the period 2000 to 2019, there were numerous shifts in how the national government has made use of and presented the term "culture of reading." From initially being presented as a nationwide ideal that would contribute to reading levels, national unity and development across all South Africans of all ages, the term has consistently narrowed in meaning, and currently functions primarily as a means of improving reading performance at basic education level.

The doxa that a culture of reading will bring about improved reading levels is widespread, as I have highlighted in this thesis. It is evident that since 2000, this belief has been held by national government. With the dominant position that the government holds, it has been able reproduce this doxa (Deer, 2008), and return repeatedly to the ideal of a culture of reading as suits its needs at specific periods of time.

By justifying decisions to promote and measure the success of efforts to create a culture of reading on quantifiable statistics such as PIRLS and EGRA, oral reading fluency and learners reaching age appropriate levels of reading (Motshekga, 2014, 2015a), the government has positioned reading as a scientific and neutral practice. With the government occupying the dominant position in the field of education, this ideology filters down to and is imposed on individual schools and educators whose success is measured quantifiably. This positioning of reading confirms Street's (1995) argument that the autonomous model of literacy is in itself ideological. With this focus on the technical and cognitive aspects of reading, the government encourages misrecognition of the diversity and many complexities inherent in the education system. In doing so, they are able to obfuscate the many complexities that need to be addressed before there can be meaningful change in the South African reading landscape. By not addressing these complexities, the government is able to deflect attention from its role in constructing a field of education that is best suited to the needs of South African learners.

Christie and McKinney (2017) critique post-Apartheid policies for being based in a narrative founded "on an idealist vision of a transformed system" (p. 15) that neglects to acknowledge the contextual realities and inequalities in the schooling system. The validity of this critique is reflected in how the ways in which the DBE has adopted the term "culture of reading" demonstrate a technicist understanding of reading that pays inadequate attention to the many different contexts in which reading is taught and learnt in South Africa. This is clear in the government's reliance on Western thinking and programmes in formulating reading policies and strategies that are not contextually appropriate in many South African schools. This is not to say that there is nothing to be learnt from the Global North, but rather that drawing on Global North policies and thinking has to include accounting for different contexts. With a continued reliance on the Global North, the benefits of a

pluriversal approach, that incorporates the extensive bodies of knowledge on literacy and a culture of reading held in the Global South (Amoo et al., 2015; Awah, 2019; Commeyras & Inyega, 2007; Commeyras & Mazile, 2011; Itenge-Wheeler et al., 2016; Kirchner et al., 2014; Lukhele, 2013; Ruterana, 2012b), remain untapped. This scholarship emanates from regions that share many linguistic and socio-economic similarities with South Africa and therefore can offer significant value and knowledge that may not be held in the Global North. With the government's consistent reliance on Global North thinking, rather than seeking a culture of reading functioning to the benefit of all South Africans, the continuous recycling of strategies and implementation of policies that are founded in ideologies and expectations that do not hold true across South Africa work against the needs of South African learners.

### 10.1.2 Influences on the school's culture of reading

*What shapes a culture of reading in a South African no-fee primary school?*

Practices in a field always result from an interplay between the historical conditions that produced habitus and the present conditions in a field which allow for a specific range of practices (Bourdieu, 1990b). In order to understand what shaped Saxon Primary's culture of reading it was necessary to identify the internal and external influences shaping the school's culture of reading. In establishing the effect of external factors and overlapping fields on the school's culture of reading, I identified four fields that significantly influenced both the school's culture of teaching and learning, and the school's culture of reading. These were the fields of education, civil society, the community and learners' homes environments.

My analysis of how the term "culture of reading" functions in government discourse highlighted how the government's representation of a culture of reading does not account sufficiently for the realities facing the South African field of education. This was confirmed in exploring how the field of education influenced the shaping of Saxon Primary's culture of reading.

Educators referred repeatedly to a curriculum that is not appropriate to their learners' interests and contains too much content for them to cover at a pace that their learners could manage. One of the major constraints that they reported facing was teaching multilingual learners in the confines of a curriculum that does not show the sensitivity to

linguistic diversity that was promised when CAPS was implemented (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). With educators not viewing any obvious ways to counter this, they feel unable to provide learners with necessary opportunities to develop their learners' ability to read for meaning or to generate an interest in reading for pleasure. The enthusiasm with which Anele and Luzuko responded to reading when they were able to draw on their home language showed there are possibilities to address this. However, it was simultaneously evident that current conditions in the school present a significant challenge to this.

The data generated from educators in relation to the field of education demonstrated how crucial it is that the government should be able to offer educators resources that will help them succeed in their role. Educators feel let down by a system that does not provide them with the necessary support to manage at-risk learners. This is both in terms of learning support and the limited access to social services available to learners. With learners not being provided with the learning support that they require, educators battle to manage teaching classrooms that they described as effectively multi-grade.

The commonalities that I have reported on in how educators understand what is required for a culture of reading to exist indicate the potential for more collaborative efforts to put in place measures to address the lack of a schoolwide culture of reading. However, there are few such efforts, with educators expressing the detrimental effects of this limited collaboration. This is apparent in statements such as "[a]ny idea that you present to the principal he will say, 'you do it.' Nobody backs you as a teacher and then initiatives often do not take off" (LL/Ms Gabriel/19.07.2019), "if you bring something up, you must run it" (LL/Ms Lawrence/22.07.2019), and educators "have their own strategies, own personalities" (LL/Ms Adams/23.08,2019). Central to educators' complaints of what underlies this isolation and their associated sense of disempowerment is the poor relationship between school leadership and educators.

My analysis of school leadership and educators' approach to reading underscored how a culture of reading cannot be understood without considering how the interrelationship between habitus, capital and field shapes reading practices. I interacted with and observed educators who demonstrated commitment to developing their learners' reading practices and insight into what is required to develop learners' ability to read for meaning and to

generate interest in reading for pleasure. However, the school's culture of teaching and learning has undermined their capacity to draw on their institutional cultural capital and this has resulted in educators feeling constrained in strengthening the culture of reading in their respective classrooms. The impact of the pressure under which educators were operating emerged in how educators' exhaustion and the isolation associated with their working environment detracted from their feeling equipped to fulfil their roles in a manner that reflected their perspectives about teaching and reading, and what they wished to achieve in promoting reading. The isolation among educators and the lack of confidence that many educators expressed in school leadership limited their social capital and therefore the potential of collaborating to build the necessary cultural capital that could assist them with promoting and teaching reading at Saxon Primary. The negative effect of a poor working environment, and of educators' frustrations at how this limits their practices, emphasises the importance of analysing a school's culture of teaching and learning in studying its culture of reading.

The high number of learners whom educators reported needing psychosocial support was in large part due to the effect of the communities and homes in which they live and how the trauma they experience outside of school is carried to school. Any school is affected by the community in which it is located (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). At Saxon Primary, the negative influence that the community has on learners' behaviour at school that then affects reading practices was repeatedly apparent. If children are exposed to trauma and violence in the home and community, they transfer the effects of this to school (Meyer & Chetty, 2017). This was demonstrated by poor discipline in the classroom and how, when some learners felt threatened, they were quick to turn to violence. These factors may not all act directly on the school's culture of reading and learners' reading practices. However, all practices occur in relation to the range of possibilities available in a field, and a successful culture of reading requires that a certain set of conditions be in place. Of particular importance is that each classroom field allows for regular opportunities to read, both in terms of covering curriculum content and creating possibilities for reading for pleasure outside of curriculum demands. The factors that I have outlined here reduced the time available to do so. As a culture of reading depends on regular opportunities to read (Bloch, 2001; Nkomo, 2017; Reeves et al., 2008), this reduction in the available time restricts opportunities for reading in

the classroom and therefore the strengthening of classroom and individual reading practices.

The government and the DBE are honest in acknowledging that they require the assistance of civil society and external funding if they are to succeed in making meaningful, sustainable changes to the country's reading and education landscape (Department of Basic Education, 2019c; Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2019). The partnership between Saxon Primary and Funda Fun provides an example of how civil society can contribute to shaping a culture of reading in individual schools. The success of this partnership is a result of ongoing consultation between the school and Funda Fun, with the school's positive reaction to the library and educators' adherence to the library timetable being essential to this success. The impact of community violence on reading practices was further evident in how some learners reported not being able to visit the school library (or attend other extra-mural activities) after school due to having to travel to and from school in groups for safety reasons.

Learners' descriptions of their home literacy practices revealed a range of practices that were in place at home and that these often resulted from their parents' involvement and encouragement. However, these practices were not necessarily the traditional Western notion of parents' role being visible in their direct engagement with learners' schoolwork and attendance at school meetings. For home literacy practices to hold benefit to learners' school reading practices, educators need to be aware of them and build on them at school (Woods & Comber, 2020). Evidence of educators' awareness of the variety of other literacy practices in the home or of attempts to build on these practices were not apparent. Educators' criticism that the majority of parents exhibited a general lack of interest in their children's education were centred on a lack of assistance with homework and poor involvement in school events and attendance at meetings. Their attention to these factors is likely influenced by Fataar's (2015) argument that the South African curriculum and education system provides "little to no space" (p. 162) for educators to build on the practices that learners bring with them to school.

In establishing learners' attitudes to reading and how this is reflected in their practices, I focused on data generated in interviews with and observations of Grade 1 and Grade 5

learners' reading practices. Grade 5 learners' general enthusiasm for reading was indicative of an interest in reading. This enthusiasm was apparent from when I first entered the classroom. They responded positively to opportunities for reading, spoke with excitement about visiting the library and demonstrated an association between reading and pleasure. There was one set of conditions in which this enthusiasm for reading often did not translate to a willingness to read. This was with regard to the learning environment and Grade 5s' hesitancy to read aloud in front of their peers for fear of being teased. This is an example of how the school's culture of teaching and learning has a detrimental impact on reading practices.

Grade 1 learners, too, demonstrated enthusiasm for reading and a certainty that reading is a crucial component for a successful life. One of the standout features of my data collection with Grade 1s was their response to being able to select books to read and engage directly with texts when invited to do so during interviews. This response highlights how, in denying learners such opportunities, Ms Gabriel reduced possibilities for further improving learners' attitudes towards reading.

### 10.1.3 The school's culture of reading

*How is this culture of reading reflected in the school's reading practices?*

In answering my final research question, I centred my discussion on the data generated from the Grade 1 and 5 classrooms. When I first approached the school, I asked to conduct my research in classrooms where there was evidence of strong reading practices. It was because of this that Ms Adams and Ms Gabriel were recommended as educators whose classrooms would provide me with examples of strong cultures of reading. In my classroom observations, the commitment that both educators have to reading was indisputable. This commitment was further evidenced by learners' reports of how they observed examples of their educators promoting reading and the ways that their educators conveyed the value of reading to them. The majority of learners' reading practices and their dispositions towards reading demonstrated reading habitus that, where possible, acted as embodied and institutional reading capital. However, there were numerous occasions where this reading habitus was hidden and could not operate as reading capital due to restrictions in access to resources, language and a hostile learning environment that discouraged participation. Both

educators demonstrated insight into what is necessary to create a classroom culture of reading. Yet, despite similar opinions and insights, the ways in which they approached reading differed.

Ms Adams' (LL/08.03.2019) belief that if "learners can understand the value of reading then that's half the battle won" and her commitment to learners realising this was evident in how she approached reading in the classroom. Her dedication to encouraging her learners to read, her consistent emphasis on the value of reading, and the opportunities she provides for reading all demonstrated this commitment. Ms Gabriel's comment to me that "if they can read, they can do anything" (DD/Ms Gabriel/10.04.2019) shows a similar perspective. Like Ms Adams, she strove to ensure learners realise this with statements such as "Reading is so important, if you can read, you can do anything" (FB/23.04.2019) and encouragements to learners when they were reading their handouts that "We are reading. We love reading" (FB/24.04.2019). However, the data generated from my Grade 1 fieldwork portrayed an educator who felt restricted in providing possibilities beyond those outlined in the curriculum to convey this to her learners.

Throughout my Grade 5 observations and interactions with Ms Adams and her learners, there was consistent evidence of a culture of reading. This was evident in a shared belief in the value of reading and the overall positive response to Ms Adams providing as many opportunities for reading as possible. There were learners who, largely due to their lack of confidence in their own reading levels and fear of teasing from peers, avoided independent reading and participation in class reading activities. However, there was no learner who responded negatively to all forms of reading practices. I witnessed numerous challenges to reading in Ms Adams' classroom. These were often due to restrictions resulting from a culture of teaching and learning that prohibited more time on reading, and the hostility among learners. The interaction among learners confirmed existing research on how peers can influence one another's practices, both positively and negatively (Juvonen & Knifsend, 2016; Neugebauer & Lia, 2018). The Grade 5 classroom offered an example of how, even in a difficult environment where conditions may potentially undermine practices, it is possible for an educator to establish a field where reading practices can flourish and result in a strong classroom culture of reading.

As I reported in Chapter 9, there were definite elements of a culture of reading present in the Grade 1 classroom. I do not doubt that Ms Gabriel created a classroom where, as in Ms Adams' classroom, reading is valued and enjoyed. Her learners spoke positively of reading, and the general enthusiastic response to reading activities in the classroom demonstrated that Ms Gabriel's commitment to reading was realised by her learners. However, Ms Gabriel's frustration that she was unable to create a stronger classroom culture of reading where this value and enjoyment could be built upon was evident throughout my time in her classroom.

Factors such as teaching a multilingual learner body while restricted by a curriculum whose monoglossic orientation to English reduces possibilities for learners' success and enjoyment of reading, pressures to complete a content-heavy curriculum that does not respond to her learners' needs and her belief that learners would damage books all resulted in her classroom practices being in contradiction to many of her beliefs and ways of thinking surrounding reading. Added to these challenges was how she felt constrained and undermined by a poor culture of teaching and learning. These internal and external challenges limited her ability to create a classroom environment that better reflected her pedagogical and reading habitus. My analysis of how the culture of reading in the Grade 1 classroom is reflected in its reading practices highlighted how an educators' ability to enact their beliefs and how their pedagogical habitus can or cannot operate as institutional cultural capital ultimately depends on the field in which they are situated.

Across the school and in my interactions with educators and visits to their classrooms, there was evident commitment to strengthening learners' reading practices. In particular, I was impressed by educators' physical construction of classroom spaces where learners were surrounded by print and had access to books and reading corners. These books were sourced by educators themselves, confirming their dedication to creating possibilities for reading. I have referred to how the library has contributed to the school's culture of reading. Its success is due not only to the efforts of Funda Fun but also as a result of the school's and educators' positive response to the library, and its incorporation of library periods into the timetable. A notable restriction on a stronger culture of reading was the lack of interaction among educators across grades. I reported on the poor relations among

many educators that resulted in limited awareness of what was occurring elsewhere in the school in reporting on the school's culture of teaching and learning. The lack of a cohesive working environment has led to the absence of a shared vision or strategy in working towards successful schoolwide reading practices. Educators often act in isolation and, because of this are unable to build on learners' previous experiences with reading.

## 10.2 Discussion

Every field is defined in relation to other fields (Maton, 2018). Saxon Primary's existence and operations are reliant on the support of those that hold power in the field of education, most notably the national government and the DBE. Saxon Primary's success in establishing strong reading practices will therefore be measured according to its ability to meet the demands placed on the school by the government and by how practices in the school adhere to the education and reading ideologies held by the government.

As a result, an analysis of the government discourse surrounding a culture of reading had to precede exploring the school's culture of reading. The DBE's presentation of a culture of reading aligns to the autonomous model of literacy and presents reading as primarily a technical skill which is necessary for academic achievement. In warning against the acceptance of the autonomous model of literacy, Street (1997) contends:

> teaching, whatever form it takes (e.g. whole-class; student-centred; phonics-based; 'real' books) has to be able to take account of the variation in literacy practices amongst students and to give value to their different backgrounds and the different literacies they employ in their home contexts. (pp. 53-54)

The DBE's seeming lack of recognition of these variations and of how learners' home practices can be built upon at school has acted to the detriment of Saxon Primary learners. Bourdieu's (1974) critique of the French education system speaks to the challenges faced by many South African schools in their efforts to promote reading, challenges that are apparent at Saxon Primary. He stated:

> as opposed to a rational and really universal pedagogy, which would take nothing for granted initially, would not count as acquired what some, and only some, of the pupils in question had inherited… our own pedagogical tradition is in fact, despite external

> appearances of irreproachable equality and universality, only there for the benefit of pupils who are in the particular position of possessing a cultural heritage conforming to that demanded by the school. (p. 38)

By not grappling adequately with the diversity of learners, the DBE fails to meet the needs of the majority of South African learners. Bourdieu's reference to how "despite external appearances of irreproachable equality and universality" pedagogical traditions function to disadvantage learners describes the disconnect between idealistic education rhetoric and actionable strategies for improvement in South Africa. It demonstrates the need for an education system, and for literacy, reading and language policies and strategies that work to the advantage of all South African children. Bourdieu's attention to how learners who possess a cultural heritage demanded by the school are advantaged is critical in any analysis of reading or literacy achievements from national level to individual classroom practices. Without recognition that literacy practices are never neutral and always embedded in structures of power and what a particular field permits (Luke, 2008b), the favouring of the autonomous model of literacy will remain in place, and contribute to narrow conceptualisations of what counts as literacy in and outside of school. This narrow conceptualisation was clear in how Saxon Primary learners and educators spoke differently about out-of-school practices. When asked about reading outside of the school, learners spoke widely of many varying literacy practices in their homes and communities. These are all practices that, when recognised as such and built upon, benefit children's school literacy practices. Educators' accounts of learners' out-of-school practices focused instead solely on reading books and whether parents assisted their children with homework. This directed attention to reading books and homework decrease possibilities for learners to draw on their range of literacy practices when they are at school.

Learners' out-of-school literacy practices and the ways in which they have been socialised as readers in their home do not predetermine their school practices but they do predispose them to specific practices (Bourdieu, 1984). For many Saxon Primary learners, their reading habitus do not operate as reading capital at school or in the field of education. Their potential for success at school is additionally undermined by Anglonormative language ideologies which leave little space for learners to draw on their linguistic repertoires. For learners who speak English at home, the varieties that they speak do not hold prestige in

the education field. Luke and Kale (1997) contend that before children enter school, it is possible to offer a "prognosis" for their success at school. They state that when there is a mismatch between school and home/community literacy and language practices, and when home practices are not built upon at school, learners' prognosis is poor. This mismatch was clear at Saxon Primary, and the negative effect this has on learners' development as readers was apparent throughout the data. The consequence of this is extended pressure on educators to apprentice learners into school reading practices and to provide language support in a curriculum centred that assumes monolingual classrooms.

Educators' classroom practices demonstrated the effects of external forces acting on them. In addition to the challenge of teaching in an education field that is not culturally responsive to their learners' backgrounds and does not make space for multilingual teaching, educators related that learners' upbringing, a lack of parental support, and the effects of the trauma of living in a violent community all negatively affected their efforts to implement their preferred classroom practices. My exploration of a culture of reading at Saxon Primary shows the realities of translating national policy to individual schools that do not have the infrastructure or necessary human and economic resources to respond easily to what is expected of them. As I stated in responding to my third research question, these external restrictions do not however determine practices in a school, and the poor culture of teaching and learning further acts to the detriment of the school's reading practices. The complexities in the struggles for power in the school were significant. These occurred between leadership and educators, educators and learners, and among learners themselves. The result was a field marked by tensions among its members and at times hostility that affected teaching and learning, as well as the wellbeing of all members of the school community. The tensions and the hostility in the school may be internal challenges. However, the school is operating in an education field that offers little support for mentoring of leadership and educators, and does not have strong structures in place for educators to access additional learning or psychosocial support for all learners that require support.

The data presented in my analysis of how a culture of reading functions in government education discourse and the data presented in my case study show that the DBE has failed

to assume reciprocal accountability (Elmore, 2005) for the demands it places on schools. The expectations it places on schools are not accompanied by the necessary resources for schools to meet these demands. Through partnerships with literacy NGOs, Saxon Primary has managed to counter some of the lack of accountability in terms of ensuring infrastructure and resources are in place to strengthen reading practices. This has not been sufficient to address the many complexities of promoting reading in a no-fee, multilingual school where a prescriptive and content-heavy curriculum provides little room for innovation and creativity.

This prescriptive curriculum and the consequent narrowing focus towards reading as a set of cognitive skills decreases educators' autonomy to respond to their unique classroom environments. An immediate effect of this limited autonomy and of prescriptive policies is that reading periods and lessons are often rushed and centred on reading skills. Ms Gabriel's focus on extensive phonics instruction that was largely separate from other forms of reading demonstrates this. This directed focus on reading skills does not allow space for the equally important element that learning to read and developing school reading practices requires meaningful reasons for reading, access to appropriate resources and extensive opportunities for reading, elements that all contribute to provide motivation to read (bua-lit collective, 2018). Without such possibilities in place, the ongoing dominance of literacy ideologies associated the autonomous model of literacy will continue to disadvantage many South African learners, including Saxon Primary learners.

The picture I have painted here is often a depressing one. Yet, throughout my fieldwork I was impressed by how, even it occurs in isolation, there are innovative educators who strive to create a field where reading practices can thrive. Ms Adams' classroom offers a demonstration of this. The ways in which learners spoke about books and my observations of their reading practices, their excitement at the establishment of the library, and their reports on engaging in various literacy practices at home show that there are many existing resources that provide foundations for the strengthening of learners' reading practices. Such successes has to be acknowledged and built upon in ways that will allow for the strengthening of learners' reading habitus, despite the many forces working against possibilities for this success.

## 10.3 Implications of findings

For centuries, the majority of South Africans did not have access to education or were educated in an oppressive system that aimed to advantage White South Africans to the detriment of all other population groups (Christie, 2021). Expectations that, in a single generation, the government could establish an education system that could overcome the results of this oppression are unrealistic. However, an effective and efficient transformation of the education system is threatened by the DBE formulating and implementing policies, strategies and curricula that do not adequately account for or build upon the linguistic, social and economic diversity of many South African learners.

The campaigns and strategies that the government has implemented in their efforts to create a culture of reading rely on the presence of economic and material resources and on home-school-community relations that are more closely aligned to the Global North context (Bridges, 2014; Clements, 2017; Fletcher et al., 2012; Kennedy et al., 2012). South Africa is a nation working to unravel the systemic socio-economic and racial hierarchies inherited from colonialism and Apartheid. Reading campaigns, policies and strategies cannot be founded in Global North ideologies and practices that frequently do not translate to the context in which the majority of South African children attend school. Instead, these reading campaigns, policies and strategies need to respond to and build on existing resources and practices held by schools, families and children if they are to support a sustained culture of reading and the improvements in reading levels that the government conflates with a culture of reading.

Throughout my fieldwork and analysis, I found myself challenging the notion of educators who "can't or won't" teach (NEEDU, 2013). I interacted with committed educators whose struggles to develop strong, curious readers were often attributable to variables outside of their commitment or teaching knowledge and capabilities. My analysis reflected Bourdieu's (1971b) commentary on how specific expectations and outcomes demanded by education systems can negatively affect educators' autonomy and practices He argued:

> In the organization of his [*sic*] teaching and sometimes of his whole work every teacher is obliged to make some concessions to the requirements of the educational system and of his own function. (p. 197)

Each Saxon Primary educator arrived at the school with an established habitus and their own perspective on reading and reading instruction. How this habitus translated to their practices at Saxon Primary occurred in relation to the school and teaching environment, and to whether this habitus can serve as cultural capital at Saxon Primary (Feldman, 2016a). Any individual vision of or perspective on what is necessary for a strong culture of reading loses value when individuals do not feel empowered to share or implement ideas that are embedded in their habitus. It cannot be expected that all staff will share the same beliefs and approaches to improving learning and reading within the school. However, what is required is a cohesive effort among staff to work towards best supporting one another to meet a clearly defined and collective vision for reading. The resulting social capital will translate to increased institutional capital as a result of educators sharing their ideas and knowledge regarding reading instruction and promotion.

Where there is interaction among educators, the extent of this interaction is often limited by their teaching load, the lack of meeting space and an environment where educators often feel unable to request assistance. Instead of existing in an environment where reading is a daily focus and embedded in school and classroom practices, many educators spoke of the exhaustion of having to fight to introduce new practices or ideas in working towards an improved culture of reading. The result of this is what Grenfell (2019) refer to as a "double bind" where educators' habitus and their preferred practices around reading clashed with what was required of them to meet the dominant education discourses and respond to the school's culture of teaching and learning.

Saxon Primary's library's contribution to the school's culture of reading is clear. The positive feedback on its existence and my observations of library periods demonstrated the validity of the DBE's and the DSAC's positioning of a school library as an important resource in developing a school's culture of reading (Department of Arts and Culture & National Council for Library and Information Services, 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2012, 2019e; Motshekga, 2015a, 2015b). However, its benefit has been curtailed by restrictions as to when learners can visit the library and who is allowed to take books home. Funda Fun requests that schools open their libraries at break but because schools are responsible for the daily running of their libraries, they do not impose this on schools. While I was working

in the NGO sector, I visited many schools that partner with Funda Fun. At these schools, I witnessed learners' enthusiasm and interest in visiting the library at break. It was frustrating to see the Saxon Primary library closed at break with the knowledge that there were learners who would have visited if they had the opportunity. The library's existence draws attention to how no-fee schools are dependent on fundraising or external partnerships if they are to meet the government's expectations of schools regarding what is required to implement to create a culture of reading. The role that Funda Fun has played in the library's existence in the absence of government highlights the invaluable contribution that NGOs play in literacy development in South Africa. However, the risk of having to rely on external partners is reflected in how, if Funda Fun were to exit and the school could find no alternative funding sources and support for a library assistant, many of the benefits that the library has brought to reading practices in the school could be quickly lost.

My concluding thoughts when writing up my analysis were that the culture of teaching and learning in the school presents the biggest threat to the school's culture of reading. Shifting any culture is not easily achieved. Mr Willemse's and educators' accounts of how external factors exerted negative influences on the school's culture of teaching and learning demonstrate the challenges inherent to improving the culture of reading at Saxon Primary. These external forces undoubtedly challenge the creation and maintenance of a strong culture of reading. However, in every field there are a range of possible ways in which groups or individuals can respond to the internal and external pressures acting on the field (Reay, 1995). In saying this, I do not dismiss the realities that Saxon Primary faces and the many obstacles that will need to be overcome for a strong culture of reading to develop. Yet, it remains the case that, although the range of possibilities for improving Saxon Primary's may be limited, every school has the agency to build on existing practices positively, and consequently there are undoubtedly possibilities for improving the school's culture of reading.

The existence of a culture of reading, as I have defined it, will undoubtedly benefit children. This is because attaching value to reading and presenting frequent opportunities for reading appropriate and relevant materials will strengthen reading practices and the emotional, social and academic benefits of reading. However, such opportunities remain unavailable to

millions of South African children. Alternative approaches and ways of thinking about reading are necessary in shaping a contextually appropriate response for the South African field of education. The focus of my research has been primarily on reading practices. The challenge that emerged throughout the research of separating reading from other literacy practices has contributed to highlighting the need for an evaluation of whether a culture of reading offers a solution to the country's reading crisis. There is an existing body of South African scholarship that demonstrates how situating reading as an autonomous practice, largely isolated from other literacy practices, restricts the possibilities available to children to bring to the learning context their existing resources. These rich resources can be drawn on in creating classrooms where social, cultural and linguistic diversities are considered valuable resources rather than obstacles to learning. Stein (2008) emphasised that building on these resources will assist in negotiating the tensions between Western and African traditions and knowledge, between the dominance of English and African languages, and between in-school and out-of-school practices. Although presented 15 years ago, Stein's argument remains relevant today. A wider appreciation across the field of education for practices such as storytelling (Bloch, 2014; Guzula et al., 2016), the production of artwork (Stein, 2008), singing and rhyme (bua-lit collective, 2018; McKinney, 2022), and dramatic play (Prinsloo, 2004; R. Sibanda & Kajee, 2019; Stein & Slonimsky, 2006) as means of invoking learners' creativity and critical thinking is crucial. By drawing on and incorporating the many resources that learners bring with them to school, the possibilities for creating a field of education where learners' potential for success in learning, literacy and reading is not immediately advantaged or disadvantaged by their backgrounds exists.

## 10.4 Recommendations

### 10.4.1 Managing multilingual classrooms

In Saxon Primary and many other Western Cape schools that were previously open to Coloured, Indian or White learners only, educators often do not speak isiXhosa. When learners enter these schools with little to no experience of English, this adds another layer of complexity to educators' practices because possibilities for translanguaging to assist with language development are reduced, particularly because of the lack of support that has

been offered to educators to assist them in teaching multilingual classes. The belief in the power of English that many South Africans hold shows no sign of abating. The language ideologies dominating an education field result in the "construction, legitimation and imposition of an official language" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 48). The ideologies that underpin CAPS, and policies and strategies ensure the legitimation and dominance of English in the field of education. This dominance is reinforced as a result of how, for many parents, English holds significant linguistic capital, which has resulted in a decision to educate their children in English from as early as possible. As long as English is perceived to be a sign of intelligence and to offer greater access to further education and economic benefits, it will continue to be the LoLT of choice for many parents whose home language is not English.

There is no easy solution to the complexities of multilingual classes at Saxon Primary. The benefit of translanguaging is gaining attention in South Africa (Guzula, 2019; McKinney, 2020; Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021), and there is a need to ensure that South African educators have an understanding of the politics of languages and language ideologies for them to teach effectively in multilingual schools (Mendelowitz et al., 2023). Ms Gabriel's encouragement of learners to speak in multiple languages during events such as GGR and my interactions with Anele and Luzuko show, on a small-scale, that even in a restrictive curriculum, there are possibilities for promoting multilingualism and translanguaging in classrooms. However, until these practices receive greater recognition as contributing to learners' education and as a valuable resource in learning and strengthening linguistic identities, their benefits will remain unrealised. It is recommended that pre- and in-service training that will assist educators in realising the value of these practices and in creating classroom environments that support multilingual learning and translanguaging is more widely implemented.

At Saxon Primary, each Grade R to Grade 2 class has an assigned 30-minute weekly English language period that is attended by about ten learners. Ms Klaasen (LL/08.11.2019) is of the opinion that even 30 minutes of additional English instruction benefits learners, and helps reduce the existing gaps in learning that educators report struggling to manage. My recommendation is that, until a curriculum and language policy is implemented that provides greater space for multilingualism and translanguaging in classrooms, the amount of

time available to learners to receive additional language support and the number of learners who attend such sessions should be increased. Such measures cannot fully counter the negative effects of learning in an additional language, but any possible resource to strengthen learners' English should be utilised. With schools operating under strict and tight budgets, this is a cost that would need to be absorbed by the DBE or WCED or be facilitated by NGOs.

### 10.4.2 Educators' wellbeing

One of the most crucial findings of my research does not relate directly to reading. Rather, it is how the exhaustion educators experience from having to manage their learners' psychosocial wellbeing affects their own wellbeing and teaching. Ideally, educators' role should be to identify any learners that may need assistance and referring them to a qualified professional. Without sufficient social worker visits, educators are expected to provide learners a level of support that should not be the responsibility of an untrained professional.

Calls for additional social workers and psychosocial support in South African schools have long gone unanswered. With no suggestion that this situation may change, equipping South African educators as best as possible to assist their learners in managing any trauma and threats to physical or emotional wellbeing (Chetty, 2015) is the only realistic alternative. This should be incorporated in pre-service training and be offered as in-service training.

Empowering qualified educators with practical skills to manage their own wellbeing can assist them in handling the pressure and stress they experience. This could occur through attending workshops and talks, or by providing materials that educators could cover independently. Providing materials offers alternative access to information for educators who may be hesitant to interact with groups on what can potentially be difficult and emotional topics. Sharing materials with all staff members allows them independence to make use of them if they wish without group interaction. I feel strongly that attendance at any such workshops should be encouraged but not enforced. Enforcing such activities removes educators' choice as to how they manage their wellbeing. A potential means of increasing participation in such events could be achieved through programmes that are

endorsed by the South African Council of Educators (SACE) as counting towards continuing professional development points.

### 10.4.3 Policy and curriculum planning

In Chapter 5, I emphasised how instead of delinking from Global North epistemologies, the DBE's formulation of strategies, policies and campaigns linked to literacy and reading continues to reflect a reliance on scholarship and practices originating in the Global North. If the symbolic violence that continues to play out in the education system is to be overcome, there is a need for rethinking any current or future curricula or education policy in pluriversal terms. This will challenge the colonial and Western ideologies that underpin the current curriculum. A decentring of Western ideologies and a willingness to draw on indigenous knowledge systems can only benefit South African learners and the field of education.

The DBE has been widely criticised for drawing on a select body of individuals, often academics, who are removed from the reality of daily teaching and learning in formulating curricula and policies (Christie & Monyokolo, 2018; Kretzer & Oluoch-Suleh, 2022; Mahabeer, 2020; Prinsloo, 2021). Any formulation of new or revised reading campaigns and policies has to include lengthier consultation and greater sharing of knowledge and expertise among all relevant stakeholders. This will allow for a better response to the South African context. Such consultation is required from the macro-level of senior government to individual educators and school librarians. Educators have the greatest insight into the lived realities of teaching in South Africa and into the needs of learners with regard to reading, and drawing on this experience and knowledge is crucial.

## 10.5 Reflecting on my research

My initial motivation for conducting my research was to understand how and why the term "culture of reading" had assumed such prominence and popularity in South Africa, particularly in the field of education. The extent to which the term "culture of reading" features in South African education discourse became even more evident as my research progressed. I continue to encounter the term in various fields and, if anything, its usage increased subsequent to embarking on my research, adding to the significance of my study.

When I set out to identify a research site, I searched for schools where there was evidence of strong reading practices. On first appearances, Saxon Primary offered this. However, from as early as my pilot study, it was clear that the school's culture of reading was shaped and threatened by a complex nexus of internal and external factors. To grapple with these layered factors, I drew on Bourdieu's theory of practice. This theory contributed to identifying that a certain set of practices, in this case reading practices, can only be understood in relation to a field in its entirety (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu's attention to how overlapping fields structure practices was particularly beneficial in analysing how the government's ongoing emphasis on a culture of reading at basic education level pays insufficient attention to how the overall field of education and society as a whole affect the country's reading landscape.

My research was centred on exploring the culture of reading at Saxon Primary. However, in identifying themes and analysing data, it was soon evident that without an in-depth understanding of what serves as the foundation for a school's culture of reading, I would not be able to present a comprehensive analysis. Consequently, my analysis of the culture of reading at Saxon Primary had to be preceded by a discussion on how overlapping fields, and the culture of teaching and learning structured possible reading practices and, ultimately, the school and classroom cultures of reading.

As I wrote up my research, my analysis consistently reinforced the comment I made to my supervisor early into my fieldwork:

> I'm realising more and more how the overall culture of the school is going to play a big part in my research... It really highlights how unrealistic government's expectations of our teachers are and why reading etc. cannot be addressed until systemic issues are addressed. (FS/28.02.2019)

It requires a brave principal, and even braver educators, to welcome an outsider into their school and classrooms with the knowledge that findings may include negative criticism. Throughout writing up my research, it has been a challenge to navigate my emotional response and my respect for the school community, from the research process and analysis. In Chapters 1 and 4, I discussed my position as a White, privileged South African conducting research in a context very different to my own upbringing and how this, too, requires

constantly problematising my position in the school. Bourdieu's notion of reflexivity has proven beneficial in addressing these factors, and I have constantly questioned my positioning in my research and how this positioning has affected my analysis. I am grateful to have maintained relationships with some educators which has allowed for member checks and for me to extend this reflection.

## 10.6 Research contributions

My definition of a culture of reading is a significant contribution to African scholarship. By conducting an extensive review of texts, I have been able to identify the elements of reading that together constitute a culture of reading and, based on this, provide a definition of a culture of reading appropriate to the African context. There is no correct culture of reading as the context in which reading occurs and the resources available will shape a culture of reading. What the definition contributes is showing what elements work together in constituting the foundations for a culture of reading. My literature review and definition draw attention to how reading has to be approached from a socio-cultural perspective.

Any schoolwide change depends on a culture of teaching and learning that supports practices, whether in reading or other areas. By formulating a conceptual model of a culture of teaching and learning, I offer a tool for schools to review their culture of teaching and learning. Further, the tool can contribute to providing a framework for future research.

With the term "culture of reading" continuing to appear in South African discourse, an empirical study exploring the culture of reading at a school that shares many commonalities with schools across South Africa contributes to highlighting the complexities associated with translating literacy policies and campaigns to individual school level. bua-lit (2018), a South African language and literacy collective, emphasises the value of ethnographic case studies in South Africa, stating that these studies have:

> produced much of the scholarship that has become foundational to our understanding of literacy as a range of practices and of how children develop literacy resources which are more or less valued within schools, as well as how these differ across social contexts. (p. 13)

Any research, such as my case study, that adds to this body of scholarship contributes to understanding literacy in South African schools. This is critical to identifying how, as a

society, South Africans can offer our children the best opportunities for developing literacy practices in and outside of school that can assist them in the schooling context and help equip them for entry into society beyond schooling. Importantly, my data reinforces the need to move beyond policies and curricula that are centred on an understanding of reading as an ideologically neutral practice, separate from other literacy practices, that can be taught and learnt in schools in a uniform manner.

## 10.7 Future research

South African research on reading and the home environment has traditionally centred on parents' role in their children's reading practices. There is little research on children's own literacy practices in the home environment. From the variety of home literacy practices reported on in Section 6.4, it is clear that there are many literacy practices occurring in learners' homes. More in-depth research into children's literacy practices could contribute to a greater realisation of the value of these practices and how these practices could be built upon and incorporated in reading and literacy in schools.

Learners' discussions of their visits to public libraries, especially to Saxon Public Library, demonstrate the invaluable role that libraries can play as a community resource that provides a space for various literacy activities and for South Africans to access reading materials. The ways in which libraries act as a community resource is an area that requires further research and could provide opportunities for greater knowledge and idea sharing among public libraries. It is also research that has the potential to contribute to revisions of or new library policies or strategies to be formulated by the DSAC.

An additional area for future research is investigation into how children's use of social media and cellphone apps shapes their reading practices. Rowsell et al. (2019) state that the growth in technologies and media requires that researchers reconsider what it means to engage in literacy events and what implications this engagement with different technologies and media holds for children and youth's literacy development. This is an area that remains under-researched in South Africa. As my research was centred on school reading practices, and cellphones were not allowed at school, I did not incorporate detailed data related to these practices. However, the value of these resources cannot be dismissed, and

understanding how they are and can be used to the benefit of children's reading practices could contribute to better leveraging their potential impact on reading.

## 10.8 Conclusion

The South African education system is flawed and messy, and continues to suffer from the effects of Apartheid, colonialism and ongoing coloniality. It is also an education system with many dedicated and committed educators, and learners who are interested in reading when there are structures in place that provide opportunities and motivation for them to do so. In presenting a case study of an individual school that has many similarities with schools across South Africa, it has been possible to explore how factors from the macro-level of national government to individuals' habitus combine in a school to shape its culture of reading.

Any researcher enters a field with certain assumptions in place, whether or not they are conscious of these assumptions. I entered Saxon Primary assuming that answering the questions "What shapes a culture of reading in a South African no-fee primary school?" and "How is this culture of reading reflected in the school's reading practices?" would generate findings that were related primarily to reading itself. However, as my research has made evident, no reading practices can be analysed in isolation from the school in its entirety, or in isolation of the effect of overlapping fields on the school's culture of reading. I undertook my research, perhaps naively, hoping to present a clear picture of Saxon Primary's culture of reading. I found, however, that there is no single story to be told.

Instead, Saxon Primary is a school of many stories. It is clear that there is much to be achieved in strengthening reading practices, from the individual level to schoolwide practices. It is a school where internal struggles for power and disconnects among staff members have acted to the detriment of its culture of reading. Adding to this are external influences that create a field with myriad challenges and potential obstacles to a strong culture of reading. Yet, the effect of overlapping fields and the habitus individuals transfer on entry to a new field *predispose* individuals or groups towards certain practices but do not predetermine these practices (Bourdieu, 1990b). Ultimately, a school's success in shaping its culture of reading lies with how members of the school community respond to the external and internal forces that influence reading, and how they work together to create a school

environment that best manages negative forces and builds on positive practices. At Saxon Primary, there remains much to be achieved in how the school manages the pressures of internal and external forces if it is to create a strong, sustainable schoolwide culture of reading that acts to the benefit of all learners.

## A FOOTNOTE

In my conclusion to Chapter 6 I stated, “although such collaborations [with Mfunqule and Funda Fun] are beneficial and provide crucial resources, reliance on NGOs is not sustainable” (p. 150). Subsequent to my fieldwork, Mfunqule has exited the school. NGOs are fundamental to the field of education as the government continues to grapple with the task of addressing the inequalities in access to education and the lack of infrastructure and resources in schools. As we look towards the future for education in South Africa, strategic planning from the DBE and ways in which the government from national to district level can provide schools with necessary additional support is required.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: NEWSPAPER ARTICLE FOR ENGLISH LESSON



Laura Parker, executive director of BGCSA; Ahmed Motala, chief executive of the New Africa Education Foundation; Pieter Swanepoel, MD of Tupperware SA; and Peter Metcalfe, group executive: sales and marketing of Novus Holdings at the mobile library handover at the Boys & Girls Club of Alexandra.

■ EDUCATION

# Mobile libraries turn pages of literacy

STAFF WRITER

READING for pleasure will not only improve literacy levels among the country's youth, but also encourage children to complete their schooling and build a better life for themselves.

That is why the Novus Holding print production company donated two mobile libraries to the Boys and Girls Club of Alexandria on International Day of Education (January 24).

Meant to bridge the gap between literacy and unemployment in the country, the libraries can be wheeled between classrooms, making them easily accessible to the club's children.

Speaking at the donation handover Novus Holding group executive Peter Metcalfe said it was vital for children to master reading for pleasure in order to stay on track and in school.

"It also helps spark imagination, which in turn helps the kids to discover new words and ideas. We hope these stunning mobile libraries will have a long-term, positive impact on the 400 children at the Boys & Girls Club of Alexandra," said Metcalfe.

He said recent research suggested that 78% of South African children in Grade 4 could not read, while South Africa has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the world.

Metcalfe said that Boys and Girls Clubs South Africa (BGSCA) are facility-based after-school programmes for school-aged children that provide daily structured programmes on weekdays where children can explore their talents and abilities in a supportive environment.

New Africa Education Foundation chief executive officer Ahmed Motala co-ordinated the donation of the mobile libraries and had up to date assisted Novus Holdings to donate 39 mobile libraries to schools in South Africa.

BGCSA executive director Laura Parker said the BGCSA team focuses on encouraging learners not to drop out before they reach Grade 12.

**Mobile libraries turn pages of literacy. (2019, January 28).** ***Cape Times*****.**

## APPENDIX B: GRADE 5 BOOK LIST

| *Author* | *Title* |
|---|---|
| Amos, R. | Angry Birds: Transformers, Deceptihogs vs Autobirds |
| Bohtam, M. | Do Turtles Really Breathe out of their Bums? |
| Chesire, G. | Science Essentials: The Solar System and Beyond |
| Crossley-Holland, K. | Storm |
| Deutsch, S. | Mysterious Makers of Shaker Street: The Whole Nine Yards |
| DiCamillo, K. | Where are you going, Baby Lincoln? |
| Dickman, N. | Strange but True: Sport |
| Donaldson, J. | Princess Mirror-Belle |
| Dowd, S. | The Ransom of Dond |
| Durant, A. | Barmy Army: Look out World, Here they Come |
| Ganeri, A. | How my Body Works: Moving |
| Gosling, S. | The Shadow People |
| Graham, I. | New Technology: Robot Technology |
| Green, J. | The Seaside |
| Hubbard and Chapman, B. | I want a Dog |
| Hurn, R. | Girlfriendz - Pirate DJ |
| Langley, K. | Miss Molly and the Velvet Bag |
| Lemon-Scott, C. | Jake in Space: Rocket Battles |
| Lemon-Scott, C. | Jake in Space: Moon Attack |
| Martin, P. | Bybel Speurder |

| *Author* | *Title* |
|---|---|
| Mason, M. | Strange but True: Football |
| Mitchell, C. | Do Dinosaurs make good pets? |
| National Geographic | Tiger in Trouble and more stories of amazing animal rescues |
| Nixon, J. | The World History of Football |
| Phillips, D. | Pirate: The Story of a Buccaneer |
| Phillips, D. | Dare |
| Polan, A. | Capturing Cresselia |
| Scaletta, K. | Steal that Base |
| Snashall, S. | Dogs and Puppies |
| Snashall, S. | Cats and Kittens |
| Spilsbury, L. and Spilsbury, R. | A Cry in the Dark: Explore Sound and use Science to Survive |
| Spilsbury, L. and Spilsbury, R. | The Cave of Shadows: Explore light and use Science to Survive |
| Street, R. et al | Metz and Bop and The Big Library Thief |
| Turner, T. | Stat Attack! Horrid Humans |
| Wilson, J. | The Dare Game |
| Woolf, A. | Nightmare Island |

## APPENDIX C: EXAMPLE OF LEARNERS' "BOOKS": MY BIRTHDAY PARTY

Name:_____

My Birthday Party





Here are the party hats. 1



Here are the balloons. 2



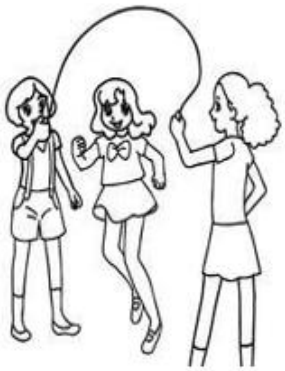
Here are the presents. 3



Here are the cupcakes. 4



Here are the kids playing. 5



Here are the games. 6



It's my birthday party!. 7

**Adapted from Grandt, 2014. My Birthday Party**

# APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

**Interview schedule: Principal**

1. How long have you been at the school?
2. What do you understand by the word “culture”?
3. How would you define a culture of reading?
4. Describe the culture of reading at the school when you arrived?
5. What changes have occurred in this culture since your appointment?
6. What are the reasons for these changes?
7. Why do you think reading is important?
8. What role should the principal play in developing a culture of reading at a school?
9. Who are the key promoters of reading at the school?
10. How do you ensure that reading is incorporated into the curriculum?
11. What reading programmes (outside of the curriculum) are in place at your school?
12. How do you source and select your books?
13. Who do you think the most important people (inside and outside the school) are to help grow children’s love of reading?
14. How do you think the classroom space impacts children and teachers’ attitudes to reading?
15. How do you think a child’s attitude and approach to reading impacts on their schoolwork?
16. What outside organisations are involved in the school and what role do you think they play in developing a love of reading and children’s reading skills?
17. A significant amount of research and results across schools indicate that there is an immense disparity in access to quality education and resources across South Africa. This extends to reading and literacy levels. How do you think this influences children’s current progress and their future, with a focus on your learners?
18. Research such as PIRLS 2016 indicates that reading in South Africa is in a state of crisis. How can we work to overcoming this?
19. What are the biggest challenges you have faced in terms of reading at your school?
20. IS there anything else you would like to add?

**Interview schedule: Educators**

1. What grade do you teach?
2. How many learners in your class?
3. How long have you been at the school?
4. How long have you been teaching for? (Tell me a bit about your teaching experience)
5. Tell me about your own reading habits.
6. What do you understand by the word “culture”?
7. How would you define a culture of reading?
8. Describe the culture of reading at your school.
9. Why do you think reading is important?
10. Who are the key promoters of reading at the school? (By promoter I mean, who are the people who most encourage and drive reading in the school.)
11. What role can teachers play in promoting reading in a school and getting children to want to read?
12. What reading and reading activities take place in your classroom?
13. How do you ensure that reading is incorporated into the curriculum?
14. Who do you think the most important people (inside and outside the school) are to help grow children’s love of reading?
15. How do you think a classroom space impacts children’s attitudes to reading?
16. How do you think a child’s reading ability impacts on their schoolwork?
17. Comment on the reading materials that you have access to and their effect on learners’ approach to reading.
18. There are two literacy NGOs that are present in your school. How, if at all, have they influenced reading in the school (either positively or negatively)?
19. What are the biggest challenges you have faced in terms of getting children reading?
20. A significant amount of research and results across schools indicate that there is an immense disparity in access to quality education and resources across South Africa. This extends to reading and literacy levels. How do you think this influences children’s current progress and their future with a focus on your learners?
21. Research indicates that reading in South Africa is in a state of crisis. How can we work to overcoming this?

**Interview schedule: Learners**

1. If I say ‘reading’ what does it make you think?
2. How often do you read?
3. Do you prefer to read to yourself or to have someone read to you?
4. How can people make it interesting when they are reading to you?
5. What type of books do you like reading (fiction, non-fiction, fantasy, drama etc.) How come?
6. How often does the teacher read to a group of you and your friends?
7. Do you like reading? Please explain your answer
8. Please can you tell me about what happens and what you feel when:
    a. your teacher reads in class,
    b. you read to your teacher,
    c. you read to yourself.
9. How do you feel when you have to read out loud (scared, happy, I don’t mind)?
10. Who else do you read to at school?
11. What does reading allow you to achieve at school and after school?
12. Why do you think reading is important (if you do)?
13. Where is your favourite space at school for reading?
14. Sometimes you might do activities about a book after you or the teacher has read it. If you do this, what sort of activities do you do (roleplay, drawing etc.) and what do you think about these activities?
15. What would make you read more?
16. How do you choose what books to read (cover, content, recommendations from friends, teachers or family)
17. What type of books would you like to read more and have more of?
18. If you read after school:
    a. Who do you read with?
    b. How often do you read with them?
    c. When did you start reading with them?
    d. What books do you read and where are they from

**Interview schedule: Other staff at Saxon Primary (e.g. teacher assistants, library assistant, interns)**

1. What is your role at the school?
2. Who employs you?
3. When did you first start at the school?
4. If you work for an NGO, what role does your NGO play in the school?
5. What was your motivation for working at the school?
6. Who are your key support people at the school?
7. Tell me about your experience while at the school.
8. Why do you think reading is important?
9. How much of your own reading do you do?
10. What systems and programmes does the school have in place in terms of reading?
11. What do you perceive the school and its staff's attitude to reading to be?
12. What is the children's attitude to reading?
13. What have you learnt about reading while at the school?
14. What have you most enjoyed about your time at the school?
15. What has your greatest achievement been at the school?
16. What challenges have you faced while at the school?
17. How do you think the school could further promote reading and instil a love of reading in the learners?
18. Do you think there is a culture of reading at the school? Why do you say so?
19. What advice would you give to someone who would want to be employed in your role?

**Interview schedule: Off-site NGO representatives**

1. What is your position at your organisation?
2. When did you first partner with the school?
3. What was your motivation for partnering with the school?
4. What role does your NGO play in the school?
5. Who are the key staff that drive reading in the school?
6. What progress do you think your NGO has made while in the school?
7. How have you achieved this progress?
8. What do you perceive the school and its staff's attitude to reading to be?
9. How do you think the school could further promote reading and instil a love of reading in the learners?
10. How do you see your partnership with the school continuing?
11. What measures does the school have in place to ensure that your programme is sustainable once you have exited?
12. What challenges have you faced while at the school?
13. What advice would you give to another NGO that is interested in partnering with the school?
14. Do you think there is a culture of reading at the school? Why do you say so?

**APPENDIX E: INFORMATION LETTERS AND CONSENT FORMS**

Information letter for principal

DATE

Dear Principal,

My name is Claire Biesman-Simons. I am a doctoral student at Wits University in Johannesburg. I would like to conduct research for my PhD thesis at your school from July 2018-2020. My thesis is entitled 'The importance of defining a culture of reading: A case study within an under-resourced South African primary school'. I would like to find out more about the culture surrounding reading at the school, how reading is viewed at the school, what is being done to promote reading and how the school could continue to promote reading and improve the school and children's attitude to reading.

I will be writing a final thesis report on my findings. As your school has focused on reading and you have insight into reading practices at the school and knowledge of education in South Africa, I would like to invite you and your school to participate in my research.

I would like to find out about your experiences of reading at the school and learn about your attitude to reading and its role in education. Data collection would take place in focus group interviews (small group interviews) and/or individual interviews. With your permission, I will request to record these interviews. Focus group interviews will average an hour. Individual interviews will be shorter. These interviews will occur outside of teaching hours. The study will also include one-on-one and focus group interviews with your staff, learners and partners such as NGOS and the WCED that you work closely with.

The study will involve classroom observations and observations of other reading-related activities, such as reading competitions, in your school. Ideally, I would like to focus on two classrooms and do general observations of other classrooms. I will observe teachers' approaches to reading and promoting reading within the classroom and school as well as learners' responses to this and their attitudes and approaches to reading. I will be a passive participant and would like to take video and audio recordings as well as photographs during these observations. No images that identify participants or the school will be included in the final report. I would like to do observations and interviews from the second half of 2018 to 2020 and am happy to negotiate with you how I spend time in the school with you and the teachers involved. Because I am not fluent in isiXhosa I will

sometimes have a translator with me. She is bound to uphold the confidentiality of participants in this research.

I would also request access to teachers' lesson plans that deal with reading and internal documentation relevant to my research that you and your staff would be willing to share. Further, I ask that, if children, wish to share their work with me I have access to it. The school or individuals will not be able to be identified through my consideration of these artifacts.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You and your school will not be paid or rewarded in any manner for your participation. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will in no way advantage or disadvantage you. You may withdraw from the study at any stage without any penalty and can ask that I do not use some or all of data generated from you. All participants and the school will be given pseudonyms and will not be identified. Participants in focus groups will be asked to keep discussions confidential and one-on-one interviews will be conducted confidentially.

Due to your position, people who are associated with the school or those present in the school, may be able to identify you. You may request to review any parts of my thesis that contain data I have obtained from you before its publication to ensure that you and the school cannot be identified and have not been misrepresented. I will also provide a summary of the thesis if requested. As the university uploads theses online, it will be available to the general public. Findings of the study may also be presented in other academic papers or at conferences.

I will destroy all research data between three to five years after the completion of the project.

If you would like to be involved in this study, please complete the attached form and return it to me.

I believe that the study will make a contribution towards identifying the systems that you have in place that create a culture of reading in your school and that this may assist you as you continue in your efforts to promote reading within your school.

Should you wish to make contact with my supervisor, Prof. Kerryn Dixon, she can be contacted at kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za. Please let me know if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Biesman-Simons

Email: cbiesman@gmail.com

Phone: 082 966 2654

**Consent form for participation in study: School principal**

PhD thesis:

The importance of defining a culture of reading: a case study within an under-resourced South African primary school

**Researcher:** Claire Biesman-Simons

I ……., principal of Saxon Primary, agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.

I agree to the school's participation in the study and to the school being the primary research site. YES/NO

My decision to participate or not participate in this study is my own and no one can force me to do so. I will not receive payment or reward for participation. YES/NO

I agree that the researcher may use quotes in her report with pseudonyms attributed to them. YES/NO

I give my consent for the following:

**Permission to be interviewed**

- I would like to be interviewed in a focus group for this study. YES/NO
- I will keep content of the focus group confidential. YES/NO
- I would like to be interviewed one-on-one for this study. YES/NO
- I know that I can exit an interview at any time and do not have to answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

**Permission to be audiotaped in interviews**

- I agree to be audiotaped during interviews. YES/NO
- I understand that no one other than the researcher, transcriber or translator will have access to these recordings. YES/NO

**Permission for observation of teachers**

- I agree that the researcher can observe teachers while they are teaching. YES/NO

**Permission for taking photographs during observations**

- I agree that photographs can be taken of the school, teachers and children. YES/NO
- I understand that features that identify the school, learners or teachers will be removed and that no individuals will be able to be identified in the photographs in the final report. YES/NO

**Permission to audio record observations**

- I agree that audio recordings can be taken during interviews. YES/NO
- I understand that no one other than the researcher, transcriber or translator will have access to these recordings. YES/NO
- I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only. YES/NO

**Permission to video record observations**

- I agree that video recordings can be taken. YES/NO
- I understand that features that identify the school, learners or me will not be included in the video recordings. YES/NO

**Informed Consent**

*I understand that:*

- my name and information and the name of the school will be kept confidential. YES/NO
- I will have access to sections of the findings that report on what I have said before publication in order to assess whether my identity may be compromised. YES/NO

- I will have access to any sections of the findings regarding the school before publication in order to assess whether its identity may be compromised or if it has been misrepresented in any way. YES/NO

- I do not have to answer every question in an interview and can withdraw from the study at any time. YES/NO

- The findings of this study will be published in a thesis. Findings may also be used in other academic papers or for conference presentations. YES/NO
- All the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the project. YES/NO

Signature_____ Date_____

**School-based participants' information letter**

DATE

Dear

My name is Claire Biesman-Simons. I am a doctoral student at Wits University in Johannesburg. I am conducting a study at Saxon Primary on the school's culture of reading. I want to find out more about the culture surrounding reading at the school, how reading is viewed at the school, what is being done to promote reading and how the school could continue to promote reading and improve the school and children's attitude to reading. The principal has given me permission to spend time at the school from July 2018-2020.

I will be writing a final thesis report on my findings. As you have insight into reading practices at the school and knowledge of education in South Africa, I invite you to participate in my research.

I would like to find out more about your experiences of reading at the school and learn about your attitude to reading and its role in education. This would take place in focus group interviews (small group interviews) and/or individual interviews. With your permission, I will request to record these interviews. Focus group interviews will average an hour. Individual interviews will be shorter. These interviews will occur outside of teaching hours. All interviews with staff and learners will be held at the school. Should other participants prefer to meet elsewhere; a suitable venue will be arranged. I would also like to observe educators and learners in their classrooms.

I would like to observe and take photographs and audio and video recordings during lessons and reading-related activities. Any images used in the final report will not show participants' faces or identifying features and one will be able to be identified from the photographs or videos. Any images that identify the school will be excluded. Any information from the observations is for my own use only. The observations are not assessments in any way but rather provide an additional way for me to gather information. I will obtain consent from parents/guardians of any children involved in the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be paid or rewarded in any manner for your participation. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will in no way advantage or disadvantage you. You may withdraw from the study at any stage without any penalty and can ask that I do not use data generated from you or specific parts of data. All participants will be given pseudonyms and will not be identified.

Participants in focus groups will be asked to keep discussions confidential and one-on-one interviews will be conducted confidentially. However, depending on your position, people who are associated with the school or those present in the school, may be able to identify you. You may request to review any parts of my thesis that contain data I have obtained from you before its publication to ensure that you cannot be identified; I will also provide a summary of the thesis if requested. As the university uploads theses online, it will be available to the general public. Findings of the study may also be presented in other academic papers or at conferences.

I will destroy all research data between three to five years after the completion of the project.

If you would like to be involved in this study, please complete the attached form and return it to me.

Should you wish to make contact with my supervisor, Prof. Kerryn Dixon, she can be contacted at kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Biesman-Simons

Email: cbiesman@gmail.com

Phone: 082 966 2654

**School-based participants' consent form**

PhD thesis:

The importance of defining a culture of reading: a case study within an under-resourced South African primary school

**Researcher:** Claire Biesman-Simons

I ……agree to participate in this research. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. My position is …….

My decision to participate or not participate in this study is my own and no one can force me to do so. I will not receive payment or reward for participation. YES/NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her report YES/NO

*I give my consent for the following:*

**Permission to be interviewed**

- I would like to be interviewed in a focus group for this study. YES/NO
- I will keep content of the focus group confidential. YES/NO
- I would like to be interviewed one-on-one for this study. YES/NO
- I understand one-on-one interviews will be confidential. YES/NO
- I know that I can exit an interview at any time and do not have to answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

**Permission to be audiotaped in interviews**

I agree to be audiotaped during interviews. YES/NO

**Permission for observation of carrying out my role (my school activities and responsibilities)**

I agree that the researcher can observe me teaching. YES/NO

**Permission for taking photographs during observations**

- I agree that photographs can be taken while I teach. YES/NO
- I understand that features that identify the school, learners or me will be removed and that no individuals will be able to be recognized. YES/NO

**Permission to audio record observations**

- I agree that audio recordings can be taken while I carry out my role. YES/NO
- I understand that no one other than the researcher will have access to these recordings. YES/NO

**Permission to video record observations**

- I agree that video recordings can be taken while I carry out my role. YES/NO
- I understand that features that identify the school, learners or me will be removed and no individuals will be able to be recognized. YES/NO

**Informed Consent**

*I understand that:*

- my name and information will be kept confidential. YES/NO
- I will have access to sections of the findings that report on what I have said before publication in order to assess whether my identity may be compromised. YES/NO

- I do not have to answer every question in an interview and can withdraw from the study at any time. YES/NO

- The findings of this study will be published in a thesis. Findings may also be used in other academic papers or for conference presentations. YES/NO
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the project. YES/NO

Sign_____ Date_____

**Participant information and consent forms for participation in study: off-site NGO representatives**

DATE

Dear

My name is Claire Biesman-Simons. I am a doctoral student at Wits University in Johannesburg. I am conducting a study at Saxon Primary on the school's culture of reading. I want to find out more about the culture surrounding reading at the school, how reading is viewed at the school, what is being done to promote reading and how the school could continue to promote reading and improve the school and children's attitude to reading. The principal has given me permission to spend time at the school from July 2018-2020.

I will be writing a final thesis report on my findings. As you have insight into reading practices at the school and knowledge of education in South Africa, I invite you to participate in my research.

I would like to interview you to find out more about your experiences of reading at the school and learn about your attitude to reading and its role in education. With your permission, I will request to record these interviews. The interview will be approximately 30 minutes at a location suitable to you.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be paid or rewarded in any manner for your participation. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will in no way advantage or disadvantage you. You may withdraw from the study at any stage without any penalty and can ask that I do not use data generated from you or specific parts of data. All participants will be given pseudonyms and will not be identified.

Interviews will be conducted individually. However, depending on your position, people who are associated with the school or those present in the school, may be able to identify you. You may request to review any parts of my thesis that contain data I have obtained from you before its publication to ensure that you cannot be identified; I will also provide a summary of the thesis if requested. As the university uploads theses online, it will be available to the general public. Findings of the study may also be presented in other academic papers or at conferences.

I will destroy all research data between three to five years after the completion of the project.

If you would like to be involved in this study, please complete the attached form and return it to me.

Should you wish to make contact with my supervisor, Prof. Kerryn Dixon, she can be contacted at kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Biesman-Simons

Email: cbiesman@gmail.com

Phone: 082 966 2654

**Consent form for participation in study: off-site NGO representatives**

**PhD thesis: The importance of defining a culture of reading: a case study within an under-resourced South African primary school**

**Researcher:** Claire Biesman-Simons

I …….. agree to participate in this research. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.

I hold the job title of ……..

My decision to participate or not participate in this study is my own and no one can force me to do so. I will not receive payment or reward for participation.

YES/NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her report. YES/NO

*I give my consent for the following:*

**Permission to be interviewed**

- I would like to be interviewed in a one-on-one interview for this study. YES/NO
- I know the interviews will be confidential. YES/NO
- I know that I can exit an interview at any time and do not have to answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

**Permission to be audiotaped in interviews**

- I agree to be audiotaped during interviews. YES/NO

**Informed Consent**

I understand that:

- my name and information will be kept confidential. YES/NO
- I can have access to sections of the findings that report on what I have said before publication (in print and online) in order to assess whether my identity may be compromised. YES/NO
- I do not have to answer every question in an interview and can withdraw from the study at any time.
  YES/NO
- the findings of this study will be published in a thesis. Findings may also be used in other academic papers or for conference presentations. YES/NO
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within three to five years after completion of my project. YES/NO

Signature_____ Date_____

**Parent/guardian information letter**

DATE

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Claire Biesman-Simons. I am a student at Wits University doing a study on reading at Saxon Primary. The principal has given me permission to spend time at the school from July 2018-2020.

I would like to interview your child about reading. The interview will take place at school but not during teaching time. I would like to record the interview. I won't use your child's real name when I write up my study and no one will know I am writing about your child. I will ask someone to help me with isiXhosa in the interviews. The translator and I will not share what your child says with anyone. If I write what your child tells me, you can ask to read what your child says in my study before it is uploaded online. Findings of the study may also be presented in other academic papers or at conferences.

For some of my study I will be observing teachers teaching reading in class. I would like to ask for your permission to observe your child in class. Observations are not about your child's performance, I am interested in how reading is taught in the school, how children and teachers think about reading. I would like to videotape and take photographs in the classroom. No video or photographs that show your child's face or what school he/she is at will be included in the final report. No one will be able to see it is your child.

It is your choice if your child takes part and your child will not be treated differently based on if you say yes or no. You can choose for your child to leave the study at any time and I will leave out what they have said. If you say yes, I will ask your child if they want to talk to me and they can choose what questions to answer. I will give your child a snack but he/she will not get any money or gifts. If you do not want your child to be photographed or video-ed I will do my best not to capture them. If children are in any of the filmed material this will not be used in my analysis. I will also not use anything they say to me.

I will destroy all the information and interviews between three to five years after the completion of the project.

Please can you fill in the form and have your child return it to his/her educator.

Prof. Kerryn Dixon is my supervisor and is guiding me in writing my thesis. If you would like to contact her, she can be emailed at kerryn.dixon@wits.ac.za. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Biesman-Simons

Email: cbiesman@gmail.com

Phone: 082 966 2654 (you can send a please call me)

**Consent form for parents/guardians**

**Focus of study:** Reading at Saxon Primary **Researcher:** Claire Biesman-Simons

My name is …… I am the parent/guardian of …… My child is in Grade ……..

My child **can** take part in this study. I know what the study is about and I understand how my child will be involved in the study.

YES/NO

Please fill in the rest of this form if your child **can** take part in this study. Please circle yes or no to show how your child can take part in the study.

- My children will not be treated differently if she/he does or doesn't take part in
- the study. No one can tell me or my child that my child has to take part. YES/NO
- The researcher (Claire Biesman-Simons) can write down what my child has said in her study report. She cannot use my child's name and will use a pseudonym (made-up name).

YES/NO

Interviewing my child

- The researcher can interview my child one-on-one but not during teaching time. YES/NO
- The researcher can interview my child with a group of other children but
- not during teaching time. YES/NO
- My child knows that he/she can stop taking part in the interview and does not
- have to answer all the questions asked. YES/NO
- Sometimes there will be one other adult in the interview who can help Claire with
- isiXhosa. I know that he/she will not tell other people what my child has said. YES/NO
- I know that the researcher will not tell other people what my child said in the interview. YES/NO

Audio recording/taping my child

- The researcher can record my child speaking during an interview. YES/NO
- I know the researcher will not share the recordings with any other people. YES/NO

**Taking photographs**

- I agree that photographs can be taken of my child. The photos will not show my child's face or what school she/he is at. YES/NO

**Taking videos of my child**

- I agree that video recordings can be taken of my child. The videos will not show my child's face or what school she/he is at. YES/NO

**I understand that:**

- My child's name and information will be kept secret. YES/NO
- I can read any part of the report where the researcher writes information from what
- my child says to make sure no one can identify my child. YES/NO
- The findings of this study will be published in a thesis. Findings may also be used in
- other academic papers or for conference presentations. YES/NO
- All the information that the researcher gets from my child will be destroyed in three to five years. YES/NO

Parent/guardian signature_____ Date_____

**Learner information letter**

Dear learner,

My name is Claire. I want to find out what you think about reading. I have asked your parents/guardians and they say you can take part in my project.

What will happen in this study?

You and I will talk about reading. It might just be you and me who meet or it might be me, you and some of your friends. I will also visit your classroom and watch some of your lessons.

Will people know what I say?

After we have talked, I will write up some of what you say. I won't use your real name so no one will know what you said it and it will be kept secret.

Can Claire record what I say in the interviews?

This is your choice.

Will I be in photos?

This is your choice. The photos Claire uses for her project will not be of your face so other people can't tell it is you.

Will I be in videos?

This is your choice. The videos Claire uses for her project will not be of your face so other people can't tell it is you.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is your choice. This is not part of your schoolwork and is not for marks. Nothing bad will happen if you don't take part. You can also stop taking part once the study has started. You only have to answer questions if you want to.

Thank you,

Claire

**Learner assent form**

If you want to take part in Claire's study, please complete this form.

My name is _____ and I am in Grade _____.

Claire has told me about her project on reading and I want to take part. No one can tell me I have to take part. YES or NO

She can:

Interview me

- I know she will not use my real name in her study. YES or NO
- I know Claire will not tell other people what I say. YES or NO
- I don't have to answer all the questions. YES or NO
- I can leave an interview even after it has started. YES or NO
- If there are other learners in the interview, I will not tell anyone what they say. YES or NO

Observe me in the classroom with my teacher

- She can watch me during reading lessons in my classroom YES or NO

Record me when we talk about reading in the interviews

- She can record me during the interview so that she can listen to it again. YES or NO
- She will not play the recording for other people YES or NO

Take photos of me

- The photos will not show my face so no one will know it is me. YES or NO

Take videos of me

- The videos will not show my face so no one will know it is me. YES or NO

Date: _____