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**Peripheral Normativity: Language and literacy,
teaching and learning in two Grade Four
classrooms in an under-resourced school in the
Western Cape**

Minor Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Masters
degree in Applied Language and Literacy Studies

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Plagiarism Declaration

This is my own work and has not been previously submitted in whole or in part for the award of any degree at this, or any other tertiary institution. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in this minor dissertation from the work of other people has been cited and referenced.

Signed:

Date:

University of Cape Town

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Abstract

This study focuses on how children in the post-Foundation phase of Primary Schooling encounter reading and writing practices and learn to be certain kinds of readers and writers in poorly-resourced school settings in the Western Cape in South Africa. The aim of this research was to investigate how literacy practices in a socially situated domain, such as a classroom in a poorly-resourced school, are shaped by both the internal dynamics of classroom teaching as well as by external factors beyond the school, relating to the social location of the school within a peripheral social context. Through an ethnographic-style case study of a multilingual context in one primary school site, this study examined how specific notions of Grade Four school-appropriate language, literacy and learning activities operated as locally normative resources that produced complex outcomes in relation to the language-of-instruction and in relation to what counted as worthwhile classroom learning. By focusing on two Grade Four classes (the 'Afrikaans class' and the 'English class'), this study investigated the ecological and cultural dimensions of the language debates that were operating at the research site, and how these influenced the children, teachers, and the school. It was found that what characterised teaching and learning at this research site involved peripheral normativity: the downscaling and localisation of educational standards and language debates to attainable local levels of possibility. The children received localised, restricted versions of language use and literacy that was context-specific. The school's educational response to the multilingual context and to the social pressure for access to high status linguistic and literacy resources was to stream the predominantly Afrikaans-speaking school community into two parallel streams where the language of learning and teaching was either 'English' or 'Afrikaans,' and these divisions reflected a broader division in the wider community between those aspiring to upward social mobility and those who more clearly constituted a social underclass. The language and literacy learning practices characteristic in both the Grade Four classes did not, however, provide the resources for school success for children in either group.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and background

1.1 Overview

In this thesis I examine how children encounter knowledge about reading and writing in the post-Foundation phase; how they encounter texts and languages; and how they learn to be certain kinds of readers and writers at a poorly-resourced school in South Africa. Using an ethnographic-style, case study approach I explore how specific notions of Grade Four learning and Grade Four school-appropriate behaviour are normative in one school setting. On a larger canvass, this thesis engages with broader socio, economic, political and historical issues by looking at how language use can be conceptualised as a set of resources that is unequally distributed in social networks and discursive spaces such as schools. I analyse examples of classroom behaviour, lesson extracts, and examples of teaching and learning practices. The aim of my thesis is to show that when investigating literacy practices in a socially constructed domain such as a classroom, nothing can be analysed in isolation or understood without taking a look at the multifaceted internal and external factors within and around the research context.

I conducted an ethnographic-style case study of a multilingual context in one primary school site for one school term for the purpose of examining the concerns mentioned above. My research data and conclusions came from this one school in the Western Cape, but my hope is that my work will provide valuable insight into an approach to language debates in schools that offers a better understanding of literacy in other poorly-resourced schools in South Africa. In the following section, I give a broad outline of my research orientation by way of an introduction. I introduce the theoretical perspectives that inform my research that I develop more fully later, and that I draw on throughout this thesis.

1.2 Research orientation and focus

My research orientation to literacy studies is that literacy is a situated social practice and is therefore about more than simply the core skills of coding and decoding text. I draw on what Prinsloo (2005) calls the 'social practices perspective' of literacy, also known as the 'New Literacy Studies' (NLS), which is a research orientation that is interdisciplinary (see Street, 1993; Barton, 1994; Barton et al., 2000; & Gee, 1990) and that studies literacy as situated social practice. The study of literacy in this perspective is never merely about 'reading' or 'writing.' In Gee's (1990) terms, one is always reading or writing *something* which is always read or written in a specific way. In other words, literacy is always part of specific social activities such as going to a Sunday school lesson, banking, reading a novel or buying a lottery ticket. Literacy is therefore always *situated* and the key to understanding this term is to look at literacy practices in their social contexts.

From this understanding of literacy as situated social practice, my data was analysed from the perspective that 'language' is a socially loaded resource. I follow Blommaert's (2003) sociolinguistic insight into the 'matter' of language resources as being subject to different patterns of unequal distribution in societies (Blommaert, 2003: 3). This means that the differences in languages are socially valued to fit particular contexts and that *language use* is therefore indexical in nature. Social, political and economical factors attribute indexicalities to language as a resource, and these factors filter through into institutions such as schools, community centres, churches, etc. The indexicality of language refers to the function and value of language as a resource, and every act of language use produces numerous indexical signals (Blommaert, 2003: 3). These signals connect the particular shape of the language in use to both the local context and larger orders of indexicality that reflect the group or system's function and use of the language being used. This approach to my data was informed by looking at the language use of the classrooms I investigated to identify the social functions and values that validated the exchanges. The exchanges displayed specific orientations towards the orders of indexicality within the classroom, the school, and ultimately, the

community. The orders of indexicality reflected the 'norms' or 'rules' of language use in these contexts and through the exchanges I observed, these 'norms' and 'rules' were reproduced and again situated within relation to the other acceptable 'norms' and 'rules' (Blommaert, 2003: 4). A key part of my thesis investigates the notion of 'peripheral normativity' and in the chapters that follow, I discuss this notion in terms of language stigmas and language-in-education. The data presented in the analysis chapters demonstrated some of the norms and rules of the language use that I observed at my research site and offer some examples of peripheral normativity. Peripheral normativity, in brief, refers to the way that language (and literacy) forms map onto language (and literacy) functions; that these have a specificity, and thus are normative in ways that are particular or distinctive in contexts that are socially peripheral, or socially distant from "mainstream" ways (Heath, 1983) of attributing meaning and value.

My study of the language in use at my research site was informed by what Martin-Jones (2007) calls a critical and interpretive approach to research. As a point of departure, this approach looks at the (often) unequal social relations in bilingual and multilingual societies by investigating language and language-in-education practices. Martin-Jones states that critical studies of bilingualism in education emphasise the role of education in the shaping of the identities of citizens and workers, and that such a critical approach can highlight how education serves as a means of instilling value to linguistic resources while, at the same time, regulating access to them (Martin-Jones, 2007: 163). My thesis investigates the language debates that were at play at the research site: how these impacted on the children's literacy abilities, notions of bilingualism, and characterised teaching and learning. In addition, I develop an analytical perspective on the language-in-education options that the school offered to understand the broader historical, social, economic, political and ideological factors that shaped these options.

At the classroom level, my focus was on what happened to the children at the research site who have been taught specific reading and writing practices in Grades One to Three (and in pre-school), who then in Grade Four, encounter subject-based learning requirements. Given that by Grade Four children have already had three years of

formal schooling, my research looked at what it was that Grade Four children could and could not do in terms of school-appropriate ways of using language, texts, visuals and other media for communication. I also enquired as to how the resources, media and modalities for communication were used by children to generate and interpret the messages and actions that were characteristic of the classroom domain. From the social practices perspective of my research, I explored how the literacy and learning in the classrooms operated as part of the local ecology of the school which in turn, operated as a system within the larger local community. On this level, cultural perceptions and language debates entered the classrooms because the language choice through which the Grade Fours in my case study were taught, were chosen for specific reasons. The ecological and cultural dimension of the language debates that were operating at the research site influenced the children, teachers, and the school. In other words, I investigated what it was that the children and the teachers brought with them into their classrooms by way of orientations to communication, language perception, literacy and learning.

1.3 Focal Research Question

Research in early childhood education suggests that a critical period in children's reading development occurs between the Third and the Fifth Grades when reading requirements shift from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn.' Children are exposed to subject-based language genres and texts in the Fourth Grade as 'general reading lesson' texts give way to texts whose focus is on the natural sciences, social sciences and on literature. Expository texts sometimes present information to readers in unfamiliar ways and when introduced to these for the first time, young readers can face comprehension challenges, especially with texts covering scientific material. However, the idea that narrative texts are necessarily easy and expository texts are hard is a generalisation that in itself does not explain why many children struggle with reading and writing activities beyond the Third Grade. The more fundamental question is about what kinds of reading and writing events and practices children

encountered in the first three years of schooling and what they have learnt from these as to how reading and writing are done in school settings.

I asked the following focal research question in an attempt to better understand what the Grade Four children struggled with in the research school, and *what* and *how* they learned:

From 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn': what were the language resources regarding reading and writing events and practices that characterised learning and teaching activities in two Grade four classrooms in a poorly-resourced school in the Western Cape, and what were their observed effects on children's learning careers?

1.3.1 The 'Fourth-Grade slump'

In well-resourced schools in the wealthier countries of the West where a lot of money and effort is placed on teaching children to read and write, some children reportedly show a marked shift in their literacy development around the Fourth Grade. Up to this age, these children would have achieved satisfactory results through continuous development in 'reading classes.' This phenomenon was originally reported by Chall (et. al., 1990) and is known as the 'Fourth Grade slump.' Snow explains that this Fourth Grade slump occurs when test scores and other performance indicators show a "decline in the rate of progress and a decrease in the number of children achieving at good levels" (Snow et. al., 1998: 78). My research question stemmed from the problem that intermediate phase primary school children in certain under-resourced schools display restricted competency in school literacy under externally-set test conditions.

Presumably, at any given school, Grade Four children have achieved some desired (determined by that school and the teachers) level of competency that falls short of Grade-level requirements. However, the 'Fourth Grade slump' is a global concern and in a South African context, and I would argue that the Fourth Grade slump occurs in the First Grade because children's emergent literacy behaviour is often stifled and ignored (see Prinsloo & Stein, 2004). This means that what occurs at an intermediate-phase

level in Primary school children as regards the observed Fourth Grade slump, is not so noticeable on the same level in South Africa because of the consistently bad results from Grade One on.

1.4 My background

This field of research is of significance to me because I wanted to know what happens in Primary School classrooms when children in poorly resourced schools are no longer being explicitly 'taught to read' and are expected to apply the particular (and presumably restricted) resources they have developed in their earlier years of schooling. I am a High School teacher by training and my research orientation was influenced by my course-based readings at university level of literacy as social practice. I am not committed to any one particular side or theory regarding current debates around whether phonics-based approaches are superior to whole-language approaches, or whether attention to children's emergent reading and writing is of central importance. My interests in what goes on in middle-Primary classrooms come from my own experience of encountering High School learners who were unable to read and write effectively. Current research suggests that alarmingly high numbers of school learners in South Africa cannot read and write well (Aitcheson & Harley, 2006: 91). Why school learners in under-resourced schools in South Africa can't read and write well, and what it is they can't do well is, however, a question that remains largely unanswered, and this is another motivation for my research around the middle-Primary years.

Although I had some idea of what happens in Primary school classrooms with regards to teaching and learning, I approached my fieldwork with as little as possible by way of preconceived ideas as to what the reading and writing practices might be in a poorly-resourced school in the post-Foundation Grades. From my own background studies, reading and experience, I have gained the impression that how, where and when children learn to read and write seems to be critically important with regards to how, where and when they use their literacy skills successfully at school, and productively in other contexts. Because my professional experience of Primary Schooling was limited I

was able to conduct ethnographic research with a relatively open mind, and as a research novice in the Primary School context. The chosen Primary school was an unfamiliar context with unfamiliar practices, norms and rules.

When ethnographic research occurs under such unfamiliar conditions, everything is 'new' and 'different' to the researcher and she can thereby assume a valuable vantage point in order to better observe, describe and explain what is under investigation. From an outsider's perspective, a particular society or context's everyday practices, ideologies, behaviours and taken-for-granted norms can be investigated because for the researcher, these might appear strange. An outsider's perspective is therefore valuable and when I decided to conduct ethnographic research about literacy, being an outsider myself appeared to be something of an advantage.

1.5 Outline of the study: the classroom as a social microcosm

Following on the brief introduction above, I elaborate and discuss the conceptual resources regarding literacy as an 'ideological,' social construct in chapter two. I examine arguments around early literacy concerns, and theoretical tools of analysis such as 'discourse,' 'literacy events' and 'literacy practices.' I also discuss the notion that language is a socially loaded linguistic resource that is always indexical; how discourse operates within the context of social structure, and how these interplay continuously. Lastly, I continue the discussion about domains by looking at literature on social semiotic domains and semiotics.

In chapter three, I discuss the significance of a critical and interpretive approach to research in multilingual contexts because this approach reveals the important linkages between local discourse practices, everyday talk and the interactional practices in classroom domains that are continuously and actively reacting to or against broader social and ideological orders. The main focus of this chapter is on 'Peripheral Normativity' and I discuss a local case study in order to present how the theoretical themes from the previous chapter are exemplified in a South African school. I also

discuss concepts such as bilingualism, multilingualism and language stigmas in South Africa. Through a brief historical overview, I look at why English is the preferred medium of instruction in South African schools by looking at language and politics, as well as the view that English is seen as a vehicle for social upward mobility.

From this theoretical framework, I begin to address my focal research question in chapter four. I discuss some of the broader social concerns of my research site and provide relevant background information about my research school, the Grade Fours, and the local community. I also discuss some of the factors I came across at my research site, such as the language-in-education policy of the school and language stratification.

In chapters five and six I present and analyse data from my case study to argue that the children at my research site gained specific reading and writing practices in this context; and that these were influenced by the setting and by localised values in the community; that *how* the children interpreted and made sense of texts and language use were domain-specific practices taught through socially-informed notions of teaching and learning, and that the children were apprenticed to be specific kinds of readers and writers. In these two chapters, I look at the different reading and writing practices that were deemed appropriate in the two classroom domains I investigated, and how these practices characterised the teaching and learning. Lastly, I argue that the observed effects on learning presented in these chapters were the result of the combined effects of a multiplicity of influences, such as the internal (domain-appropriate behaviour within the classrooms) and external (social, political, historical and economic) factors, normative literacy events and practices. The crux of my analysis centres on the argument that 'peripheral normativity' operated at my research school, and that the teachers, children and school used the resources available to them to teach, learn and operate in this context.

In summary, this thesis is an attempt to illustrate that there are many factors that influence teaching and learning in any classroom domain, and that these factors cannot

be isolated from one another. What this thesis did was take an ecological approach (Barton, 1994) to address the focal research question stated earlier in this chapter. I take the view that literacy is a socially situated practice and that any attempt to investigate it should include an understanding of the social aspects of literacy and language use. My approach was to investigate, through the focus on literacy (and language) events and practices at my research site: what were the social functions and values inherent in these activities and how these shaped what learning was about at this site. What this thesis does not do is offer any solutions, at the level of teaching methods, to the educational challenges that were highlighted. This thesis is an examination of and a reflection on the classroom realities of two Grade Four classrooms in a poorly-resourced school in the Western Cape; the theoretical debates I examine below provided the conceptual resources which I used to make sense of what I observed. My hope is that the analysis presented in this thesis will speak to similar contexts in South Africa, and offer useful ways of interpreting other classroom realities.

Chapter 2: Conceptual context

2.1 Overview

In this chapter I introduce, outline and examine some of the major theoretical approaches I used to formulate my understanding of literacy. I develop the notion that literacy is not a set of basic, discrete skills and that it is ideological because it is always embedded in social practices that are context-dependent. I point out the significance of this perspective and outline how this approach frames language use, language practices, and the use of different literacies.

2.2 Literacy is 'ideological'

I followed Street's (1984) conception of literacy being 'ideological' because literacy is always socially, culturally and historically situated. Street's definition of the ideological model places a focus on the specific social practices of reading and writing because he believes that literacy is culturally embedded in the construction of meaning for the participants (Street, 1984: 2). This approach also focuses on the socialisation process that occurs simultaneously with the construction of the meaning of literacy for the participants in an exchange. In other words, the implicit ideological messages from institutions such as schools and churches should be looked at in order to better understand what is at play through communicational exchanges. This model distinguishes claims for the consequences of literacy by looking at the significances of literacy for specific social groups (Street, 1984: 2). In addition, the function of control through literacy is examined and questioned, because at this level, what appears to be implicit is made explicit. This model is termed ideological exactly because literacy has an abstract theoretical and ideological nature and a moral integrity that is aided by social interaction. There are multiple dynamic literacies that operate in different contexts and isolating one generalised perspective on literacy can never fully explain the events and practices surrounding literacy.

The 'technical skills' of literacy are acquired in situational, cultural, and socially interactive learning contexts and as pointed out already, will therefore differ from one context to another. What is meant by literacy varies from situation to situation and is dependent on the ideology and the social institutions of that situation because literacy practices are the *social practice* associated with the written word, as well with other semiotic modalities. This view can help one to see how social institutions and the power relations they support, structure our uses of written language and related modes of communication.

2.2.1 Literacy from a social practices perspective

The 'ideological' model distinguishes claims for the consequences of literacy by looking at the significances of literacy for specific social groups (Street, 1984: 2). Literacy practices cannot be treated as something that is 'neutral,' 'technical' or 'transferable' because literacy will always have a social meaning and people make sense of literacy as a social phenomenon. As a social practice, literacy is mediated by language and other cultural tools and artefacts when social actors both position and are positioned by sign-based exchanges (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004: 69).

In terms of the social view of literacy, Barton (1994) explains that the following three points can be made: firstly, that literacy, as a social activity, can best be described in terms of the literacy practices people draw upon in literacy events. For example, when a Grade Four child reads about a topic in a textbook in a classroom context, that child draws on her grasp of available literacy practices in order to participate in the literacy event. Secondly, literacy practices are always situated within broader social relations and in order to understand them, the social settings of literacy practices should be examined. For example, when this Grade Four child reads about a topic in a textbook, she also draws on her social background and orientation. This juncture (where the social world of the child combines with the social relations of the literacy practice) can only be understood when the social setting of the literacy practice is examined. Lastly, Barton states that people make use of different literacies that are associated with

different domains of life, and examining different cultures or historical periods will reveal more literacies (Barton, 1994: 34 – 35). This means that when a Grade Four child reads about a topic in a classroom, she is participating in a specific kind of literacy practice and this will differ from the literacy practice she participates in when reading, for example, a comic book at home with her friends. According to Barton, this is because different literacies are associated with different aspects and contexts of life. These three points are useful when thinking about any literacy event and they help frame my research design because my data included the broader teaching, organisational, and communicative practices of the research school and classrooms. Barton's three points enabled me to situate the observed literacy practices within a larger frame of meaning which makes sense to the children themselves. My research looked at how the children participated in the social activity of literacy by way of particular literacy practices and events, and in addition, how they interpreted literacy events and practices through their social understandings of them.

In order for children to experience sustained literacy development and to get literacies they can make use of in their everyday lives, they need to be able to make meaning of texts. And they also need effective help to 'crack the code' of literacy, to learn about letters, sounds, words and their meanings. In the next section, I discuss the early literacy encounters of young children by focussing on reading and writing.

2.3 Early literacy encounters: young children as readers and writers

By the time children reach the Intermediate Phase they are supposed to have had a sufficient introduction to literacy in the Foundation Phase. In the first few years of school one might assume that children will get a lot of productive exposure to letters, sounds, rhymes, songs, stories and other literacy activities. This exposure to literacy events and practices might be said to be vital because it helps children to set a basis for becoming successful readers and writers in school contexts. It is commonly said that it is in Grade Four where the shift from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' occurs (Chall et al, 1990; Snow et al, 1998): instead of 'learning how to read and write' (say by

practicing, reciting, and memorising letters, numbers and sounds) the subjects and curriculum requirements of Grade Four learning places an emphasis on using the ability to read in order to learn about particular subjects. Grade Four teachers commonly focus less on literacy-as-skill-learning (including such activities as sounding-out-letters or rhyming), and instead, focus more and more on content knowledge and on genre-specific forms of writing. How well children are prepared for this shift is important because if they reach Grade Four and they are expected to read and write in ways for which they have no precedent, then they will fall behind those who have had precursory experiences of school-like ways of making and taking meaning from and with print. Knowing how to read and write in school-appropriate ways is a critically important resource that can help children to navigate the intermediate school grades and prepare for a successful high school career. This means that children should be able to think, act and behave in the appropriate ways of their classroom and school domains so that they will be able to interpret the messages and meanings in ways that are domain-appropriate. Many of these domain skills are not explicitly or consciously taught by teachers but through practice, feedback and participation, children learn what the explicit as well as the implicit rules are for participation in the classroom domain. Intertwined with rules for making and taking meaning with regard to print, the children learn simultaneously the rules for appropriate behaviour. These include rules about responding, initiating topics and turn-taking in spoken interaction, together with what counts as satisfactory performance in reading and writing activities.

2.4 Discourse, 'literacy events' and 'literacy practices'

In this section, I discuss 'literacy events' (Heath, 1983) and 'literacy practices' (Larson & Marsh, 2005) as conceptual resources for data collection and analysis, and I frame this discussion with reference to the concept of discourse as it is used by NLS researchers. 'Literacy events' are the empirical units of analysis in the study of literacy, and include both the acts and products of reading and writing as well as the actions and interactions amongst participants that characterise that event. 'Literacy practices' are the cultural assumptions and habits that give shape to particular activities and conceptualisations of

reading and writing. Because the social framings of literacy activities are varied, there are multiple forms characteristic of literacy events and practices, and NLS research will always pay close attention to the domain or social activity which frames a particular literacy event. Gee (1990) looks at what happens in these domains and conceptualises the term Discourse(s) (with a capital 'D') as the different ways in which we combine non-language 'stuff,' (such as symbols, signs, objects, different ways of feeling, thinking and valuing) with language at the right time, the right place and in the right way in order to enact and recognise various identities and activities, interact with others and distribute social goods, make meaningful connections through experiences, and also, favour certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others (Gee, 1990: 13). I draw on Gee's understanding of Discourse(s) throughout my research but will refer to his conceptualisation of the term with a lower case 'd.' All literacy activities in school are bound to particular discourses because at school, there are specific and appropriate ways of behaving, thinking, speaking, believing, reading and writing.

2.5 Languages are socially loaded linguistic resources

Instead of seeing languages as 'whole' or 'bounded' systems where there is one standard form of use, Monica Heller (2007) states that when speakers of a language engage in language use, they draw on "linguistic resources which are organised in ways that make sense under specific social conditions" (Heller, 2007: 1). This happens, she argues, because language is subject to patterns of distribution in society and one cannot assume, in the study of language, that 'language' equates to one, 'proper' or standard form and function, independent of the social practices of situated language use. Instead, language use entails ingredients of repertoires, and these repertoires comprise of ways of speaking where forms of language use and the knowledge of their use in specific social environments reflect the accepted norms for that context-specific, discursive domain where particular genres of language use are available and others are not (Blommaert, 2003: 3). As Blommaert explains it, when one takes the view of sociolinguists that languages are socially loaded linguistic resources, then language use entails a process where certain linguistic forms undergo a process of production and

reception in order to match up to specific social and economic situations (Blommaert, 2003: 3).

Language use, in this perspective is socially-indexical in nature, bound-up in social valuations and used in appropriate contexts where the indexical signals will reflect both the local 'context' and the larger orders of discourse that are drawn on locally. As Blommaert argues, language 'function' (or the production of meaning) cannot be separated from social valuation processes. Through language use, language forms are continuously mapped onto language functions in situated ways (Blommaert, 2003: 3). Language users thus signal their orders of indexicality and simultaneously, reproduce the indexicalities that reflect the norms of the language in use. Language use entails identity work through the orders of indexicality that signal 'groupness' to both members of the same 'group' and outsiders (Blommaert, 2003: 4). The function of language is also tied to the evaluation of meaningfulness through orders of indexicality, and the meaningfulness of language function comes from a range of what Blommaert calls centring institutions (such as schools).

2.6 Discourse and Social Structure

Elsewhere, Blommaert (2005) explains that there is an important connection between discourse and social structure and that they interplay continuously. The features of social structures should therefore be regarded as part of a linguistic context when a closer look at discourse is taken (Blommaert, 2005: 39). Discourses themselves are socially constructed knowledges about reality that reflect the values and meanings of any social group or institution (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Through orders of indexicality a school can therefore be seen as the point of fusion where the discourse of the school is influenced by the social background of the school's pupils, the parent community, the local community, and wider or global influences upon these. In any social context the discourse(s) available in that domain – including the characteristic literacy events and practices – are all influenced and 'maintained' by the structured social practices whereby meanings and values are produced in located settings.

2.6.1 'Semiotic domains'

From a socio-linguistic or social semiotic perspective, classrooms can be seen as 'social semiotic domains' where the social functions, resources for making-meaning and communicative purposes are all closely intertwined (see Halliday, 1978; Gee, 2004). The idea of a classroom as a social semiotic domain allowed me to describe and analyse the forms of communication that I came across in the Grade Four classrooms as specific and distinct classroom practices, events, and language activities. My understanding of this perspective is that all classroom activities and practices are domain-specific and that each domain operates through the use of established domain practices, such as the greeting of teachers or visitors in ritualised or specific ways that both follow pertinent rules of 'politeness' and also reflect and endorse the authority structures that pertain in that context. Another example from my own research would be the order or sequence of exchanges followed in a comprehension lesson where the teacher would select and read out a comprehension piece, talk about the written questions that were asked about the passage and then direct the students to write down answers to the questions, following an expected format. This apparently mundane literacy teaching and learning event can be seen, following the example of Freebody and Freiberg (2008), as an enactment and reconstruction of relational, cultural, ideological and moral patterns. The focus on 'social semiotic domains' that I make use of here allows me to identify the specific elements and processes that were involved in becoming literate in my research context.

Reading and writing is always taught in specific ways in specific domains:

An interactant learns what reading is, how it is done, and what counts as reading, procedurally ... Unless we attend to procedural definitions and how teaching and learning activities are organized to produce them, we can never know whether our uses of reading and the theories are appropriate to the interactional contexts of their application. Those theories, in their flawed ways, tell us what reading is, and how it is done, supposedly in context-free terms. But students' knowledge of

the *what* and *how* of reading is culturally and socially mediated through interactions with other persons (Freebody & Freiberg, 2008: 31).

There are specific literacy practices for specific domains, for example, in a home: an 'everyday' domain, and in a classroom, a 'specialist' domain (Gee, 2004). Gee similarly argues that whichever domain an individual is accessing, she will be learning the domain-specific ways of knowing, acting, feeling and valuing. In the classroom domain, the 'what' and 'how' of reading is taught to the children in culturally and socially mediated ways, and this thesis investigates how this happened in two Grade Four classes.

This chapter dealt with some of the fundamental theoretical topics that form part of the perspective on literacy and language as social practice, and discussed some conceptualisations around literacy events, literacy practices, language use, language form, function and meaning. I also discussed how discourse operates within social contexts, where language use involves a process of mapping form onto function in situated ways. Language users use a multitude of signs and signals that together produce and are produced by a particular order of indexicality. In the next chapter, the focus is on researching multilingual literacies and I take a close look at the concept of 'peripheral normativity,' drawing on the analysis in Blommaert, Muylleert, Huysmans & Dyers (2005). South African issues regarding concepts such as bilingualism, multilingualism and stigmas about language use are also discussed. In chapter four I go on to provide a brief historical overview of language use and politics in this country, and offer a better understanding of these concepts.

Chapter 3: Researching multilingual literacies

3.1 Overview

In this chapter, I start by examining research that highlights the importance of taking a critical and interpretive approach to the study of language use and literacy in multilingual settings (Martin-Jones, 2007), and go on to on examine arguments from a South African case study where localised solutions to unobtainable levels of literacy and language use resulted in a process where errors became normalised and accepted (Blommaert, Muylleert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005). In an attempt to better understand the dominance of the English language in our multilingual country, I provide a brief overview of some of the historic, politic, economic and social dimensions at work in our communities. Finally, I examine how concepts such as multilingualism, bilingualism, how language use can be influenced by multiple factors, and how these arguments might apply at my site of research.

3.2 Research in multilingual settings

A critical and interpretive approach to research in multilingual settings highlights the role of education in regulating access to linguistic resources. The following quote illustrates how a holistic approach to multilingual settings is necessary in order to unpack and investigate the factors that influence language use in schools:

Educational choices in such settings, whether regarding structures, programmes, practices, or materials, are clearly much more than choices about how to achieve linguistic proficiency. They are choices about how to distribute linguistic resources and about what value to attribute to linguistic forms and practices. They are choices that are embedded in the economic, political and social interests of groups and that have consequences for the life chances of individuals as well as for the construction of social categories and relations of power (Martin-Jones, 2007: 174-175).

In other words, how children achieve linguistic proficiency at a school-level is a more complicated matter to investigate when one takes into consideration the role of schools as 'centring institutions,' where the forms and functions of language that are endorsed in this context are influenced by economic, political and social factors, such as relations to labour markets and ideals of social upward mobility. A critical interpretive approach examines the different dimensions that influence the conditions of teaching and learning in classroom settings, and how these react and respond to broader influences outside the classroom. By providing insights into the processes at work in everyday classroom exchanges, this approach works by firstly, investigating language values and discourses about language and language learning (Martin-Jones, 2007: 175). In this way, it can examine the many complex ways through which classroom exchanges can draw on the available linguistic resources within a classroom domain (Martin-Jones, 2007: 175). In addition, this approach takes into consideration the wider social, political and ideological processes that influence the first level of inquiry to better understand those investigations. In this way, a critical interpretive approach is able to offer linkages between "developments at different points in the history of language-in-education policies in a particular nation-state and between local struggles over language in urban or rural areas with different sociolinguistic histories" (Martin-Jones, 2007: 175). Because schools are one site where 'legitimate language' is defined, they are also sites where languages are positioned in hierarchical structures where non-dominant languages or language varieties become devalued and stigmatised in this setting (Martin-Jones, 2007: 175).

The value and importance of critical interpretive research provides a way to illustrate the disjuncture between the day-to-day realities in multilingual classrooms and the economic, social and political challenges communities face by looking at types of discourses and language-in-education policies (Martin-Jones, 2007: 178). In other words, this approach looks at contributing factors inside and outside the classroom while it investigates what children at a school are learning, what the language-in-education policy of the school is, how language resources are used (and valued), and why.

3.3 'Peripheral normativity'

In Blommaert, Muylleert, Huysmans & Dyers' (2005) ethnographic study of the classroom practices of a Western Cape township school, they argue that in the multilingual and diverse classroom settings of their research, certain norms of language use emerged and that these were contingent on occasion, place, social and sociolinguistic environment. Their research took place at a 'peripheral' school in a marginalised community that struggled with serious socio-economic issues. At the school, some of the learners and their families, together with their teachers, shared ideals of upward social mobility where they saw English as the tool that would aid their ambitions for spatial and social mobility. The learners' English writing demonstrated features of what the authors label as 'grassroots literacy': a "sub-elite literacy characterised by orthographic, syntactic, lexical and pragmatic peculiarities" (Blommaert, Muylleert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 378). These errors or peculiarities appeared to be shared by the teachers and the learners alike. What happened at this site was that a locality was produced through peripheral normativity. However, the upward mobility ideals were inevitably problematic because these locally valid forms of English literacy did not travel well nor retained their validity and acceptability in other contexts.

3.3.1 'Peripheral' settings

In societies with social inequalities, it is argued that different layers and niches develop in which different ways of life are developed based on norms, rules and opportunities that are not necessarily valid elsewhere. These kinds of spaces are then often only seen in relation to the wider system as 'peripheries,' 'backward areas,' 'margins' and so forth. The politics of semiotic stratification assumes the existence of a uniform system where places can be ranked as 'good' or 'worse.' This system is homogenising and often appears through a discourse of standards, 'normalcy' and monocentricity, where the customs and norms of the 'centre' are taken to be the only valid ones and the ones that guarantee upward social mobility and success (Blommaert, Muylleert, & Dyers,

2005: 382). Failing to meet these norms and customs will usually be perceived as failing to achieve *the* norms. Those who fail to meet the norms of the only perceived possible trajectory for success in society are then qualified as 'marginals' or 'abnormals.'

These homogenising approaches to differences in an already unequal society obscure and inaccurately present the local dynamics in parts of the system. These spaces on the 'margin' are not always spaces in which people fail to meet the norms, but can actually be seen as a space in which 'new' or different norms are produced in response to local possibilities and limitations. These 'new' norms do not carry value in the 'centre,' and once outside their contexts, clash with the homogenising and singular images of the dominant normative society. This process requires careful attention because disqualifying such 'deviant' norms automatically cancels these norms as not existing, and fails to recognise their located functionality (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 379).

3.3.2 A localised solution: literacy normativity

Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers (2005) suggest that the emergent norms described in their study neither counter the dominant (or curriculum) norms, nor disqualify them. The emergent norms do, however, suggest unique solutions to local problems that occurred out of a local level of organisation. The production of local, deviant normativity can both be seen as a problem and a solution: it becomes a problem when compared to the dominant norms, and provides a solution because it allows for a productive teaching practice in school to emerge that also allows for a degree of community development and identity construction (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 380). Importantly, the authors regard literacy normativity not as a singular, uniform object, but as an ecologically and economically localised one. What they found were recurrent 'errors' and they perceived these as indicating the presence of a 'different' order that operated within a restricted repertoire (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 389). The 'errors' they found respond to *local* issues of

function and need, and these were ecologically embedded in the community in which they operated (see Barton, 1994, Street, 1995).

The authors of this paper argued that the teachers and students displayed widespread features of a particular form of literacy that occurred regardless of linguistic backgrounds or average academic performances. That means that the teachers and students all shared a literacy culture at the school in an otherwise vastly heterogeneous community (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 391). The researchers claim that the “sociologically ‘realistic’ form of literacy” that they found mirrored the marginalised status of the community in which it occurred because it was a form of literacy that was characteristic of the place in which it operated (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 392).

3.3.3 ‘Peripheral normativity’ vs. the ‘centre’

The shared literacy culture under discussion becomes not only a practical code, but also a tool for expression: an evaluative and thus normative code in which degrees of correctness and ‘quality’ can be distinguished (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 395). The yardstick of evaluation is measured in terms of local, realistic norms to which learners can aspire. The yardstick is embedded in the local economies of semiotic resources and is a normative complex with a relatively significant degree of sociological and cultural reality in terms of the levels of the community’s literacy. Doing ‘well’ in school therefore means doing well in terms of the local criteria for success and acceptable performance. This situation occurred because both teachers and students were part of the same sub-elite literacy stratum in society (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 395).

From one perspective, this school took ‘errors’ and raised them to the level of norms (and effectively ‘normalised’ errors in writing), but from another perspective, interesting pedagogical opportunities were created that were both productive and positive (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 395). What happened here can be

seen as the localisation of education standards where education was 'downscaled' to bring it down to the level of the local community. At this level, it borrowed the norms and expectations of the local environment in order to train learners in the localised codes and norms. The teaching and learning practices localised its normative complexes, adjusted its evaluative yardstick, and created a realistic pedagogy of practice that valued local varieties of literacy (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 396). The school provided a solution to the otherwise unattainable 'ideal' academic norms of the centre (for people on the periphery). The localisation of norms was however, problematic because it was a move away from the hegemonic norms of the centre. That means that students who displayed adequate and successful literacy skills at a peripheral level, would be seen as unsuccessful and failing to achieve the norms and standards of the centre.

3.3.4 Downscaling of normativity

In a South African context, the majority of teachers and students regard English as a linguistic resource that allows spatial and social mobility. This is where the localisation of norms in teaching becomes problematic because there is a "*pretextual gap*: a gap between expected language competence and really available language competence" (Maryns & Blommaert, 2002). Such pretextual gaps are *systemic*: they do not depend on the individual efforts (or lack thereof), intrinsic capacities and possibilities of subjects, but are elements of social structures of inequality and the reproduction patterns of such structures (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 398 & 399).

As a result, the downscaling of normativity to a more realistic and attainable local level of possibilities and norms is both a productive pedagogical instrument, and something that reproduces the systemic inequalities of societies. That is because the rift between centres and peripheries is maintained and regulated (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 399). This study argued that what was observed at the school cannot be understood when one assumes the existence of one singular, stable and uniform perception of normativity in the field of literacy, nor in the field of 'language' in general

(Blommaert, Muylleert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 400). Instead, the paper concludes that a more contextualised, fragmented and localised perception is required that will make allowance for an understanding of its inherent practices in terms of repertoires, of determination and creativity, and of a local play-off of agency and structure (Blommaert, Muylleert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005: 400). My research site is also located on a periphery and this case study encouraged me to develop a detailed, localised perception of my research site within its ecological setting.

3.3.5 Language and language use

I do not use this study on 'peripheral normativity' as the only explanation for children's school failure. I also do not romanticise school failure and identify what happened at the school in the study as effective learning. What happened at this school is similar to what I observed at my research school because in both schools, it was clear that the children could not read and write in school-effective ways as judged by external examination criteria. However, at both schools, the teachers were making what could be described as productive use of their available resources to teach, and the children were making effective use of the resources available to them to learn. The result, however, as I go on to describe, was the sad reality that most likely, no one would attain upward mobility because in both cases, the children got localised, restricted versions of language use and literacy that was context-specific and did not 'travel well' beyond that setting.

3.4 Bilingualism, multilingualism and stigmas regarding 'English education' in South Africa

In a South African context, support for the continued development of students' 'first language' or 'mother tongue' is difficult to summon because of socio-cultural, socio-linguistic, historical and political reasons. When looking at the case for 'mother tongue' education in this country, one cannot help but encounter negative attitudes because of the infamous policies of Bantu Education. This occurs in spite of the fact that most

researchers and academics in South Africa are unanimous in the proclamation that a home language should be the essence of bilingual programmes (see Lockett, 1995; Heugh, 1995). This is also problematic because so many homes in this country are multilingual and the notion of a 'home language' is a contested one because children might grow up with two or more 'home languages.' What also happens in many cases is that parents use English to communicate with each other and then that becomes the 'home language,' albeit a localised version of English with lots of code-switched terms from one or more languages (Banda, 2000: 51).

3.4.1 English as the preferred medium of instruction

Given these multilingual home and family contexts, we can also take a look at how socio-cultural, socio-linguistic, historical and political reasons contribute to English being the preferred medium of instruction in South Africa. The Afrikaner Nationalist apartheid government went to great lengths to ensure that ethnic identities in this country were preserved, which was and used to separate people according to their race and language groups (Banda, 2000: 51). The apartheid government also insisted on 'mother tongue' education and attempted to create monolingual social groupings out of people living in multilingual contexts. However, then, as now, most South Africans were bi- or multi-lingual and individual Black South Africans, especially those in urban areas, were frequently known to be trilingual and even multilingual. Relatively recent data on linguistic distribution suggests that South Africa's languages are so diversely distributed that all the designated languages that can be found in this country, are present in each of the nine provinces (Banda, 2000: 52). This is also the case for the myriad diversities within languages and sub-languages. Which language to use as a medium of instruction in school is therefore not an easy choice to make. When a closer look at the history of this country is taken, it becomes clear that the socio-cultural and socio-linguistic makeup in the aftermath of apartheid is a complicated matter.

3.4.2 Language and politics

After the Second World War, the use of English among Black South Africans was increasing because of its use as a medium of instruction in state and mission schools (Banda, 2000: 53). The apartheid government, on the other hand, saw education as a powerful political tool and wanted to advance the use of Afrikaans in every aspect of society. This meant that the use of English was to be reduced and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 was introduced to, amongst other things, reduce the role of English relative to Afrikaans. Through this Act and its implementation, mother tongue education in African languages in the first years of schooling was introduced, following which there was a switch to the use of English and/or Afrikaans as media of instruction (Banda, 2000: 53). At the same time, the government also removed all White English mother tongue teachers from Black schools and thereby denied young Black students the benefit of access to experienced first-language English-speaking teachers. For ideological reasons, successive generations of Black students thus encountered weak examples of English in the classroom because their teachers had themselves been deprived of proper learning experiences (Banda, 2000: 53).

3.4.3 English as a vehicle for social upward mobility

Black and Coloured South Africans widely prefer English as a medium of instruction because of the important social gains attached to the use of English (Banda, 2000: 57). English is seen as the vehicle through which Black students and 'Coloured' students can attain personal achievement in both professional and formal spheres. In addition, English carries with it the attributes of status and power – characteristics that were denied to these groups under the apartheid system (Banda, 2000: 57).

One result of these language dynamics is that students from previously disadvantaged social groups (Black and Coloured students, in particular) continue to regard English as a tool for socioeconomic mobility. Bourdieu's (1991) notion of 'legitimate language' provides an explanatory resource for describing how social, political and economic

conditions can result in a particular language, or set of linguistic resources, to gain a level of legitimacy within a particular linguistic market (see Martin-Jones, 2007: 172) that marginalises other languages. According to Bourdieu, schools are the centring institutions where the social and cultural reproduction for the legitimisation of a particular symbolic order occurs. In other words, Bourdieu sees the labour market as playing a significant role in determining the value or dominance of a language where particular ways of speaking and writing are more valuable than others. Schools are where access to the dominant and valuable language use is regulated, and because schools are social spaces where students are evaluated and ranked according to performance, students' performance determine their eventual position within the labour market. This process involves the unequal distribution of the highly prized symbolic resources of language use.

To conclude here, this chapter followed on from chapter two to focus more closely on research concerns and research orientations towards language dynamics in multilingual settings. I started off by emphasising the value of Martin-Jones' critical interpretive approach and briefly discussed how this approach operates to provide insight into literacy practices, language use and language-in-education policies. I then discussed Blommaert, Muylleert, Huysmans & Dyers' (2005) concept of 'peripheral normativity' and examined its value in my own investigation. I examined how linguistic concerns in language and literacy research try to take account of the shaping impact of broader social, political, historical and economic factors. Finally, I briefly examined historical perspectives on language-in-education policies that helped to contribute to the dominance of the English language as a medium of instruction in South African Schools. In the next chapter, I describe my site of research in more detail and attempt to apply the critical interpretive approach to researching multilingual settings in setting out to answer the questions that I posed for this enquiry. I begin the chapter by addressing both what I observed inside the classroom, as well as the broader social landscape that gave shape to this local community setting in the Western Cape.

Chapter 4: A school on the social periphery

4.1 Overview

In this chapter, I give more background information about my research school; discuss the Grade Fours that I spent most of my observation time with; look at the language-in-education policy of the school; and discuss the Grade Fours in terms of this policy and language stratification. The aim of this chapter is to begin to address my focal research question by looking at the school in its specific, localised context. I investigate some of the broader, social concerns through a critical interpretive approach and argue that the choices made by the parents as to the language of instruction for their children, were made available to them by the school as a reaction to the social environment of the community, by economic, political and historical considerations, as well as by related ideals of upward social mobility.

4.2 Background information: social, economic, political and historical influences

My site of research was a Primary school in Grassy Park. Grassy Park forms part of an area in Cape Town known as the Cape Flats, where people classified as 'Coloured' were forced to move during the Apartheid era (Principal interview, 26 June, 2008). Terms such as Coloured, White, African and Black, used to refer to racial identities, are legacies of the racial segregation policies of the apartheid era and are still widely used, though they are contested in various ways and I use these terms without racist intention. The term 'Coloured' refers to persons of mixed race and also to persons who are at least partly of KhoiSan descent, as distinct from 'Blacks/Africans', which refers to South Africans of Nguni- and Sotho-speaking origin; and 'Whites' which refers to persons of European origin. The term 'Black' is sometimes used to refer to persons who are not White, and sometimes to refer to only South Africans of Nguni- and Sotho-speaking origin, or South Africans who are speakers of the Bantu languages (or descendants of such people).

According to the principal, the school opened in 1974. The buildings, classrooms and bathrooms were built in prefab and in a hurry to accommodate the children of the families that were forcibly moved from the White-designated suburbs of Constantia and Kirstenbosch. None of the buildings have since been upgraded. The school is surrounded by apartment buildings and run-down houses. Many of the houses had make-shift structures ('shacks') at the back where extended family members lived. A typical set-up was that older family members lived in the house and their children and grandchildren lived in these informal houses in the backyard.

The principal of the school was an energetic woman who had been with the school for 30 years. She had been the principal since 1996, and according to her, the school was seen as an 'oasis' by the surrounding community. In an interview, she described the role of the school in the following way:

[p]arents and the communities relies on the school. The school is their guide... in my case, if there's a death in the community they would come to the school, see the Secretary. What do we do now? We do the pamphlets, we help with the arrangements. Any tragedy, people run to the school for assistance. With their pensions... it's like we have a social responsibility towards those people. I think it is quite evident that you see that if a child does not come to school then that would be a hungry child (Principal interview, 26 June, 2008).

In many ways, the school was used as a point of call because there were almost no other sources of help for the parent community. As with other under-resourced schools in poorer communities in South Africa, the parents of the children at this school turned to the school for mediation of the practices of local institutions and government.

The principal explained that the school was also used an Adult Basic Education (ABET) centre at night and that it was the only centre in the neighbourhood. The ABET centre was where adults could go for literacy classes. The principal claimed that she started adult literacy classes a few years previously because she noticed that the parents were unable to respond to any letters she sent home and as such, were unable to support their children with homework or any other school-related tasks:

[p]arents are not equipped to do that. They don't know how, they don't have the tools... as principal, as staff, you must forever be aware what is happening in the community, what are the reasons for things not happening for the school. Ten out of ten times it would be a social problem (Principal interview, 26 June, 2008). She did not, however, describe any school-led strategies to involve parents in their children's learning, or any other 'family literacy' strategies, which might address parents and children in relation to each other's learning.

4.2.1 Two Grade Four classes divided by parental language-choice

My research focus was on the two Grade Four classes at the school. I focussed on the Grade Fours because of the shift of the nature of the schoolwork that occurs at this level, as discussed in chapter one. One class was the so-called 'English' class and the other class was the 'Afrikaans' class. This split represented the choice parents made when enrolling their children into the school because the parents could choose the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) for their children. There is no doubt that parents made this choice of LOLT not on the basis, simply, of whether their 'home language' was Afrikaans or English, but also on the basis of what they imagined for their children's future. From this perspective, they were differently influenced, depending on their own social positions and ambitions, by perceptions that the English language was associated with the middle-classes in the Cape Town area, and thus with aspirations for upward social mobility and employability in that setting. The school offered both English and Afrikaans classes to their students because that was the choice the parents wanted. Parents who were first-language Afrikaans speakers could thus choose to have their children educated in English, and, as I go on to show, many of them made that choice.

Indeed, around 98% of the children in the English class had parents who spoke Afrikaans as a first-language but had decided to raise their children as English-language speakers who were educated in English. This phenomenon might perhaps be thought

of as an early stage in a progressing language shift on the part of upwardly aspirant Coloured local communities in the Western Cape. The shift is from Afrikaans, which has lost status as a language of power since the end of the apartheid era, to English, which is increasingly the language of power and the language-of-choice of the de-racialised middle-classes in this setting (see Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005). The children in the English stream all understood Afrikaans from exposure to the language in their social communities but had limited exposure to spoken English, and also very little opportunity to practice and develop their Afrikaans language skills once they were in the 'English' class in school. They thus 'fell between two languages,' if one is to accept the implicit definition here of 'English' and 'Afrikaans' as clearly distinct and bounded linguistic resources: on the one hand, the language that their parents spoke with each other, and, on the other, the language of learning and teaching in school. In effect, these Afrikaans-speaking parents were engaging in a social experiment by having their children educated in English when they themselves had limited competency in that language. As a result, the children were exposed to a lot of Afrikaans but they were not encouraged to speak it or to read and write it. Instead, the children 'became' English and were educated in English.

4.2.2 Language-in-education practices as a reaction

There is an important link between language-in-education practices and the social, political and economic conditions of a community and, indeed, of a country. That is because what one perceives to be the dominant language or the language of power, will commonly be the language of choice for education in a multilingual setting. In a multilingual and post-colonial setting such as South Africa, the distribution of linguistic resources translates into the value that is attributed to linguistic forms and practices (Martin-Jones, 2007: 174). From this perspective, the language choices the parents made at my research site were undoubtedly influenced and shaped by economic, political and social interests.

A critical and interpretive approach to researching language-in-education practices can reveal that educational policies and classroom practices contribute to the reproduction of power relationships through the use of language (Martin-Jones, 2007: 171). Schools operate as institutions that are linked to the state and they therefore serve as spaces wherein specific languages and specific linguistic practices are invested with legitimacy, power and authority (Martin-Jones, 2007: 172). It is then at school where children are categorised, assessed according to performance, and ultimately moulded into citizens ready for the world of work. This categorisation process is further linked with the wider processes of social stratification through which citizens are again categorised according to gender, class and ethnicity (Martin-Jones, 2007:172).

The Grade Four parents of my two research classes were able to read the economic signs of the world around them, responded to their own histories where politics and power shaped and influenced the stigmas attached to particular languages, and reacted to the social implications of having their children educated in a language that could provide social upward mobility. Bourdieu's (1991) theoretical work on how a language becomes legitimated through the actions of the state and the education system, offers valuable insight into the situation that played itself out at my research site. As discussed earlier, Bourdieu saw education as the key site where social and cultural reproduction occurs to facilitate a particular symbolic order (Martin-Jones, 2007: 172). In addition, Bourdieu saw the labour market as playing a key role in determining the value of a dominant language because the language of economic power, where certain ways of writing and speaking are valued more than others, can only be accessed through the education system. The education system provides access to attaining the linguistic resources needed to obtain social and occupational mobility (Martin-Jones, 2007: 172). The Grade Four parents who chose English for their children would also resist a teacher's or the principal's suggestion that they move their child from an English class to an Afrikaans class if their child was struggling at school. According to the principal, this was a common reaction and parents would threaten to send their children to another school where English was the sole medium of instruction, and on occasion would indeed move their child (Field notes: 29 May, 2008).

At schools, children are ranked, evaluated and assessed on the basis of their performance, and access to symbolic resources provides the key to upward mobility. The ideal of social and economic upward mobility operates at schools on the periphery because that is where the children can gain access to the labour market. This occurs despite the reproduction of unequal opportunities in under-resourced schools because even if children gain access to symbolic resources through being educated in the dominant language, it is at the same peripheral school where children's potential will be shaped with regard to the labour market (Martin-Jones, 2007: 172). It is clear that this process of determination is unevenly distributed because of the limiting nature of the educational resources of the peripheral school, yet this is where unequal distribution is produced and reproduced. It is apparent that the children, their parents and the teachers were being socially positioned and at the same time, were actively responding to the limitations and opportunities open to them in the particular classroom context as regards language choices (Martin-Jones, 2007: 173).

4.2.3 The Grade Fours and social stratification

The English class had about 30 children and the Afrikaans class 48. The different social backgrounds connected to the language division were interesting to note because most of the children in the English class lived in the apartment buildings surrounding the school, or in houses and apartments in the nearby estates, whereas more of the children in the Afrikaans class lived in informal settlements or on the neighbouring farms. It therefore emerged that the children in the English class were, on average, from better socio-economic backgrounds than the children in the Afrikaans class. It also emerged that the division between classes on the basis of language was not simply an administrative convenience but also had consequences for how the student community interacted with each other. Over the entire period of my research work at the school, I never saw children from the English class interact or play with children from the Afrikaans class. It seems that the social values attached to the two different languages were the origins for this division within the student population, to the extent that strongly distinct social identities emerged in the two different groups.

In this chapter, I examined how language stratification highlighted the school's reaction to external influences that were internalised through language-in-education practices. I also discussed the notion of legitimate language use and argued that the parents of the Grade Four students at my research site saw English as a vehicle for social upward mobility. In the following two chapters, I develop my analysis that distinctive teaching and learning practices were apparent in the Grade Four classes at the school, and that these were responses to local and wider influences. I examine how language and literacy resources and practices were shaped by situated normative understandings; draw on the concept of 'peripheral normativity' to examine what the sources were for these practices; and what the consequences were; how these practices characterised teaching and learning activities; and how multiple factors effected teaching and learning at this school. I rely on the data I collected through my research period and present lesson extracts, field notes and transcripts as evidence to support my analysis.

Chapter 5: Literacy teaching and learning in a peripheral setting

5.1 Overview

In this chapter, in the context of an analysis of data on the two Grade Four classes, I enquire how language use signalled social functions and values inside the classroom. I argue that specific norms and standards operated in localised ways in this school. My analysis suggests that these norms resulted in the children learning to be certain kinds of readers and writers, and that the teaching and learning practices at this school would not necessarily be transferrable or adequate outside this context. Through a consideration of how the children encountered knowledge about reading and writing, texts and languages, I analyse what the Grade Fours could and could not do in terms of using language and texts. I suggest that at the school, a located and peripherally normative form of teaching was happening in the classes and that meant that localised, and effectively limited, learning was happening as well. However, I make the case that the teachers and the learners used the limited and particular resources available to them and that they were able to achieve some degree of context-specific and domain-specific success, because they were able to successfully 'bring off' lessons in the form of literacy and language events where everybody knew how things worked and what they had to do. I end the chapter by discussing how my case study highlighted 'peripheral normativity' in operation, and that similar situations can be found at other under-resourced schools in this country where teaching and learning practices are re-defined and re-conceptualised in a peripheral setting.

5.2 The 'English' Grade Four class

The desks were arranged into three rows with two children per desk in the class. The middle row was where the 'support' children sat and these children went for remedial lessons three times a week during school time. The walls were decorated with the

children's projects and on one wall, there were posters with vocabulary words that were continuously updated. The one poster was called 'Wall of Words' and the teacher would add words to the wall (such as 'weigh', 'solar,' and 'trolley') that the children were supposed to be able to spell after completing a comprehension piece in class. There were also posters on the walls about child abuse and children's rights ('Know your rights'), AIDS, local government and a few maps. The classroom was mostly neat and tidy, and the teacher encouraged the children to sweep, pick up their rubbish, and keep the classroom clean.

The teacher had a kind and caring demeanour towards the children in his class, and he was able to demand and maintain discipline effectively. He had different methods for gaining the class's attention that he used continuously: one involved him counting from the number 5 to the number 1 backwards. Whenever he said '5' all the children in the class would put up a hand and count with him from 5 to 1 with the last finger going onto their lips to demonstrate that they were going to keep quiet. The teacher has been teaching for 5 years and has been a Grade Four teacher for 2 years. He told me that he used the timetable as a general guide and that although he was busy studying for his Honours degree in Education, he did not believe that Outcomes Based Education (OBE) was an effective way of teaching. He believed that OBE did not work at his school, especially in subjects such as Maths and in languages, because the children could not cope with group work, working on their own, or helping their peers. He would do one OBE-type exercise at the beginning of each year, and if this failed, he would carry on teaching in the way he was taught when he was at school. According to him, the children at the school were not on the 'right level' for OBE-type exercises and it was thus a waste of his time. His teaching methods included a lot of 'talk and chalk' and his lessons were highly teacher-directed and dominated by teacher-talk.

Of the 30 children in the class, only two of the children lived in the nearby informal settlement. The rest of the children lived in the apartment buildings and houses surrounding the school. According to the teacher, as I have already described, about 98% of the children in this 'English' class had Afrikaans first-language parents, but they

spoke English at home. I had opportunities to speak to some of the children informally at times throughout my research period and learned more about their parents' occupations from them. Most of the parents had service-industry jobs at places such as Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pick n Pay. According to the teacher, most of the parents were able to pay the school fees and they attended parent evenings. There were two children from the Eastern Cape and they were Xhosa first-language speakers. The one child from the Eastern Cape was new to the school and only started there at the beginning of the year. He was repeating Grade Four and struggled with reading and writing. At times, the teacher spoke Afrikaans to the children and their understanding of Afrikaans was apparently quite good, but during my time there, I hardly heard the children speak Afrikaans outside of the Afrikaans language lesson (even when the teacher spoke Afrikaans to them).

5.3 The 'Afrikaans' Grade Four class

Compared to the English class, the Afrikaans class was much smaller in size even though it had to house more children and desks. In addition, this classroom had broken windows, broken desks, felt very cramped and it was difficult to move around in the class. That also meant that the teacher spent most of his time in the front of the classroom because navigating to the back was not easy. The walls were bare and although the class was neat and clean, it looked messy with 4 rows of desks, 6 desks per row and the children's bags in the isles. When all the children were in the class, there were 48 of them but my research term fell mostly during the rainy season (winter) and absenteeism was a big problem. Half of the class were 'support' children who received remedial lessons, but they were not separated from the rest of the class, in contrast to the seating arrangements in the English class, described above.

The teacher I observed during the first part of my research period failed to return after the June holiday and this resulted in chaos for the school and the children in this class. The principal could not find a suitable replacement and asked her aunt, a retired teacher, to come and help out. This did not work because the aunt left after a few days

because she could not cope with the children. The other teachers in the school stepped in where they could and the English Grade Four teacher took over all the English language lessons. After a few more trials with replacement teachers, the principal decided to take over all the Afrikaans language lessons. This was also not ideal because she still had her other duties to attend to, and as a result, the Afrikaans class ended up being supervised by other teachers or teacher aids. These events caused a lot of disruption and not much teaching happened for the first weeks of the third term. However, the principal decided to use her lessons to teach the Afrikaans class some discipline, school-appropriate and other learning-like practices. She was disappointed in the overall academic level of the children and used every opportunity to teach them reading and writing practices. She also spent a lot of time on teaching domain-appropriate behaviour because the children did not follow some of the behavioural rules of the school, such as standing up and greeting visitors, praying before and after break and wearing the required school uniform.

Most of the children in this class lived in Lotus River in the apartments surrounding the school, while about 10 lived in Egoli (an informal settlement near the school). Some children lived on vegetable farms in the area. About half of their parents were unemployed and the rest were unskilled workers with temporary employment. On occasion, some of the children talked to me about their younger siblings at home, their parents who stayed at home all day, or about their dream jobs. One girl said that she wanted to be a policewoman, and another talked about becoming a hairdresser one day. Very few of the parents were able to pay the school fees, and many of the parents were unable to attend parent evenings. Two of the children were repeating Grade Four and one of them had fetal alcohol syndrome and spent most of his time drawing pictures in his workbooks.

The children in the Afrikaans class clearly faced different challenges to those in the English class, reflecting both contrasts in home conditions and differences in the way the classes were constituted. The different socio-economic backgrounds of the children in these two classes were visible in the way the children were dressed for school, rates

of absenteeism, general behaviour, parental involvement in school events such as 'parent evenings,' and not least, in the language divide. The Afrikaans parents of the children in the English class chose to have their children educated in English, while the Afrikaans parents of the children in the Afrikaans class, had their children educated in their home language of Afrikaans.

5.4 Language and literacy in the the classroom: analysing the data

I now go on to focus on language as a social construct within the context of my research school. I investigate how language use signalled social functions and values inside the classroom, I examine the consequences of language stratification at the school and finally, I discuss the effects of 'peripheral normativity' by way of some examples of teaching and learning at the research school.

In the chapter that follows, I will extend this analysis to focus on classroom domains as regulated by the teachers and investigate the domain practices in these classrooms by looking at, for example, how control methods were used to maintain them. I will then look at how classrooms operate as social semiotic domains, how domains act as precursors for other domains, and how the children were being apprenticed into acting, behaving, and learning through the 'norms' and rules of their classroom domains. My analysis suggests, however, that what was perceived as learning was the children's abilities to follow the domain-specific rules, behave in domain-appropriate ways and display 'fluency' in the school-appropriate determinants. Success in this school was often measured and evaluated through a display of 'fluency' of domain-appropriate behaviour and my data indicates how much time the teachers invested in regulating and maintaining these rules. My analysis endorses the claim that children encounter reading and writing in schools by way of 'procedures,' and if we want to know what it is that children have learnt we should attend to these procedures far more than is often the case in studies of children's literacy and language learning in school.

The data presented in these two chapters include field notes, lesson extracts, writing samples and transcripts from voice-recorded lessons. The field notes and lesson extracts come directly from my observation notes, and where appropriate, the lines are numbered for easy reference. I adapted Dyson's (1993) transcript conventions in my examples, as follows:

/./	A single dot inserted between parallel forward slashes indicates a short pause.
/./	Two dots inserted between parallel forward slashes indicate a long pause.
()	Parentheses enclosing text contain notes, usually about contextual and non-verbal information (e.g. giggles, winks at her).
()	Empty parentheses, on the other hand, indicate unintelligible words or phrases.
{ }	Brackets contain explanatory information inserted into quotation by me, rather than by the speaker.
[]	These brackets enclose translations, where relevant. Full translations for all Afrikaans transcripts can be found as an Appendix at the end of the thesis.
...	Ellipsis points indicate interrupted utterances.
N-O	Capitalised letters or words separated by hyphen indicate that letters or words were spelt aloud by the speaker.
<u>No</u>	An underlined word indicates a stressed word.
/:/	A colon inserted into word or sentence indicates that the sound of the previous letter was elongated.
NO	A capitalised word or phrase indicate increased volume, e.g., shouting.
[A single bracket(s) indicate overlapping speech across speakers.
*Conventional punctuation marks are used to mark ends of utterances or sentences, usually indicated by slight pauses on the audiotape. Commas specifically mark breaks within words or word phrases.	
PP	Stands for all children collectively (especially in whole class activity).
P	Stands for one child.
T	Always stands for teacher.
RES	Stands for me (the researcher).

Figure 1: Transcribing conventions adapted from Dyson (1993).

5.5 Language is a socially constructed resource

My research examines the educational consequences of the arbitrary classification of language, and how schooling serves as a means of instilling value to linguistic resources. The broader cultural perceptions and language debates had complicated social consequences both inside and outside the classroom. To a degree, it can be said that the parents and teachers at this school participated in a 'social experiment,'

and that this had a 'labelling' effect. In other words, language use was the resource which the children, teachers, school and the community used to label themselves and others, and as a result, language use became an internal method of stratification. That is, the ways in which language was used signalled the social functions and values of the community and the school. At my research site, language-in-education was a choice and this choice was shaped by broader social dynamics, and in particular, the perception of English as a language of power that could provide access to the labour market and other economic resources. In what follows, I investigate this language dynamic further and use examples from my data to illustrate some of the effects and consequences on learning of this language dynamic.

5.5.1 Discursive spaces: the effects of language choice on teaching and learning

As discussed earlier, the parents of the English Grade Four class chose to have their children educated in English even though they were Afrikaans first-language speakers. I have also argued that because of socio-historical and socio-political reasons (amongst others), English was seen as a vehicle for social upward mobility and that by speaking English at school and at home, the children were encouraged to 'be' English. This meant that the children in the English class were positioned between two languages: English and Afrikaans. This class, as well as the school and their parents, implicitly accepted and sustained the notion of languages as distinct and bounded sets of resources. In reality, 'working class' South Africans (particularly Coloured people in the Western Cape) speak a version of Afrikaans that is a hybrid mix, drawing freely on English terms. The separation of languages inside the classroom thus contrasted with the mix that characterised language use outside the classroom. This constructed boundary between linguistic resources was directly translated into the ways in which the children accepted the use, value and function of 'English' as the dominant language, and how they viewed the use of Afrikaans. In addition, the children were not encouraged to be bilingual because of the perception that Afrikaans was a low status resource. The use of English was signalled to be more valuable than the use of Afrikaans, and this was also characterised by how the children in the English class

behaved during Afrikaans-subject lessons; for example, they would answer in English when spoken to in Afrikaans (even in an Afrikaans lesson), and ask each other in English how to spell Afrikaans words. I would like to suggest that because English was signalled as more valuable than Afrikaans, these children did not really have much of an incentive to learn, use, and practice Afrikaans as a language. They were familiar with Afrikaans but they understood spoken Afrikaans much better than they could speak, read or write it. Their background knowledge of Afrikaans was far less the result of their Afrikaans learning at school, but undoubtedly came from their language experiences outside the classroom, at home and on the streets.

The following data extracts show children's answers to an Afrikaans First Additional Language test, and they illustrate how the English Grade Four children's writing displays evidence of restricted and limited exposure to the conventions of Afrikaans spelling rules. These examples indicate that the children wrote in a way that was consistent and phonetic, but unconventional (see Appendix A for English translation):

- 1 "Ek kow may kos met may tan" {should be "kou," "my" and "tande"}
- 2 "Vandag gan ons op die gras speel" {should be "gaan"}
- 3 "wet" {instead of "wit" }, "klass" {instead of "klas" }
- 4 Question: Waarmee kou jy jou kos? Answer: "Met my gums"

In L 1 it would appear that the child spelled the word 'may' phonetically because the 'y' in this word sounds elongated. Here, the child draws on her English spelling know-how to spell an Afrikaans word. The opposite effect can be observed in what the same child did in L 2 where phonetically, 'gaan' sounds shortened in the 'Cape Coloured' accent, and the child therefore wrote the word with one 'a' because of local pronunciation. L1 also shows how this child spelled the word 'kow' phonetically by using a 'w' instead of a 'u.' In L 3, the child spelled 'klas' with a double 's' because he or she knows that the translation of the word, 'class,' is spelled with a double 's.' The child transferred her knowledge of English spelling rules used that understanding and know-how to spelling in Afrikaans. In L 4, the child answered the Afrikaans question with an English word (even though 'gums' was the wrong word). Additional examples that I found in the

children's writing indicated how some children spelled Afrikaans words with an English understanding of spelling rules and meta-knowledge, for example, they used 'f' instead of 'v' and 'th' instead of 't.'

The following example is also from an Afrikaans First Additional Language test but these three answers are from the same child. In this example, the child did not understand the instruction or read the sentences correctly in order to successfully complete the task. The instruction was to write down the verb in each sentence. In L 1 and L 3, the child indicated that she understood the general gist of the sentences, but her answer in L 1 was in English, and in L 3, a mixture of Afrikaans and English (see Appendix B):

- 1 Die mense sing mooi in die koor. P's answer: mouth
- 2 Vandag gaan ek my ma 'n vissie vang. P's answer: kare
- 3 Die mense hardloop baie vinnig. P's answer: foote

This child was unable to identify the verbs in these three sentences, and although she understood what the sentences meant in L 1 and L 3, she completed the task by identifying objects/nouns. The instruction for this task clearly stated: "Skryf die werkwoorde neer in die volgende sinne" and a space was given after each sentence in which the child was supposed to write the answer. The problem here is twofold: first, it is clear that she did not know what 'werkwoorde' were and secondly, she also did not know the correct Afrikaans words for what she thought the instructions wanted. In L 1, the correct answer was 'sing' but the child understood the question in terms of *what* the people in the choir sang *with* and answered with the word 'mouth' in English. The second question is grammatically incorrect in this test and should have read: 'Vandag gaan ek *vir* my ma 'n vissie vang.' This mistake, however, was not picked-up by the teacher and therefore, remained uncorrected. It is not clear how the child got to the answer of 'kare' because this is not an Afrikaans or English word. Whatever answer she wanted to give here, was unfortunately misspelled and I am not able to make out what she wanted to write. L 3 is an interesting example because once again, the child answered by giving the object of the sentence, but her answer 'foote' is a mixture of the Afrikaans word 'voete' and the English word 'foot.' This answer can therefore be seen

as an attempt at giving an Afrikaans answer but she got confused with the use of 'v' and 'f' in Afrikaans.

These examples indicate that because of the perceived value and function of English, the children did not really perceive Afrikaans as being a language with much social or economic use and function. This community stigma was constantly signalled to the children in this class, both at home and at school. Examples of such signals at school would include the following: very little time was spent in class for Afrikaans language lessons; the teacher on occasion spoke Afrikaans with an exaggerated accent during (these situations usually resulted in laughter and jokes from the class); and the way in which the children perceived the Afrikaans Grade Four class. Examples of how the children responded to these signals would include: speaking to each other in English about Afrikaans words and questions during Afrikaans lessons, and not speaking or playing with the Afrikaans Grade Four children during breaks.

The examples presented in this sub-section, where the children wrote English words instead of Afrikaans words, also reflected the general classroom practice of using English words and sentences verbally during Afrikaans lessons when the children were unable to respond with the correct words or sentences in Afrikaans. This oral, classroom practice was transferred into their writing practices and this 'code-switching' was acceptable in the verbal, everyday exchanges in the classroom, but not in the more formal, test-writing practices where these examples came from.

5.6 Identity construction through internal language stratification

Internal language stratification and labelling occurred at my research school and these were part of children's identity construction processes and practices. As discussed earlier, Blommaert (2003: 4) argues that through language use, identity work is always involved because it is through language use that speakers display their orientations towards orders of indexicality. For example, the English Grade Four class displayed their 'groupness' to each other and to the Afrikaans Grade Fours by speaking English

inside and outside their classroom. The internal language stratification at the school also translated onto the playgrounds and resulted in each 'language group' having respective areas to play in and produced the situation where the two groups did not interact with each other on a social level.

This labelling effect had various consequences and I observed that the language groups also did not interact or play together even when a teacher purposefully grouped them together in a class. The effect of the language stratification was noticeable even amongst the youngest children at the school as this example from a lesson extract illustrates. The following extract from my field notes comes from the Grade Rs and on this day, the Afrikaans Grade R teacher was absent and the class had to spend the day with the English Grade R teacher and children:

The girls got their activities first and the T encouraged them to work with girls they don't usually work with (i.e. from the Afrikaans group) but they still paired up with friends from their own group so the T had to organise them into mixed language pairs. Some of the girls pulled faces at being separated from their friends and it was clear that they resented having to work with girls from the Afrikaans class. The puzzles were mostly 24 piece association puzzles and include topics such as "How my body works" or "People who help us" (Field notes: 10 June, 2008).

Although the language groups were mixed for the day, the children did not voluntarily play with children from different language classes. The Afrikaans children preferred to play with their Afrikaans classmates and the same was true for the English children. Although most of the children appeared to understand Afrikaans, during individual interaction with the teacher, the teacher spoke Afrikaans to the Afrikaans children and English to the English children. For group activities, the teacher used both languages and there was a lot of code-switching. The children, however, did not code-switch and answered questions and participated in activities by using the languages they were streamed into:

One game required each P to name his or her name by saying: "My name is ____, who are you?" and then the next P would repeat the rhyme and include his or her name. The Afrikaans children would automatically say: "My naam is ____, wie is jy?" (Field notes: 10 June, 2008).

These processes of identifying through the use of language were constantly in play at the school, as can be seen in this example of a conversation I had with some Grade Three girls during an interval. I was watching some girls play and after a while they came over to talk to me. These field notes indicate how members of the same family can label and identify themselves through language use:

Some Grade Threes come to talk to me. At first they were very shy but soon they volunteered some information. I spoke English at first but when a girl answered a question in Afrikaans I switched to Afrikaans. She was surprised that I could speak Afrikaans because she said some 'ladies' can't speak Afrikaans, only English. Her mother works on a farm (vegetable farm in the area) and she's got two brothers. One P said that her cousins are English because they are in an English class at school although their parents are Afrikaans. So they have to speak English at home and she must speak English to her cousins (Field notes: 27 June, 2008).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the language choice at this school also meant that the children became identified through and by a language. This girl said that her cousins *were* English *because* they were being educated in English. Her cousins' language use indicated their orders of indexicality and which 'norms' and 'rules' they were living by. In other words, they *were* English because their parents wanted them to be English and receive, according to their own function and value of the English language, a 'better' education and therefore, 'belong' to a different social group.

The language issues in this case study were influenced by many factors, including community concerns, stigmas and social factors. Bourdieu's (1991) arguments about legitimate language, symbolic power, labour market factors and social value are again applicable here because of the ways through which educational discourses construct an understanding of what a local language is, how it should be used and taught (see Stroud, 2003: 19). This understanding is often at odds with how these languages are actually used in communities, but this is where language in education becomes a form of symbolic and cultural capital. Language in education continues to be the great divider and in my case study, the language stratification facilitated division and labelling, and as a result, children 'lived' and 'learned' how language was not simply used as a resource for communication. Instead, language became a label that signalled socio-

economic backgrounds, ideals of upward social mobility, and languages were placed within a hierarchical structure.

5.7 'Peripheral Normativity': a school on the social periphery

I use the concept of 'peripheral normativity' (from Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005) to analyse what was going on at this school with regard to language and literacy. A localised pedagogy of teaching and learning operated at my research school where particular norms as to what constituted 'good' reading, writing and learning were created through the teaching practices in the classrooms. The result was that levels of success and failure were re-defined for this peripheral setting and borrowed the norms and expectations of the local environment in order to train the children in the localised codes and norms.

The peripheral norms at this school resulted in the delivery of limited and 'restricted' versions of literacy, despite the teachers' enthusiasm and the principal's energy. I argue that the teachers used the resources that were available to them to teach according to what they thought and understood as 'acceptable' and 'adequate' lessons. As a result, while the children received the 'best intentions' of the teachers, these produced a form of pedagogy and an understanding of what constituted worthwhile knowledge that was restricted, localised and problematic, particularly when judged by outside criteria in examinations and tests. I will now present some examples of 'peripheral normativity' and discuss how these affected the teaching and learning in the contexts presented.

5.7.1 Normative teaching and learning practices: 'choral learning'

The literacy lessons I observed in the Foundation Phase classrooms involved much 'choral learning,' and relied heavily on, for example, the use of decontextualised lists for spelling drills, rhyming activities and chanting. I describe choral learning as occurring when a teacher focuses on the whole class during a lesson, and expects the whole

class to collectively answer or repeat answers. For example, in the following transcript, the teacher used flash cards and wanted the whole class to respond to the exercise. This lesson extract comes from the English Grade One class and is a good example of normative practices regarding literacy teaching, learning and language use:

1 The T used some flash cards and asked the class to give her the first sound of
2 words (for example: mouse, nose, and snake) and the PP responded in chorus.
3 The teacher then asked individual P by name to give her the first sound of the
4 words. She started with the “Teddy bear, Teddy bear” rhyme to get
5 everyone’s attention. Next, she asked for the last sound of words such as
6 ‘mop’ and then middle sounds (while she spells out words) for example: ‘M-O-
7 P’ and the class answers in chorus ‘o.’ The T was not satisfied with the class’
8 answers and explained to me that they were still struggling with that one. She
9 then wrote on the board:

10	Bb	Tt
11	Rr	Jj
12	Ww	Uu
13	Hh	Ff

14 The T tapped on each letter with a ruler and the PP had to say the sounds
15 over and over again in unison. She also asked some individual P to say some
16 letters over and over. Next, she asked for words starting with some of the
17 letters and told the PP not to shout out answers but she only received chorus
18 answers. She was forced to stop the lesson because the class was too noisy
19 and she changed the activity to focus on vowels. She wrote them on the
20 board and the class had to read them as follows: ‘a a a a a e e e e e...’
21 While the T asked someone to “build Teacher a word with a vowel in the
22 middle” she wrote the following words on the board: ‘cop, mop, top, pot, cot,
23 dot, not, got, dog, jog, log’ and the PP only give her the words on the board.
24 The T gave them clues as to which words she wanted to give her, for example
25 “a piece of wood” and then the PP would answer “log.” She then spelled out
26 each word on the board by tapping her ruler on each letter again and again
27 while the PP spell out “d-o-g, dog, d-o-g, dog, d-o-g, dog.” Not all the children
28 participated but it was difficult to gauge who it was because of the noise level
29 during the chorus answers. The T gave a context to only three of the words
30 they had to spell, for example: “the food is in the p-o-t, pot, the baby sleeps in
31 the c-o-t, cot” (Field notes: 19 June, 2008).

This teacher’s idea of a literacy lesson involved rhyming (L 4), recognising sounds (L 1, 5 & 6) and spelling words orally (L 27). She used a lot of repetition and the decontextualised nature of this lesson required rote learning and memorisation skills rather than creative and cognitive skills that could have been encouraged through open-

ended questions. In L 21 to L 25 in particular, the lesson was very teacher-dominated and there was only one correct answer to her questions. If the children were to become proficient at school literacy, this spelling drill example should have included literacy practices that encouraged the children to summarise, synthesise, paraphrase, comprehend, and interpret the words, their use and their meaning. These literacy practices were absent and in this way, the children received a restricted, normative version of how these words and their meanings could have been used.

The teacher's logic regarding her reaction from L 7 to her actions in L 10 to L 16 does not make sense: in L 10 to L 16 she shifted her focus from asking the class to spell out words and identify phonics to upper-case and lower-case consonants. This shift is confusing and moved from using whole words with meaning, to individual consonants. In her attempt to get the children to recognise letters and match them to sounds, it seemed irrelevant to then sound out upper-case letters since their phonetic sounds are similar and up to this point in the lesson, the children were being taught with flash cards that only used lower-case letters.

The activities on the mat ensured that those children who struggled with spelling orally or recognising sounds and letters, could stay anonymous. The teacher's method of teaching what she regarded as a literacy lesson, taught the children little with regards to the actual use of language. The extract illustrates how the children were exposed to words and sounds but not necessarily to their meaning or use. There were no discussions about the words themselves, and there were no open-ended questions that could have encouraged discussions about the words, their meaning, or their use. Similarly, the children were exposed to domain practices that allowed them to rely on memorisation, chanting and on each other because of the nature of the lesson.

5.7.2 Normative teaching and learning practices: 'talk and chalk'

At the research school, a norm was to immediately copy down anything that was written on the board. In the Intermediate Phase classrooms, this 'talk and chalk' methodology

was very popular amongst the teachers who would spend a large part of the lesson writing detailed lessons on the board. The teachers would then rapidly go through the instructions and leave the children to finish copying down the information for the rest of the lesson. In the Grade Four English class the children habitually wrote down everything the teacher wrote on the board and they instantly did that without being instructed to do so. The children were so accustomed to the 'talk and chalk' method that they mechanically copied down information without necessarily understanding what they wrote down, or the instructions themselves. It was often the case that questions *and* answers were written out on the board and all the children had to do was copy everything down into their books. The teacher would then mark the books and grade the children on how well they were able to copy down a lesson from the board.

The next lesson extract is an example of a typical 'talk and chalk' lesson from the English Grade Four class and the lesson exemplifies that with these types of lessons, the children were not given the opportunity to develop any academic skills such as critical, analytical or interpretational skills. The children were not encouraged to think for themselves or to apply any cognitive skills because all the information was given to them and as a result, a specific but restricted notion of language learning occurred: what they learnt was how to copy a lesson from the board into their books. This lesson was an English First language comprehension lesson on a local celebrity. The class got an extract of an interview with a musician, Petronel Malan, from the *Sarie* magazine (14 November, 2001). The teacher wrote the following questions and answers on the board and without asking the class to do so, they started to copy everything into their books:

1. Q: Where was she born?
2. A: In Pretoria.
3. Q: What is her present age?
4. A: 34 years old.
5. Q: How did her father help her?
6. A: He encouraged her to complete school.
7. Q: When did she first start taking music lessons?
8. A: At the age of 4 years.
9. Q: What are her qualifications?
10. A: She has a doctorate (a doctor's degree) in music
11. Q: Is she well know?

12. A: Yes, she is.
13. Q: How many years ahead is her diary booked?
15. A: Two years.
16. Q: How many hours a day does she practice?
17. A: Eight hours.
18. Q: Which instrument does she play?
19. A: The piano.
20. Q: Where does she travel to perform?
21. A: All over the world.
22. Q: What should close family & friends do for you?
23. A: They should give you their full support.
24. Q: What should you never do as an artist?
25. A: a) never doubt your ability.
26. b) never drive yourself too hard.
27. c) never overestimate your ability.

The teacher went through all the questions and answers after he read the comprehension piece to the class (once), and then gave some time for the class to copy the lesson down from the board into their books. That was the end of the lesson and the children had all the answers. The questions were straightforward and not demanding at all but the children were not given the chance to answer them by themselves. From this and similar lessons, the children learnt that what counted as effective literacy work involved copying a lesson from the board into their books. The literacy practice described above signalled to the children that copying a lesson into their books successfully constituted successful learning. These children were apprenticed into this peripheral normative practice of 'copying well' and this literacy practice was learnt and deeply imbedded as a domain- and discursive-specific activity. The possible long-term results of this particular teaching practice could translate into these children thinking that copying other people's work would also constitute success in other contexts such as in high school or tertiary-level settings. As an immediate consequence, the mechanical nature of this activity resulted in the children paying more attention to the practice of copying than to the actual words and their meaning. I asked a few children about the celebrity they read and wrote about, and they did not know much about her or understand some of the words on the board. Also, some children made mistakes in their workbooks and could not correctly copy down the lesson, and ultimately, they will be evaluated on how successfully they copied down the lesson into

their books. The task of copying down this lesson also took a very long time because the children would look up at the board after writing a letter or two. While the children were busy copying this lesson from the board, the teacher carried on with other work and kept himself busy.

The next example is a writing sample and comes from a test given to the same English Grade Four class. The question was about antonyms and the children were supposed to choose the correct antonym for each word in bold in these sentences. A box with all the possible answers were given to them (the child's answers are in italics):

Die mes is **skerp** maar die byl is *skerp*
Ek spring **hoog** maar sy spring *hoog*
Die lig is nie **helder** nie dit is *helder*
Die klas is nie **vuil** nie dit is *vuil*
Jou hemp is nie **swart** nie dit is *swart* (see Appendix C)

The example above indicates that this child had no idea what he or she was supposed to do and as a result, he or she could not correctly complete the activity. In this test, possible answers were provided but the correct answers for the correct sentences were not, and the child was required to think for herself and complete the task individually. However, due to lack of practice of what such tasks require, the child was unable to correctly answer the questions and instead, repeated the word in bold.

It could be argued that the two examples in this section are on extreme ends of a continuum and that there is not much in between. The children were either required to copy down questions and answers, or they were faced with test situations where answers were not given to them and they were required to find the correct answers themselves. In the second scenario, the child failed to complete the task correctly because of a lack of practice and training. If the children were to get the skills to successfully complete the task in the second example they would have to have had scaffolded examples and practice at writing, reading and answering questions independently. However, I did not observe any lessons where scaffolding was used to train and apprentice the Grade Fours to think, read and write independently. Part of the

problem was that too much class-time was spend on ‘talk and chalk’-type lessons such as the one highlighted here, and as such, the teaching practice did not adequately prepare the children for tests or exams where the answers were not given to the children.

5.7.3 Context-dependent literacy practices

At my research school, the teaching practices taught the children context-dependent literacy practices where the children learned specific literacy practices. However, as indicated already, the value of the learning in these contexts were questionable because *how* and *what* the children learnt gave them restricted versions of literacy. That meant that despite the ideals of social upward mobility, the children were getting localised and restricted versions of language use and literacy. The following lesson extract comes from an Afrikaans comprehension lesson taught to the Afrikaans class by the school’s principal and is a good example of how a child used her available resources to participate in the writing practices of her class (see Appendix D):

1 After the comprehension piece was read {only once during this lesson, but the
2 piece is familiar to the class}, the T went over the questions. Most of the
3 answers were given orally and the PP were asked to work individually and write
4 down all the answers into their books in full sentences. For example, question
5 1 was: “Waarom het Annemarie haar vergaap?” The T told the PP to begin
6 their answers with: “Annemarie...” and to complete the answer in a full
7 sentence. The girl next to me wrote the following answer to question 1 {the
8 spelling mistakes she made are in bold text}:
9 “Almal lyk so haastig is hulle nie **mis**kin.”

In this example, a girl displayed a restricted literacy competency by answering the question about what Annemarie was in awe about by copying down a part of a sentence directly from the text. Her answer in L 9 did not make sense because she looked at the text in the comprehension piece (L 10 – 11) and wrote down random words and parts of sentences relating to the question in L 5. The section with the answer to question 1 in the piece was as follows (the part in italics is what the girl used from the text to answer):

- 10 “Sy vergaap haar aan al die mense wat so haastig in- en uitloop. *Almal lyk so*
 11 *haastig. Is hulle nie miskien* laat vir die trein nie?”
 12 A boy sitting close to me wrote the correct answer into his book: “Annemarie
 13 het haar aan die mense vergaap.” Question 2 asked: “Gee nog ‘n word vir
 14 tasse” and the same girl answered:
 15 “nig sy vergaap haar **al** mense. Wat is hulle.”

The girl used the same method of copying (incorrectly and with spelling mistakes – see words in bold) down words from the passage by way of answering question 3 as well. Question 3 asked: “Wat is die nommer van die perron?” Her answer was:

- 16 “in- en uitloop. Almal lyk so haastig. Is hulle.”

The girls’ answer in L 16 to question 3 is a continuation of her literacy-as-copying orientation where she copied down parts of sentences from the text instead of answering the questions in her own words. None of her answers made linguistic sense because they disregarded spelling rules and punctuation. However, from a domain-practice perspective, this girl used her available resources and domain-specific practices to help her to answer the questions that she clearly did not understand. She knew that copying words from the text was correct, but she used the correct domain-practice incorrectly. When the principal came to help her she was still unable to complete the task correctly:

- 17 The T, who has been walking up and down the isles, saw that this girl was
 18 randomly copying words from the comprehension piece as answers to the
 19 questions. She told me that this girl was a support learner and then asked the
 20 girl to answer one of the easier questions in the next section where the
 21 children are given sentences and asked to fill in the missing word.

For example:

- 22 “Op die stasie lyk al die mense so _____” {the missing word is “haastig”}
 23 The T asked the girl to go to the comprehension piece, look for the sentence
 24 and then fill in the missing word. The girl was able to do this but when the T
 25 moved on to the next desk, the girl continued to copy down the whole
 26 sentence even though only one word was required. She then erased the
 27 extra words and ended up with this answer:
 28 “Op die stasie lyk al die mense so haastig”
 29 She continued to answer the rest of the questions with nonsensical answers
 30 by copying down any part of a sentence into the missing gaps where only one
 31 word was required.

This girl clearly did not understand the writing task or the comprehension piece. When the questions required one missing word in L 22, the girl wrote *two* words instead of one (L 28), even with the extra help and individual instruction from the principal. It is possible that she was just lazy and wanted to get the task done, but even after the principal came over to help her, she was unable to correctly complete the task. She understood the convention of looking for a cue in the comprehension piece in order to find the answer to the question, but she copied words and parts of sentences down as answers. She ignored punctuation marks, wrote down part of words, and also misspelled some of the words she copied, even with the text in front of her.

The principal's advice and help in L 23 – 24 was reinforcing the way in which the girl attempted to answer all the previous questions by going to the comprehension piece and looking for the answer. However, instead of reading what the question asked and reading the correct sentence(s) in the comprehension piece, extracting the relevant information and rewording that into a correct answer, this girl copied words and bits of words. In part, the way in which she attempted to answer the questions was correct, however, she failed to understand what the questions asked, what the answers were and even though she participated in the literacy practices, she was unable to answer the questions correctly.

To conclude here, in this chapter I looked at some of the effects of the social functions and values of language use and 'peripheral normativity.' My analysis suggested that these norms resulted in the children learning to be certain kinds of readers and writers, and that the teaching and learning practices at this school would not necessarily be transferrable or adequate outside this localised context. In addition, I suggested that the teaching practices resulted in specific learning practices that were questionable and problematic. However, in the peripheral setting of this school, I made the case that the teachers and the learners used the resources available to them and that they were able to achieve some level of context-specific and domain-specific success. The NLS research has shown that children get inducted into particular ways of thinking, speaking, acting, reading and writing (see Heath, 1983; Gee, 1990, 2008; Freebody & Freiburg,

2008), and I discussed some of the ways in which the children at this school acquired and interpreted messages in this chapter. These particular ways might or might not be precursors for successful reading and writing in school-specific ways, and in the next chapter, I look at different domains and domain practices.

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Chapter 6: Normative behaviour and social semiotic domains

6.1 Overview

In this pen-ultimate chapter, which is the last chapter in my data-analysis, I examine data from the classrooms that I studied from the perspective that classrooms operate as social semiotic domains where specific rules, practices and expectations are determined and maintained by both internal and external forces. I draw on Gee's (2008) argument that particular domains of human activity act as precursors for other domains: as an obvious example that is applicable here, in a school setting the domain of a lower grade prepares the members for the domain-specific ways of thinking, acting, feeling, valuing and using the language of the next grade that they will enter the following year. In other words, the classroom domains of the Foundation Phase act as precursive domains: for better or for worse, they orient the children towards the activities that will take place in the post-Foundation Phase grades. In this chapter, I also focus on and analyse data from lessons that I observed in the Foundation Phase classrooms at my research school, and I use this data to further develop my argument that the socio-semiotic practices that I observed emanated from both within the school and classroom domain, as well as from outside the domain. These practices, rules and expectations were shaped by the school itself (by the teachers and principal), as well as by the parent community and by other social factors.

6.2. Domain-specific practices: following the rules

In primary school classrooms, it is a given that the task falls on the teacher to initiate children into domain practices, to regulate and maintain the rules of the classroom, and to regulate, discipline and direct the children as novice members of the domain. At the classroom level the teacher has relative autonomy in that she can change or add rules to the domain, whereas the other members of the domain, the children, are mostly

powerless. In classroom domains, the teacher's ways of acting and behaving are endorsed by institutional authority. The children in the Grade Four domain were still being apprenticed as writers and were still learning about particular writing, typographic and lexographic conventions (such as what a sentence consists of, when to use capital letters) and other school-appropriate ways of behaviour (for example not shouting in the classroom).

The idea of a classroom as constituting a social semiotic domain (see Kress et al., 2001; Gee, 2008) allowed me to describe and analyse the forms of communication that I came across in the classrooms of my case study as specific and distinct classroom practices, events, and languages activities. Classroom activities and practices have a specificity that separates them from the discursive practices of other institutions, including those of the family/home domain. The rules of engagement are domain-specific, such as when and how to talk and write, when and how to answer questions, and how to behave. Children encounter these domain practices and the work of the early grades is at least partly about apprenticing the children into these practices, and about teaching them what is expected of them in their classrooms.

I would now like to present a lesson extract by way of an example of a domain specific activity from my research site. This example is an illustration of the typical sequence followed for comprehension lessons in the Grade Four English class, where the teacher would read the comprehension piece that he had selected, go through the questions and then give the class the opportunity to complete the questions:

The T starts with lesson: "Who of you have pets at home?" {There is a short discussion about pets – how many, what kind of pet etc.}. The T talks about how animals don't have speech but their own way of communicating. The T briefly talks about his dog called Psycho. The T then brings PP's attention to the comprehension piece {an extract from a fairytale} he says this is also about a dog. The T sits on his desk and reads the piece to the PP. He stops to explain a few phrases e.g. 'skin and bones' – "this means that someone is very thin." PP seems to follow along. After finishing the extract, the T goes over the story again in his own words and explains what a 'common' is. He asks: "What tells us that the dog was not being taken care of?" {no one answers and the T refers to the phrase 'skin and bones' to answer his own question}.

The T talks about the SPCA and asks who can tell him what it stands for? /../ {silence}. A P starts to tell the T about how he took his cat to the SPCA. Then the T does not tell the PP what SPCA stands for, but says they should look at the second page he gave them and he starts to go over the questions but stops PP from answering. He's just reading the questions out loud one by one. T Tells PP to quickly do numbers 1 – 12 in their books and he goes to the back of the class to get the books, hand them out (Reading and Creative Writing workbooks). The T goes to the board and writes the date and heading of the lesson.

RES walks around to look at some of the P's answers: Question 1: "How many puppies did Perdita have?"

One P copied down the questions as well as the answers {they were told not to copy the questions down into their books}. P's answer to Question 1: "Perdita had eight puppies."

Another P's answer: "Perdita have eight puppies." After more than 30 minutes, most of the PP were only on Question 2 and some haven't started yet. The T walks around a bit and asks: "Who's struggling?" No one answers but he walks around and checks a few P's answers (Field notes: 24 July, 2008).

This extract illustrates the set formula for comprehension lessons in the Grade Four English class that the teacher followed and it is notable that this was the primary form of pedagogic exchange in almost all of his language lessons. Although the teacher initiated a discussion about pets and told the class that the comprehension piece was about a dog, the comprehension extract came from a "101 Dalmatians" and not all the children were familiar with the story. It was my observation that the children struggled with the words and the concepts in the story, and also, could not follow the story because they lacked the background information needed. The comprehension piece was only an extract and therefore decontextualised since the children lacked the necessary information to make full use of the exercise.

However, the children have been initiated through this formula and knew what was expected of them. They read and listened to the extract, then listened to the teacher reading the questions, wrote the date and heading of the lesson in their books, then started to answer the questions. They followed the rules, participated in the lesson, and did what they were told to do. In other words, they were 'fluent' in these domain-appropriate rules and literacy practices. A social semiotics focus on domain activity is a way in which one can look at how what happens in the classroom can be either

beneficial or problematic for the children's learning, and how teachers regulate attention and learning by way of procedural activities. What I found at my research site was, however, in many ways problematic because the children learnt little about the words and their meanings through attention to the communicative context, and they were not given the opportunity to synthesise, paraphrase or practice other literacy practices where thought and interpretation were required. Although all the domain-specific rules were followed, the example above indicates that the teacher's formulaic approach to language teaching did not achieve much in terms of new learning. In addition, it took a very long time for the children to answer the questions and very few children worked on their own. After half an hour, some of the children were still answering question 1, and this could have been an indication to the teacher that his approach to dealing with the questions was not successful in terms of achieving the desired result. The teacher simply read the questions out loud to the class but there was no scaffolding provided by way of a discussion of the questions and help for the children to get to the answers.

The following extract is another example from the Grade Four English class and involves a spelling drill where the teacher wrote lists of words on the board. Again, the domain-specific rules were followed and the children's actions and behaviours displayed 'fluency' in the domain practices. After the children copied the lists into their books, the teacher spelt each word out, followed by the class spelling the same word in unison. This extract is a good example of a typical spelling drill and illustrates how this teacher taught spelling and how the children have been apprenticed into following these domain-specific rules and practices:

There are lists of words on the board that the PP copied into their books. T would say a word e.g. 'will', then spell it out, W-I-L-L then the PP spells it in a chorus about 3 times. Then the T says: "Close your eyes" and then 'will,' then the PP spell it out very loudly again. Next word: 'Shall,' then T says: "Remember the rule I've taught you in English? I shall, you shall, everybody else will." PP repeated this rule about 5 times. Then T asks individual P to make sentences with 'shall', "I shall be eating my supper" {e.g. from T}. Decontextualised spelling lists are then quickly run through and PP have words in front of them while the T carries on spelling out word by word, then T says "R-U-N, RUN" and then PP repeat, then T moves on to the next word. The T encourages PP to give complex sentences as examples but they struggle to do so. The T moves on to

the next list and then asks for more examples of sentences {most of the examples are 3 or 4 word sentences}. T talks about the words a little and also translates a word or two into Afrikaans (Field notes: 30 June, 2008).

As presented in the extract above, it is clear that the teacher's approach to skill and drill where rote learning and memorisation were required was his idea of literacy learning. Pedagogically, this teaching practice resulted in the students with good recall skills being more successful than those with limited memorisation skills. There is a question, though, as to what the children actually learnt, besides how to participate in the domain practices of spelling lessons. The teacher did not explain all the words or describe what their meaning, or use any of them in a sentence. The children were also not required to make sentences with the words that explained their meaning. In effect, the normative rules of this literacy lesson did not include any opportunities or space to talk about the words, their use or meaning, and the children were also not encouraged to ask questions, or tell the teacher when they did not know the meaning of a word. He simply spelt them out and occasionally, translated one or two into Afrikaans. The words were simply listed and dealt with as 'words to know how to spell.' The teacher left the words on the board and the children had the words in their workbooks in front of them so the task of running through the lists and spelling them out one by one did not in any way indicate whether the children could spell them or not. The choral nature of the exercise also prevented the teacher from identifying the children who were struggling to spell the words. In this lesson, successful learning was measured by 'fluency' in the domain-specific behaviour: the ability to copy the words into books and to spell them out together as a class.

6.2.1 Domains act as 'precursors' to other domains

In the Foundation Phase classrooms I observed very similar domain rules and practices. There were domain rules in the Grade One class that were very similar to the domain rules of the Grade Three English class, and it was clear that the children were apprenticed to participate in terms of the classroom-appropriate requirements expected of them. Even in the Grade One class, the children knew what was expected of them,

how they were expected to behave and what they could expect from their lessons. Some examples of domain-appropriate behaviour include: answering as a class, reciting rhymes and songs, and lots of repetition. A good example of domain practice involves control methods and the following extract illustrates how the Grade One teacher gained the attention of the class, and used domain-specific rules for language use and activity:

The T called the PP to the mat and said: "Teddy bear, Teddy bear" and the PP began to recite the rhyme, followed by three more rhymes (Field notes: 19 June, 2008).

We see here an example of a teaching event based on a ritualised practice, initiated by the teacher, which cued a set collective response from the children. This activity was initiated by the teacher as a 'technique' to get the children to pay attention and to focus. The teacher used it here to settle the children on the mat and to get everybody's attention before starting the lesson. This practice was very common in all the Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase classrooms I observed, and this Grade One teacher in particular, used such methods for control throughout her literacy lesson. During her lesson, one boy kept on talking and misbehaving, and the teacher stopped her lesson twice to discipline him:

During a spelling drill, a boy was talking to his friend and the T hit him over the head with the flash cards.

The same boy that got hit over the head with the flash cards got hit with the ruler on his leg this time because he was not paying attention (Field notes: 19 June, 2008).

The two examples above of the boy getting hit with flash cards and then with a ruler was an incident of deviation from the expected behaviour that was required in this domain. He was not following the rules and therefore disrupted the whole class. The teacher signalled that his behaviour was not appropriate and disciplined him. The teacher's disciplining methods signalled her opinions about what was acceptable, domain-appropriate behaviour, and how deviations were to be dealt with. The teacher dealt with the boy according to her own perspective of the domain practices in her classroom and thereby regulated the rules of 'her' domain.

The following lesson extract comes from the Grade Three English class, and the control methods in this example were very similar to the “Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear” example from the Grade One class:

The T asked everyone to stand and to then sit down again. Next, she started with rhymes and most of the class participated. Some PP did not know the words while others recited the lines with extra enthusiasm. The T was obviously very proud of the PP’s ability to recite these rhymes for me and it was apparent that she was showing off her class. Most of the rhymes included a lot of repetition and the T emphasised the sections where the tone changed and the class had to repeat these sections until she was satisfied. For example: “A rainbow is a gift from God, for all the world and me” (Field notes: 27 June, 2008).

This lesson was very similar to the Grade One lesson described above because of the repetition, the control methods, the recital of rhymes and poems, and choral answers. The domain practices that were visible in these contexts echo each other because, as Gee (2008) explains, different domains act as precursors to each other. In the example from the Grade Three class, movement was used in addition to rhymes and repetition. The teacher felt a lot of pride at her class’s ability to recite the rhymes she initiated, and she repeated different sections of the rhymes randomly. It appeared as if the teacher saw the class’ ‘fluency’ in the domain rules as an indication of successful teaching and learning. She led the whole exercise and the children were able to follow her cues and responded with the correct, domain-appropriate practices. When she was unsatisfied with the enthusiasm of the class’ responses or tonality, she had them repeat those lines or sections until they achieved the desired results. A very similar situation is illustrated in the next example from the Afrikaans Grade Four class, where the principal initiated movement and songs to gain the attention and focus of her class:

PP told to stand, rub their hands together and do other movements {each movement was cued by the T and she led the children by actively participating in the movements herself}. T starts to sing “My Bonnie lies over the ocean” and PP breaks into song and do all the hand gestures. Another song: “The Alphabet Song.” PP told to sit on their hands and be quiet (Field notes: 21 July, 2008).

The principal gave the children the cues necessary to participate and she encouraged enthusiasm and tonality throughout the exercise. During “The Alphabet Song” some

children mixed up the letters and the principal had them repeat it again and again until they got it right. She walked around the class and up the isles to listen to individual children while they sang the song and she made sure that everyone participated.

In the examples presented thus far, I've shown how the Grade One domain was a precursor for the Grade Three domain, and how these two were precursors for the Grade Four domain in the ways through which the children were disciplined, apprenticed, and monitored to follow domain-appropriate rules. Because of the hierarchical nature of schools, the skills, concepts and knowledge children acquire are supposed to function in a progressive sequence, where children are taught and prepared for the next level of teaching and learning. In terms of language use and literacy learning, these examples showed how the teachers valued the ability to recite rhymes, repeat words and phrases, and use memorisation skills as indications that the children were learning.

6.3 Classrooms operating as social semiotic domains

In the under-resourced classrooms of my research site, I investigated what the teachers 'signalled' about what was important and what was not. Information about reading and writing was given to children, but I argue here that a locally constructed notion of literacy was given to the children. In the local context of the school, the particular kinds of reading and writing were taught and it is important to look at some of these normative practices in detail in order to better understand what happened in the Intermediate Phase primary classrooms.

The following transcript highlights how much emphasis this teacher placed on what she valued as important learning-like behaviour in this domain. Again, note the way in which this teacher used repetition as a disciplinary technique. The teacher also emphasised rules and domain-appropriate practices through the use of repetition. The transcript is a recorded lesson from the Grade Four Afrikaans class, and it is an extract of an Afrikaans first language lesson (see Appendix E for the English translation):

1 T: Luister baie mooi ek gaan net een instruksie gee. Juffrou gaan vrae vra, jou
2 antwoorde is in daardie twee paragrawe. Nou, daar is reëls, daar is reëls. Jy
3 gaan vir my jou antwoord in 'n vol sin gee, byvoorbeeld as ek vir jou vra, Nikita,
4 wat is jou naam? Gaan Nikita sê, "My naam is Nikita." Dit is wanneer ek sê jou
5 antwoord in vol sinne. Ek gee vir Nikita 'n instruksie: wat is jou naam? En dan
6 jou antwoord is in 'n sin geskryf. Stephan, jy gaan jou sin oorlees om te kyk of
7 jy enige woorde {inaudible}, jy gaan jou sin oorlees. Jerome, kyk of jy spel
8 foute maak. Die goue reël is 'n sin begin altyd met 'n hoofletter en eindig met
9 'n punt.

10 PP: (repeats) 'n Sin begin altyd met 'n hoofletter en eindig met 'n punt.
11 T: Goed, jou antwoord gaan jy in jou skryfboek skryf. Kyk nou, hierdie boek is
12 'n heilige boek. Julle weet mos dis 'n heilige boek. /../
13 Goed die grootste reël is Juffrou, niemand staan uit sy bank op nie, want
14 Juffrou gaan {inaudible} jy gaan vir my respekteer en Jerome, jy gaan vir
15 Juffrou help om nie onnodig te skree nie. Ons gaan mekaar help, nê? Goed.
16 Niemand gaan begin nie want ons weet nie wat ons skryf nie. Reg, wat is die
17 datum vandag?

18 PP: 29 Julie

19 T: Goed. Jy gaan nie die vraag neerskryf nie, Brandon, jy gaan nie die vraag,
20 en Stephan, Nikita, skryf nie. Sit die potlood neer. Sit die potlood neer, jy
21 wag. /../ Juffrou wil net kom kyk of jy geskryf het. Jy moet nou klaar wees.
22 Juffrou Jaftha sal baie kwaad wees as daar iemand was wat 'n uitveër gebruik
23 het en hard gedruk het op sy potlood. Ek gaan baklei. Ek en Kathleen gaan
24 vreeslik baklei. As jy klaar is trek jou lyn, sit jou potlood neer, sit jou potlood
25 neer. Is jy klaar? }T speaks to one student}. {To the same student}: Jou letter
26 hoef nie oor die lyn te gaan nie. Goed (Field notes: 29, July, 2008).

This extract shows how the teacher mixed the rules of domain practices with rules for writing (or literacy practices). In other words, the teacher emphasised the school-appropriate and classroom-appropriate behaviour she expected from them by repeating the rules the children had to follow that were domain-specific. At the same time, she repeated the discourse-appropriate rules that were expected of the children, by way of literacy practices, by repeating the rules for writing. The rules and practices include the following: listening carefully to instructions (L 1), writing answers in full sentences (L 3), writing sentences that start with a capital letter and ends with a full stop (L 8 - 9), double-checking for spelling mistakes (L 7), working neatly and respecting their workbooks (L 11 & 12), not getting up from their desks (L 13), respecting the teacher (L 14), not shouting out (L 14), helping each other by being respectful (L 14), not writing

anything down until being told to do so (L 16), only copying down the answers into their workbooks and not the questions as well (L 19 - 20), leaving your pencil on your desk until told to pick it up (L 20), working fast but accurately (L 6, 21 & 25), not using erasers (L 22), not pressing down too hard on the paper with a pencil (L 23), drawing a line across the page underneath the completed work (L 24), and writing between the lines (L 25 & 26).

In the 26 lines above, 17 domain rules were emphasised, and some of the 17 were emphasised more than once, for example, leaving the pencil on your desk until told to pick it up. There is no differentiation between the domain rules of valued ways of behaviour and rules for literacy practices and this amalgamation is typical of the type of domain we are looking at. Any classroom domain includes rules of conduct (for example respecting their workbooks), rules of behaviour (for example not getting up from their desks), specific rules of writing requirements (for example writing in full sentences) and other procedures because the idea of a classroom being a social semiotic domain fundamentally recognises people as members of a variety of social groupings. The rules of that domain then act to unify and regulate the various members of the domain. These rules are necessary in classroom domains because they can be used for various functions, discipline, and also control the members of the domain. In other words, children get school literacy as a practice that is inseparable from regulative discourses. That is why the teachers in the examples presented thus far used control methods for discipline and continuously regulated what was seen as domain-appropriated behaviour. The extract above is a good example of how a social semiotic domain such as a classroom is maintained and regulated through the way in which the teacher spent a lot of time emphasising discourse-specific literacy practices, while regulating domain-appropriate behaviour.

The Grade Fours at my research site were prepared for Grade Four work in a specific, localised way but as I illustrated in the previous sections of this chapter, that was because the other grades were receiving the same specific, localised literacy instruction, where a lot of time was spent on regulating domain-specific practices. The

data I presented in this chapter illustrated that at times, following the rules of the domain was seen as more important than learning, for example, in the Grade Four spelling drill. In that example, the fact that the children displayed domain 'fluency' was what counted for successful learning instead of the children being able to spell, use and understand the words in meaningful ways. The 'fluency' was therefore a measure of successful learning instead of the children's actual language use. The examples discussed in this chapter also indicated how internal and external factors had moulded and shaped the practices, rules and expectations in the classroom domains I investigated, and as such, these domain practices had become normalised within the context of my research site. Because the children are continuously being apprenticed into doing school appropriate activities in their local context, they become 'fluent' in school-appropriate abilities and come to take as normative the particular activities, ways of making and taking meaning, and rules for talking and turn-taking that were domain-specific. My analysis suggests, however, that what has become normalised as domain practice in this school can be seen as problematic from the perspective of what counts as school success in the externally-designed, standardised tests that are used to measure learning attainment.

Chapter 7: Summative conclusions

Throughout this thesis I underscored the importance of taking a holistic, critical interpretive approach to the study of literacy in multilingual contexts. This was the approach I took because my research school was in a multilingual context and I argued that internal (classroom-specific) and external (social, economic, political and historical) concerns and influences contributed to the specific dynamics of the contexts. I argued that in an attempt to understand and investigate the literacy practices and what characterised teaching and learning in this context, the influencing factors had to be looked at through an understanding that language is a socially constructed resource with context-specific social functions and values.

In the socially marginal setting of my research school, the teaching and learning were products of 'peripheral normativity' and a localised pedagogy where the levels of success were determined by the localised norms. The 'new' pedagogic solution to the unattainable ideals of the 'centre' resulted in the children learning the localised characteristics of learning in this peripheral setting. By knowing or learning the domain-specific rules, or by being 'fluent' within the domain practices, some of the students were able to achieve a 'level' of success in this context. However, the success was limited to this local setting because the children received a restricted notion of literacy and literacy practices.

Language stigmas regarding Afrikaans and English played a big role at my research site. An investigation of these issues led to a deeper exploration of the language constraints and struggles that some of the Grade Fours in my case study were dealing with. For example, they learnt that English was more valuable than Afrikaans, and that language was stratified both inside and outside the classroom. The 'social experiment' where Afrikaans parents chose to have their children educated in English, helped me to describe the literacy events, practices, teaching and learning activities through a social semiotic understanding of language use. The parents and the teachers' roles in orchestrating this shift (where some children ended up 'between' two languages) had

specific consequences and I used data to show how the socially-invested functions and values of language use characterised language learning. For example, how the Grade Four English class were taught that language was a bounded resource and that English was more valuable than Afrikaans.

The localised norms transpired because the teachers taught according to their own understandings of what teaching was and how to teach. As such, these teaching and learning characteristics could be common in other sub-elite classrooms and under-resourced schools. The teaching practices I investigated resulted in specific learning practices and I showed how in many ways, the children were more capable and successful at following domain-specific rules than discourse-specific rules.

I also discussed the role of education as a centring institution where language functions and values were regulated and maintained. I made the case that the downscaling of normativity to a more realistic and attainable local level of possibilities and norms was both a productive pedagogical instrument, and something that reproduced the systemic inequalities of the wider society in that children failed to acquire the high status resources associated with school success. As with the case study presented in chapter three, my case study showed that peripheral normativity can be seen as the localisation of education standards. This means that my case study can offer some insight into similar situations in other poorly-resourced schools in South Africa because the unobtainable educational levels of the centre were used in a localised way.

Education was 'downscaled' to bring it down to the level of the local community and at this level it borrowed the norms and expectations of the local environment in order to train learners in the localised codes and norms. A more realistic pedagogy of practice that valued local varieties of literacy was created through 'peripheral normativity,' and in this way, the school provided a solution to the otherwise unattainable 'ideal' academic norms of the centre. The localisation of norms that resulted in the specific teaching and learning practices was, however, problematic because they were a move away from the hegemonic norms of the centre. That meant that the students who displayed adequate

and successful literacy skills at this peripheral level, would be seen as unsuccessful and failing to achieve the norms and standards of the centre.

In conclusion, this thesis showed that being successful in a localised, peripheral setting does not necessarily guarantee Grade-level literacy skills or Grade-level academic results. That is because these skills and practices were localised, moulded and shaped by factors that were context-specific. These context-specific factors produced specific values regarding literacy, language use, reading and writing practices. These localised norms characterised the learning and teaching activities of the Grade Four classrooms at my research school, where the available language resources remained localised and as such, would not successfully transfer to other contexts.

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APPENDIXES

TRANSLATIONS: Afrikaans

Below are literal translations to the Afrikaans transcripts, lesson extracts, and writing samples discussed in this thesis. The English translations are in italics:

APPENDIX A

- 1 “Ek kou may kos met may tan[de]” – should be “my”
I chew my food with my teeth
- 2 “Vandag gan ons op die gras speel” – should be “gaan”
Today we will play on the grass
- 3 “wet” instead of “wit;” “klass” instead of “klas”
white; class
- 4 Question: Waarmee kou jy jou kos? Answer: “Met my gums”
Question: What do you chew your food with? Answer: “With my gums”

APPENDIX B

- 4 Die mense sing mooi in die koor. P’s answer: mouth
The people sing beautifully in the choir
- 5 Vandag gaan ek my ma ‘n vissie vang. P’s answer: kare
Today I will catch a fish for my mother
- 6 Die mense hardloop baie vinnig. P’s answer: foote
The people run very fast

APPENDIX C

Die mes is **skerp** maar die byl is skerp
*The knife is **sharp** but the axe is sharp*
Ek spring **hoog** maar sy spring hoog
*I jump **high** but she jumps high*
Die lig is nie **helder** nie dit is helder
*The light is not **bright** it is bright*
Die klas is nie **vuil** nie dit is vuil
*The class is not **dirty** it is dirty*
Jou hemp is nie **swart** nie dit is swart
*Your shirt is not **black** it is black*

APPENDIX D

- 1 After the comprehension piece was read {only once during this lesson, but the
2 piece is familiar to the class}, the T went over the questions. Most of the

3 answers were given orally and the PP were asked to work individually and write
4 down all the answers into their books in full sentences. For example, question
5 1 was: “Waarom het Annemarie haar vergaap?” The T told the PP to begin
6 “*What did Annemarie look in awe at?*”
7 their answers with: “Annemarie...” and to complete the answer in a full
8 sentence. The girl next to me wrote the following answer to question 1 {the
9 spelling mistakes she made are in bold text}:
10 “Almal lyk so haastig is hulle nie **miskin**.”
11 “*Everybody looks so rushed are the not perhaps.*”
12 “Sy vergaap haar aan al die mense wat so haastig in- en uitloop. *Almal lyk so*
13 *haastig. Is hulle nie miskien laat vir die trein nie?*”
14 “*She looks in awe at all the people who are so busy walking in and*
15 *out. Everybody looks so rushed. Are they not perhaps late for the*
16 *trains?*”
17 A boy sitting close to me wrote the correct answer into his book: “Annemarie
18 het haar aan die mense vergaap.” Question 2 asked: “Gee nog ‘n word vir
19 “*Annamarie looked in awe at all the people.*” “*Give another word for*
20 *suitcases*”
21 tasse” and the same girl answered:
22 “**nig** sy vergaap haar **al** mense. Wat is hulle.”
23 “in- en uitloop. Almal lyk so haastig. Is hulle.”
24 “[**quick**]ly she looked in awe at all the people. What are they.”
25 “in- en uitloop. Almal lyk so haastig. Is hulle.”
26 “[walk] in and out. Everybody looks so rushed. Are they.”
27 The T, who has been walking up and down the isles, saw that this girl was
28 randomly copying words from the comprehension piece as answers to the
29 questions. She told me that this girl was a support learner and then asked the
30 girl to answer one of the easier questions in the next section where the
31 children are given sentences and asked to fill in the missing word.
For example:
32 “Op die stasie lyk al die mense so _____” {the missing word is “haastig”}
33 “*At the station all the people look so _____*” (“*rushed*”)
34 The T asked the girl to go to the comprehension piece, look for the sentence
35 and then fill in the missing word. The girl was able to do this but when the T
36 moved on to the next desk, the girl continued to copy down the whole
37 sentence even though only one word was required. She then erased the
38 extra words and ended up with this answer:
39 “Op die stasie lyk al die mense so haastig”
40 “*At the station all the people look so rushed*”
41 She continued to answer the rest of the questions with nonsensical answers
42 by copying down any part of a sentence into the missing gaps where only one
43 word was required.

APPENDIX E

Listen very carefully, I will only give one instruction. Teacher will ask questions, your answers are in those two paragraphs. Now, there are rules, there are rules. You will now give me your answer in a full sentence, for example if I ask you, Nikita, what is your name? Then Nikita says, 'My name is Nikita'. That is when I tell you that your answer is in a full sentence. I give to Nikita an instruction: what is your name? And then your answer is written in a sentence. Stephan, you will reread your sentence to see if you any words, you will reread your sentence. Jerome, look if you made spelling mistakes. The golden rule is a sentence always begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop.

A sentence always begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop. Good, you will write your answer in your workbook. Look now, this book is a holy book. You know that it's a holy book.

Good the biggest rule is Teacher, no one stands up out of their desks, because Teacher will you will respect me and Jerome, you will help Teacher to not shout out unnecessarily.

We will help each other, né? Good. No one will begin because we don't know what to write. Right, what is the date today?

29 July.

Good. You will not write down the question, Brandon, you will not write the question, and Stephan, Nikita. Put the pencil down. Put the pencil down, you wait.

Teacher will just come and look if you wrote. You must be finished now. Teacher Jaftha will be very angry if there is anybody that used an eraser and presses too hard with his pencil. I will fight. Kathleen and I will fight a lot. When you are done draw your line, put your pencil down, put your pencil down. Are you done?

Your letter does not have to go over the line. Good.

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