Early language and literacy learning in a peripheral African setting: A study of children's participation in home and school communicative and literacy practices in and around Manzini, Swaziland

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Abstract

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This thesis is an ethnographic study of the early literacy development of four children from low-income families in and around Manzini, Swaziland. It investigated the orientations to literacy, language, and communication that children brought to school from home, vice versa, and the sorts of consequences that such traversing of sites has for the children's literacy development and schooling. It is the first study of literacy and children's literacy carried out in Swaziland from a socio-cultural perspective.

The study joins a growing body of New Literacy Studies research into the social practices that shape children's early literacy learning and a smaller body of such work from Africa. I used evidence from four children's home and school literacy lives, systematically collected by means of in-depth ethnographic case studies and used an interpretive analytical frame of enquiry. This study breaks with previous research in Swaziland by detailing the situated ways that reading and writing happen in specific socio-cultural contexts. It adopted an interpretive case-study approach that illuminates children's engagement in particular home- and school-based reading and writing practices. I based conclusions on a detailed study and analysis of each child case in keeping with ethnographic-style enquiry's quest for grounded theory; i.e., emanating directly from data evidence as opposed to imposing preconceptions. Resultant in-depth understanding of particular cases made it plausible to relate studied cases to the larger situation.

I show that teachers disregarded children's creative out-of-school communicative repertoires in literacy learning and that this was linked to the way that Swazi society (and perhaps other African contexts) generally subordinates children, who defer to and passively learn from the adults around them. Children initiated activities and expressed themselves only during unsupervised play at home and off-task in school, thereby manifesting language resources which remained invisible to adults at home and teachers in school. I argue that these children encountered a restricted form of literacy in school which neither drew from nor elaborated on their emerging communicative resources; nor provided them access to a substantial alternative resource for sense-making and communication which could form the basis of successful schooling careers, as well as post-school real-life literacy applications.

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Chapter 1

Children's failures to read and write

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is based on an ethnographic study of the early literacy development of four children from low-income families in and around Manzini, Swaziland. The study is the first empirical investigation in Swaziland into the orientations to literacy, language, and communication that children bring to school from home and from home to school, and the sorts of consequences that such traversing of sites has for children's literacy development and schooling. This is also the first study of literacy in general and children's literacy in particular carried out in Swaziland from a sociocultural perspective. The study joins a growing body of research into the social practices that shape children's early literacy learning and a smaller body of such work from Africa. I show in this thesis that children's creative out-of-school communicative repertoires were disregarded in literacy learning in the classroom and that this was linked to the way that Swazi society (and perhaps other African contexts) generally treats children as subordinates who defer to and passively learn from the adults around them. It was only during unsupervised play at home and off-task in school that children were free to initiate activities and express themselves, thereby manifesting language resources which remained invisible to adults at home and teachers in school. I argue that the children in my study encountered a restricted form of literacy in school which neither drew from nor elaborated on their emerging communicative resources; nor did it provide them access to a substantial and alternative resource for sense-making and communication which could form the basis of a successful schooling career.

My aim in this opening chapter is to outline the focus of the research that is the basis of my thesis. I begin by introducing the theoretical resources that shaped the research approach and analytic tools that I apply in the thesis. I go on to reveal children's reported reading and writing difficulties that are a focus of this study. I then state the study's aims and make explicit components of the main question the study sought answers to.

Next, I develop an account, drawing on the historical literature, of the background and development of schooling in Swaziland, from the Christian missionary movement to the colonial and post-colonial eras. I review this historical background in order to point to key characteristics of school education that were to be retained and gradually adapted to the Swazi socio-political setting for purposes of both mass schooling and the reproduction of a socio-political and economic elite class, during and after independence from the British. The contextual background is necessary for making sense of the particularities and idiosyncrasies of schooling in Swaziland in contemporary times.

I go on to describe post-independent Swaziland's macro socio-political setting, for similar reasons to those of the historical account: to make sense of aspects of the contemporary organisation of schooling and literacy instruction that are shaped by socio-political influences in a stratified society. For instance, an asymmetry of power characterized the introduction of literacy-based formal schooling by Christian missionaries whose language and literacy practices – reading and writing in English – carried more status than both the SiSwati language and indigenous education. This dominance of one set of language and literacy practices over another continues in contemporary Swazi schooling and society. Children of the elite benefit more from schooling because of their disproportionate exposure to communicative practices that are compatible with schooled ways (Heath, 1983). Because power figures in these different ways around literacy, it is important to deal with questions such as for what purposes literacy is used, who uses literacy, in whose interests, who sets the norms for good and bad literacy, what are the reasons for choosing those norms (Wedin, 2004: 8).

I then examine Swaziland's early literacy policy. I do this in order to gauge the extent to which the state's outlook on early literacy is consistent with or conflicts with the socio-cultural view of literacy taken in this study. Moreover, I want to understand the mode the state adopts to communicate policy to classroom practitioners for implementation. I strongly believe that the official definition of literacy policy and practitioners'

understanding of its objectives have a bearing on how teachers subsequently frame literacy's presentation to young learners in the classroom. My analysis of the official policy statement ultimately seeks to further illuminate the need for the current ethnographic approach to the study of literacy.

Next, I review research carried out in Swaziland around literacy in general and early literacy in particular. My intention here is twofold. Firstly, I seek to ascertain the extent and scope of research around literacy in general, and early literacy in particular, in Swaziland. Secondly, I want to assess the approaches to the study of literacy that previous research has adopted. I am of the view that just like policy statements, research approaches have a potential to entrench certain classroom practices and discourage others. It is important for the present study to identify gaps in previous research and to respond to them. Finally, I give an overall outline of the thesis structure.

1.2 Theoretical frame: the study of literacy as socio-cultural practice

My approach to this study of early literacy development is informed by a socio-cultural perspective. I draw on work in the New Literacy Studies (see Gee, 1996; Street, 2001), emergent literacy debates (see Clay, 1975; Dyson, 1993) and socio-cultural approaches (see Cazden, 2001; Comber, 2003). From this perspective, as I describe it in detail in chapter two, I view literacy as a complex socio-cultural practice rather than as a decontextualized, socio-culturally neutral, basic skill. Literacy is located within social practices and its acquisition does not lead to the same personal or social consequences for individuals and social groups wherever they are and whatever their socio-cultural circumstances. In learning literacy, the individual does not merely acquire the mechanics of reading and writing. Instead, the learner is apprenticed to particular, situated ways of speaking, reading and writing that are characteristic of particular social groups or fields of practice. By social group in this study I refer to the people with whom one is in interaction and with whom one engages in collective enterprises, be they the household activities of a family or the specialised activities of an institutional practice. It is now

increasingly recognized that acquiring the ways of one's group is not a one-way transference of pre-existing and static culture to a passive recipient. For this reason, the notion of bounded social groups is now considered to be insufficient in accounting for an individual's here-and-now active interaction with and hence recreation of one's culture in the intricate processes of socialization (Gee, 2008; Rampton, 1998; see also chapter 2, section 2.2 above for a detailed account of these concepts). For instance, one learns what can be said and done, where, how, and for what purposes under what circumstances with spoken or written language through active participation with others rather than passive reception of immutable facts and actions. The learners' agency, i.e., their active role in influencing and reshaping their social reality, of which literacy is a part, needs to be recognised. Literacy is part of the socialization of the learner into group membership and social identity processes (Vygotsky, 1978; Watson-Gegeo, 1992). Literacy should thus be redefined in terms of a situated or located social practice (Scribner and Cole, 1981) without predictable, general application across socio-cultural domains.

Nor does literacy happen in 'the world of books' in some kind of insular way, because words mean nothing until people actively put them to specific socio-cultural uses (Bakhtin, 1994). Literacy should therefore be studied as an event occurring in the world, in time, and in the multiple, often overlapping, contexts in which it is practised (Dyson, 1993). It is in contexts of usage that literacy reveals its social, cultural, and political dimensions, otherwise overlooked by earlier research approaches. If literacy were a socially and culturally neutral technology, perhaps it wouldn't be conserved and distributed disproportionately by dominant social groups through schools and other agencies to preserve their privileges over subordinate groups. Literacy as a social practice is part of the reproduction and maintenance of social inequalities, empowering some while disadvantaging others.

The socio-cultural view of literacy described above takes account of children's differences at the individual level as well. It does that by not assuming that all children are the same, learn at the same pace, and present similar evidence of literacy development

through distinctly observable developmental sequences irrespective of where they live, what learning opportunities are at their disposal, and what each child chooses to attend to at a given time (Kress, 1997). I take the view that children's literacy development follows differing pathways (Clay, 1998) or forms because of children's different backgrounds, motivations and interests, but that, whatever the route, language plays a pivotal role, in conjunction with other semiotic modalities for communication. Though literacy learning everywhere specifically involves de-coding and coding of signs and the learning of particular sign systems, this study takes the view that the coding mechanics don't autonomously account for literacy development, in that literacy practices have socio-culturally specific meanings and situated social applications, which mark them as neither universal nor neutral. This contrasts sharply with common behaviourist classroom approaches to literacy, which see literacy learning as progressive engagement with increasingly complex skills whose acquisition happens the same way for everyone irrespective of their socio-cultural context.

In this study I assume that English second language (ESL) learners at school are children who are competent first language speakers by the time they embark on their school literacy careers. They have thus developed ways of knowing and of being through this language and their own experiences. I wondered, as I approached fieldwork, if children's home linguistic repertoires were viewed as a resource or a hindrance to literacy development. I wondered whether or not classrooms reduce learning to read and write to the tracing out of letters and making words out of them instead of teaching children written language that connects with sense and meaning making in their home language (Vygotsky, 1978). These questions arose from my conviction, derived from my review of relevant literature presented in chapter two, that just as socialization entails becoming a competent member of one's social group, literacy development also entails developing as a person who comes to use a symbol system commonly shared by his or her group for his or her own social needs and purposes (Dyson, 1993). Swaziland is a unique socio-cultural setting in relation to those analyzed in the wider literature. Locating this study within the wider debate included establishing the extent to which reading and writing formed an

integral part of Swazi children's home and school life. The task equally involved ascertaining if these literacy practices reflect in children's free play activities at home and in school. In the next subsection, I point out significant implications for classroom research of a socio-cultural orientation to the study of literacy.

1.2.1 Implications for classroom research from a socio-cultural perspective on literacy

The implications of research from a socio-cultural conception of literacy are enormous. Schools and classrooms, charged with delivering literacy, are not socially and culturally neutral or value-free sites. For instance, the teachers and children who populate classrooms occupy different power spaces (Watson-Gegeo, 1992). The ideologies that define and shape the larger socio-political context in which the school functions inform the actions of teachers and children and how they relate to one another in the classroom. These variously located players in the school and classroom may not explicitly recognize the tacit power relations at play in participation structures at the classroom level. However, teachers' decisions about approaches to literacy instruction derive from how they see themselves relative to both policy makers and learners. In this sense, teaching and learning literacy in the classroom is not merely about decoding and encoding abilities. It also serves as an important mediational tool through which wider relationships with others are subtly enacted and transacted (Dyson, 1993).

What transpires in classrooms should also be seen relative to larger institutional and socio-political dynamics to which it is responsive and of which it is reflective. I am wary of studying the classroom as though it were a complete research site; one whose activities can be fully grasped with little or no reference to external factors that inevitably exert pressure on it. I therefore wanted to find out if larger social processes and institutional practices shape classroom and community interactions in some ways. I sought to enquire if children from poor home backgrounds, for instance, fail school-based literacy more because of what possibilities the official classroom climate opens up and shuts for them rather than because of their poverty and the deprivation of their environment. I wanted to

find out if possibilities for children in the classroom resonate with the socio-political space assigned to children in the larger social context in which the school functions. My task as I approached fieldwork in rural and urban settings, however, included being cautious about drawing conclusions too quickly about the relationships between poverty, disadvantage and school outcomes. My focus turns in the next section to a discussion of the research focus.

1.3 Research problem: reading and writing failures in Swazi schools

This study investigates early childhood literacy learning in Swaziland. Early literacy is a relatively under-researched field in Swaziland, yet it arguably lays the foundation for every child's learning success or failure in subsequent years. Successive studies by the Ministry of Education (MoE) have invariably decried primary school graduates' inability to read and write in both SiSwati and English (MoE, 1995; 2000). In a small-scale qualitative study of Grade Four reading instruction Masilela (1999: 23) remarked:

> Complaints about the inability of pupils in primary schools to read [and write] both English and SiSwati have assumed such alarming proportions that one cannot but wonder what has gone wrong. Are primary school children losing interest in reading [and writing]? Or are teachers not doing the right thing when it comes to teaching reading [and writing]?

An earlier study of Grades Five, Six, and Seven[1] writing lessons established difficulties arising mainly from teacher and children's dependence on the textbook and limited exposure to other reading materials (S. Dlamini, 1999). The present study is a sequel to that earlier research. It aims to narrow the focus to a smaller sample to facilitate an in-

[1]Swazi schooling starts at Grade One. Preschool is not compulsory and not all Grade One entrants have preschool experience. Primary schooling runs from Grade One to Seven, Secondary schooling lasts from Grade Eight to Grade Twelve. Progression from preschool to Grade 1 is not always automatic as in most cases it is children who pass Grade 1 entry tests who find places in the schools of their parents' choice. The rest are absorbed by schools that do not insist on school 'preparedness' and these are often not the best schools.

depth description and analysis to enhance understanding of how children begin to learn to read and write, what difficulties they encounter, how the difficulties arise, and how children negotiate their way around difficulties in and out of class. The study offers an alternative approach to the study of literacy, and the findings will hopefully inform future policy, research, and ultimately classroom practice. This is because, unlike the earlier studies, this ethnographic study seeks a holistic understanding of classroom phenomena. That is, this ethnographic inquiry takes into account the various aspects that impact on literacy learning rather than studying the different bits in isolation or out of context.

When I started this research I had already developed an opinion from my reading of the wider literature (e.g., Heath, 1983; Prinsloo & Bloch, 1998), that the reading and writing challenges of children from low-income families owe much to the nature of the interface between their home cultural and linguistic repertoires and school literacy. I was therefore interested in seeing how those arguments apply in an under-researched African context - Swaziland. Below I enumerate the aims of the research.

1.4 Aims of the research

In its conception the research aimed specifically to:

- collect evidence of home- and school-based communicative practices, habits and literacy events, as orientations to language and literacy practices;
- examine the nature of differences between home- and school-based communicative and literacy practices; and
- examine the extent to which home-based communicative and literacy practices are recognized, drawn on or ignored in the school literacy domain and the effect this has on children's performance on school literacy learning.

In the research I set out to investigate young low-income children's paths into literacy. I tracked children's orientations to the uses of language and literacy through the communicative practices the children are exposed to in home and school contexts. I sought to analyze the nature of differences and/or similarities between home- and school-

based orientations to the uses of language and literacy and to examine the linkages and discords between school and non-school emergent literacy orientations on the part of children. I examined the extent to which such differences and/or similarities facilitate or hinder early schooling for children whose socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds differ from those preferred by teachers in classrooms.

1.4.1 Relevance of the research

I view the significance and relevance of the study at two broad levels. At the local level of the Swaziland context, the study augments and extends research around literacy in general and children's early literacy development in particular. I also hope that my argument that children's home-based communicative repertoires are discarded in the classroom will contribute to literacy policy debates and improved classroom practice. This is the first study of children's emerging language and literacy as social practices carried out in Swaziland. As such, it tackles literacy's embeddedness in cultural contexts as opposed to views of literacy as a neutral set of skills with universal applicability across different socio-cultural contexts. I examine theories derived from research findings elsewhere, which have challenged claims that low-income children's socio-cultural and linguistic deficiencies necessarily impede literacy acquisition and thus account for school failure. I make the case that only systematic enquiry like the present study can confirm or disconfirm whether low-income children's home backgrounds interfere with literacy acquisition and cause school failure or whether schools initiate such children's difficulties by viewing their cultural and linguistic repertoires in terms of problems to be carefully prevented from polluting literacy learning in the classroom. The findings of a localized study like this point to wider dynamics with regard to home and school in an African context. I now detail the research question which I address in the study.

1.4.2 Research question

The question I set out to answer at the commencement of the research was:

What emergent language and literacy orientations do low-income ESL Swazi children bring with them to school and to what extent are these drawn on, recognised or ignored at the level of classroom interactions around literacy and learning, with what kinds of potential or actual consequences for children's language and literacy development and success at school?

The research question identified a need to understand and come to terms with the impact of home-school differences on children's literacy and learning achievement. As described earlier, the first step in answering this question was to develop an overview perspective on how a peculiar western form of education known as schooling became the key literacy training agency in Swazi society. The next section traces the origins of school learning based on reading and writing. It highlights key features of the new school education, which first co-existed with a pre-existing indigenous one before eventually blending with and replacing it.

1.5 From indigenous to school-based education

In this section I develop an overview, drawn from secondary sources, of the growth of school-based education. I start by going back to pre-colonial Swaziland's initial contact with European Christian missionaries and South African Afrikaner land and mineral concession seekers between the middle of the 18th and the late 19th centuries respectively. I develop an historical account of the manner in which education shifted from its indigenous form to schooling in colonial and post-colonial times. I examine historians' accounts of the socio-political and economic factors within and outside Swaziland that facilitated the shift from one educational form to the other, as well as the implications of this for the current form of education that characterises the Swazi setting.

Present day Swaziland is a small sovereign southeast African state. Swaziland was reportedly one of the last societies in Southern Africa to be subordinated to white imperial rule in the 19th Century (Bonner, 1983). Bonner argued that in addition to this

fact, Swaziland also played a pivotal role in the configuration of the socio-political and economic make up of the region in the same period. He was, however, concerned that the historical evolution of the Swazi state was misunderstood owing in large part to the fact that it is grossly under-researched. This situation arose because the early historical accounts by Europeans such as Kuper (1963: 73 - 84), portrayed Swazi society simplistically as a mere outcome of wider political events in southern and south-eastern Africa, to do with the wider dynamics of colonial conquest, European settlement and industrialization in that region, as though Swazis had no active influence on these events themselves. Bonner attributed the skewed representation of early Swazi historiography to the historians' failure to engage directly and seriously with Swazi data sources such as oral traditions, resulting in them interpreting Swazi ways from a Eurocentric perspective.

Though Bonner (1983) acknowledged attempts by Swazi historian Matsebula to focus more firmly on the Swazis in the late 1970s and 1980s, he was still concerned that Matsebula's writings lacked analytical detail because they were more of a survey. Only Kuper (1980) in particular, observed Bonner (1983: 3) "provides an unrivalled insight into the functioning of Swazi politics…". Bonner was still concerned, however, that though exceptionally rich in historical allusions, Kuper's (1980) analysis was problematic from a contemporary historian's point of view. Bonner (1983: 1) argued that like other writers of her time, Kuper's work reflected dominant assumptions about the backwardness and stasis of African societies to which was often added their incapacity to shape history. Bonner argued that the structural-functionalist school of analysis that was dominant in anthropology in the middle of the 20th century reinforced the idea of stasis in African societies. Bonner concluded that the limited success of these few writers has rendered Swazi history both under-researched and misunderstood.

Perhaps partly due to the general misrepresentation of Swazi history, the country's comparatively smaller territorial size relative to its neighbours, and the fact that indigenous Swazis comprise several clans who speak one tribal language, SiSwati, Swazis have for a long time come to regard themselves as a monocultural or culturally

homogeneous society. In a study grounded in archival and oral sources, Bonner (1983) specifically set out to put Swazi history in its proper perspective; i.e., to attempt to show how thoroughly intertwined were domestic, political, and economic processes with a whole host of forces from outside. The study emphasized, from an Africanist tradition, the uniqueness of the Swazi experience, and the dynamic role Swazis played in shaping their wider political environment. For instance, Bonner (1983) and Kuper (1963: 45) noted that Swazi leaders adopted (and continue to do so to this day) control over labour and reproduction through an age regiment system invented by the Zulu king Shaka in the early 19th century. The point affirmed that, like other societies in the region, the Swazis of the late 18th and early 19th centuries were influenced by forces from outside just as they took hold of innovations that worked for them and themselves also had a reciprocal influence on wider events.

Freund (1984: 139) corroborated Bonner's (1983) observations, particularly his assessment that domestic socio-political and economic processes within Swaziland interacted with similar and other forces from outside in shaping the evolution of the early Swazi state in relation to its southern African neighbours. He argued, for instance, that Swaziland was a classic locale for indirect British colonial rule "a condition that went well with the depredations of 'traditional' authority reinforcing its own controls while acting in the colonial economic interests." Carpenter (1975: 32), however, reported that the British initially resisted direct political control of Swaziland on grounds that there was very little economic benefit to them from such an arrangement. It was not until the Boers (white Afrikaner South African farmers) claimed two-thirds of Swazi territory in 1895 (Matsebula, 1988: 62) through controversial land concessions that the British finally heeded the Swazis' appeal for political 'protection' from the Boers at the end of the Anglo-Boer war in 1902 (Carpenter, 1975: 33). Carpenter (1975: 33) and Matsebula (1988: 62) agreed that as soon as King Sobhuza II ascended the Swazi throne in 1921 he resumed talks earlier initiated by his grandmother Queen Regent Gwamile with the British to return Swaziland's independence. Sobhuza, at the same time commissioned Swazi men to work in South Africa's gold mines in order to buy back Swazi concession

lands from the Boers. According to Kuper (1980, 31), Queen Regent Gwamile had welcomed Western formal school education brought by early Christian missionaries because she saw in it an effective cultural tool in the quest to gain back lost Swazi territory as well as in the economic development of her people.

According to the foregoing accounts therefore, Swazis, or at least dominant groups amongst them, were not static spectators while outsiders shaped their history. Instead, they continuously adjusted socio-economic practices and positioned themselves to co-exist with powerful as well as subordinate others within and outside Swaziland in a constantly changing socio-political and economic environment. It is from this premise that this study takes a critical view of suggestions that educational transformation was purely externally determined, passively accepted, and wholly implemented. Such a notion of culture and cultural transmission is problematic because it overlooks socio-historical events that inevitably influenced the birth of the Swazi nation and its educational and cultural evolution (Bonner, 1983). In this study, therefore, I regard culture as neither a static nor a neutral notion.

Present day Swaziland evolved from the conquests of the ruling Dlamini clan. The Dlaminis defeated and incorporated the clusters of both the Nguni and Sotho tribal groups they came across on their inward migration from their original home on the Mozambican coastline and those they found already in present day Swaziland (Kuper, 1980). From these incorporations, Mthethwa (1985) argued that there emerged a heterogeneous Swazi society in that the conquered tribes were persuaded to assimilate the language and cultural practices of their conquerors because of the prestige attached to them, especially, the SiSwati dialect, while they still retained distinctive aspects of their own. For instance, particular dialectal characteristics in the SiSwati vocabulary and style of different cultural groups are still evident to this day, particularly along Swaziland's borders with neighbouring Mozambique in the east, and with the Zulu of South Africa in the southeast, which can be contrasted with the dialect spoken by the royal family in

central Swaziland[2]. Historical events such as the arrival of Christian missionaries and the later incorporation of Swaziland as a colony of the British Empire added a small European settler population. Such events altered the demographics, politics, and cultural character of the country and introduced reading and writing as the basis of schooling (Mthethwa, 1985).

Kuper (1963, 1980) argued that formal school education however did not immediately replace indigenous informal Swazi education, which continued to co-exist with the former for some time. A number of factors facilitated this initial co-existence. For instance, a traditional Swazi communal structure founded on a very strong extended family bond ensured that relatives passed on to their young the customs and values of the family, clan, community, and nation. Traditional economic activities such as subsistence agriculture and livestock farming also enhanced the bond of the extended family unit because of their labour intensity. From birth to about six months, Swazi babies were commonly either held or strapped to the mother's back with a sling. From six months, older siblings and young and old extended family members took turns in holding and playing with the baby when the mother was busy. From around the age of two years when the toddler was finally weaned from its mother's milk and close care, it was left to independently associate with peers, in the care of children not much older than itself. The toddler incidentally learned accepted rules of behaviour mostly through first watching and then increased participation in play, song, dance, riddles, household chores, etc. I say incidentally because there was no predetermined curriculum or designated teacher in this learning. Instead, the socio-cultural setting, which included play peers, was both curriculum and teacher. Here, disobedience or rudeness on the part of younger children incurred instant rebuke and the threat of physical punishment such as a sharp slap across the face. There was no constant adult supervision (Kuper, 1963: 53). Seniority was

[2]For instance, the Swazis in southern Swaziland speak a SiSwati dialect that mixes Zulu and SiSwati. The Swazis in eastern Swaziland speak a SiSwati dialect that has features of various Bantu languages such as Shangaan, Tsonga, etc., reflective of constant contact with people from Mozambique. The royal family in central Swaziland speak a 'polished' SiSwati dialect regarded as the standard due to the high social status of the royal family.

nevertheless observed and younger children generally learned from observing and emulating older siblings and playmates. Children generally could not question the authority of their elders or they would be punished for being disrespectful. In fact, children were left to mingle and learn from their peers, because adults would not sit and engage them in direct instructional conversation, in contrast to what is reportedly common amongst Western middle-class families (Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983). As a sign of respect, children would normally never initiate conversation with their elders, lest they be viewed as unacceptably forward.

Kuper (1963) observed that children's play was largely based on activities from the adult world and was gendered. For instance, while boys might model clay oxen, cars, or guns, girls pretended to cook and care for babies and the house. Children of both sexes built miniature huts and acted out the roles of relatives. Children would converge in the evening around the grandmother's hearth where the old women entertained them to sleep with fables, often with a moral message at their core. Sometimes a legend was narrated, dealing with clan history or clan heroism. "The focused education of boys and girls [was] differentiated in accordance with the male and female roles in [Swazi] society" (Kuper, 1963: 51). For instance, boys went out to the world of herding cattle, hunting, acquiring knowledge of nature, learning to fend for themselves, returning to listen to direct lessons about responsible growing up from adult males by the cattle enclosure, etc., while girls remained home to accompany their mothers to draw water, clean the house and yard, cook, collect firewood, baby-sit, etc. With relatively less freedom of movement than boys, girls' closeness to their mothers offered the opportunity to be tutored on how to look after themselves until they were 'ready for marriage'. The formal European school-based education system therefore was to subsequently replace a communal[3] indigenous

[3]There was a prevailing attitude that property and amenities were communally owned by the entire family and ultimately the community, and not by individuals. Adults also generally regarded every child in the community as their child. For this reason, all adults had a communal responsibility to teach every child who in turn respected and learned from all adults.

education founded on the seniority and authority of the age-class or regiment system (Kuper, 1980).

Kuper (1980) reported that Queen Regent Gwamile who reigned in the interregnum and King Sobhuza II's coronation in 1921 welcomed Western education brought by Christian missionaries. Kuper (1980) claimed that the Queen did this in order to arm the young crown prince with book knowledge to enable him to negotiate with the Boers and to win back Swazi concession land, which constituted two-thirds of original Swazi territory (see Carpenter, 1975: 33), signed away by previous king Mbandzeni in 1895 (Matsebula, 1988: 62). According to Kuper's (1980) account therefore, Western education was initially desired only for the future king, princes, and sons of chiefs who would ultimately work closely with the king. This education was not at first intended for the general population because they did not need to negotiate with the white settlers. In fact, the ruling elite saw Western education based on literacy as a double-edged sword through which to resist European domination and at the same time entrench their own political hegemony over the indigenous population.

It is, however, also likely that from the outset the royal elite viewed education with suspicion, as a potential source of social discontent and resistance to their rule, as was the case elsewhere in Africa. The Swazi political elite's discriminatory application of modern education was also a perception on their part of the superior status and power of European education and its potential to alter social dynamics such as the prevailing asymmetry of power. It is likely too that the European land and mineral concessionaires' use of the written word to control Swazis' land fuelled this suspicion that literacy would awaken a hitherto subservient population to question authority. Thus, it was only later that education incrementally filtered down to commoners as the need arose to facilitate the missionary work of preaching Christianity based on the written Bible (S.R. Dlamini, 2006). Initially only a few national schools were built. Subsequently, however, mass schooling followed, partly in response to the settler economy's need for a workforce that

was literate enough to follow instructions and communicate with their new English-speaking employers and other authorities.

The use of English as the medium of instruction in schools from the inception of Western formal schooling entrenched the language's superior social status compared to SiSwati. It is important to note that schooling emphasized and rewarded individual ability as opposed to the communal effort at the heart of the moral instruction of indigenous education. When the communal spirit of the extended family structure still prevailed, children learnt the Christian missionary ways in school and went back home to learn the traditional way of life. The communal-individual dichotomy is important for this study, which, following the NLS's 'social turn', takes a social practice stance on literacy and recognizes the influence of the socio-cultural milieu in socialisation in general and literacy learning in particular. Initially, there did not seem to be serious tensions between the two forms. However, as already pointed out above, Swazi leaders were already sceptical about the consequences of mass schooling and did their best to undo the damage of schooling by pointing out that it was only important to enable their children to interact with the settlers, but that it should never be allowed to alter their culture and customs (Kuper, 1980).

As twentieth-century Swazis continued to be alienated from their principal means of livelihood – land and livestock – the men turned to concession farms for wage employment in order to support their families (Freund, 1984). In order to accelerate the creation of mass labour, the settler administration introduced a hut tax, which every adult male was required to pay (Matsebula, 1988). Thereafter Swazi men no longer simply sought employment to support families, but they were legally bound to earn money with which to pay the mandatory tax enforced through the traditional leadership at the community level (Freund, 1984; Matsebula, 1988). The settler administration slowly transformed a traditionally subsistence agricultural Swazi economy into a capitalist one (Freund, 1984). The systematic transformation of the Swazi way of living over the years has seen women leaving their traditional role as household caretakers to join the labour

market to supplement dwindling household incomes. The advent of manufacturing industries in the twentieth century has resulted in massive rural-urban migration as people try to find increasingly scarce employment in towns. Swazi men found employment in growing numbers as far away as the emerging diamond and gold mining industries of South Africa's Kimberley and Johannesburg, leaving their families behind in the process.

The social effects of capitalist restructuring on the extended Swazi family structure and indigenous education have been enormous (Carpenter, 1975; Freund, 1984; Kuper, 1980; Matsebula, 1988). The pressure for the economically active to go out and find work resulted in the gradual breakdown of extended families (Kuper, (1980). Extended families have given way to nuclear ones comprising an adult couple and their children, or to single parent families, headed mostly by women. Communal ownership of resources has given way to individual ownership and competition for scarce resources. Boys and girls no longer have their grandparents or other relatives to teach them (Kuper, 1980). This separation from the extended family has widely left children without the traditional folktales that used to characterize family evenings (1980). Urban parents leave for work in the morning and return in the evening; often too tired to even help children with homework (S.R. Dlamini, 2006). Even in rural areas where subsistence farming still persists, the extended family and its traditional education are said to have virtually died out (Gulaid, 2007). The modern money economy has pervaded Swazi life to the extent that every adult now focuses mainly on providing for their own direct family and leaves relatives to fend for themselves (Gulaid, 2007). Nowadays, children do school homework on their own, play, or watch evening TV with their parents where this is possible (Dlamini, 2006). Education is now largely an exclusively school business, except for a few middle-class homes where parents may appreciate and heed schools' increasing calls for parental involvement in their children's schoolwork (Dlamini, 2006).

1.5.1 Schooling in post-colonial Swaziland

The dismantling of the division of education and schools along ethnic lines at independence opened formerly European schools to indigenous children (Mthethwa,

1985). A bi-product of the desegregation of schools was their further division into English language medium and predominantly SiSwati language medium schools. The majority of English medium schools were former European and Euro-African schools, the bulk of whose enrolment was made up of the children of English speaking European settlers. As the number of European settlers continued to decline after independence (many left), so did the distinction between English medium and Swazi schools, as the former enrolled increasingly more indigenous children. There has always been a tendency, even among indigenous Swazis themselves, to equate the eventual departure of Europeans, and the subsequent absorption of their schools into the public sector, with a decline in educational standards (MoE, 1985). Claims of dropping educational standards are not baseless though. Post-independence Swaziland Government (GoS) efforts emphasized basic education expansion with very little regard for quality (Ministry of Education (MoE), 1985: 26). This expansion culminated in the attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 1984 – loosely meaning the availability of classroom space for every school age child (MoE, 1985). However, soon enrolment outstripped available classroom space, learning materials, and the number of qualified teachers. This imbalance resulted in overcrowding, the employment of unqualified teachers, and general wastage manifested by high rates of repetition and dropout (MoE, 1985). In response, GoS has since the mid-1980s also attended to both education expansion and quality provision (MoE, 1994a; 1994b; GoS, 1994; 1995). Nevertheless, quality continues to be a problem and a concern. Concern about declining standards also explains, in part, the advent of English medium urban private schools a decade and a half ago (Boampong, 2001: 18). These urban schools enrol children of non-SiSwati speaking black and white foreigners as well as children of middle- and lower-class indigenous Swazis who associate private schools with a higher quality of education. It is fair to observe that the advent of private schools also came as a relief to the state, whose schools could no longer accommodate all the country's school-going population (Boampong, 2001: 18). The prevailing belief in the superior quality of private school education has inspired more lower-income parents to invest their hard-earned savings in private school education for their children. A defining feature of the quality of private schools is their adherence to English medium instruction

from the first through to the last grade of schooling (Mngomezulu, 1985). Through this English medium policy, private schools are believed to produce proficient speakers and writers of the country's official second language, mastery of which is widely thought to guarantee better further education and other career prospects (MoE, 1992; 1985; 1994a; 1994b) in a hierarchical and competitive neo-colonial economic environment. In this regard, English-medium instruction continues to be conflated with better education. It is important to note that successive post-independence Swaziland governments have retained not only the English medium policy, but also the use of a predominantly elitist education whose purpose is the selection of the few for limited job opportunities and the 'cooling out' of the masses of school leavers. A 1985 National Educational Review Commission (NERCOM) report recommended a more culturally relevant school curriculum for Swaziland's children. As a result, NCC for the first time developed textbooks that incorporated Swazi names, more localized content, graphics, and concepts. However, education is still largely geared toward elite selection whose members comprise the royal family, state officials and professionals. These are the people who enjoy the benefits of school education. The majority still eke out a living from subsistence farming or as unskilled labourers or both (UNDP, 2003). The attainment of English dominated Western-type school education remains the only path to wage employment, which has since eclipsed livestock and subsistence farming as most people's source of livelihood, wealth, and status.

The dominance of the English language in and outside the school lives of Swaziland's citizens can be understood from other perspectives as well. English plays a dominant role in the official, legal, political, and commercial spheres, even though daily communication at the personal level among native Swazis continues to be in SiSwati. While SiSwati is also an official language, English is the language of international trade, global communication and cultural exchange, as well as diplomatic relations. English has a higher value and status not just in education but also with regard to its perceived and actual influence on individual's social mobility. Even the way in which the two official languages are taught in the country's school system betrays a strong bias toward the

superiority of English to SiSwati. Unlike SiSwati, English is not just taught as a subject but is also the Language of Instruction, through which the rest of the curriculum is taught. It is hardly surprising that contrary to MoE policy requirements for the simultaneous development of SiSwati and English, particularly in the early Grades, urban and rural schools are invariably under pressure from parents to go 'straight for English'. Thus, it can be seen that language ideologies, i.e., theories and beliefs about which SiSwati dialect or language, and which of SiSwati and English, is socio-economically more viable have existed from pre-colonial through colonial and post-independence Swaziland. In the next section, I discuss Swaziland's broader post-independence political setting in order to further reflect on the way in which education has been implicated in continued elite reproduction and in the dynamics around the division of labour.

1.6 Swaziland's macro socio-political context

Swaziland has been a sovereign absolute monarchy since 1968 when decades of British "imperial protection", as the occupation was officially termed, eventually gave way to self-rule (Matsebula, 1988). In 1973 the then king Sobhuza II decreed the repeal of the 1968 Westminster independence constitution, and proscribed political parties and opposition (GoS, 1973), on the premise that the British-conceived constitutional arrangement had thus far proven too divisive and unworkable for Swaziland (GoS, 1973). Since then the king (and since 1986, his successor Mswati III) has wielded sweeping executive powers that supersede both the legislature and the judiciary, in a unique political dualism that ambiguously melds modern and traditional governance (GoS, 2005: S15). This imbalance of political power has resulted in systemic socioeconomic inequality manifested by the continued consolidation of aristocratic hegemony and the marginalization of the general masses (Hlophe, 2007: 19). As a result, Swaziland is ranked number five among countries of the world with serious income inequality, with the highest 20% controlling two-thirds of the economy as opposed to a mere 2.7% controlled by the lowest 20% of the population (UNDP, 2003: 6). An estimated 69% of Swaziland's estimated one million people lived below the poverty datum line (UNDP,

2003: 5) mainly due to inequitable distribution of state resources (GoS, 1999). Widespread poverty has progressively meant that children of the poor majority cannot access quality education. Quality education is generally believed to be located in good urban public and private schools. The high tuition fees at such schools can only be afforded by the minority elite whose children are therefore guaranteed better employment and a better life. Despite a prevailing clamp on political dissent since 1973, however, undercover political groupings, pressure groups, non-governmental and civic organisations, and the international community had by the turn of the millennium exerted enough pressure on the king and his government for them to partially heed calls for social reform through the implementation of an all-inclusive national policy document, the *National Development Strategy* (NDS) (GoS, 1999: 1). The eventual launch of the NDS was however received with mixed feelings as pro-reform stakeholders criticized, in particular, the removal by traditional authorities of a chapter that addressed the important area of governance, which recommended the speedy codification of Swazi Law and Custom (SLC); clear and effective separation of powers between the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary; as well as the re-introduction of a multiparty system (Hlophe, 2007: 19). Thus, in 2005 Swaziland's first written constitution since 1973 was promulgated - widely perceived as a reluctant, tentatively progressive move toward modern democracy, characterized by a deliberately protracted return to political pluralism (GoS, 2005). The new constitution ambivalently promised possible re-establishment of a political party system. The constitution does not explicitly remove the 1973 decree or unban political parties. It only states that any law that is inconsistent with the constitution shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, become void (GoS, 2005: S15) and guarantees freedom of assembly and association, though election to a non-party parliament is strictly on an individual basis and not on a political party basis (GoS, 2005: S51).

Patriarchy and children's rights posed yet another social challenge that the constitution proposed to redress through a bill of fundamental rights and freedoms (GoS, 2005: S15). On the ground, a stratified social hierarchy that subordinated women and children to men, as a voiceless minor stratum, still prevails (GoS, 1999). The patriarchal class

stratification had intensified with the advent of 19th century British colonial occupation, which eroded livestock and subsistence agriculture. Farming was the source of most people's wealth and status and was the mainstay of the Swazi traditional family – (Carpenter, 1975; Kuper, 1980; Matsebula, 1988). The decline in farming ushered in wage employment, turning men into labourers who owned nothing and only exercised authority over their households – wives and children. Currently, uneducated poor peasant women in rural areas, who form the majority of the population, still uphold the practice of deferring to men and, in turn, expect children to unquestioningly defer to all adults at home and in school. Only in towns and amongst the middle-classes were gender, human, and children's rights issues beginning to be concerns (GoS, 1999: 39; Dlamini, 2006: 22-23). A royal committee which finalized the constitution actually deleted a clause that guaranteed women cultural parity with men (GoS, 2005: S30) on the claim that the provision in the Bill of Rights was unworkable, particularly in relation to Swazi Law and Custom (SLC). The codification of SLC is still incomplete but it forms the basis of the traditional wing of the system of dual governance referred to earlier (GoS, 1999: 7; Hlophe, 2007: 19). Swazi traditional leaders still view education with suspicion because they believe that education is largely responsible for the growing clamour for further reform (Dlamini, 2006: 17). King Mswati III enrols his children in schools in the USA and UK in the belief that Western education is superior to local education. However, the king's appointment into crucial political positions of less educated officials, including a Minister of Health and Social Welfare, in 2006, who has only passed Grade Ten (Dlamini, 2006: 17) is inconsistent with this assumption. The constitution in fact allows Swazi citizens eighteen years and above to stand for the country's non-party Tinkhundla[4] elections, and stipulates no prerequisite educational qualification (GoS, 2005: S53). On the one hand, the constitution's silence on educational qualification and the king's appointment of loyalists irrespective of their qualifications call to question Swazis' general belief in a correlation between education and improved career prospects. On the

[4]This is the prevailing non-party political system in Swaziland under which the electorate may only vote a candidate from a local constituency into parliament on individual merit despite a constitutional provision for freedom of association and assembly.

other hand, some social commentators have argued that educational qualifications alone would be detrimental to a government that dislikes criticism and opposition (Dlamini, 2006). It would seem that schooling and school qualifications alone are no guarantee for better employment, socio-economic advancement, and ultimately power. Instead, schooling acts in collaboration with a host of other socio-cultural dynamics to ensure an individual's access to power.

The summary presented here has described the socio-political backdrop that inevitably impacted on the domestic and school lives of the children I studied, as detailed in the chapters that follow. The classrooms and homesteads where this research took place were distinct sites, which nonetheless, cannot be treated in isolation from the larger social world in which they are located.

The connection between the material in this section and my interest in early literacy lies in the fact that early literacy teaching and learning does not happen in a socio-cultural vacuum. The social dynamics shaping the larger social milieu in which schools and teachers teach young children how to read and write often play out in subtle ways in the manner in which teaching and learning is designed, as chapter two below elaborates. My focus in this section has therefore been to examine how literacy learning is situated with regard to power dynamics emanating from outside the classroom. In the next section, I examine Swaziland's early literacy policy with a view to establishing its intentions and how they are communicated to classroom teachers for implementation.

1.7 Swaziland's literacy policy

Swaziland has a broad education policy from which national intentions for language and early literacy development are implicitly deduced (MoE, 1998). Otherwise, snippets of specific official stipulations for language and early literacy are contained in various MoE circulars, the most definitive of which is *The Nine Year Programme of Instruction for English* (MoE, 1992). In the few schools where this key document is available it is often

locked away in the head teacher's office and most teachers have never even seen it (Dlamini, 1999). An earlier research project which I carried out investigated the use of English as Swaziland's medium of instruction, and found that the then education system was, in response to recommendations of the NERCOM report (1985), in the process of evolving from that inherited from the colonial period (Dlamini, 1988). There was, however, then neither an explicitly formulated language policy nor an explicit literacy policy – a situation that persists to this day.

Motivation for this study arose from the fact that formal school literacy learning practices form a critical part of early and subsequent learning due to the importance of text and text-linked learning in schooling. For this reason, early emergence and development of school-appropriate orientations to literacy and learning are so crucial that it may be counterproductive to leave them entirely to chance; i.e., without clear official policy direction. This is particularly so in English as a second language (ESL) settings like Swaziland. I therefore chose to study literacy policy documents before looking at current literacy teaching and learning practices. Swaziland's National Education Policy (MoE, 1998: 5 & 7) has this to say about literacy:

> In providing essential life-skills, the Ministry of Education (MoE) shall also support efforts aimed at providing reading and writing skills as well as pre-vocational, vocational education and entrepreneurship within and outside the school system…[and] adult education shall provide numeracy, literacy and life-skills respectively.

This implicit literacy policy statement suggests that the MoE regards literacy as part of a cluster of other related skills. Notably, it says nothing about early literacy development. Before the enactment of the policy in 1998 policy guidelines were contained in various MoE documents and circulars. Among the earlier attempts at making the MoE's early literacy policy guidelines as explicit as possible, only *The Nine Year Programme of Instruction for English* (MoE, 1992: 2 & 4) stipulated in part that:

> From Grade Three, English is the official medium of instruction and every effort should be made to ensure that this policy is adopted. It is pointed out however that children are encouraged to both read and write in English and SiSwati from Grade One, albeit in a very limited way…To acquire the necessary competencies in English the student needs to be given the opportunity to use the language in a meaningful and beneficial way…At the lower level, the curriculum plan in Language Arts is designed to continue the development of a child's first language as well as to help him/her to acquire a second language through a programme combining listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. The activities are planned to encourage the use of language skills in meaningful situations…

These clear policy guidelines explicitly recognize the role of reading and writing development in both the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) of the young learner. The policy also recognises the embeddedness of language and literacy in each child's daily socio-cultural milieu and interactions. Such policy directions spell out the MoE's broad outlook on young children's literacy development as regards first language-second language interrelations in the curriculum on the one hand, and the embeddedness of language (and literacy) development in meaningful contexts of use on the other.

The underlying assumption is that Swazi children as second-language learners of English will learn to read and write successfully in both their first language (SiSwati) and English if this learning takes a late bilingualism format. That is, they should spend three years focusing on learning to read and write more in SiSwati before their learning of English intensifies in the subsequent nine years of a twelve-year schooling progamme. As the practice I examine later in chapters four and five will indicate, however, group chanting, copying, and memorizing decontextualized individual words are the predominant modes of learning how to read and write in preschool and Grade One classrooms. The practice is inconsistent with the official recognition and call for learning literacy in meaningful contexts of use.

Departments of education worldwide have been criticised for over-regulating and eroding school autonomy and teacher professionalism (Gutierrez, Lopez, & Alvarez, 2001). The MoE's relatively less directive education policy position might be seen as being so broad so as to be a means of minimizing bureaucratic interference rather than as lack of direction and/or commitment. Criticisms of over-prescriptive policies have emphasized the fact that officials of departments of education are far removed from the day-to-day life of classrooms. Such criticisms suggest that classroom practitioners are better positioned to know what will and will not work for their particular situations. Open-ended policy therefore supposedly empowers teachers to use their experience and expertise in response to local needs. However, a crucial consideration for ESL situations like Swaziland is whether or not teachers are adequately qualified to respond to the peculiar challenges of their individual classes. I examine this question in detail in the context of my own research in later chapters in this thesis.

In conclusion, despite implicit hints of a skills approach, there is sufficient suggestion in the policy statements that language and literacy learning are viewed largely as situated, embedded processes. This understanding of what literacy is concurs with the view taken throughout the present study of literacy as a situated social practice. Earlier views of literacy as a basic skill that is uniformly transmitted and acquired across diverse contexts contrasts directly with both Swaziland's stated literacy policy and the view that I develop here of literacy as a social practice that can only be fully comprehended within the socio-cultural contexts in which it is used. Schools have always interpreted public policy to suit their own circumstances, which affords teachers the autonomy to exercise professional judgment in confronting classroom challenges.

Elsewhere, in Britain, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and, later, South Africa, where early literacy has received enormous attention, there has been an interplay between policy, practice, and research (e.g., Clay, 1993; Gutierrez, Lopez, & Alvarez, 2001; Lo Bianco, 1997; Maybin, 1994; Prinsloo & Bloch, 1998). The next section therefore reviews literacy research within the Swaziland context. This is done both to establish the

amount of research activity around early literacy in Swaziland and to carry out a review of the local research context, the findings of which further illuminate the need for the present study.

1.8 Literacy research in Swaziland

An issue that gave rise to this study was a dearth in Swaziland of research on literacy in general and on children's early literacy development in particular. Apart from the small-scale qualitative enquiries by myself (Dlamini, 1999) and Masilela (1999); a study by N. Dlamini (1993); and a small-scale survey by Ginindza (1991), hardly any other similar study has been undertaken. Kunene's (1979: 22) pseudo-longitudinal study of the acquisition of noun prefixes, noun classes, and agreement markers among monolingual first-language SiSwati speaking children between the ages of two and six years, was the closest anyone had ever got to closely studying young children's language acquisition. Unlike the present study, however, Kunene neither focused on emergent literacy nor used a socio-cultural research approach. Only one nationwide survey of adult literacy has so far been carried out (Sebenta National Institute, 1982). This, together with the findings of three national census surveys (GoS, 1989, 1997, 2007), has been the basis for Swaziland's current claim of an 80% national literacy rate. The adult literacy rate is an estimated based on the percentage of people 15 (years of age) and above who "can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life" (World Bank, 2005: 1).

However, neither Dlamini's (1999) nor Masilela's (1999) qualitative pieces of research studied language and literacy as they occur in social life, or from an ethnographic perspective. The present research is the first ethnographic study of literacy as well as the first study of literacy as a social practice to be carried out in Swaziland. It differs from previous studies in that it explicitly aims to go beyond classroom-based research, as well as the aggregated findings of national surveys. The study's socio-cultural outlook on the study of literacy as a social practice sought to take account of the context of use, the

purposes for which literacy was used, and the different meanings of literacy for different individuals who make located uses of it in different contexts.

In an earlier study (MoE, 2000) in which I was tasked to collect classroom feedback towards the revision of Grade Four English course books, I observed four reading lessons in four different schools. All four lessons were teacher-fronted and the only time pupils said something was to respond to teachers' questions after reading aloud on their own, in turn. Invariably, the teacher first read out a whole passage, then let individual children read paragraphs aloud in turns while she listened and instantly corrected mistakes, and then allowed individual silent reading before individuals wrote answers to comprehension questions (MoE, 2000). It was difficult to determine the amount of interaction that took place either between teacher and pupil, pupil and pupil, or between reader and text. Reading or literacy in these lessons came across essentially as group and individual oral public performance or recitation. It must be noted that Swaziland's early literacy policy guidelines in the foregoing section propose the use of authentic oral and written L1 and L2 contexts (MoE, 1992). The reading lessons just depicted, however, were so invariably teacher-dominated and based on unauthentic activities that it is difficult to discern how much real transaction took place between reader and text which may have resulted in personal literacy development.

These observations corroborate Masilela's (1999: 26) findings that teachers have been found to be overusing the "reading-while-listening" method, in which children have open books in front of them, teacher reads a line or lines or whole passage with pupils doing the choral reading or group chanting after her. According to her, careful observation of such reading lessons (in English) often reveals pupils' steady gaze at either the teacher or the text, which suggests "they cannot possibly be reading print from left to right and top to bottom of a page", unless they are forced to keep track with the passage by the necessity to know where to start when it is their turn to read. Williams (1996: 200) identified similar dynamics in classrooms in Zambia and Malawi. He showed that the teacher's reading invariably served as a prompt for whole class repetition. He described

the result as a 'reading-like' activity where successful chorused repetition was indistinguishable from 'real' reading aloud. He described a lesson where the teacher scolded a child who recalled a sentence while looking at the ceiling: “When you say it, you have to look at the words. That is what reading is.”

An earlier survey in Swaziland of instructional approaches to Grade One introductory reading in English lessons established the predominance of “audio-lingual direct methods” (Ginindza, 1991), which still amounts to group oral chanting.

1.8.1 ‘Emergent literacy’ in the international literature

Research into early literacy development, or emergent literacy, has been carried out by scholars in the United States, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand (e.g., Clay, 1975, 1993, 1998; 1999; Dyson, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2003; Fox, 1999; Goodman and Goodman, in Moll, 1990; Kress, 1997; Teale and Yokota, 2001; Wray and Lewis, 1997). South African scholars have followed their lead (e.g., Prinsloo and Bloch, 1998; Prinsloo, 2004; Prinsloo and Stein, 2003; Stein and Slonimsky, 2001). This research points to the importance of the interface between home- and school-based literacy practices, especially as this has come to be seen as a critical factor in the learning success or failure of low-income children who embark on schooling often equipped with neither the literacy practices nor the language through which these are perpetuated in the school. Like all of these countries, Swaziland too has low-income children, particularly ESL children in both rural and urban public schools and urban private schools. Their exact experiences may differ because Swaziland is a different socio-cultural context; but this is precisely the point - investigating the same phenomenon in a different context by means of similar research orientations and conceptual resources adds to our understanding of the complex dynamics involved. The current study therefore also sought to enrich general literacy research by exploring a relatively unresearched context.

Research on children’s literacy learning in Swaziland suggests that children from Grade Four to Grade Seven face difficulties in reading and writing (N. Dlamini, 1993; S.

Dlamini, 1999; Ginindza, 1991; Masilela, 1999). One source of the reading and writing challenges might well be the ways in which children are initiated into school-based literacy practices in the formative pre- and early school years.

1.9 Outline of the study

Chapter one outlines the research focus. I spell out in detail what I set out to study and set up a rationale for studying it. This is also where I describe the nature of the research problem and outline the broad features of my line of analysis, in anticipation of the detailed presentation that follows. In this chapter I have described the socio-historical background pertaining to literacy, schooling and language-of-instruction, as well as the sources and nature of the inequalities that shape children's access to such high status educational resources as reading and writing in English.

In chapter two I review and describe the theoretical frameworks, resources and arguments that shaped this research. I analyze those theories and conceptual tools that I drew from the wider literature, that inform my approach in the present study. For instance, I discuss the rationale for the study's orientation towards a socio-cultural perspective on literacy studies. Chapter two's contribution to the thesis is to review the literature applicable to my socio-cultural inquiry into children's literacy development in Swaziland.

In chapter three I discuss application of the study's methodological approach, which follows on and is linked to the conceptual framework synthesized in chapter two. I argue that an ethnographic-style enquiry was appropriate for researching individual children's participation in literacy because it provides qualitatively effective resources for this purpose. I also outline what I did in the research process, what worked and what didn't work well.

In chapter four I analyse children's language resources which they manifested during free play at home and off-task in school. I argue that both the home and official school

settings disregarded children's resources because of a general tendency for the wider Swazi society to dismiss children and their activities as simply play or unimportant. I argue that adults at home remained unaware of the serious work that children could accomplish with language because they interacted with children only in particular ways, where children initiated almost nothing. Instead, children passively listened to and did as their elders said, on the basis that the elders knew and children did not. Teachers in school made no links between what children already knew and literacy learning because there was a distinction between what children knew and could do and what they were in school to learn.

In chapter five I analyse typical classroom-based literacy events. I argue that children's restrained participation in official or on-task literacy activities contrasted sharply with their exploratory and expressive participation in interactive communicative and literacy activities during play at home and off-task in school. I further argue that the contrast in participation arose mainly because teachers felt obliged to insist on what they interpreted to be the official curriculum, to the exclusion of children's repertoires. The official curriculum included such teacher-initiated and controlled classroom activities as group chanting, individual read-alouds, and correct individual spoken and written responses to assessment tasks. Children who had not yet taken hold of such prized classroom literate behaviours like reading, writing, naming and labelling things in English, for instance, were restricted to working with only a very limited resource without recourse to their elaborate out-of-school interactive communicative repertoires.

In chapter six I summarize and synthesize emerging conclusions from the analysis in chapters four and five. I conclude that while children deployed language resources in creative ways during home-based play and in unofficial school contexts, these resources did not figure in their literacy learning. The various reasons that accounted for this state of affairs included Swazi society's general condescension towards and dismissal of children's enterprise as play, as well as schools' insistence on the 'official' curriculum to the exclusion of children's out-of-school repertoires.

I now go on to review the wider literature, focusing on the specific conceptual tools which directly informed this research's methodology and analysis.

Chapter 2

Taking the 'social turn' in the study of early literacy

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I review the socio-cultural perspective on early literacy, which provides my theoretical and methodological framework, as well as the relevant research literature relating to early childhood literacy. I first examine the theoretical and empirical contributions of New Literacy Studies (NLS) researchers and theorists, and related work that takes the 'social turn' in the study of literacy. In outlining the research focus in chapter one, I identified problems with basic skills-based[5] orientations in previous research on low-income children's school-based literacy learning. That research treated literacy as a context-independent universal skill whose acquisition and application did not take account of the particular socio-cultural circumstances of different settings. Instead, it propagated a "standard" form of literacy as having application in all contexts. Those approaches to literacy research also assumed a direct link between literacy skills and access to social goods and power. In the present study, consistent with research in the NLS tradition, I adopt an ethnographic approach to early literacy learning that seeks to develop a different account of literacy and how children learn it, that makes fewer assumptions than the skills-based approaches as to the consequences of literacy and is more sensitive to local variability. The socio-cultural approach of the NLS that I discuss in this chapter, informs my empirical response in chapter three to the research focus I outlined in chapter one. The approach also informs my empirical and analytical work in the chapters that follow.

[5]Skills-based approaches (both behaviourist and some Piagetian approaches) hold that there are definite recognizable and measurable stages of cognitive development that children go through as they grow up. These stages determine whether or not a given child is 'ready' to learn how to read and write. According to this view, certain children may progress through these stages faster or slower than others depending on how conducive or non-conducive the environments they grow in are. For all children to reach the required reading readiness, school-based programmes are necessary to hasten every child's readiness to learn (Crawford, 1995).

In reviewing the literature my overall intention is to situate my study in relation to the broader international picture of children's early literacy research. I adopt a thematic approach where I begin by reviewing mainly the foundational or classical studies in the NLS, and others with a related theoretical orientation. I then orientate my research in relation to this field in the subsequent discussion. I conclude this chapter with a review of the unresolved early literacy learning debate in the context of ESL and late bilingualism in educational settings such as Swaziland and examine calls for an eclectic approach to early literacy instruction in the light of this discussion.

2.2 The new literacy studies (NLS)

The research that I first review here is the formative work that shaped the interdisciplinary study of literacy as varying social practice (Barton, 1994, 2001; Baynham, 1995; Gee, 1990, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2008; Heath, 1983; Kress, 1997; Luke and Freebody, 1997; Prinsloo and Breier, 1996; Scribner and Cole, 1981; Street, 1984, 1993, 1998, 2001). These scholars drew variously on multiple disciplinary traditions, from psychology, socio-linguistics, anthropology, sociology, and social semiotics.

2.2.1 Separating school effects from literacy effects

Scribner and Cole's (1981) groundbreaking study drew on four years of testing of more than 1000 Vai - a minority Liberian group, which had developed its own writing system early in the 19th century. Scribner and Cole's departure point was the identification of three scripts and literacies associated with different sites and practices amongst the Vai people. These were, firstly, an indigenous Vai script, which was learnt informally at a community level and was used for traditional ceremonies, funerals and personal communication; secondly, an English-language school literacy, learnt in school and predominating in the formal spheres of national education, politics, commerce, road signs, law courts, etc.; and thirdly, a Qur'anic school-based script and literacy, which involved the learning of religious texts, mostly in the Arabic language and script.

Scribner and Cole's study drew on emerging Vygotskian scholarship in the USA and followed that of Luria (1976) who had conducted a large-scale psychological investigation back in the 1930s, aimed specifically at determining "how changes in cultural conditions, exemplified by the introduction of schooling and literacy, affect intellectual functions" (Scribner and Cole, 1981: 10). Luria's study took place in a rapidly changing Central Asian region, in transit as a result of reforms introduced by the central Soviet Russian government. For instance, new machinery and collective systems of ownership were replacing traditional modes of farming, as schools were opening in the countryside, and communication with the outside world was expanding. Luria discovered, however, that since these changes did not affect all residents equally, it was possible to compare the differential effects of the changes. Luria compared groups of traditional nonliterate farmers with other residents of the same villages who had gone through brief literacy courses or who had participated in short teacher-training programmes. He used a variety of experimental tasks, dealing with perception, word associations, concepts, classification, and reasoning. "On these tasks and in informal interviews he found consistent differences in performance among the three comparative groups, which he interpreted using Vygosky's theoretical framework" (Scribner and Cole, 1981: 10). He found that:

> The most traditional and isolated of his population, with neither literacy nor schooling, tended to respond to the tasks in a concrete, context-bound way, guided by the perceptual and functional attributes of things. The most schooled group, on the other hand, tended to take an abstract approach and be responsive to the conceptual and logical relationships among things. Minimal literacy groups fell in between (Scribner and Cole, 1981: 10).

In this series of studies, reported Scribner and Cole (1981: 10), Luria (1976) confirmed Vygotsky's thesis that socio-cultural changes formed the basis for the development of higher memory and thinking processes and more complex psychological organization. Scribner and Cole (1981: 10), however, noted that the design of Luria's research "limited what could be inferred about the particular effect of particular changes." They argued, for instance, that:

> While the groups could be designated by the amounts of literacy or schooling they had attained, they also differed in age and exposure to other novel activities such as collective management and planning of agricultural operations. Thus, differences in performance could not be attributed to literacy or schooling experience per se. This covariation of literacy with other major changes in life experience – a pervasive condition in almost all settings – is a formidable obstacle to research on educational effects…

Three decades later, Patricia Greenfield studied cultural influences on concept formation among Wolof children in Senegal. As reported by Scribner and Cole, she found differences in performance between children attending school and their unschooled siblings or counterparts, matched for age, and rural or urban residence. Scribner and Cole (1981: 11) identified this research on school effects as "a significant forerunner of our own research…" They focused on "one experimental task on which the nature of children's performance suggested to Greenfield the importance of their knowledge of a written language". The task required classification of familiar objects and was not dissimilar to the one used by Luria. Schooled and non-schooled children differed systematically in some of the ways they grouped objects together and how they talked about their grouping. According to Scribner and Cole (1981: 11):

> Greenfield interpreted these differences as due to the schooled children's capacity for context-independent, abstract thought. She went on to link this thinking to literacy by a series of propositions about the nature of oral and written language: oral language relies on context for the communication of messages and is, therefore, a context-dependent language. In contrast, written language requires that meaning be made clear, independent of the immediate reference. If one assumes that context-dependent speech is linked with context-dependent thought, and context-dependent thought is the opposite of abstract thought, it follows that abstract thought fails to develop in a nonliterate culture. Societies with written language, however, provide the means for abstract, decontextualized thinking.

David Olson in Canada continued the strategy of comparing preliterate preschool children with school children of various ages and educated adults to test the thesis that literacy makes possible a unique form of logical competence. Scribner and Cole (1981: 11) summarised Olson's claims as follows:

> Literacy allows people to master the logical functions of language and to separate these from interpersonal functions. For example, literacy is said to provide people with the ability to listen to the sentence "John hit Mary" and to derive the sentence "Mary was hit by John" simply on the basis of the logical relation among terms in the sentence without any factual information about who was hitting whom. Evidence that preschool children lack this ability, while older school children and adults display it, has been claimed by Olson to provide support for the theory that literacy biases cultures toward the development of formal reasoning systems" (Scribner and Cole: 1981: 11).

Scribner and Cole (1981: 11) then concluded that:

> While these psychologists have brought the power of psychological analysis and technique to the problem of literacy and thought, their experiments fail to support the specific claims made for literacy's effects. No comparisons were made between children with and children without a written language; comparisons were made between schooled and unschooled children, and schooling and literacy are not synonymous. The attribution to literacy of causal significance in cognitive development remained, as with Vygotsky, on the hypothetical level.

Scribner and Cole's (1981) study of the Vai therefore aimed to measure the cognitive effects of literacy, through a separation of 'schooling effects' from 'literacy effects'. They were able to distinguish these in their research, because unlike the earlier influential research of Luria, Greenfield, and Olson, Scribner and Cole (1981) were able to carry out research in a setting where there was both school-learnt literacy and out-of-school scripts and literacies, as described earlier with regard to the Vai of Liberia. The researchers used (side-by-side) a combination of sample surveys, ethnographies, linguistic elicitation, clinical interviews and psychological experimentation. They established that literacy per se neither affected cognitive performance nor diminished the distinction between

contextualised and abstract concept formation in individuals. Rather, exposure to urban life, for instance, seemed to account for differences in concept formation. They also found that schooling facilitated explanations for response choices to syllogistic tasks. However, school effects were generally not consistent enough in their studies to support claims that school attendance stimulated growth of general cognitive competence or that deep psychological differences divided literate and non-literate populations. The failure of literacy to yield cognitive effects and the inconsistency of schooling effects on cognitive performance led the researchers to conclude that schooling and literacy were not synonymous and that literacies were in fact highly differentiated. This made them question the tendency by many writers to "discuss literacy and its social and psychological implications as though literacy entails the same knowledge and skills whenever [and wherever] people read and write" (Scribner and Cole, 1981: 132). They suggested that to support the thesis that "literacy makes a difference in mental processes, psychological analysis has to be joined with cultural analysis…" (Scribner and Cole, 1981: 8). This is the underlying principle of the social practice account of literacy for which these co-authors came to be known. Their work was groundbreaking in that they went beyond the earlier speculations and guesswork about the power of the written word to amplify human mental capacities, and replaced it with the substantial empirical results just summarised.

The relevance of Scribner and Cole's findings to the present study lies in their recognition of literacy as a socio-culturally situated practice. A social practice account of literacy is applicable to the present study's focus on the emergent home and school literacy of Swaziland's low-income children. My engagement with home and school influences on children's early literacy development in the present study sought, among other things, to assess the extent to which different ways of sense- and meaning-making with or without literacy at the children's respective homes interfered with or facilitated meaning-making and meaning-taking in their different school literacy settings. Below I examine the related ethnographic findings of Heath (1983) among working and middle-class communities of America's Piedmont Carolinas. The relationship between Scribner and Cole's (1981) and Heath's (1983) investigations lies in the importance both attach to

the role of one's socio-cultural context in shaping one's interaction with both literacy and the wider environment.

2.2.2 Socio-cultural ways of meaning taking and participation in school literacy

Shirley Brice Heath engaged in ethnographic study over a period of more than seven years into the ways in which literacy was embedded in the cultural contexts of two separate local communities in one town in the Piedmont Carolinas in the USA (Heath, 1982, 1983, 1986) as well as the middle-class town members. The two communities comprised mill-working black people of Trackton, on the one hand, and their white counterparts of Roadville, on the other. The middle-class members, both, black and white, did not form a geographically specific group like the other two, but none the less shared strongly similar ways amongst themselves of talking, interacting, valuing, reading and writing, that contrasted strongly with the two working-class communities' practices. Heath recorded striking differences in the way the three groups socialised their children into ways of taking knowledge from the environment, particularly how types of language and literacy events were involved in this taking. She employed the concept of the 'literacy event', a concept that features prominently in her study, as a resource to focus on any event engaged in by one or more members of a group where print played an integral role, and she examined the mix of talk, reading and writing that characterised particular events. Examples of literacy events included group negotiation of meaning in written texts such as adverts; a child drawing a squiggle on a piece of paper and publicly announcing what it represents to those immediately around; or taking down a telephone message. Heath, like Scribner and Cole (1981) above, came to dismiss the oral-literate dichotomy on the basis of the fact that whereas they might not share the same knowledge of school literacy, to varying degrees and for different reasons, the daily lives of members of all three communities were filled with literacy events in which they responded to print-based information in locally specific ways that were culturally shaped.

Heath (1983) found that children in both Roadville and Trackton were generally unsuccessful in school despite the fact that the parents of children in both these working-class communities placed a premium on success in school. She found important

differences as to how children were initiated into print-related social communication in their lives. In Roadville, adults read books to their children, but did not relate such literacy events and descriptions beyond the book to what children encountered in the real world. Roadville parents did not decontextualize book knowledge because they were Christian fundamentalists who interpreted books such as the Bible literally, as the literal word of God. For this reason, they discouraged personalising of knowledge and development of individualised perspectives. Roadville children were thus not encouraged to fictionalize real events, a practice associated with lying. Reality was seen to be better than fiction, and children were discouraged from shifting the context of items and events in fictionalised and abstract terms. Roadville children were read to from books that emphasized nursery rhymes, alphabet learning and simplified Bible stories. Adults told oral stories of actual personal experiences, which children also came to model in their own storytelling. Those were often tales of transgression and resolution, which stressed the norms of expected moral behaviour. Thus in school Roadville children were rarely able to take knowledge learnt in one context and shift it to another; they did not compare two items or events and point out similarities and differences. This was because they were not practised in decontextualizing their knowledge or fictionalizing events known to them, or shifting them into other frames.

Heath (1983) argued that Trackton, a black, working class, more recently rural community than the Roadville one, was characterized by strong communal traditions. Heath observed that Trackton babies, who were almost always held in their waking hours, were constantly in the midst of rich verbal and non-verbal communication that went on around them. There were no reading materials in the home specifically for children apart from Sunday school materials. Whereas adults generally did not sit and read to children, children did constantly interact with peers and adults. Adults did not ask children ‘what is X’ questions’, but rather analogical ones which called for non-specific comparisons of one item, event, or person with another (e.g., ‘What’s that like?’). Though children could answer such questions, they could rarely name the specific feature or features, which made two items or events alike. Whereas they placed a high value on success in school – like their white Roadville counterparts – black Trackton parents did

not believe that they had a tutoring role. They generally neither simplified their language for children nor labelled items or features of objects in either books or the environment at large. Instead, they believed that children learnt when they were provided with experiences from which they could draw global rather than analytically specific knowledge. Children therefore seemed to develop connections between situations or items by gestalt patterns, analogues, or general configuration links, not by specification of labels and discrete features in the situation. They did not decontextualize; rather they heavily contextualized verbal and non-verbal language. Trackton children learnt to tell stories by rendering a context and inviting the audience's participation to join in the imaginative creation of the story. Group negotiation and participation was a prevalent feature of the whole group. Adults generally read together, not alone. In school, as a result, most Trackton children not only failed to learn the content of lessons; they also did not adopt the social interactional rules for school literacy events. For instance, print in isolation bore little authority in their world, and they found the 'what questions' and explanations alien. On the other hand, their home-based abilities metaphorically to link two events or situations and to recreate scenes were ignored by the school. By the time in their education, after the elementary years, when their imaginative skills and verbal dexterity could really pay off, they had failed to gain the necessary written composition skills they would need to translate their analogical skills into a channel teachers could accept.

By contrast, through bedtime stories, the mainstream black and white children studied by Heath (1983) were from infancy prepared for school by learning initiation-reply-evaluation (I-R-E) sequences, labelling, fictionalizing, relating book knowledge to real life experience, learning to listen and wait, etc. The children were generally successful in school where literacy practices were similar. Their parents shared a proximity between their own 'ways of knowing' and literacy practices with school ways, and passed these on to their children.

Heath (1983) suggested that an analysis of the differences in the three communities' ways of taking meaning from their environments could help to account for differences in

success or failure in school of children from different communities and socio-economic backgrounds. She called for recognition of cultural differences across groups of people in their ways of communicating and sense-making and called on schools to take account of these as differences rather than as evidence of cultural deficit. Heath asked instead for more detailed research on how such differences work in context and how they might be incorporated into general education for all. Gee (1990: 66) captured Heath's suggestion thus:

> In order for a non-mainstream social group to acquire mainstream, school-based literacy practices, with the oral and written skills this implies, whether children or adults, must 'recapitulate' (at appropriate levels for their age, of course) the sorts of literacy experiences the mainstream child already has at home. Unfortunately, schools as currently constituted, tend to be good places to practise mainstream literacy once you have its foundations, but they are not good places to acquire these foundations.

The significance of Heath's (1983) analysis for the present study is three-fold. Firstly, Heath's use of the construct of the 'literacy event' as an analytic resource or tool was an invaluable contribution to the study of literacy as a culturally embedded practice. The focus on the literacy event as a unit of analysis which includes the literacy activity together with the other actions and interactions that make up the moment, has since facilitated a sharper understanding and in-depth description of precisely what individual children do with print, whether on their own or in collaboration with others. Secondly, Heath's ethnographic inquiry methods provided a useful example for the present study's yearlong ethnographic observation. Ethnographic methods afford the researcher enough time to interact with the research participants and their environment, and encourage one to attend to 'insider's' or 'native's' view of phenomena. Lastly, though Heath compared working and middle-class children's distinct participation in school literacy, her approach still lends the present study a useful point of reference. I take forward to my own analysis Heath's focus on the literacy event, ethnographic methods, and differentiation of home and school literacy practices and examine their applicability in a study that focuses on the extent to which schools engage with or discard the out-of-school language,

communicative and literacy resources of children from low-income family backgrounds. Below I examine Street's (1984) contribution to the NLS, particularly his rejection of an 'autonomous model of literacy' and his preference for an 'ideological' one. His argument for an ideological model is of direct benefit to the current study in that it amplifies both Scribner and Coles' (1981) social practice emphasis and Heath's (1983) concern for diverse backgrounds. Street questioned widespread tendencies to reduce literacy, a complex socio-cultural practice, to a culturally and politically neutral mechanical skill with universal application and consequences despite people's different socio-cultural circumstances and diverse backgrounds.

2.2.3 Literacy as a culturally specific, located practice

Street carried out anthropological research into the uses of literacy among the rural *Cheshmehi* mountain fruit-growers of north-eastern Iran in the 1970s. Street identified three literacy practices: a Qur'anic literacy based in the *maktab* (religious schools); English, school-based literacy; and thirdly, a market literacy, adapted from the Qur'anic *maktab* literacy, rather than from school literacy, because the older, senior men in the village were *maktab*-trained rather than school-trained. The market literacy had well established ways of entering signed business transactions in pages of exercise books specifically formatted for this purpose; and the use of cheques in the form of written notes, where cash was not immediately available. The *Cheshmehi* had also developed an enabling marketing infrastructure, which included the use of a middleman who trucked merchandise from the village to the city and brought back cash in return. Besides, the *Cheshmehi* village fruit-growers also experienced seasonal stays in the city. Street argued that a combination of the indigenous *maktab* literacy practices and the marketing infrastructure, rather than either of the two alone, facilitated, first, the adaptation of the village *maktab* literacy into a market or commercial one, and, subsequently economic development for the village farmers. Street's finding suggested that while it participates among many enabling factors in bringing about socio-economic prosperity, literacy in and of itself does not account for socio-economic prosperity. It would appear, from Street's argument, that any other group without the specific indigenous literacy abilities

and economic infrastructure of Iran's *Cheshmehi* fruit-growers might not have realized the same commercial success simply as a result of external literacy interventions.

Street (1984) further cited failed adult literacy campaigns in the UK and USA as counter-evidence to the generalized consequences of literacy (e.g., abstraction, rational thought, cognitive development, and economic prosperity). Street refused to ascribe a pure type of oral tradition as opposed to a pure type of literate tradition to any of his subjects and, just like Heath (1983) above, talked instead of a mix of oral and literate modes, but not as the discrete forms of consciousness often advanced in the literature. I conclude, on the basis of evidence provided by the studies of Scribner and Cole (1981), Heath (1983), and Street (1984), that in all modern societies, Swaziland included, particular examples of the social uses of literacy show a mix of reading, writing and talk. What gives these literacy events their distinctiveness is not the communicative modes being used but the social practices that cause reading, writing and talk to happen in those characteristic ways in that context.

Ideological versus autonomous models of literacy

Street rejected the view of literacy as an autonomous or neutral technology that could be detached from its social context, and whose acquisition guaranteed development. Street (1984: 1) posed, instead, an ideological model of literacy; that is, one which conceived of literacy as a social practice, where literacy could not be fully understood outside its social context of use. Street called for an:

> …analysis of the uses and consequences of literacy that will permit theorization in a way that is adequate for cross-cultural comparison…[and possibly bring out] just what is the nature of the practice which has these uses and consequences.

An autonomous model of literacy, as Street described it, is one in which literacy is a technical skill which can be isolated from the complex social contexts of its use. As an isolable skill, literacy, in this view, means one unitary phenomenon, which has similar applications across diverse cultural contexts. That is, those who acquire literacy do so in identical ways despite socio-cultural differences. Besides, literacy's acquisition leads to similar benefits in the form of power and development. Street's (1984) ideological model,

on the other hand, acknowledges that literacy is culturally defined and cannot be separated from its contexts of use without removing what gives rise to it in the first instance. In other words, literacy cannot be reduced to a detachable politically and culturally neutral skill because different people always use it for socio-culturally determined purposes. For this reason, literacy is used to empower certain groups over others (Street, 2001). Street (2001) argued that literacy does not necessarily lead to empowerment for all who acquire it because not all who encounter literacy set its standards and the reasons for them. Street (1993: 6) thus rejected the concept of an autonomous model of literacy, arguing that the autonomous model was "…unhelpful with regard to both the social nature of literacy and to its relationship to other institutions." He argued that this was precisely the limitation of the autonomous model that led to the development of and later extension of an alternative ideological model. He found the alternative model to be more theoretically sound and provided ethnographic understanding of the actual significance of literacy practices in people's lives. So, like Scribner and Cole, Street (1984, 1993) saw literacy as not sufficient in and by itself to account for cognitive development. In this sense, literacy is never culturally and politically neutral wherever people engage in its practices.

One of Street's (1984, 1993,1995, 1998, 2001) notable contributions to the NLS, which the present study draws on, is his extension of Heath's (1983) definition of literacy event to the higher level of literacy practices. As earlier noted, literacy events are empirical occasions to which literacy is integral. Literacy practices, on the other hand, "…incorporate not only 'literacy events'…but also 'folk models' of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them" (Street, 1993: 12-13, citing Street 1987). Street's illumination of the scope of literacy practices as 'folk models' influencing one's participation in literacy events opens the way for the study of literacy to take account of communicative practices that may not explicitly be literacy events, from a different perspective. Awareness of communicative tendencies other than literacy is important in the present study of children whose prior-to-school encounters with literacy may be different from that expected in school. I therefore take Street's notion of literacy practices

as a resource to draw on in my own analysis. Next I present Gee's (1990, 1999) interdisciplinary socio-cultural perspective on the literacy debate.

2.2.4 Discourse as a bridge between the study of language, literacy and the social

According to Gee (1990), it is not sufficient to focus exclusively on language without an attempt to appreciate that language, including its written form, has socially defined applications. Gee argued for engagement with what he termed *Discourse*, which lies at the heart of implicit decisions underlying people's choices of language uses in interactions with individuals and groups in their local environments. Gee (1990: xv). argued that:

> To appreciate language in its social context, we need to focus not on language but rather on what I will call 'Discourses' with a capital 'D' [adding that] Discourses include much more than language…

Gee observed that what we say, how we say it, the impressions of our feelings, beliefs and thoughts our actions convey as we say it in speech or in writing, are already Discourse-determined. He rejected the notion of literacy as just 'reading' and 'writing', and asserted instead that we always read and write a certain type of text, in a certain type of way, because we believe in a certain type of way in certain types of contexts. In other words, we recruit different identities in different socio-cultural contexts (Gee, 1999). How we read and write or say is informed by the theories (our ideology) we hold about other people's position and influence relative to the distribution of social goods. Such theories, argued Gee (1990), are our ideological position. What and how we eventually read and write or say betrays an ideologically determined social discourse.

According to Gee, Discourse is acquired, not learnt through teaching in a classroom. It is therefore unfair to expect non-mainstream children (e.g., low-income children in the Swaziland context) to display a school literacy Discourse, which they are just beginning to learn at the same time. Whereas such children are generally considered deficient, Gee (1990) argued that no one was linguistically deficient on the basis of the Discourses their social milieu has apprenticed them to. Mainstream children were not necessarily more

intelligent than their non-mainstream counterparts in the same classroom. Instead, they found school relatively comfortable simply because it recognized, rewarded, and extended the discursive resources which for them began at infancy through home-based school influenced practices, as Heath's (1983) study earlier found out. From this sense, schools excluded from success non-mainstream children by labelling their Discourse unintelligent and using the children's 'expected' failure as evidence that school's deficit judgments were correct after all. Schools overlooked the fact that there were multiple orientations to literacy and the roots of some of these were embodied in the repertoires of children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These repertoires are the children's primary Discourse, which could serve as a springboard for learning the secondary Discourse of school-based literacy if recognized and drawn on in the classroom.

Gee (1999) went on to view 'Discourses' in terms of 'cultural models'. He defined these as our socially-shaped thoughts or taken-for-granted assumptions about what is typical or normal in a given socio-cultural context. Cultural models, according to Gee (1999: 59), "mediate between the micro level of interaction and the macro level of institution." Gee's reference to cultural models here invokes Street's (1993) folk models in relation to literacy practices discussed above. They both constitute an essential tool of inquiry in the present study's quest for ethnographic understanding of low-income children's participation in school literacy.

Gee's later work (2008) problematizes the notion of bounded social groups and offered instead one which also emphasized an individual's here-and-now active interaction with and hence recreation of one's culture in the intricate process of socialization (see also Rampton (1998). Gee and Rampton attempted to clarify why it is problematic to ascribe a neat homogeneous status to any group of people or community given the fluidity of cultures. No culture is static, and as people acquire the cultural practices of their community, they do not do so without equally influencing its new outlook. Similarly, no culture is immune from the influence of co-existing cultures. The transmission of culture, language and literacy included, is no longer seen as a one-way, unidimensional affair. It

is shaped just as it shapes the actions of those who acquire and participate in it, adapting it to their contemporary needs in the process. The present study adopts this process or development approach to socialization to one's culture and the language and literacy through which it finds expression.

A further resource of particular interest to the present study is Barton's (1994) "ecology of literacy" metaphor, which situates literacy among multiple interdependent social phenomena such as the users of literacy and the purposes for its use in particular socio-cultural contexts, as I describe more fully below.

2.2.5 The ecology of literacy metaphor and the NLS: towards a broadened definition of literacy

Barton's (1994: 26) ecology of literacy metaphor captured the collective orientation of the different proponents of the NLS already discussed above. The essence of Barton's 'ecology of literacy' metaphor lies in his endorsement of the proposition that there are in fact many different forms of literacy. Each one of them is important in that it responds to and services local needs, i.e., it is ecologically embedded in the local community in which it is put to use and is given a located meaning. More significantly, the metaphor resonates with the NLS's view of literacy as a situated social practice, a human activity that should be interpreted contextually. Barton (1994: 37) argued that the ecology of literacy outlook:

> …is very cautious about the broad generalisations often associated with reading and writing. It starts out from a belief that it is necessary first to understand something within a particular situation before looking to generalities. This suggests certain methodologies, such as ethnography, and rests on a particular theory of what knowledge is. Literacy is not just a variable.

Barton's ecological approach to literacy rested on the theory that knowledge (of literacy and language) is embedded in socio-cultural contexts. Such an orientation to literacy research opens up the research to ethnographic inquiry, which starts from the question 'What's going on here?' For this reason, it should be seen within the framework of the

'ecology' in which different people engage in specific literacy events and how specific literacy skills enable them to achieve social goals. It is through this ability to situate literacy vividly within the broader social milieu that Barton's ecological metaphor approach clarified Scribner and Cole's 'practices account', Street's 'ideological' approach, and Heath' and Gee's socio-cultural analyses of literacy. The metaphor brings to the fore not only the interdependence between literacy and contexts of use, but also the interdependence between literacy and the particular purposes for which members of different societies use it in given socio-cultural contexts (Scribner and Cole, 1981; Street, 1984). In other words, it is inadequate to look at one literacy practice in isolation from the situated applications that give it located meaning. Barton's metaphor endorses Gee's (1990) notion of multiple literacies of which school literacy is but one, but appeals for the recognition of the worth of children's diverse cultural and linguistic frames of reference in introducing school-based literacy practices in the classroom as well (Heath, 1983). The ecology of literacy metaphor also helps clarify why it would be folly to presume universal applicability for any form of literacy outside the 'ecology' of its social setting.

Barton (2001) called attention to the analysis of language and social practices in a textually mediated world. According to him, social practices around literacy vary and what is meant by the terms literacy, reading, and writing differs across cultures. He argued that such differences exist not just cross-culturally, but even within different contexts in the same culture (e.g., the home, work-place and even within the same activity). Research in the NLS has characteristically included detailed investigations of particular situations through ethnographic methods, utilizing the concepts of literacy events and practices as its units of analysis and overarching concepts. The NLS, noted Barton (2001), arose partly as a direct reaction to broad generalizations about literacy and claims of a great divide between oral and literate at both the social and cognitive levels. To this end the NLS has broadened the meaning of literacy to embrace more than the mechanical acts of reading and writing from which writing was largely construed as spoken language written down. According to Barton (2001), the NLS has broadened not just the meaning of literacy, but even the original notion of literacy event which in the early work of Heath (1983) denoted a speech event with text in it. The literacy event, as

further developed by the NLS, has come to include symbolic text (e.g., swearing on the Bible), and implicit text (e.g., when talking about texts which are not immediately present).

Barton's (2001) overview of the range of the NLS's broadening of the meaning of literacy is useful for the present study at two significant levels. For one thing, the Swaziland primary education setting is teeming with first-graders who do not immediately display school-specific reading and writing practices. Traditional assessments of literacy would characterize such children as oral in relation to their literate counterparts who come to school already able to read and write. The NLS's broadening of the meaning of literacy however makes us conscious of the fact that one is not illiterate on the basis of inability to display particular domain-specific literacies in a textually mediated contemporary social world. For this reason, I take forward Barton's ecology of literacy metaphor and its broadened meaning of literacy for examination in my own analysis in chapters four and five below. I now examine Kress's (1997) social semiotics orientation to the study of literacy, which introduced a new dimension to the NLS debate by, for example, also calling attention to emerging visual sources of information in addition to language and print in a new multimedia and multimodal communicational landscape.

2.2.6 Social semiotics: literacy as multimedia and multimodal

Kress (1997), drawing on the systemic functional linguistics and social semiotics approaches of Halliday (1979; 1985), saw language as both a 'system of signs' and as a social product, in its forms and functions. According to Kress (1997) social semiotics is the study of the meaning of systems of signs in social activity. He defined literacy as 'language in its written form – a medium of information'. On the one hand, language, and by extension, literacy provide the means through which we make sense (through internal processes) of our environment. On the other, language or literacy is the means through which we externally express or make public our sense of the world to others (a potentially large, disparate and distant audience). Kress (1997) defined the process of reading as active and creative 'internal sign-making' (in a social and cultural

environment) in that the reader ascribes their own interpretation as to the meanings embedded in visual signs of lettered representation.

Kress illustrated his point by providing a series of examples. One of these examples was a letter through which Kress explained the difference and co-relation between media and mode. The letter itself is the medium of communication and the actual print (written words and other characters such as numbers and graphics) are the mode. Kress called attention to a need to note that signs are read or interpreted according to the reader's interest in relation to the sign. This, he argued, is why the man using a shovel in a 'Roadworks ahead' road sign could be interpreted by individuals for whom the intended meaning is not culturally obvious to represent 'man resting on a shovel' (Kress, 1997: 7). Similarly, a child's drawing of a car represented by a series of circular characters may not signify a conventional representation of a car. However, a child's interest in a car is concentrated on its wheels, possibly due to the child's wheel-height and the circular motion of wheels. In representing cars therefore, a child, in a way that is similar to those of adults, singles out what stands out for them (selected aspects are represented – never the whole thing in sign-selection, Kress, 1997: 11). An analogy in the Swaziland context is the socially recognisable sign made by a person's repeated raising of a cupped hand to the lips. The sign is a familiar reference, implying the practice of excessive drinking of alcoholic beverage on the part of an individual. This is so despite the fact that the sign only selectively imitates the specific single act of putting an object to the lips and leaves out equally important but, at the moment irrelevant, details like the shape and size of the container, the type and brand of alcohol, etc. Kress's (1997) explanation of the omitted details was that the sign sufficiently conveys the message to the sign maker's audience. What comes to mind here is the fact that the mutual understanding between the signer and the audience is what Geertz (1973) referred to as a shared 'imaginative universe' (where, for example, insiders distinguish winks from twitches). A shared imaginative universe (or understanding) develops from cultural resources one accumulates over time through participation with others and the environment.

For Kress (1997) children's representations of what they read reveal active transformation, because they do not simply copy but create new meaning out of what they see. Children often engage in internal and sometimes external conversations in search of personal meanings of signs in their world. Their personal interests or affect, determined by what for them seems significant, shape their representations of the world around them. In this sense too, contrary to adults' simplistic assumptions of how children should ease into literacy, children actually energetically create their own literacy using the resources provided by their environment, or, in Kress's terms, what they have to hand.

The conflict between adults' expectations and children's multiple paths into literacy is central to Kress's attempt to understand what principles children themselves use in sign-making and their representation of the world. He adopted a theoretical approach which, as Thorne (1993: 8) described it, [t]reats [children's] meaning-making as work, as [serious, meaningful] action, which is itself best explained in terms of the social structures and cultural systems in which children and adults act in communication.

Kress (1997) argued that signifying systems, of which language is one, are culturally learnt and therefore are not universal. Kress argued that Saussure's influential thesis about the relation between the form and meaning of signs in language was incorrect. Saussure had claimed that there was no 'intrinsic relationship' between words and their referents. Instead, the relationship was a 'radically arbitrary' one. According to Kress, however, the relationship between form and meaning was not purely arbitrary, and this could be seen in children's early sign-making practices. For them form and meaning were closely related, as could be seen in their drawings and at least partly in their emergent literacy practices. While children often found the lettered representation of the English language a challenge, they drew on their sign-making experiences with drawing to explore the visual, spatial and sequential dimensions of written words.

Kress therefore argued for a reappraisal of the phenomenon of literacy, as well as for a decentring of language in educational theory and practice, through the recognition of

other modalities besides language and print in social communication, particularly that of the visual dimensions of multimedia communication. He based his proposal on his projection that literacy and language, as he defined them above, were likely to play a less central role in a future (even the present) communicative world in which children will be required to function, where screen-based and other forms of electronic communication predominate.

Kress's (1997) contribution to the NLS has particularly been his emphasis on multimedia and multimodal forms, which characterize children's current and future communicational reality. Equally significant is his argument for paying attention to the form and meaning of children's representations in order to understand their engagement with literacy. Evidence of Kress's influence on the development of the NLS was Street's (1998) recognition and application of Kress's (1997) social semiotics take on literacy, as well as their collaborative work. Street and Kress jointly wrote the Preface to Pahl and Rowsell's (2006) book, *Travel Notes from the New Literacy Studies*, with the declared agenda of combining the resources of the NLS together with the 'multi-modalities' approach with which Kress is identified.

Street (1998) used practical examples to illuminate Kress's social semiotics stance. One of these was a Water Quality Slide, which he collected from South Africa as part of his anthropological bid to collect both photographs of literacy events and graphic objects themselves, and to analyze the ways they were used in context in order 'to build a mental picture of reality'. Street (1998: 9) described his find thus:

> The slide involves a mix of text and images typical of the 'new communicative order', which many people who do not pass standard literacy tests may nonetheless encounter and understand. The slide is intended to help people in South Africa living near to water sources to recognise when water is safe to drink…

Street stressed that to understand the sort of visual images Kress was preoccupied with and the events they depict requires a combination of anthropological interpretation of context, 'recognition of the tropes and plays with language that actors engage in'. Street

(1998: 9) emphasised that this is essentially the kind of 'textual analysis' "…proposed by Kress and others: a combination of approaches often referred to as 'texts and practices'".

Street continued to describe the slide as typical of a genre of information put out by agencies worldwide, often with familiar discursive styles and layouts containing many hidden assumptions about knowledge and meaning. The card used small drawings of water creatures to indicate what organisms might be found in the water. The card also used a coding system to indicate the relationship between the presence of such creatures and the degree of pollution in the water. From the left to right the number of creatures reduced so that on the extreme right there were none and this was intended to indicate that pollution had increased on this side. Street noted, however, that this side of the card was lighter than the left. He explained that at first interpretation he took the lightness to represent purity rather than impurity, since the left side, with its darker shading, seemed to represent impurity, or pollution. Similarly, as someone not accustomed to 'seeing' creatures in the water he drank, Street assumed that the sector of the card indicating more creatures would be more polluted. According to Street's description, the semiotics of the card became more complicated as he realized that there were not only shading, drawing and directionality but also other signs that operated at a different level than the pollution indicators. He observed, for instance, that on the bottom left was a picture of a shell. According to Street, this was not, in fact, a real shell of the kind to be found in the water and analogous to the water creatures but was a logo for the Shell oil company whose education service underwrote the slide. Similarly, on the bottom right were a series of logos, which he recognized as those of the *Umgeni* water organisation itself, indicated by a series of waves in a box; and a rhinoceros, also not to be found in the water but to be interpreted as a logo. The distinction between images indicating real creatures in the water world and images representing the logos of organisations was conveyed through positionality and design features, including the use of boxes, highlighting and drawing style. There was also at the top of the slide an elongated arrow pointing to the right inside which was written: 'As the level of pollution increases so the variety of animals decreases', that was intended to reinforce verbally the message conveyed by the images, shading, etc.

Street concluded that the mix of images and written text was typical of public documentation in the new communicative order envisioned by Kress. As if to echo Kress's (1997) criticism of narrowly conceived literacy curricula, Street (1998: 9) lamented:

> But the mix of decoding skills may be less typical of learning environments, especially those where attention is focused narrowly on literacy at the expense of other semiotic systems and within literacy on phoneme-grapheme relations at the expense of the social meanings of literacy or recognition of its significance as a resource in building 'mental pictures' of reality.

I draw on Kress's notion of multimodal and multimedia communication in my own analysis of the literacy development of children whose communicative repertoires interwove semiotic resources and intricately criss-crossed the home and school semiotic domains during play and off-task in school. I will return to Kress in the section on early literacy debates below. But first there is need to complete the study's epistemological undergirding by acknowledging other influential works I drew on.

2.3 Children's early literacy learning in social context

The NLS has shared its emphasis with related research which has similarly taken the 'social turn' in the study of language, literacy and communication, and in the study of the social dimensions of children's emergent literacy (e.g., Clay, 1975, 1979, 1990, 1998; Cazden, 2001; Chittenden et al, 2001; Dyson, 1989, 1993, 1997; Harris et al, 2003; Pransky & Bailey, 2002; Polakow, 1993; Prinsloo, 2004; Sahni, 1994; Sipe, 2002; Stein and Slonimsky, 2001; Whitehead, 2002).

2.3.1 Schools' deficit views of low-income children: predetermined educational impairment

Polakow (1993) studied the classroom experiences of Head Start[6] children in Michigan. Polakow used ethnographic methods of inquiry to describe the harrowing public school classroom experiences of children of single mothers. She argued that such low-income children and their 'stigma-carrying' resources were perceived as problems even before the children entered school. According to Polakow, the damaging effects of their 'tags' meant that such children were placed in inferior educational tracks designated for those perceived incapable of success in school. For this reason, Polakow (1993) argued that children from low-income families were exposed to continuing impairment in a school setting. She reported how one such child, repeatedly sent to the principal's office for stealing school lunch, was described as an inherent misfit who certainly didn't belong among normal children. Already constructed as an habitual thief by a teacher on account of her disadvantaged background, this child pilfered an extra ration on Fridays to ensure that she, her elder sister, and single mother had food for the weekend because their food stamps never lasted a whole week. This child's problem, argued Polakow (1993), was perpetual hunger brought about by poverty in a society whose economics of distribution severely punished single mothers, consigning their children to a continuous cycle of destitution along with them. Polakow argued strongly against simplistic outlooks on correlations between poverty, family structure, and school performance that often inform the education of poor children worldwide. Polakow (1993) argued that to focus exclusively on individuals and individual family pathologies in explaining poverty and low school achievement is to disembed them from the socio-economic realities that shape the politics of distribution of resources and opportunities in the first place.

Polakow's work relates to the current study in that the latter similarly focuses on the home and school literacy development of low-income children just beginning their

[6]Heart Start was established by the USA federal government and funded by the Opportunity Act of 1965. It was a massive early intervention programme in the lives of poor children to inoculate them against all ill effects of poverty – including ill preparedness for primary school education as a result of the socio-economic underdevelopment associated with poor children's predominantly 'dysfunctional families.

schooling careers. Polakow's stance that society cannot simplistically attribute the problems of poor children to their family pathologies, coincides with Gee's (1998) 'social turn' which shifts the blame for literacy difficulties away from the individual child to the larger society which predisposes children to particular ways of participating in different forms of literacy (also Gee, 1990). I draw on Polakow's stance in my own analysis in order to work out if and the extent to which the communicative resources of low-income children in my study were drawn on or dismissed as impediments to literacy learning in the classroom. The influential work of Anne Dyson (1989, 1993, 1997, 2001), and specifically her contribution to the body of work on children's emergent literacy is another key resource for my study. Dyson's emphasis has been on studying the interactive 'social work' inherent in children's early literacy.

2.3.2 Children's composing as 'social work'

Dyson (1989, 1993, 1997, 2001) conducted extensive ethnographic research in multicultural inner-city schools of California's Bay Area. Dyson used a socio-cultural perspective drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory and on Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) dialogic outlook[7] on language to study culturally diverse children's interaction, semiotic composition and reading in school settings.

Dyson (1989) studied children as composers of imaginary worlds, using symbolic and social resources to lean on for support. She found that symbolic resources at children's disposal were initially speech and pictures. The children used these resources to organize their understanding of their world and to connect with each other, including their reader. Dyson used what she termed composing events[8] as the basic unit of analysis to try and understand how children's texts developed or found a niche within children's symbolic and social worlds. At the same time she sought to find out what might be the nature of possible differences among children in this development. Dyson (1989) argued that it is

[7]This view holds that learning to use language involves learning to interact with others in particular social situations, as well as learning to be within the dominant ideologies about human relationships.

[8]Defined as all behaviour involved in the production of one journal entry (including talk), as the unit of analysis.

the nature of the classroom rather than the home that is the distinctive context for early literacy growth.

Dyson (1993) set out to study the composing of six African-American children in a culturally diverse urban primary school. She observed these children composing not just text but a place for themselves in their social world. That is, they used the text to reach out to and connect with each other. The children drew their literacy tools or composing material from their experiences of home and school as well from their peer interactions. Home resources and experiences included popular cultural ones and folk traditions such as jokes, pop songs, cartoons, etc., and not just the storybooks that are often associated with the school-like homes of mainstream or middle-class children. Dyson (1993: 6) sought to:

> …counteract visions of literacy learning and teaching that are grounded in narrow imaginative universes, universes that see literacy as taking root comfortably only for children with middle-class backgrounds who speak Standard English and respond to school-like tasks in conventional ways.

She aimed to understand how children were differentiating and negotiating among their intersecting social worlds. Dyson discovered that children constructed what she termed "symbolic worlds" or "fake lives" such as contrived classroom neighbourhoods, whose construction no doubt benefited from the real physical classroom seating arrangement and children's proximity to each other. She wondered how the children's experiences as storytellers and language players, as builders of relationships through fake worlds, would influence the development of literacy.

Dyson (1993) observed that the construction of fake worlds (contrived or imaginary) facilitated the re-conception and transformation of the children's emerging friendships into new possibilities. The children's imaginative use of language created the symbolic worlds, which in turn enabled them to accomplish what she termed "social work". Dyson's unusual use of *social work*, a term normally associated with professionals involved in welfare work, reflected her respect for and recognition of children's classroom products as also shaped by the interpersonal links they forged with each other

through symbolic media such as writing and talk. The social work metaphor also helps to highlight Dyson's conviction that children's literacy entailed not just children's handwriting and spelling. Instead, argued Dyson (1993: 4), children's engagement with literacy entailed "…children's use of print to represent their ideas and to interact with other people…" For instance, children's social work included the relationships they built among themselves and with others like the teacher. Dyson observed that children accomplished this social work in the real world through the symbolic tools of language, which included stories, jokes, language plays, and other cultural art forms or genres that people create as they construct their social lives together. Social work is a fitting description for children's writing because, in Dyson's studies the children were constantly working on their membership and place in their peer groups, etc., exploring aspects of status and identity in these groups. A concrete example of a symbolic world was the creation of rows of child houses as fake neighbourhoods that brought the children together (in a symbolic world). It was that symbolic world which nonetheless accomplished the social work in the form of the imaginary and "real world" relationships in the classroom. Dyson argued that for successful social work to be accomplished through the symbolic tools of language, the children needed to have a "shared imaginative universe", a term borrowed from Geertz (1973), defined as shared ways of interpreting mutually intelligible symbols.

Dyson (1997) examined how children's interest in and conflicts around popular culture inspired both literacy and social learning, especially participating in a community of diversity. Dyson (1997: 4) argued that authors'

> texts are formed at the intersection of a social relationship between…composers and [their] addressees and an ideological one between [their] own psyches (or inner meanings) and the words, the cultural signs, available to [them]."

For this reason, Dyson (1997: 4) saw composers more as meaning negotiators than as meaning makers because they "adopt, resist, or stretch available words."

From Dyson's research findings I take forward for further examination in the present study the reverberating theme in all three studies that children had extensive opportunity

to write their own thoughts and leaned on each other for support and symbolic tools such as pictures/drawings and talk (and dramatic play) as they developed as writers. Also of significance to my research is the freedom the children in Dyson's (1989, 1993, 1997) studies are reported to have had, not only to incorporate out-of-school resources into their composing, but also to ask each other questions and to comment on each other's written products. I also examine the extent to which the low-income children in my study collaborated, appropriated literacy, and had recourse to the primary discourse of their home frames and communicative repertoires. Sahni (1994) brings a complementary perspective on early childhood literacy to that of Dyson, but in a non-Western context, as I describe below.

Sahni (1994) conducted an ethnographic investigation into children's uses of literacy in a rural northern district of post-colonial India. Her work draws on Dyson's (1989, 1993, 1997) Vygotskian and Bhaktinian perspective. Sahni adopted a socio-cultural approach to the study of literacy. She argued that India's political independence had converted local administrative officials into 'internal colonizers' who authored plans of development and resource allocation, which essentially entrenched their own class interests to the detriment of the majority of the population. Post-colonial education was therefore predominantly elitist in nature. As a result, children of the 80% rural population faced enormous difficulties in school where they were presumed to be completely ignorant without school literacy, despite the knowledge they already possessed and could articulate through their home language. Sahni's (1994) ethnographic analysis of low-income children's uses of literacy in a rural classroom, claimed that children exclusively copied and memorized textbook and teacher's notes out of context. The result was that they got no opportunities to learn to use literacy to express their own thoughts and real-life experiences.

Sahni's findings relate to my study in that we share a common focus on low-income children in post-colonial settings. In Sahni's study, the language and literacy practices of the classroom had more status than children's undervalued home linguistic resources. The present study's focus, as already indicated above, includes examining the extent to which

low-income children's out-of-school language resources were recognized, drawn on, or ignored in the classroom. In Sahni's analysis, classroom-based information carried absolute textual authority. Children were thus expected to pick up this information as it was and use it in ways already determined by the teacher or textbook. Teachers apparently saw no need to rework this information to adapt it to children's circumstances and cultural frames. If the students faced difficulties it was because of their failure to adapt to the new information and not the other way round. Children's part of the learning contract was clearly to passively and willingly receive the information. This is a deficit view of children which conflates children's young ages and relative lack of experience with absolute ignorance. Such adult preconceptions about childhood culture have often prevented an open minded approach to studying and understanding children's learning strategies and abilities for what they really are or as they unfold in the classroom. In the light of the arguments reviewed here, the present study is inclined to the view that children's resources that they take into classrooms are crucial in the quest for classroom literacy success. I turn next to Marie Clay's (1975, 1979, 1990, 1998, 1999) contribution to the study of children's emergent literacy. She takes a Piagetian constructionist perspective on children's inroads into literacy which, for the purposes of my analysis, I consider to be a pre-cursor to Dyson's social constructivist outlook.

2.3.3 Children as active in their learning of literacy: different paths to common outcomes

In her PhD research, Clay (1975) collected and analysed school and home-based work samples from five-year-olds whose schooling was just beginning. She focused on city children for most of whom English was their first language. She started from the premise that "the children's own work samples might tell the clearest tale". Clay (1975: 1) found that "the messages conveyed by the work samples were as complex as the problems which children face…" Clay examined the complexities around young children's learning of lettered representation. She argued, for instance that young children grappled with numerous challenges in the active negotiation of meaning of their early literacy development. These challenges include the important question of which direction letters should face. Clay emphasized the importance of being there and directly watching and

listening as children write their own stories and experiment with the possibilities of print. Clay (1975) cautioned against adult researchers assuming what children's products entail. Instead, they should heed children's perspectives. Clay doubted the value of sequenced learning as, according to her, different children achieved maturity at different paces and stages depending on previous experience, interest and ability. She noted the impact of writing on children's literacy learning, in contrast to widespread concerns with reading at the expense of writing: "For children who learn to write at the same time as they learn to read, writing plays a significant part in the early reading progress" (Clay, 1975: 70).

In later work, Clay (1998) called for sensitive observation of the active child and the challenges he/she faces with learning to write. She similarly emphasized the diverse resources rather than problems young children bring to school with them, resulting in them approaching literacy from different perspectives via different paths – but towards common goals, as regards success in schools.

Clay (1979: 8) saw children as active learners who:

> …search for links between the items and relate new discoveries to old knowledge. They operate on print as Piaget's children operate on problems, searching for relationships which order the complexity of print and therefore simplify it.

Drawing on Piaget, Clay saw children as setting up a series of hypotheses for themselves, as to how writing/reading work, and modifying these hypotheses as they went along, as they encountered new information or confirmed or modified their ideas. Clay emphasised the operations or strategies, terms used for the actions initiated by the child to get messages from a text.

The Reading Recovery programme, which Clay (1993) developed, emphasised early diagnosis or detection of reading difficulties and early appropriate intervention. She argued that both were possible only with close, sensitive, and honest observation of children's reading attempts by qualified, experienced reading specialists who observe firsthand precisely what children are saying and doing.

Clay (1999) again emphasized what children need to know in order to learn how to read and write (e.g., knowledge of print conventions, knowledge of story, exposure to a variety of books or sources of print, etc.). This point was later further developed by Chittenden et al, (2001) in their discussion of "resources necessary for reading" development. The significance of Clay's (1975, 1979, 1993, 1998, 1999) works, which I draw on in my own analysis, is her recognition that different children's routes to literacy are not only multiple but are also fraught with complexities that children are called upon to grapple with, all at once. Since this process can be particularly bewildering for children who may not have literacy background experiences upon entry to First Grade, teachers' understanding and patience is essential. I turn next to the work of Chittenden et al (2001) who take up some of the ideas put forward by Clay to develop a theory for early literacy development.

2.3.4 Early literacy learning as orchestration of existing knowledge resources

Chittenden et al (2001) tracked the literacy development of a cohort of twenty-six diverse beginning kindergartners and first-graders over two years in 13 schools in New York City, Philadelphia, and Vermont. The researchers set out to place learning how to read within the context of particular types of individual readers within a selected age group. They did this by illuminating the network of meanings (understanding, expectations, intentions, knowledge, styles, and interests) that a particular child brings to bear on learning in the classroom. According to Chittenden et al. (2001: 24): "The theoretical rationale of the research assumed that a person's meanings were revealed in patterns of action over time". They discovered that young children's learning styles and interests were so diverse that subjecting them collectively to one particular teaching approach could have greatly facilitated the learning of some and seriously impeded others. Chittenden et al (2001) argued, like Clay (1998), that learning to read was a process that varied with individual style and pace. They established that child-child talk, often viewed more as disruption than as collaborative or peer learning, was an essential aspect of how children learnt to read and write. Chittenden et al (2001) concluded on the basis of their own ethnographic observations of young learner readers that the concept of time on-task was a fluid one when applied to young learners. They argued that this was because of

children's general tendency to engage in both social and academic conversations during the course of a school activity. From this sense, children's interactions around their reading or writing may be a crucial form of peer instruction which, as Dyson (1989, 1993, 1997) above also discovered, can energize and enhance children's literacy growth. The spontaneous child-child interactions that teachers often instantly discourage as off-task or dawdling, can be valuable adjuncts to children's efforts to make sense of their work. From a social constructivist standpoint, children actively construct knowledge, but not without the influence of their socio-cultural surroundings, including the influence of their peers and others around them.

When teachers demand that individual children work in isolation, they deny the significant role played by others in children's construction of knowledge even in the classroom (Chittenden et al, 2001). Children's literacy learning, from this perspective, is more socially assisted than self-taught. Where Clay's argument foregrounded children's individual use of familiar knowledge of literacy in making sense of new knowledge, a Vygotskian view acknowledges the important role played by other children in this knowledge formulation. The present study views the constructivist and social constructivist outlooks on early childhood literacy learning just discussed as complementing rather than conflicting with each other in that while children are individual beings with personal abilities, styles, and interests, their learning is not independent of the external influences of other children and adults around them. This is so even in instances where the child individually applies existing knowledge in engaging with new situations. The individual child attends only to aspects of new situations that hold particular interest for the child and works out how to make sense of them using culturally provided knowledge frames. Since the child makes use of culturally formed materials in constructing new knowledge, this study takes an eclectic approach, which conceives of a complimentary relationship between constructivist and social constructivist outlooks on learning in general and early literacy learning in particular.

The literature reviewed here suggests that no child learns in isolation, just as no child's learning occurs without the child's active involvement. This view conflicts with

predominant classroom practice, which takes learning as a solitary act of receiving teacher-mediated textbook knowledge. Such isolationist or solitary learning is reflective of education systems structured in line with the necessity for individual children to pass or fail examinations at the end of each school year. Whereas children are seen and taught predominantly as a group, they must display individually satisfactory oral and written performances - the prized student outputs – before they are deemed fit to progress to the next grade level. Children are treated as a group because even where they are asked to read and write individually, the focus is still on conforming to the group norm rather than children's development as individuals with particular styles and interests, a point I fully discuss later.

In recognition of children's diverse resources, which they bring to bear on their reading and writing efforts, Chittenden et al (2001: 73) coined the term "orchestration of knowledge". They noted that the act of reading is goal oriented in that it is intended to accomplish the purpose of constructing meaning from print. In this endeavour, young children assemble, orchestrate, and deploy diverse knowledge resources in an effort to make sense of text in front of them. Such knowledge includes intertextual knowledge children already have about reading and writing prior to interaction with a particular text. Chittenden et al (2001: 73) therefore saw reading essentially as an "act of constructing meaning from text while maintaining reasonable fluency and reasonable accountability to the information contained in writing." I consider the applicability in my own research of Chittenden et al's (2001) focus on children's individuality, children as peer teachers and learners, and children's orchestration of knowledge resources. To put it another way, I examine the extent to which the individual and collective language repertoires of the children in my study were or were not brought to bear on the learning of literacy in the classroom. I now move on to examine the claim of Harris et al (2003) that Bakhtin's (1981) notion of intertextuality extends our understandings of the meaning of text and literacy beyond print, as well as demonstrating just what it entails when children marshal varied knowledge resources and interweave semiotic domains in their negotiation of meaning and construction of new knowledge.

2.3.5 Intertextuality: children read more than just the text on a page

Harris et al (2003) carried out a socio-cultural inquiry into the complexities and challenges that children had to contend with when learning literacy. The authors challenged classroom teachers to understand children's intertextuality as a source of pleasure, complexity, and as a guide to appropriate and engaging instruction. They argued that, in reading, young children read much more than the text at hand; they also read the authority structures and power relations inherent in a reading situation. Harris et al's (2003) interpretive inquiry evoked Bakhtin's (1981) theorization that a text carries many voices that filter through the writer onto the page – an intertextual phenomenon Bakhtin called heteroglossia. To fully explore intertextuality, argued Harris et al (2003), we need to broaden our definition of "text" to encompass written texts, spoken utterances and interactions, visual images, and lived experiences. In their view, broadening "text" in this way inevitably means a parallel broadening of what we define as "reading" and "writing" and "literacy". Harris et al (2003) further observed that, when reading, children made connections across texts and experiences in their various home, school and community settings as they made sense of texts and classroom tasks. These connections evoked texts and experiences that teacher and children had encountered in and beyond their classroom. As part of their meaning-making process, children made many connections among texts; just as they made many complex insights into texts that could be revealed by children's utterances. However, what children said was often susceptible to being overlooked in the busy interactions of reading lessons, or misunderstood in light of a teacher's own preconceptions.

Harris et al (2003) made reference to the "reader environment" which shapes what connections readers make to their resources. In classrooms, this environment is made up of complex social as well as pedagogic factors that shape the choices readers make therein. In this view, reading may be characterized as a process of shuttling back and forth between the language of the work and a network of contexts that are not in the work but are essential for its realization. Readers have a crucial role to play in choosing and constructing meanings from texts, drawing on their experiences of other texts – such as those texts previously read, those lived, and those explicitly recollected. Likewise, while

texts carry a myriad of possible meanings, it is up to the reader to achieve unity of meaning. It is readers who must find their own paths through texts (Harris et al, 2003). Such paths are shaped by both the texts themselves and the store of experiences and predispositions readers bring to their readings, as particular meanings are evoked for particular readers. The question that I ask, in this regard, with reference to my own research, has to do with whether the interconnectedness of children's knowledge sources is valued or discouraged at the level of literacy learning in the classroom.

2.3.6 Teachers as mediators of children's literacy learning

In the light of the preceding claims about intertextuality, the role of the teacher in directing 'traffic flow' in the classrooms is crucial. Cazden (2001) observed that classrooms were crowded, busy places. However, unlike in restaurants, classroom conversations were controlled by one person – the teacher, controlling not just negatively, as a traffic officer did to avoid collisions, but also positively, to enhance the purposes of education. In short, observed Cazden, teachers set up, organized, regulated participant structures in the classroom, or they regulated actions and talk within official classroom 'airtime'. According to Cazden (2001) teachers should be asked to rely less heavily on the traditional three-part pattern of classroom lessons – Initiation/Response/Evaluation (IRE/IRF) – that best fitted the transmission of facts and routinized procedures. Following Hymes (1962) and Heath (1983), Cazden (2001), suggested that language should be studied in its social context and in terms of its organization to serve social ends because language does not just occur in a socio-cultural vacuum. Cazden (2001) also took Hymes' proposition that learning different patterns of language use – different "ways with words" (Heath, 1983) - involved changing more than words alone. It entailed, she argued, taking on new roles, and the new identities they expressed – for students as well as teachers. The ability to do all this, according to Cazden (2001), rests on what Hymes (1962) called "communicative competence" which described what conversational participants knew in knowing how to participate in the first place.

Cazden (2001) argued that adults such as teachers helped children to make connections between new situations and familiar ones. She also noted that children's curiosity and

persistence were supported by adults who directed children's attention, structured experiences, supported learning attempts, and regulated the complexity and difficulty of information for children. Cazden made reference to the concept of a shifting zone of competence within which a learner, with help, can accomplish what later can be accomplished alone. This, noted Cazden (2001), is what Vygotsky (1978) called the "zone of proximal development" or the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with peers. Cazden argued that a scaffold had to change continuously as the child's competence grew, just as a physical scaffold is raised higher and higher upon a building as construction proceeds. In the strictest definition, argued Cazden (2001), the name scaffold properly applied only if there was evidence that the learner's competence did indeed grow over time. In other words, there is no point in raising the bar if the child is still battling with earlier concepts.

Appropriation: toward social constructivism

In order to illuminate the socio-cultural and social constructivist nature of the process of children's learning, Cazden (2001) drew on Bakhtin's (1981) related theory of appropriation. According to Bakhtin, there are two basic modes for the simultaneous transmission and appropriation of another's words (e.g., a text, a message, a rule, a model, a culture, etc.); namely, reciting off by heart and telling in one's own words. Bakhtin formalised the contrast into "authoritative discourse" and "internally persuasive discourse" (Bakhtin, 1994: 76). Authoritative discourse describes when the learner encounters a transmitted concept with its original authority still intact and therefore binding. This is learning at the level of learning off by heart knowledge to be repeated on demand in the future. Internally persuasive discourse, on the other hand, is when the learner moves a level higher to internalize and incorporate the transmitted concept into his or her own repertoire. At that time it loses its original hold and becomes more open to the learner's own intentions, marking a complete process of appropriation.

Cazden (2001) argued that Bakhtin's term *appropriation* makes clearer the distinction between passive transferral and active transformation of knowledge. The use of

appropriation instead of *internalization* eliminated another problem in that internalization implied a unidirectional process. Cazden (2001) argued that apparently only students were expected to internalize what they heard, saw, and read, as though children's intertextual histories played no active part in the process of acquiring new knowledge. Appropriation, by contrast, can be reciprocal. For instance, parents and teachers can appropriate children's utterances in order to re-voice more culturally mature formulations, which the children then will gradually appropriate into their own mental knowledge systems.

Cazden (2001) argued that even substituting appropriation for internalisation still said little about the internal mechanisms, as it only emphasized learners' active constructive as opposed to passive copying. A crucial precaution is to note that what can be internalized, or appropriated, from other people still requires significant mental work on the part of the individual learner. That mental work is what constructivism refers to. Variations on this term combine it with references to origins of the externally provided assistance, i.e., the external building materials. *Social constructivism* highlights the source of such in other people, from patterns of discourse to human-made artefacts like computers; socio-cultural and socio-historical constructionist perspectives call our attention to the origins of social resources in a particular culture with a particular history. Cazden (2001) was concerned that constructivists assumed that all knowledge is constructed individually from previous knowledge, irrespective of how the learner was taught. Yet even listening to a lecture involves active attempts to construct knowledge.

Cazden (2001) argued that the most important asymmetry in the rights and obligations of teachers and students in classroom discourse was over control of the right to speak. She argued that teachers had the role-given right to speak at any time and to any person. They also could fill any silence or interrupt any speaker. They could speak to a student anywhere in the room and in any volume or tone of voice. She observed too that the teacher frequently chose to direct verbal traffic by asking students to raise hands and then selecting someone to speak. She asserted that typically students looked at the teacher while speaking, signifying that they considered her the only official addressee. Classroom

seating can therefore play a big role in influencing who children have access to between the teacher, peers, and the immediate environment, for the externally provided assistance entailed by social constructivism.

Notwithstanding their relatively young ages, mentally normal children already know and can accomplish something on their own upon entry into school. Whatever they still can not accomplish unassisted, they can do so with the assistance of the teacher or in collaboration with more capable peers. Teachers therefore aid children's acquisition of new knowledge by setting up zones of proximal development for children to acquire culturally valued knowledge. Such a social constructivist outlook defines the teacher's role as mediator of children's learning. I find Cazden's approach to the well known concepts of scaffolding and appropriation to be both particularly relevant and useful for my own analysis. Her argument that scaffolding is only effective if there is evidence of learning, raises the question whether teachers in my study ensure that children lean on what they already know for support in an effort to reach for and grasp new literacy knowledge. Similarly, I wonder, in light Cazden's emphasis on appropriation rather than internalization, as to the applicability of Cazden's perspective in a research site in which adults may regard or value children's inputs as important in both the home and school literacy learning settings. Cazden's work provokes the question as to whether and what sort of social constructivist learning takes place in a setting where learning is generally one-way transmission from adults and teachers to children. I turn next to and fuse the works of Pransky and Bailey (2002) and Sipe (2002), specifically their treatment of how the links or de-links between curricular content and children's home cultural repertoires and frames shape how children come to relate and respond to text.

2.3.7 Cultural congruity and children's expressive engagement with text

Pransky and Bailey (2002) engaged classroom teachers in an investigation into their own pedagogic practice in order to reflectively improve it themselves. In other words these researchers undertook a branch of qualitative inquiry called action research. They drew substantially on Gee's (1990) concept of 'Discourse Community' in a study of ESL Cambodian refugee and Latino students in their own USA classrooms. They argued that

mismatches between home and school discourses caused cultural conflicts and put children academically at risk.

Since home and school are different social domains, which serve different socio-cultural purposes, these tensions will always be evident. Like Heath (1983) above, Pransky and Bailey (2002) suggested that areas of congruence and difference between home and school be identified and made explicit. The significance of congruence or difference between curriculum content and young children's home cultural experiences is explored and extended further in the related findings of Sipe's (2002) study, which identified explicit ways in which children achieve various levels of what he termed 'expressive engagement' with story or text if they can identify with the content and it makes cultural sense to them.

Sipe (2002) tape-recorded first- and second-graders' storybook read-alouds in a classroom in the USA. He focused on children's conversational turns that represented *expressive engagement* beyond the usual analysis and interpretation of plot, setting, characters, and theme. He applied Glaser and Straus's (1967) constant comparative method of analysis that involves 'bottom up' theory-biulding, or 'grounded theory'[9]. The analysis subsequently yielded five conceptual categories: dramatizing, talking back, critiquing/controlling, inserting, and taking over, as indicators of 'expressive engagement'. I focus on and take forward "talking back" because of its particular relevance to the findings of the research I present in this thesis.

Sipe (2002) described "talking back" as an instance where a child is stimulated to talk back to the story or characters. Sipe (2002: 477) argued that:

> …talking back to the story and addressing [in read-alouds] characters directly begins to blur the distinction between the 'story world and the children's world'.

[9]That is, theory is derived from the analysis of empirical evidence rather than imposing perspectives from outside the research context. This is also the essence of inductive inquiries whose conclusions emanate from the findings and are not shaped by preconceived hypotheses about a research problem.

> For a moment the two worlds become superimposed with one another – one transparent over the other.

Sipe (2002: 477) further argued that such instances of expressive engagement "…are evidence of children's deep engagement in the "secondary world" of the story: the world of the author..." It ceases to be the world of the author at this level of engagement if we take into account the reader's appropriation and infusion of the original text with his or her own intertextual meaning. It is important to recognize the fact that expressive engagement at the level of talking back is greatly facilitated by the child's ability to connect and identify with the content at a personal level (Pransky and Bailey, 2002). Connecting with textual content in this way suggests that reading is a personal engagement; a personal search for meaning in which otherwise inanimate text takes on animate attributes for it to be engaged directly in conversation. This personal search which resulted, in Sipe's (2002) investigation, in a merging of the imaginary literary world and children's lived worlds, presupposes a classroom ethos that incorporated children's intertextual histories in the construction of textual meaning. Otherwise, the same intertextual histories could be a source of alienation from school literacy for many children who, like those in my research, are just embarking on their classroom literacy journeys.

At this level of personal engagement with text, following Bakhtin (1981; 1994), meaning does not reside in the text at hand. It can be guessed at, experimented with, and extended to suit the reader's intentions. Such active negotiation and construction of meaning clearly transcends the limited range of literacy skills to which children from low-income family backgrounds are often restricted in official reading tasks, with an exclusive emphasis on correct recitation and coding competence. Marian Whitehead's (2002) longitudinal observation of her little middle-class grandson's literacy development, which I discus next, made comparable findings to those just discussed.

Whitehead (2002: 270) argued that "[e]arly literacy develops within networks of social and cultural expectations, human relationships and distinctive child-rearing beliefs and practices". Whitehead (2002) observed her grandson's first encounters with storybooks

from eight weeks to two years of age and noted his progressively personalised response to storybooks, which included cross-referencing between books and life and endowing inanimate things such as toys and other objects with life and feelings. She concluded that little children who interact with storybooks from an early age often develop a close relationship with textual content to a point where the familiarity somewhat blurs the distinction between the literary content and real life. Socio-culturally diverse children's varying relationships with texts were further explored through ethnographic studies by Stein and Slonimsky (2001) in a province in South Africa. Their studies bear direct relevance to my research in that they followed a similar theoretical perspective and applied similar analytical resources. The research took place in a non-Western context just three hundred kilometres from Swaziland where the present study took place.

Stein and Slonimsky (2001) investigated literacy practices in two black working class families and a white middle-class family in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. They found strikingly different ways in which the three families mediated or held literacy for their children. They noted, in accordance with Heath (1983) that the different ways of initiating children to print at home predisposed the children to approach literacy in different ways in school and later life. Stein and Slonimsky (2001) established that while all three families took education seriously and, for that reason, mediated literacy for their children, the low-income parents' efforts fell short in that, unlike their middle-class counterparts, one attended exclusively to coding competence while the other extended literacy a little further to exploit text's metaphorical meaning for moral lessons intended for the child. For the middle-class child, on the other hand, literacy was not just about sounding it out correctly and invoking it for 'fixed' moral or instructional purposes. It was something the child could take apart and try out numerous possibilities with, depending on what the child wanted literacy to do for him or her at any given time. It wasn't external to the child who had the agency to adapt it to his or her specific purposes. The children were part of it and it was part of them. Related research (e.g., Prinsloo and Stein, 2003, Prinsloo, 2004) indicates that in school the two sets of children's contrasting encounters with literacy were likely to continue as a result of differentiated initiation to literacy at home.

Stein and Slonimsky (2001) concluded that each family's approach to literacy mediation was critical to understanding their respective social and cultural relations to literacy as a social practice. However, as the working class and middle-class children's contrasting initiation to literacy and subsequent interaction with classroom literacy illustrates, the working class children were exposed to a narrow channel of literacy which increased the likelihood that they would not learn to use literacy in creative and critical ways in later learning in particular and life in general. Stein and Slonimsky's (2001) findings relate to the present study in that both address the issue of low-income children's different socialization to language and literacy and how that impacts their overall literacy development in the classroom and beyond.

Prinsloo (2004), presenting a related study of a working class Xhosa girl's play-based creative language use in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, argued that the girl's elaborate language use at home contrasted sharply with highly directed literacy learning in school, which disregarded her home-based linguistic repertoires. Prinsloo (2004) observed that the young girl drew extensively on local popular culture, such as Xhosa and Christian church influences and the mass media such as TV, radio, and schooling. Prinsloo's study established that the girl, from a working class family, in play with her peers, actively experimented with language drawing from the official world of school, the peer social world, and the home sphere (Dyson, 1993). At play, observed Prinsloo (2004), the girl showed highly active use of and interest in language across sites. In school however, she was subjected to a highly directed skill and drill teaching which excluded her knowledge and interests. Prinsloo (2004) argued that school, unlike the home play context, also insisted on individual rather than collective performance. Prinsloo concluded that while the girl coped in school, the classroom restrictions meant that many children did not. Instead, emphasized Prinsloo (2004), the children were being inducted into a very limited version of school reading which did not prepare them for learning through reading later in school and beyond. Like Stein and Slonimsky (2001) above, Prinsloo's (2004) research relates to the present study in that it dealt directly with low-income children's differentiated encounters with language and print at home and in

school. It also went on to expose the problems at the interface between home and school language and literacy practices.

From the foregoing discussion of Pransky and Bailey, Sipe, Whitehead, Stein and Slonimsky, and Prinsloo, a pattern emerges of the dependence of children's varied participation in school literacy on their varied orientations to communicative and literacy practices at home. I therefore engage, in my own analysis, with the question of what kinds of orientations to literacy were facilitated by home backgrounds of the children in my study. I also examine the ways in which those orientations matched or differed from school literacy practices and expectations. In particular, I assess the extent to which the similarities and dissimilarities facilitated or impeded literacy learning in the children's respective classrooms. Below I review the major arguments regarding which is the best way to teach literacy to young children in the light of the discussion of the NLS's social turn which I have explored in detail in this chapter, thus far.

2.4 Arguments for an eclectic approach to early literacy teaching and learning

The question of which is the appropriate approach to the teaching of early literacy has been the subject of an intense debate over the last three decades, particularly in the USA. The origins of the debate date back to long before the influential research of Jeanne Chall (1967), commissioned to investigate and identify those aspects of reading that were most in need of research. The debate had centred on whether phonics or the whole language approach was the better option. The debates originate from policymakers and educationists' aspirations to children's reading readiness. Reading readiness itself is the perception that certain prerequisites such as bio-mechanical skills and stages of cognitive development are required before a child can handle the more challenging competencies of reading and writing with meaning and understanding. The phonics approach is concerned that a central focus of beginning reading instruction must be that of developing the skills involved in recognizing individual written letters, the sounds they represent, and words because, as Adams (1994: 13) argued, "these skills, after all, are singularly lacking in the

beginner and are a prerequisite to reading, however one defines it". The primary focus of the phonics approach is therefore correct word recognition and the relationship between letters and the sounds they represent. Adams (1994: 50) defined phonics as a "…system of teaching reading that builds on the alphabetic principle, a system of which a central component is the teaching of correspondences between letters and groups of letters and their pronunciations." Children, such as those from low-income families, who come to school without these prerequisite skills are said to be at risk of failing to learn to read. This risk is the reason for direct phonics skills drill to make all children ready to read.

On the other side of the debate is the whole language approach, which holds that because the purpose of reading is comprehension, comprehension should therefore be emphasized right from the start. Among the pioneering proponents of the whole language approach are Kenneth and Yetta Goodman. Kenneth Goodman (1991: 108), for instance, argued strongly: "…until a child can read, talking about letters and about the sounds of letters is sheer jabberwacky. Thorough knowledge of letters and their sounds is not required in order to read words; phonic skills come with reading." According to this opposing view, phonics is not a prerequisite for reading. In fact, the opposite is true in that it is exposure to reading that naturally gives rise to phonemic awareness in young children. Kenneth Goodman (1986: 84) even dismissed the matching of letters with sounds as "a flat-earth view of the world, one that rejects modern science about reading." His rejection of direct phonic instruction echoed that of Weaver (1980: 86) who argued, "Children can develop and use an intuitive knowledge of letter-sound correspondences [without] any phonics instruction [or] without deliberate instruction from adults." Goodman and Weaver were of the view that it was more desirable and beneficial to immerse children in authentic and meaningful reading activities than to design decontextualized phonics instruction in the classroom.

Goodman et al (1986: 2) who were increasingly dissatisfied with such descriptions of emergent literacy as 'early reading and writing' or 'beginning reading and writing', eventually coined the "roots of literacy" metaphor. As far as they were concerned the earlier labels:

> …have been so unsatisfactory to explain the complexity of the development of literacy in children. Such terms have allowed teachers and curriculum developers to believe that the beginnings of reading and writing can be stated as a specific point in time that is visible and measurable. Even with all the research and anecdotal knowledge about oral language, no one has ever been able to pinpoint the exact moment when a child begins to talk or listen. In the same way, no one knows when a child begins to write and read.

The roots-of-literacy metaphor also suggests the complexity of the interaction of functions, forms, and conceptualizations that become part of children's knowledge about literacy as they develop. According to Goodman et al (1986: 2),

> (t)he metaphor can also be extended to suggest that the roots are deeply buried in the soil of a literate environment [in which case] the roots can be studied in the environment in which they occur, but their growth and development are not observable on the ground surface.

Two pertinent observations come to mind here. One has to do with the fact that it is nonsensical to speak of 'reading readiness' if we have no notion of when reading and writing occur in individual children. Certainly, if reading and writing development begin "…long before children even reach kindergarten" (Teale & Yokota, 2001) amidst play, interactions, etc., then no-one knows precisely at what point the process begins. Literacy development in children is indeed a complex social phenomenon, which cannot be fully comprehended without serious engagement with children's interactions with their environment.

Goodman et al (1986: 1) argued that children in a literate society grow up with literacy as an integral part of their personal, familial, and social histories. They added: "Interacting with their literate environment, children invent their own literacies, and their inventions often parallel the inventions of literacy by society as a whole." Children thus begin to be aware of the functions of written language and to play at its use long before they come to school (Goodman & Goodman, 1990). The school is charged with extending this immersion in literacy. Often the school is a richer literate environment than the world

outside of school. The teacher ought to serve as mediator between the learner and this literate environment. This mediating role will be incomplete if it fails to engage with the learner's prior-to-school and out-of-school facility with language, written language included in some cases. Goodman and Goodman (1990: 226) observed, "…all children are whole-language learners. Unfortunately,…they often don't encounter whole-language teachers." According to these writers, language and literacy are located in social contexts, and so should be their learning. The Goodmans argued that direct phonics instruction reduced literacy to the bare mechanics of reading and writing and totally disregarded the socio-cultural applications and functions of literacy as a social practice.

The Goodmans' were so bitterly opposed to the phonics approach that, according to Levine (1994: 42), Kenneth Goodman once attacked Marilyn Adams, a critic of the whole language approach, and called her "a 'vampire' who threatened the literacy of America's youth." Adams' (1994) advocated a somewhat more eclectic approach to early literacy instruction than the debate would suggest. She argued that phonics can work together with a focus on meaning-making as an approach to teaching reading. She argued for a calculated balance in order to take care of questions of both the form and function of literacy at once. She argued that an overdose of phonics, to the exclusion of meaning and vice versa, did not result in effective reading development.

Adams then provided an integrated treatment of the knowledge and process involved in skilful reading, as well as the implications for reading instruction. She developed a useful analogy for describing the operation of the reading system that supports our ability to read. She likened it to a car whose assemblage of the engine and the mechanics of the car represent the perceptual and conceptual machinery that make the system go. However, just as the car requires fuel energy to move, print is essential for reading to occur. And just like a car needs a driver, print is silent without a reader who interprets letters into sounds that make up meaningful words, phrases, and sentences. Once more, the reader, like the driver needs a purpose for driving in a particular direction and manner, needs a purpose for reading to sustain his or her interest in the exercise. That interest is developed through exposure to the functions, methods, and personal pleasures that can be derived

from engagement with print. Quite unlike a car, however, learning to read is not a modular, hierarchical activity whose discrete and countable parts of each subsystem are from bottom up screwed, welded, and otherwise fastened together. As Adams (1994: 6) observed:

> For the reading system, in contrast, the parts are not discrete. We cannot proceed by completing each individual subsystem and then fastening it to another. Rather, the parts of the reading system must grow together. They must grow to one another and from one another.

Adams (1994: 3) argued that the ability to read words, quickly, accurately, and effortlessly, is critical to skilful reading comprehension. However:

> Skillful reading is not a unitary skill. It is a whole complex system of skills and knowledge. Within this system, the knowledge and activities involved in visually recognizing individual printed words are useless in and of themselves. They are valuable and, in a strong sense, possible only as they are guided and received by complementary knowledge and activities of language comprehension.

Not all reading experts agreed entirely with Adams' selection of studies or with her interpretation of research data in support of her position. The present study takes the view that Adams' eclecticism might provide a useful approach in ESL situations like Swaziland, the context of the present study. In such circumstances, where beginning second or foreign language learners struggle with coding the target language, phonics drill methods possibly have a role. As Adams (1994: 10) argued, "Research indicates that, particularly for children who enter school with weak [school] literacy preparation, direct instruction in word analysis skills is critically important."

She did, however, qualify her argument in noting that:

> All students, whether their preschool reading preparation is high, low or in between, need to learn about spelling, sounds, and their relationships; few students will do so without conducive instructional guidance.

The risk, however, in overusing the phonics approach is that children may master 'cracking the code' but fail to acquire not just the language, but also everything else about literacy, in particular the feel for how one does things with reading and writing, if

they do not interact with it in meaningful contexts as suggested by the Goodmans above. This is so because reading and writing occur in culturally meaningful contexts. Just as speech would not develop if one were exposed to isolated sounds, humans do not develop speech because of an innate disposition alone. They do so in interactive social situations. Even more applicable to the present study, however, is Adams' (1994: 423) caution against prescribing "any particular universal, best method for teaching reading" which overlooks the role played by the cultural makeup of the teacher and students as well as the specific teaching milieu in which teaching occurs.

From the point of view of Yetta Goodman (1989: 125), whole language inherited from humanism "respect for, and positive attitudes toward, all learners regardless of their ages, abilities, or backgrounds." Kenneth Goodman (1986: 25) shared her observation:

> Whole language teachers…believe in kids, respect them as learners, cherish them, and treat them with love and dignity. That's a lot better than regarding children as empty pots that need filling, as blobs of clay that need moulding, or worse, as evil little troublemakers forever battling teachers.

Yetta Goodman (1989: 125) argued for greater recognition of the importance of children's active involvement in their own learning, that "…children learn language best as they use it for real and functional purposes". She also recognized the "social community of the classroom and its influence on learning language".

Goodman and Goodman (1990: 225) summarised the argument for immersion of children in meaningful contexts of whole language use thus:

> Language, written language included, is learnt most [effectively] in the context of use. When language is whole, relevant, and functional, learners have real purposes for using language, and through their language use they develop control over the processes of language, in authentic literacy events, events that have personal and significant meaning for the language user, there are transactions between the reader and the text in which the reader is continuously solving new problems and building and extending psycholinguistic strategies. Through these transactions text serves to mediate the development of reading and writing.

There is an implicit suggestion here that just as young children learn spoken language naturally and unconsciously through direct immersion in real conversations, all they need to develop reading and writing, including phonics, is direct participation in authentic reading and writing situations. Critics of an exclusive whole language approach to literacy have argued that the Goodmans' comparison of learning to speak a first language with learning to read and write is flawed. This is so because whereas first language speech develops 'naturally', presumably because we are genetically disposed to acquiring language while infants, reading and writing, on the other hand, requires direct instruction because we do not have the same genetic disposition to learnt literacy as we do language (Snow, 1991).

In studies conducted in different settings, young children have been shown to engage in self-teaching. For instance, Bissex (1984) reported the differential writing development of her middle-class pre-school son, Paul, and a working-class first grader, Scott. They were both in the early stages of literacy learning. While they both 'taught themselves', Paul was advanced in his literacy skills while Scott was behind. Their contrasting literacy learning environments accounted for the differences in their literacy development. For instance, whereas Paul did his early reading and writing in a very quiet home environment, where he worked undisturbed for stretches of time, Scott worked in the midst of classmates, with whom he talked a great deal, so that he concentrated on his work for briefer periods. Paul taught himself a spelling system based on the use of letters to represent letter names; e.g., 'DA' for day even before he was much of a reader. It is evident that Paul made use of his literate environment to construct literacy for himself, of course not entirely without the intervention of his highly literate mother whom he frequently invited to this 'self-teaching'. Scott's home environment was not only less literate, but his parents did not involve themselves in his literacy development, as did Paul's mother.

Another example is Ferreiro's (1984) discovery of children's similar self-teaching in a study of early literacy development among middle- and working-class Mexican pre-

schoolers. She documented evidence that the children actively constructed literacy progressively from using graphemes to using actual letters. In a similar study of 78 children from different socio-cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and geographical backgrounds, Goodman et al's (1986: 2) findings matched those of both Bissex and Ferreiro in what gave rise to the Goodmans' "roots of literacy" metaphor discussed earlier in this subsection.

A critical feature in these reports of children teaching themselves is that of the presence of a literate environment wherein the child finds herself. Kress (1997) similarly referred to what children 'have to hand', to indicate this environment. In a literate environment, as the examples above illustrate, children begin to negotiate meaning from print by producing 'squiggles', which they progressively perfect through hypothesising and experimentation (Clay, 1975, 1979, 1993). In print-deficient environments, young children adapt a range of objects or artefacts around them to construct meaning and to represent their world. In both cases, the children draw on the wider social landscape in negotiating and constructing meaning. Kress (1997) argued that all children are competent meaning-makers when they enter the First Grade. The trouble is that schools are highly selective about which of these linguistic repertoires (Luke & Kale, 1997) count as 'reading readiness', and children might well bring resources to school that make it easy or less easy for them to acquire reading and writing in school-like ways. Those children identified as 'deficient' in school literacy are seen as not ready to learn to read and write despite the wealth of other meaning-making skills they possess, which they must now completely discard to make way for new learning. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (1981: 7), "The world around us is made up of millions of details, and when we look at it, we 'see' only some of them, the ones which contain meaning for us." In support of this view, Kress (1997) observed that children's meaning making and subsequent representation of their world are guided by their individual interest and what to them seems significant to communicate and how it should be communicated. Skutnabb-Kangas (1981: 7) argued, "When we are interested in something, we learn a lot of details about that part of the world, that particular area…and our language, its

structure, vocabulary and what of it we have learnt, participates in choosing what we 'see.'''

2.5 Closing remarks

In this chapter I have outlined the theoretical concepts that inform the research concerns and methodology adopted in this study and detailed in the next chapter. For instance, I discussed the influence of the NLS and related works whose thrust is a social practice approach to literacy. I also pointed out that because of its NLS theoretical orientation, the present study takes the view that as a social practice literacy cannot be studied outside its socio-cultural milieu which gives it its situated meaning. The located nature of literacy's meaning gives rise to the notion of multiple literacies, which challenges earlier traditional notions of literacy as a universal set of culturally neutral, detachable skills. In this chapter I also emphasized the argument from the literature that no single literacy is 'naturally' the standard. What makes school literacy look like one is a dominant ideology associated with Western middle-class societies, whose influence shapes what counts as school literacy. I observed that one implication of these arguments is that for culturally diverse children to have equal access to privileged school literacy there is, most likely, a need to draw out such children's linguistic resources as well as to explicate what school literacy entails. Finally, I presented the contending phonics/whole language debate, taking the position that the two could perhaps work side-by-side in the quest for reading development in young children from diverse backgrounds. In reviewing the material in the foregoing subsections I treat them not so much as indisputable facts, but as influential works whose arguments I will draw on and examine in relation to my own analysis in chapters four and five below.

In the next chapter I describe the framework for the empirical research that I carried out with the help of the theoretical resources just discussed.

Chapter 3

Research Design

3.1 Introduction

In chapters one and two I set out the background and theoretical frame for the study. This chapter describes the research methods and tools that were developed for the research. After summarising the theoretical issues at stake in this work, I explain my choice of ethnography as a research orientation and method, including the use of interpretive data-gathering tools and related analysis procedures. I explain how these ethnographic methods suited my concerns in this study, as well as how they worked in my research context. I conclude this section by describing the ethical considerations that shaped the selection of research subjects and my access to the research sites. I then give an introductory description of the children who were the focus of the research. Next, I provide a snapshot description of the teachers who mediated literacy for the focal children. I then provide a brief description of the research schools as research sites in which the children's stories took place. Next, I discuss access issues such as initial challenges faced and breakthroughs achieved during the fieldwork part of the research. Lastly, I provide a key for the conventions I adopted in transcribing tape-recorded data. (Audio-recordings, both of observational and interview data were the primary medium of data capture in the fieldwork, together with my own written fieldnotes.)

3.2 Ethnographic-style research: epistemology and method

My concern in this study was not with statistical representativeness or empirical generalizability. Rather, I sought to make inferences of a grounded, theoretical kind that were based on a detailed study and analysis of each of the focal children's home- and school-based literacy development. In other words, the study aspired, in the first instance, to grounded theory emanating directly from data evidence in each case rather than the testing of existing theory. I assumed, following Bell (1999), that the relatability of a case study is more important than its generalizability, where the former is the extent to which

description is sufficient for someone working in a similar situation to relate their decision making to that described in the case. I was also concerned, following Erickson (1986), to consciously generalize within the specific case rather than across all study cases, though I related my findings to those of the wider literature and drew on that literature to make sense of my data. Following work in the New Literacy Studies (e.g., Freebody, 1997), I was concerned that the aggregated findings of traditional census survey research is silent about, and therefore conceals, the situated ways that reading and writing happen in specific socio-cultural contexts. National surveys undertaken in Swaziland had reported an above 80% literacy rate for Swaziland, (GoS, 1997, 2007) but did not shed light on whether and how people were or were not actively engaging in reading and writing practices in home or work settings, nor on the nature of these practices. An interpretive case-study like this one held potential for addressing this limitation by attending to the situated nature of language, literacy and learning, thus facilitating an in-depth understanding of particular cases that might then be related to the larger situation.

At the start of this research, and following my wider reading around the topic, I was also concerned that in Swaziland, like elsewhere, schools might indeed punish children from low-income families for "…not having a priori the forms of linguistic and cultural capital that schools are ostensibly charged with delivering" (Bourdieu, cited in Gee, 1990: viii). Thus, my research question was: How do children from low-income families encounter the situated literacy practices of schooling in Swaziland, and how do these practices set them up to succeed or fail at school?

The wider research in literacy studies and early childhood literacy, in particular, as I discussed it in chapter two, together with my own informal observations, had suggested to me that the linguistic resources of children from low-income family backgrounds in Swaziland's schools, might well be ignored or disparaged by teachers. I was concerned to examine these claims by identifying the particular dynamics characterising such interactions in this peripheral African setting. I used evidence from four children's home and school literacy lives, systematically collected by means of in-depth ethnographic case

studies and used an interpretive analytical frame and ethnography as my frames of enquiry.

3.2.1 The choice of ethnography and rationale for using it

The choice of ethnographic-style research underlines the centrality of observational data in this study. Ethnography as a qualitative research method originates from the field of anthropology for which a primary construct is culture (Angus, 1998). The term ethnography itself means the study or description of a people or groups of people in the context of the dictates of the culture which shapes their beliefs, thinking, and actions as they go about their everyday lives. For the present study, whose thrust is a description, analysis, and interpretation of children's early literacy development in their cultural contexts of the home and school domains, ethnographic inquiry seemed suitable and appropriate for a detailed description and record of socio-culturally located literacy activity as it occurred in school and out-of-school settings. Ethnography concerns itself with a holistic interpretation of socio-cultural phenomena. For instance, the researcher immerses himself or herself in the field and has extended opportunity to interact with the setting and participants over a reasonably long period of time. According to Emerson et al (1995: 10) the "…ethos of (ethnographic) fieldwork holds that in order to fully understand and appreciate action from the perspective of participants, one must get close to and participate in a wide cross-section of their daily activities over an extended period of time." In the process of interacting the researcher develops significant insight into the locals' ways of doing things. As Emerson et al (1995: 3) observed:

> The fieldworker enters into a previously unfamiliar (not known in an intimate way) social setting, participates in its daily routines, develops ongoing relationships with the people in it, observes what's going on, and writes down in regular systematic ways what they observe and learn while participating in the daily rounds of life of others (the two distinct activities involved are *observation* and *writing down* observations). Getting close, as ethnographic fieldworkers must, requires physical and social proximity to the daily rounds of people's lives, in order for them to take up strategic positions in the sites and scenes of other

people's lives to observe and understand them. Such 'deeper immersion' is the essence of participant observation.

It is crucial to point out that the familiarity that comes with the ethnographic fieldworker's deeper immersion is aimed at facilitating his or her ability to make the familiar strange rather than to blunt it, as well as to make the unfamiliar more familiar to the readers. This is the point of sustained participant observation and, more importantly, detailed systematic documentation of research evidence.

An added advantage of ethnographic inquiry is that it starts from an unassuming, though not totally neutral, position as reflected in the question "What's going on here?" Bogdan and Biklen (1998: 50). In other words, the field researcher approaches the study site with an open mind as much as possible and is therefore to a large extent informed by what he or she finds out upon observation. The field researcher's immersion over a period affords him or her enough understanding of the local situation or meaning to produce detailed or 'thick description'. It is important to note that in ethnographic inquiry the field researcher aspires to a detailed description of reality from the point of view of the participants. Once again this is so that the field researcher does not impose his or her perspective on the research field and participants. In a sense ethnography remains democratic despite the field researcher's obvious research agenda. Ethnography, according to Emerson et al (1995: 10, citing van Maneen, 1988: ix) "is the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one's experience in the world of these others." The object of participating in others' settings is "ultimately to get close to those studied as a way of understanding what their experiences and activities mean to them" (Emerson et al, 1995: 12). This is the essence of the pursuit of "indigenous meaning" or local meaning in ethnography. Ethnographers, as Wedin (2004: 19) noted, are "interested in understanding, [and] not predicting, people's behaviour." Such understanding develops from careful, sustained study and cultural interpretation of behaviour in naturally ongoing social settings. I believed that by 'integrating' myself into the research context for a twelve-month period, I was better positioned to elicit as much 'naturally-occurring' phenomena as was possible.

The actions of human subjects across domains differ from the behaviour of both physical objects and other animals. Human actions do not consist simply of fixed responses or even of learnt responses to stimuli. They involve interpretation of stimuli and the dialogic construction of responses. Thus, as Hammersley et al (1994: 6) argued, "…if we are to be able to explain human actions effectively we must gain an understanding of the cultural perspectives on which they are based", through proximity to the people and their actions. This is what the ethnographic fieldworker endeavours to achieve through participant observation. Interacting with my subjects over a long period had its challenges, which included inevitable observer effects. However, it also facilitated mutual understanding that reduced initial social distance and with it potentially contrived behaviour.

In ethnographic research, such as in the current study, understanding the world essentially from the point of view of its inhabiting participants is referred to as seeking an 'emic' perspective. Developing an emic perspective inevitably involves sustained close interaction with the context and the participants whose actions are embedded within it (Angus, 1998). To achieve this, leading ethnographers such as Erickson (1986: 119), recommended using "…as a basic validity criterion the immediate and local meanings of actions, as defined from the actors' point of view…" which they themselves have come to take for granted. Without claiming that the field researcher could ever become so completely 'native' (Geertz, 1973) – an absolutely impossible task given the transient nature of my regular visits - as to capture completely 'naturally-occurring phenomena' (Gregory, 1994; Purcell-Gates, 1993), he or she stays long enough to become familiar with the context enough to distinguish 'winks from twitches' (Geertz, 1973), that is, to understand 'local ways' on the basis of extended proximity to them. That is how fieldworkers attempt to counteract an ever-present and bothersome 'observer's paradox' (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998) arising from observer effects on the setting, where the researcher's own preconceptions influence their perceptions and thus distort the field of study.

In the current study I was an outsider in the individual children's respective homes who was also privileged to the extent that I was a member and, therefore, an insider of sorts

when it comes to the broader culture that I share with members of these homes. As a result, I knew my social boundaries particularly in the children's houses. I also knew what I could and could not ask of my participants. This shared knowledge minimized chances of offending my hosts and, at the same time, limited what data it was possible to generate.

Ethnographic inquiry's first concern is with process rather than product. The fact that it starts by asking 'What's going on?', as alluded to earlier, is indication that causal relationships are not central at first to ethnographic inquiry. This owes to the assumption that the field researcher does not know enough about the research site and the participants until participant observation takes place. It would therefore be presumptuous for the field researcher to behave as though he or she already knew what was happening and only needed to establish the causes of the phenomena. Ethnographic research starts from the premise that inquiry would not be necessary if the researcher already knew what was going on in the field. The purpose of inquiry is therefore to find out rather than to confirm or disconfirm preconceived hypotheses, as is the case with controlled laboratory studies.

Ethnographic inquiry is open-ended in nature. As such, it operates like a funnel; that is, it starts from broad to narrow, from the general to the particular. The broad research focus is narrowed and refined as the research develops. In addition, ethnographic research is said to be inductive in that theory is generated from data, rather than pre-hypothesised, as in traditional experimental inquiry, which is known for being deductive in that its point of departure is a specific hypothesis. In that case, the aim of research is to prove or disprove that particular hypothesis. As an interpretive ethnographic-style study, my research adhered to an inductive rather than deductive analytical frame. As such I did not draw up and then set out to test explicit hypotheses (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998; Hammersley et al, 1994), although I was undoubtedly influenced in my perceptions by my own prior experiences and by the readings that I carried out before and during the fieldwork research. In line with an open-ended research focus, I began with a general interest in home and school influences on early literacy development, and developed a sharpened interest, once in the field in the ways in which children possessed and displayed rich and

diverse out-of-school language resources, in the form of interactive communicative practices, and an interest in whether these were disregarded at home with adults and in the classroom literacy learning context. As Angus (1998) advised, I systematically started looking for confirming and/or disconfirming processual evidence relating to earlier observations and grounded theorisation. The focus of the research subsequently "…narrowed and sharpened as it proceeded" (Hammersley et al, 1994: 7).

In line with its open-ended nature, ethnographic inquiry uses unstructured observations. That is, there is no need to develop highly structured observation schedules which are strictly adhered to. It is this open-endedness that has exposed ethnographic observations and interviews to criticism for being unscientific and subjective. Critics have argued that the open-endedness significantly minimizes chances of replication by other researchers. In conceding this bias, I note that whatever data are collected always depends on the researcher and, to some degree reflects his or her personal characteristics. I therefore contend that all knowledge is personal and cultural in some way, after all. To counteract the perceived weakness, however, I combined observation and interviewing alongside document analysis as a triangulation technique to ensure that findings were not entirely idiosyncratic. Hammersley et al (1994: 7-8) argued that:

> …the structuring of data that quantitative research employs to overcome subjectivity [always] has reactive effects. In other words, people react to the structure itself, thereby increasing the chances that the behaviour studied is an artifact of the research process and not representative of the [naturally-occurring] phenomena purportedly being studied. Nor does the use of schedules solve the problem of subjectivity because different people can interpret the same structure differently. For example, the same question asked by an interviewer at the same point in an interview may mean different things to different people if they have different perspectives.

Along these lines, I approached the task from the standpoint that all research is inherently subjective, at least to the extent that from the outset it is always researcher-determined and involves varying degrees of personal interpretation (Geertz, 1973; Gregory, 1994; Hammersley et al, 1994). My aim was thus to take account of and attempt to minimize

subjectivity by acknowledging and making explicit possible influence of personal perceptions, then stepping back and using the experience to increase sensitivity to others' feelings. Otherwise, "all descriptions are selective, purposed, angled, voiced, because they are authored" (Emerson, et al, 1995: 106). I sought to keep description 'thick' enough (Geertz, 1973), grounding conclusions in the observed consequences or functions of participants' actions in context (Gregory, 1994), which in the case of my study translated into the social work (Dyson, 1993) accomplished through communicative and literacy events. That way I hoped to enhance chances that different readers of the eventual research report would reach similar conclusions about events reported on. I now turn my focus to the interpretive data-collecting tools I systematically applied in this ethnographic enquiry.

3.2.2 Interpretive data-gathering tools

I used ethnographic observation as the major data-gathering tool in my research. In other words, I was the chief data-gathering instrument. To this end, I regularly observed each of the four focal children (introduced under 3.3 below) at home and in school, in turn, over a period of twelve months. Following Dyson's (1993) example, I settled into their home and school lives and tried to present myself as an un-threatening, friendly, and minimally reactive adult who did not attempt to guide or help the children with their work in and out of class. There were uneasy times, however, when the line between reacting minimally and total involvement was blurred, particularly with respect to one boy in the study who occasionally invited me into his writing (see subsection 3.4.1 below for Fana's full profile and chapter 5, subsections 5.4.1, and 5.4.2, for a detailed discussion of this tendency). That experience made me realize the meaning of Purcell-Gates' (1993) counsel that the fieldworker cannot assume a completely passive posture in ethnographic research. This caution is more pertinent to a study that involved children who might easily interpret your distanced relationship to them as lack of interest in their work.

I observed focal children during verbal and non-verbal interactions with adults (very rare) and siblings at home; during solitary play, peer interactions, reading, writing, or drawing, while in church, threshing maize, going to the grinding mill, vending sugarcane and playing skipping-rope at a roadside market stall. I observed them in school, mainly during language arts activities such as spelling time, informal quiet talk among children during individual official drawing and writing, formal talk during direct teacher-child exchanges, whole class sessions, during free play out in the playground, and during mealtimes. I used audiotape to record literacy and communicative events and the episodes embedded in them while jotting down on-the-spot fieldnotes to capture striking observations (including contextual details) and to record my preliminary perceptions of what I perceived to be going on.

I endeavoured to ensure that the audiotape recorder was as less intrusive as possible by first establishing if children were already used to and comfortable with the presence of the device. Where they weren't, which was invariably the case, I brought and made it visible to children during familiarization sessions prior to observation wherein children had the opportunity to handle the device, ask questions about its use, or simply make comments that led to debates among peers. I am not claiming that I completely eliminated the audiotape recorder's effects on the setting and the research children. On the contrary, I was always conscious of its presence and potential effects and undertook to minimize distraction. Once observation commenced, I always strapped the micro audiotape recorder to my wrist, while I watched and took fieldnotes.

I also used interviews as a data-gathering tool. For instance, there were ongoing informal interviews with teachers in the form of chats about focal and other children and their work during morning break. Towards the end of the fieldwork, I interviewed each of the four focal teachers, using an adaptation of Chittenden et al's (2001) descriptive interview schedule. The interviews followed a semi-structured design, enabling the teacher the flexibility to address a whole range of pedagogical issues per broad question category relating to the focal children. I scheduled the interviews strategically very close to the end of the fieldwork in order to be able to focus on observed classroom behaviour patterns, as

well as to allow teachers to reflect on the meaning of selected aspects of their teaching practice. I audiotaped all descriptive interviews and transcribed and analyzed them.

In addition to ethnographic observation and interviewing, I also used document analysis. The documents were any kind of text from textbooks to children's worksheets to children's drawings, photographs, and other artefacts, which might reveal the kinds of literacy practices behind observed literacy events and the social work children accomplished through them. Document analysis thus also fulfilled a triangulation function for checking the validity of observational and interview data. In the next subsection, I detail the interpretive data analysis procedures I used to facilitate my interpretation of the different categories of data.

3.2.3 Interpretive data analysis procedures

In order to make sense of accumulated observational, interview, documentary and other data, interpretive data analysis procedures were used. It is important to establish at the outset that this is a qualitative study whose data analysis of necessity adhered to 'naturalistic', sociolinguistic methods. There were three major data sources, namely observational data, which predominated and comprised tape-recorded data and fieldnotes; interviews with teachers; and documents, which included official books, textbooks, and children's products such as writing and drawings. Below I detail interpretive analysis processes that applied to each set of data.

Observational data included notes on non-verbal aspects of focal children's social interaction. Non-verbal behaviour, like talk, occurred in space, time and place., I tried to take account of who was interacting with whom and how the interactants related to each other at a given time. Non-verbal interaction, recorded in fieldnotes, was analysed in the context of where and how it occurred, as well as with reference to accompanying conversation, where it occurred. Observational data also included collected artefacts and photographs, which were analyzed alongside fieldnotes, while bearing in mind the contexts of their occurrence.

As pointed out in the foregoing section, I accumulated a large amount of text during the fieldwork. As Silverman (1993) noted, much of what we observe in formal and informal settings will inevitably consist of conversations, and that, though often viewed as trivial, talk has increasingly become recognized as the primary medium through which social interaction takes place. Just as families and friends assemble their activities, both in homes and in public places through talk, the focal children similarly negotiated social spaces (Dyson, 1993). In Gee's (1990, 1999) terms, primarily through talk they established solidarity and status; they constructed, enacted, and recruited identities during communicative interaction with teachers, family and local community members, and peers. According to Silverman (1993), the linguistic character of field data is most obvious in the case of texts and interviews. In this study, linguistic salience was enhanced through the creation of text through detailed transcription of audiotaped interviews and talk in the home, official (school), and informal (peer) spheres in which focal children interacted with a variety of others around them. Texts therefore comprised transcripts and documents, including children's products such as drawings, scribbles, writings, and cuttings-out. Documents, drawings, writings and cuttings out were interpreted taking account of the contexts of their creation as social work (Dyson, 1993).

Transcripts[10] of interviews (mostly translated from SiSwati into English), classroom and home talk (also mostly translated from SiSwati into English), on the other hand, were analyzed at two implicit levels. Conversational analysis (Silverman, 1993) was used, in a loose sense, to determine the nature of language used by focal children. Transcripts were of necessity carefully detailed in order to capture all the linguistic features and organization of utterances. The next level, discourse analysis (Gee, 1999), was then applied, again in a flexible way, to analyse the social functions to which focal children

[10]Over the twelve-month duration of the fieldwork, I sat in on and closely observed approximately 168 sessions, which included classes and home visits. From these sessions, I obtained about 112 hours of transcribed data. I then organized the data by means of thematic coding categories. The themes for my chapters, sections, and subsections emerged from these coding categories. I came to select the data examples I show in chapters four and five below based on either how they represented typical behaviour or a striking exception to the norm.

put language at home, in school, and during play with their peers. Ultimately, I sought to analyse and describe the cultural models (the assumptions and belief systems, including social practices) that underlay the focal children's 'ways with words' (Heath, 1983), or 'ways of being' (Gee, 1999) in their different social worlds (Dyson, 1993). To summarise, then, I selectively applied conversational and discourse analysis which aimed primarily to capture children's critical language and literacy use (Comber, 2003; Luke and Freebody, 1990) or, in Volk and de Acosta's (2001) terms, communicative competence or social intelligence. By engaging in text analysis I was, in a way, looking for that missing link between the analysis of texts and the analysis of practices, which Barton (2001) considered necessary to see the mutual influences of the two on people's 'ways with words'.

The creation of data analysis categories served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it ensured sustained focus and enabled me to detect missing links in the data, particularly inadequately answered main and underlying process questions, and/or those questions arising from the data themselves. On the other, it facilitated the selective application of aspects of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative analysis method to identify emerging issues and themes. This shuffling back and forth captures the spirit of an inductive ethnographic enquiry whose target is a 'grounded theory' approach: discovering theory from data rather than verifying analytic propositions or confirming preconceived theory (Emerson et al, 1995). During this ongoing analysis process, I also used open codes whereupon I carefully and minutely read to sift through and categorize segments of fieldnote records that identified and named specific analytic dimensions and categories. Later I used focused coding that involved fine-grained, line-by-line analysis of notes in categories, building up and elaborating incrementally emerging themes and eventual chapter formulation. I eclectically and selectively applied relevant aspects of various interpretive analysis procedures, rather than apply either of them exclusively, in an effort to adequately respond to process questions embedded and subsumed within my overall research question. The next subsection describes the ethical considerations I took into account in the research design and fieldwork.

3.2.4 Ethical considerations

In this section I discuss ethical issues relating to this study. As an ethnographic researcher on and among human participants, I had an enormous ethical responsibility. Social science, under which this study falls, is not and has never been a neutral enquiry into human behaviour and institutions. For instance, it has often been implicated in the project of social control, whether by the state or by other agencies which ultimately serve the interests of a dominant group. Though not working for a government agency, and irrespective of their own political views, researchers, myself included, need to think long and hard about the uses to which findings might be put, particularly the potential negative effects they might have contrary to the interests of participants. Researchers need to be always aware, for instance, that certain negative observations about any socially dominated participant could colour the expectations and treatment of them by dominant individuals or groups. That would potentially contribute to the perpetuation of the domination (Cameron et al, 1994).

The fact that ethnographic researchers never intend to promote participants' disadvantage is not enough. As ethically aware social scientists, ethnographic researchers foresee the possible dangers that use of research information might have on participants and actually take appropriate practical action to forestall them. They do this in a number of ways, depending on institutional guidelines. For instance, the present study adhered to ethical rules set out by the University of Cape Town's Graduate School in Humanities. The thrust of the rules are participants' consent and confidentiality. The question of individual consent is a tricky one in a hierarchically structured social setting like Swaziland. For instance, in a research project such as this, one involving schoolchildren, the researcher seeks permission to carry out research from the Ministry of Education (MoE). The researcher then takes the MoE's letter granting permission to the prospective research site or school's head teacher. The head teacher interprets the letter as a MoE instruction to sanction the exercise. Likewise, the head teacher introduces the researcher to a teacher who interprets the introduction as the administration's directive to allow the researcher into the classroom. The teacher in turn makes sure that the researcher has access to the study children. The peremptory, top-down nature of seeking and obtaining permission to

research in a classroom gives the school, teacher, and child at the bottom of the social hierarchy virtually no say in the matter. Their lower status in relation to the MoE and the researcher is such that they cannot object even if they are unwilling to participate. For instance, Swazi children invariably defer to adults and junior staff defer to seniors. It is therefore left entirely to the researcher to negotiate and develop a positive rapport with the school administration, teacher, and children. The researcher is already perceived to wield more power and status than the participants. Unless he or she carefully and quickly defuses tensions and develops a working relationship in which all can relax and open up to him or her, the research project could be in serious jeopardy as participants might take part only perfunctorily. In the case of research such as this, which involved very young children, the question of consent becomes even more complicated.

In this research I dealt with the question of consent and respect for the respective participants' interests in different ways. For instance, I handed over a copy of the MoE permission to the school administration upon introducing myself and the research objectives. Without documented evidence of the MoE's express consent, I could have been turned away instantly. Once the head teacher was satisfied that the visit was official, I then asked the school's permission to conduct the research. The head teacher introduced me to the grade teacher in whose class I wished to observe a particular child. I did not assume that the administration's introduction meant that I could start right away. It was still crucial for a healthy working relationship to impress on the teacher that his or her specific consent was important and that I did not take it for granted. For this reason, I expressly asked for the teacher's permission to observe a child in her[11] class over a twelve-month period. Once the teacher agreed, she introduced me to the class and explained that my interest was in seeing how they learnt to read and write and that I would afterwards observe just one of them over a certain period of time.

Once I identified a potential focal child, I first went to see the child's parents to explain my research objectives and to request permission to observe the child at home and in

[11]All focal teachers were female.

school. Despite a general attitude in Swazi society whereby all adults look on children as their own children (Kuper, 1980), I ensured that I did not talk to any child without his or her parents' prior permission. It was only after parental consent had been obtained that I then asked the child to let me sit next to him or her, look at his or her reading and writing in class as well as during play out of class and at home at weekends and during school holidays. I always appeared friendly and respectful to a child who had already seen me negotiate with his or her family to let me observe him or her. Even though I cannot claim, under the prevailing social circumstances, that children or, even their parents, fully understood[12] the research aims and results enough to give free consent from an informed position, I at least made an attempt to involve them and to respect their right to give or decline consent. Other ethical issues relating to giving or denying consent will be discussed under access issues later in this chapter.

I tackled the problem of confidentiality first by adopting pseudonyms in order to protect participants' identities. In addition, the names of schools were withheld so that they remained anonymous research sites. Only the geographical locations of schools were revealed. To this end, I still aspired to ethnographic thick description (Geertz, 1973) but was always careful to minimize the chances of participants being identifiable. I was also extremely selective about what findings on children's performance I shared with teachers and others. Besides, only participating teachers would know whose performance the findings described and, hopefully, by the time the report was published the children would have passed their current grades and teachers and would therefore be immune from association with contents of the thesis.

Below, I introduce the four children from low-income families who were the subjects of the study. I do this to free up space for analysis in the chapters that follow, as I do not

[12]Three things happened to suggest that research families' understanding of the research somewhat differed from mine. For one thing, parents generally took no active part or interest in the research during visits and during children's self-recordings at home. For another, parents of two children asked me to help them to assist with getting a child's biological father to contribute to the child's upkeep and to find a mother a job respectively. This was in addition to the teachers in one school asking me to help them solicit donor funding for school projects. Finally, one grandparent actually forced his granddaughter to write each time I arrived.

have to provide the background detail there that I give below. I give 'thumb-nail', descriptive sketches of each child, identifying the personal features that distinguished each, as well as a summary of the key features of their home and school circumstances. These descriptions provide the backdrop to my analytical work later in the thesis when I discuss details of communicative and literacy-linked events and practices with regard to each of these children.

3.3 The research children

I observed at length the literacy, language and communicative practices of each of four SiSwati-speaking preschoolers and first graders, together with their peers, in school and out-of-school settings – one boy from a rural public school; one boy from an urban private school; one girl from a suburban public school; and one girl from a rural public preschool. I focused on four children as a compromise between my initial intention to study just one child in-depth, and in response to feedback from a critical review on my proposal, which suggested I widen my study beyond one child. The four children from low-income families are not representative of the full range of the student population in the three types of school in Swaziland. However, the choice of a small sample was a deliberate trade-off between studying each case in depth, consistent with ethnographic inquiry, or getting a broader canvass (Hammersley, 1994). As Mitchell (1984: 239) pointed out, the particular kinds of inference that are drawn from quantitative data are inappropriate to case study research:

> What the anthropologist using a case study to support an argument does is to show how general principles deriving from some theoretical orientation manifest themselves in some given set of particular circumstances. A good case study, therefore, enables the analyst to establish theoretically valid connections between events and phenomena which previously were ineluctable. From this point of view, the search for a "typical" case for analytical exposition is likely to be less fruitful than the search for a "telling" case in which the particular circumstances surrounding a case, serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent.

My concern was to examine what was 'telling', in each case that I studied as well as what could be inferred across the individual case studies. I looked for particular features which signalled a child's suitability for the study before I made a choice, including questions around my ease of access for research purposes to the child's school and out-of-school settings. The time was limited, in that I had three years from the approval of my research proposal, in which to conduct thorough observation and document detailed records followed by fine-grained analyses and the writing of a dissertation based on a study of four children's different home- and school-based literacy and communicative lives. I therefore sought out sufficiently confident children who might go about their in- and out-of-class activities despite my being present. That would facilitate my quickly settling in and save time, whereas overly shy and self-conscious children might take longer to get used to my presence.

I present brief individual profiles of the research children below. I give thumb–nail, descriptive sketches of each child, identifying the personal features that distinguished each, as well as a summary of the key features of their home and school circumstances. These descriptions provide the backdrop to my analytical work later in the thesis when I discuss details of communicative and literacy-linked events and practices with regard to each of these children.

3.3.1 Individual child profiles

Apart from displaying a generally out-going disposition, each child was picked for exhibiting particular personal attributes and socio-economic circumstances. In detailing respective profiles of the four children who were the focus of my study, I give their ages; describe their physical and temperamental attributes as I observed them; describe their physical home infrastructure and literacy practices (or lack thereof) at home, as well the children's roles in these events and practices; describe their families' involvement in and mediation of (home and school) literacy; examine in detail their play activities and play-based engagements with and orientations towards literacy; describe features of their

respective school participation; and examine continuities and discords between patterns of children's socialization to communication at home and in school. My overall purpose in these profiles is to introduce the home and school contexts that constituted the setting for each child's communicative and literacy development. These descriptions set the basis for the analysis that follows.

Musa[13]

I found out about Musa through his aunt who taught at the University of Swaziland. She offered to arrange for me to observe her young nephew immediately I told her I was looking for preschoolers to study for my PhD research. Seven-year-old Musa - the only SiSwati-English bilingual in the study- lived with parents, elder brother and sister, in a fenced big modern house whose extension neared completion by the close of study, just southwest of Manzini, Swaziland's commercial hub. His middle-aged father, a self-employed professional photographer, took occasional part-time jobs, while Musa's much younger-looking mother worked in town. Musa and his two elder siblings attended the same private school and occasionally visited their aunt at the University of Swaziland (Uniswa), with whom they had previously stayed while work was done on their house. Small in stature and brown-skinned with a square face, Musa occasionally sported a neat short square haircut. In school he was always tidily turned out in either khaki or grey shorts or pants, red-trimmed grey socks and black shoes, and red-trimmed grey jersey or grey-trimmed red tracksuit in winter. At home, by contrast, Musa donned his trademark tight track pants, or just pyjama shorts. A bubbly, ebullient little fellow at free play, Musa often swatted sweat off his forehead and tucked a flapping shirt back in his shorts or pants on return from typically 'hectic' morning breaks. He so enjoyed his play time that his first grade teacher once observed that Musa "shovelled" in his food before racing off to the play area south of a scanty, dusty, buzzy schoolyard. His activeness was on display beyond school boundaries as well, with him being called back to 'order' in Sunday school as he furtively chatted to and nudged his neighbours. Musa enjoyed competitive

[3]All participants' names apart from the researcher's are pseudonyms to protect their real identities.

outdoor games like shooting marbles with friends during church recess the same way he did with neighbourhood playmates at home. During the winter Musa, siblings, and neighbourhood peers regularly climbed guava trees in the household front yard to pick ripe fruit. He never initiated reading or writing in the time that I observed him, though I saw discarded workbooks, which contained home-based reading, writing, and drawing that all siblings attributed to Musa. In class, Musa usually sat quietly and absorbed as he carefully formed his letters and numbers, and scored well on spelling callout, often just one point short of the total score of 10. I came to attribute such small slips to Musa's competitive scramble to finish first, resulting in letter-sound miscues. Like all his classmates, the confidence in the form of readiness to volunteer spoken and written contributions that Musa displayed with his more accommodating teacher in Grade Nought[14] the previous year paled into timidity in the face of his Grade One teacher's frequent criticism of her children's writing and pronunciation. Musa insisted on his desk mate replacing shared erasers and other communal facilities at the centre, betraying a strong sense of orderliness, itself a sign that in his fourth year in school Musa had come to be properly attuned to a compliant classroom ethos enforced through mutually comprehensible participant structures. He glued his eyes on the teacher when he listened to instructions. I concluded that his 'exemplary' classroom conduct and performance earned him sought after responsibilities like materials distribution and lead roles in play activities, which his Grade Nought teacher frequently assigned him (and all of which he lost to a girl in Grade One). Such behaviour and rewards earned him the respect of his peers who often simulated 'reporting' to him in the teacher's brief absences. During the teachers' longer absences from the classroom in Grades Nought and One, however, Musa broke loose from his shell and joined in the din made by his classmates. On such occasions, as was the case outside, Musa was gregarious and friendly; yet very swift to frown, yell, or spank if he felt someone was being cheeky or mean to him.

Musa rarely wrote in my presence at home where he often initiated and led play activities, but also readily accepted alternating play roles. This observation of his out-of-

[14]This was Musa's second year in preschool. Grade Nought was the year after Nursery – the first year – and before Grade One.

school literacy matches the observation that literacy events in school, where Musa learned most of his reading and writing, were very rarely voluntary or spontaneous.

Fana

I identified Fana as a potential research child during my initial visits to familiarize myself with his preschool before observation resumed. His teacher offered to ask his parents' permission to include him in the study once I showed interest in him. Five years old at the start of the study, Fana was a friendly boy who readily invited me into his storytelling and literacy worlds. His family home, where he lived with his young-looking parents, two elder and two younger sisters, was the biggest modern house in a homestead that also housed paternal grandparents, aunts, and older cousins. The house was fenced, fully furnished and had electricity. An easy-going team player with a passion to 'win' at break-time free play, Fana was his peers' most sought-after team-mate. In his first grade khaki school uniform, Fana cut a tall, slender frame and a neat scholarly figure that belied his age. Often cropped, his hair was always neatly brushed or combed. At home, Fana's unkempt appearance stood in stark contrast to his disciplined school look. Often barefooted and topless, he would emerge from the house to meet me on the unfinished porch with a shy smile on his dark square face. Fana's piercing brown eyes would dance left and right as his fidgety hand stroked his chin before his standard "Good morning, Teacher" greeting. These initial formalities would however be forgotten immediately Fana's siblings and, occasionally, cousins, settled in the porch. This swift change from formal greetings to peer talk served to allay my initial fears of a contrived performance in tune with the distanced relationship implicit in the greetings. Fana truly came to life here. He initiated and led folktales, frequently chiming in with his own opinions, understandings, or interpretations of his sisters' stories at home, just as he occasionally did between breaks in pre-school. Fana occasionally joined his family's regular herd boy to go out to the veld to look after cattle and goats. Activities such as river swimming, sparring karate kicks and climbing mulberry trees often took place here. Fana took lead roles in most teacher-sanctioned classroom plays, often volunteering and firmly articulating oral contributions ahead of others. Though he was unafraid to publicly declare ignorance, Fana's confident and positive attitude toward oral question-and-

answer classroom tasks instantly gave way to self-consciousness in writing where he hunched up, concealed, and repeatedly rubbed mistakes till the page blotted. Despite taking leading roles in mini dramas and reciting poems at his graduation ceremony, Fana paradoxically faded into obscurity at intervals when he would literally hide behind his classmates. While his behaviour suggested shyness, it contrasted with his confident participation. I suspected that the apparent shyness signalled Fana's respectful awareness and fear of adults' presence and evaluation of children, a significant factor in shaping children's behaviour in front of adults both in and out of class. His father was a self-employed building contractor while his mother was a housewife. Fana's father once confided to me that he discouraged Fana's curiosity because it often disturbed him. That, and the fact that he was often away at work during the day, was a telling revelation, which explained in part why only Fana's mother figured in mediating Fana's school-like home-based literacy events such as spelling callout and say-after-the-teacher reading. Fana's typical curiosity showed itself in the many questions he asked me in and out of school about a variety of subjects, including his official writing in class.

His mother always insisted that Fana greeted and offered "Teacher" [me] a chair. I also recall Fana's grandfather making him and his bigger sisters kneel on clammy ground next to a water tap to accept a glass of Coca Cola he had poured them. I interpreted the adults' actions to be ways of instilling 'respect' in the youngster. Though Fana was brought up to respect especially male adults, he freely sought my assistance with his writing. Similarly, though he could ask his mother anything at anytime, Fana did not do the same with his female teachers in class. He would rather elicit quick correct answers from me to present to his teachers as his own, rather than seek their assistance. I suggest that Fana's selective behaviour corresponded to assumptions he held about the social roles and statuses of the different adults with whom he interacted in and out of school. These assumptions shaped what Fana could and could not say or do to different people, as well as how and when it was and was not appropriate to do so. Since I was neither his father, grandfather, nor one of his teachers, and lacked their substantive status and authority, Fana assigned me an information-giving role and carefully selected the appropriate language for retrieving the information. That way he safely extracted information from me in ways that he could not

from the important people whose respective expectations he still needed to meet. Fana's ability to select language that was appropriate for particular situations and people exemplifies sophisticated social intelligence and communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Philips, 1972; Saville-Troike, 1989; Volk & de Acosta, 2001). The emphasis on teaching a limited range of literacy skills such as sounding out words out of context in the classroom, discussed later on, failed to draw out, build on, and develop to a level where Fana and peers could use literacy both creatively and critically, in the same way that Fana already used language for specific purposes.

Sebe

My identifying Sebe as a research subject followed a similar path to that taken with Fana, described earlier. Her teacher offered to introduce me and my research to her mother and to ask her permission to include Sebe in the study. Just four years of age at the start of the research, Sebe was the youngest of the cohort. Sebe was a very tiny child who walked with a quick step. Sebe's radiant, light-complexioned face wore a shy smile that exposed a gap between her lily-white upper incisors when in her usually jovial mood. She did however have a perpetually runny nose, which frequently left the area between her upper lip and nostrils encrusted with dried mucus. For this reason, she often wielded a tissue. In school, Sebe always wore her light green check uniform dress on warm days, with only a few days when children wore civvies. Often barefooted and unwashed at home, she usually wore just track pants and a sweater when I arrived mid-morning. Though mixing with other classmates, Sebe had two clear girl favourites, and consistently quizzed girls who played with boys. Though generally amiable, Sebe instantly pouted, frowned, threw temper tantrums, shoved or spanked those who 'violated' her, or simply cried meekly and very briefly, if she felt helpless. She spoke with a low, laid back infantile drawl but swiftly yelled to admonish or draw others' attention. Chatty outside and attentive in class, Sebe 'swore' readily (as did her peers). She was an active team player in teacher-sanctioned activities who, however, preferred to lead playmates, but immediately retreated to the background when she faced unfamiliar challenges or lost her lead role. She frequently monopolised holding dolls and real babies whenever possible, and frequently kept quiet at playing house both in school at home. Sebe's usually confident,

articulate contributions in oral sessions in class gradually fizzled out with her teacher's insistence on correct English forms. She visibly struggled with writing and only managed 'squiggles' and initiated no writing/drawing in and out of class save for making marks on "malume's" [my uncle's] dusty car and belatedly writing and drawing alongside older playmates at home. Sebe was quick to remind peers in school and at home that I was her uncle[15]; yet she remained outgoing and wrapped up in her peer world of play despite my presence.

Her young single mother worked long hours from morning to sunset at a garment factory. She thus couldn't stay home to care for or take Sebe to hospital when tapeworms kept her away from school for a week. This responsibility fell on her maternal grandmother who looked after several other grandchildren, in addition to waiting on an 'idle'[16] husband. Sebe - the only daughter until her mother had a baby late in 2003 - and her mother occupied a room in the family's big main modern house, situated east of a cluster of smaller family houses and a row of one-room rentals in a rural neighbourhood. Though with electricity and a telephone, Sebe's homestead had no running water and, as a result, soapy water from the bath and laundry was dumped in a slushy backyard.

Sebe's extended family lived in a large homestead some of whose houses were rental apartments, and Sebe played with cousins and the children from these rented apartments. These children were Sebe's playmates whom I observed together with her every Saturday and during holidays. With regard to her participating strategies in school, it is noteworthy that Sebe led most play activities and that her initial enthusiasm for activities in class was gradually replaced by an increasingly characteristic silence, after her teacher continuously ignored her contributions made in SiSwati.

Heli

[15]I am a Dlamini. In Swaziland, unlike elsewhere in Africa, there are no tribes but clans. Swazis generally believe that members of each clan originally came from one ancestor. Sebe's mother was also a Dlamini, which therefore made me her 'brother' and therefore Sebe's uncle.

[16]This is my own description. I always found Sebe's grandfather seated on a porch reading a religious booklet.

Obtaining parental permission to study Heli was a more tortuous and exacting task than the previous three children. On the day I was to meet her grandparents, Heli was not in school. Heli's teacher therefore got permission from the head teacher to give me a classmate cousin of Heli's to accompany me to Heli's home. Both her grandparents at separate times, and later her mother who stayed in a different place, gave their consent. Nine-year-old Heli was the oldest of the cohort[17], the only one without any preschool experience. Her sturdy build and firm quick gait gave dark-complexioned Heli the look of a hardy herd boy. Heli wore a threadbare frayed blue v-neck jersey and an oversized dress whose hem was later adjusted to size. She was barefooted during all the time that I observed her out of school. Parts of her neck showed grimy streaks suggestive of continuous improper bathing. She often sported barely combed hair and rare haircuts, definitely the patchy handiwork of a quick pair of scissors. Her legs were usually oilier than her face with Vaseline jelly.

Whereas slightly more outgoing and vociferous outside, in class Heli was a reserved student whose frequently bruised (from her maternal grandfather's beating) round face often wore a slight frown when it wasn't totally deadpan. Heli had no distinct steady school associations, usually just merging in as part of the general Grade One lot. At home, she and her peers freely traded 'swear' words such as *fuseki*[18]. The death of a grandmother with whom she initially stayed resulted in the disappearance of Heli's birth certificate and a subsequent break in school attendance. At the start of the research she had just moved in with her young single mother, a garment factory labourer, who rented a one-roomed stick-and-mud apartment in a buzzy, run-down residence. Often unwashed and smelly here, Heli babysat her skimpy-haired, skinny, potbellied, perpetually crying infant half-brother. I came to believe that it was Heli's babysitting responsibilities that constrained her in some ways as well. She usually wore a visibly dirty floral red dress when I joined her in the morning. Later on, the 'family' moved in with Heli's surviving grandmother and grandfather, together with an older half-brother, a younger half-brother,

[17]I use *cohort* to denote the fact that the same four focal children were studied in the twelve-month period of the fieldwork rather than that they formed any other kind of unit.

[18]Transferred from the Afrikaans *voetsek* which means 'get lost' or 'shut up' depending on context.

and several younger and older relatives, in the biggest concrete block among a mixture of concrete and stick-and-mud one-room rentals, in a sprawling rural neighbourhood. Toward the close of the study Heli's itinerant mother had faded out of the picture and Heli hinted to her having moved house all by herself. Heli talked freely with her grandmother whom she often helped in an open ground hearth and out in the garden. She sometimes anxiously asked her grandmother about her grandfather's whereabouts, or whether he was leaving shortly for somewhere when he snarled for his bath water after a morning's hard work in the garden. I often found Heli washing dishes, or pushing a wheelbarrow laden with a 25 litre vinyl water container from a well by the garden, and occasionally, either playing with peers or washing clothes by the well alongside older women. In winter, Heli joined other neighbourhood children who sold various wares, to sell her grandfather's sugarcane at a roadside market where skipping rope was often played. Her school attendance was erratic, punctuated by lengthy absences; often resulting from bruises inflicted by her grandfather's beatings.

Heli never initiated reading, writing, or drawing in and out of school. She and two peers/cousins only wrote at home in my presence at the firm prompting of their grandfather. The children only once wrote voluntarily at home, though not entirely without my prodding. It was a rainy morning, so grandmother glumly ushered us inside and the children sat and wrote in their old school workbooks on a dining table, amidst the quiet crackle of a tiny black-and-white TV screen on top of a tall wooden cupboard. In class, Heli struggled to decode and encode individual letters, words, numbers; failed to draw pictures, copy off the chalkboard, write inside lines and squares, and to recognize colours; struggled to orally label body parts and classroom furniture in English. She subsequently failed at the end of 2003 and would have repeated Grade One in 2004 had her teacher and principal not sought my opinion on her promotion. I suggested that she be promoted mainly due to her age and the fact that I did not think that making her repeat the class would benefit her. Despite her teacher, grandmother, mother, and a peer each once referring to me as "Bunga's[19] father" [Heli's father], Heli called me "Madam" and

[19]Heli's nickname.

she and I had a somewhat tense relationship in which she stole furtive glances at me, spoke softly when almost alone with me, ducked when I took pictures, only curtly answered my questions, and initiated no conversation between us. I never asked Heli why she called me Madam in case she perceived the question as a test. I assumed that, just like Fana who called me "Teacher" above, she too saw me in the same light as her teacher because I was an adult who carried paper and pencil in her class. For Heli, it seemed, "Madam" was a generic term for teacher irrespective of gender. Heli's reticence could be interpreted as a sign of respect as well as evidence that Swazi children are generally socialized not to engage adults in conversation. However, deflecting attention also signalled her distrust for generally evaluative adults.

Details such as the fact that Heli was the child of a single mother whose work kept her away from home from dawn to evening for six days in a week; was not properly clothed; was often beaten; had no preschool experience; had babysitting responsibilities in addition to others; skipped classes; found reading, writing, labelling, and reciting hard and subsequently failed Grade One, are not presented here as a caricature but are significant for my research to the extent that they reveal a combination of circumstances that put Heli at risk when it came to literacy learning and learning in general at school.

The four children's individual profiles offer a glimpse of their different family backgrounds and respective participating strategies in and out of school. The profiles also start to give a sense of the children's home literacy and communicative worlds, which shaped each child's participation, success, or failure in classroom literacy practices. For instance, though they grew up in different circumstances, Musa, Fana, and Sebe's initial enthusiasm for their schoolwork diminished with their respective teacher's generally negative attitude toward the form of their contributions. Heli, on the other hand, was never comfortable with literacy throughout the fieldwork.

The thumb-nail sketches I have given here of the children will be drawn on and developed in detail in the chapters that follow, in the context of my analysis of particular reading, writing and communicative events and practices involving the children. In the

next subsection I introduce the teachers who taught reading and writing to the children. I give an overview account of their presence in their classes and their characteristic teaching and regulative styles.

3.3.2 The teachers in the study: mediators of classroom literacy

The children's teachers, and their pedagogy, were initially not an intended focus of this study. I intended to concentrate exclusively on the children. However, it became obvious, once the research was in progress, that teachers constituted such a crucial aspect of each child's school literacy learning context that reference to their particular characteristics became inevitable in an attempt to deconstruct their role in shaping children's literacy trajectories. My description of the teachers here focuses exclusively on the ways in which they handled literacy lessons. This is because how they mediated literacy, particularly for the focal children, was more important for my thesis than their respective personal characteristics. My extended focus on focal teachers here enhances the claim made above (see subsection 3.2.1) that the focus of ethnographic-style research in educational contexts is defined by the research process and narrows as the research progresses and unfolds.

Musa's nursery, Grade 0 and Grade One teachers

My initial contact with Musa was near the end of his nursery class in August. I sat in on a few classroom-based lessons before contact broke, only to resume in September of the following year. He had an experienced middle-aged Nursery teacher. A typical nursery day kicked off with the convergence at assembly of Nursery, Grade Nought, and Grade One classes for singing, prayer, nursery rhymes, and phonics sing-song. Once the two senior groups left for their respective classrooms, the nursery teacher made children recite phonics again from wall charts, before she instructed them to switch and engage with an assortment of plastic and wooden toys individually and in small groups. After about an hour, the teacher then made children pray, sit, and eat before they trooped out to join schoolmates in an already noisy schoolyard for mid-morning break.

The Grade Nought teacher's morning assembly, on the other hand, was followed by a writing task in which individual children formed three-letter words based on the '*Alphabet for Africa'* phonics textbook. Occasionally, children preferred to either have the teacher read them a story of their choice or to do an individual spelling activity before engaging in the regular word formation task. The teacher's accommodation of children's choice of activity rendered her official curriculum relatively flexible, in that she did not always insist on her pre-planned activity in the face of the children's expressed preference, though she still conducted the activities herself. The teacher then instructed children to draw and do basic addition and subtraction tasks. The morning session always ended with individual reading of *Meg the Hen, Ben the Dog*, and other popular readers at the teacher's table. During this activity the teacher also checked parents'/guardians' signatures in each child's reading register – evidence of each child's home reading, or its absence. After that, she would then make children pray, sit, and eat before going out for break, though there were occasions when they simply sat inside, mingled, or played. On such days Musa spun coins, wrestled, or read magazines or books with a neighbour. This middle-aged Grade Nought teacher seemed to enjoy a mutually warm relationship with her group of twenty children.

In Grade One the following year, Musa had a young English-educated teacher who, by her own admission, had no teaching qualification despite the fact that she held three degrees in different fields, including law. She spoke with a contrived British accent, which she required her students to emulate during daily reading sessions and spoken contributions in class. Though acknowledging that Musa was "at the threshold"[20] of things in an interview with me, this teacher also noted a recent slump in performance due to 'playfulness'. Besides, she resented the boy's "weird" laugh at "only the silly things" and his ill-mannered "shovelling" of his food. I suspected tension between Musa and his teacher resulted from a reprimand by the headmistress after Musa's parents protested about the teacher's unkind comments about Musa's ringworms.

[20]Meaning that he was generally aware and quickly caught on to new knowledge.

The teacher preferred the children to address her as "Ma'am" and her sixteen pupils quickly realized that she expected them to at once stand at attention when she entered the classroom, and to sit still and quietly until she told them what to do and precisely how to do it. In order to ask a question or Ma'am's permission to go to the toilet, the teacher insisted on a well cadenced "Excuse me, Teacher" - the children's only acceptable call for her attention. Only after the teacher had responded did the child stand and state his or her request. If it was granted, which it often was, the child said "Thank you Teacher" before taking action. Contrary to Grade Nought's homely ethos, Grade One was characterized by strictly disciplined Initiation-Response-Evaluation (I-R-E) interaction sequences. Only when the teacher walked out did children whisper to and nudge each other or even venture off their respective seats. Only with prolonged teacher absences did the children's cautious exchanges 'degenerate' into noisy hullabaloo. The teacher once confided to me that she and the administration sought to instil discipline in the children - an explanation that was in conflict with the friendlier teaching style displayed by the headmistress when she took the group for her weekly 'intense phonics' session (which she once confided to me formed the axis of the school's early literacy programme). The teacher's frequent public disapproval of Musa's stuttered reading, "bad" pronunciation, and written errors made him increasingly self-conscious and his general participation had significantly declined by the close of the study.

Musa's Grade One teacher's highly controlled approach to early literacy development not only contrasted with the Grade Nought teacher's more relaxed and accommodating style, but also restricted the child's role to a reactive one of only responding to the teacher's stimuli, as though the child was capable of no more than this in his or her quest for school literacy. Ironically, the restriction prevented Musa from making use of the general awareness that his Grade One teacher attributed to him.

Fana's preschool[21] *and Grade One teachers*

[21]Unlike Musa's urban private school where preschool was called Grade Nought, Fana's rural community preschool was referred to as a preschool. When I started observing Fana, he was in the second year of preschool and had just started Grade One when the fieldwork ended.

In preschool, Fana had a middle-aged female teacher and her younger assistant. The teacher was a devout Christian who also regularly preached in the same community. She had completed an official preschool teacher training course but her younger assistant had no qualification. Both teachers' religious orientations emerged in daily morning assembly sessions which they either co-conducted or led in turn. These teachers recited rhymes and verses, and sang traditional Swazi and biblical songs with the entire group. During individual writing or drawing activities (prescribed by the Ministry of Education) which took place before each day's mid-morning break, the teacher took charge of the graduating group, comprising twenty children. She sometimes told children either bible-based stories or traditional Swazi folktales, often with an explicit moral lesson. She also prompted children without much success, to tell their own stories. Her untrained assistant oversaw another group of around twenty children who occupied their own half of the hall during worksheet time. Both teachers also attended to children's emotional and physical needs. On Monday mornings children got an opportunity to share happy or sad weekend accounts or earlier experiences with the class[22]. This was the only designated opportunity for children in class to communicate personal experiences. Before midday breaks teachers asked children if they all had food and if not ensured that the elderly school aide gave them the school's juice and bread. The assistant teacher had two infant children who also took part in the students' academic activities, eating and play. Fana's preschool community was in some ways like an extension of his family.

In Grade One Fana had one middle-aged teacher who described Fana as a "smart" student when he joined her class of over 50 children in January 2003. She based her admiration on the boy's 'fervent' participation in both spoken and written aspects of his schoolwork. By the end of the study however the teacher decried Fana's "declining" success in class, which she readily ascribed to "playfulness" and "disturbances" by his classmate friends. My own observation was that Fana's eagerness in spoken classroom tasks was hardly ever matched by his often 'superficial' engagement with individual written work. He sought 'correct' quick clues from me and/or his peers in order to get tasks over with.

[22]The teachers encouraged children to either tell the teachers or the class their stories or write them for the teachers to read.

Then he went back to chattering, eating, and 'fighting' with his peers whenever the teacher wasn't watching or pretended she wasn't watching. It was difficult for the teacher to keep track of every child's progress in the restless crowd. Since preschool days Fana was neither comfortable with, nor enjoyed, individual official writing exercises. This apparent antipathy toward school-based writing contrasted sharply with Fana's enthusiasm for reading off-task in school with peers, as well as for reading and writing at home with his mother and siblings.

I came to see that there was a contrast between Fana's preschool teachers' responsiveness to children's out-of-school experiences and concern for children's physiological needs, on the one hand, and his Grade One teacher's inaccurate assessment of Fana's capabilities as well as her designation of interaction with others as playfulness and disturbance, on the other. The Grade One teacher's idea of what counted as literacy seemed to be limited to the here-and-now events of the classroom which, unlike the preschool teachers' wider focus, did not extend to include children's out-of-school repertoires. The Grade One teacher's narrow definition of literacy resulted in her remaining unaware of Fana's individual storytelling and collaborative abilities.

Sebe's preschool[23] *teacher*

This middle-aged teacher warmly welcomed my research and facilitated my early settling in by instantly writing a letter to the mother of my prospective focal child, Sebe, and explaining the research, before I had met the mother. She hinted that she had carried out a similar research project for her teacher training qualification. She introduced me to the children as their "malume" [uncle], which they subsequently called me throughout our yearlong contact. She had close to forty children in her class when I started observation in January 2003, though there were a lot more by December.

Early on in the year, the teacher assembled children and led whole-group singing and rhyming before giving everyone a worksheet with a drawing for each child to colour.

[23]I only observed Sebe in her second and graduating year of preschool. Otherwise, I sat in on only one of her Grade One classes at the end of the fieldwork in 2004.

After that, they took their their bread tins outside for mid-morning break. From around April/May the teacher separated the two groups immediately after assembly. She took the graduating group, those in the second and last year of preschool, to an adjacent room where they read handmade word and picture cards, coloured in, wrote their names, and later rehearsed for their oncoming graduation ceremony. The newcomers on the other hand, had different activities which included regular colouring in worksheets and playing mainly wooden blocks.

The teacher described Sebe as an "expressive" child whose mood swings could be read in her general countenance, which my observation came to confirm. She considered her a capable, cooperative student and an outgoing child whose enthusiasm for free play however increased or decreased commensurate with whether or not she led a given activity. By April/May Sebe's attempts at copying the teacher's writing of her own name yielded inverted, rotated, and uneven letter-like characters that meandered up and down the page. The teacher's awareness of Sebe's potential abilities, enthusiasm for classroom activities, friendliness, and eagerness to lead during play, was crucial when contrasted with the fact that the teacher's preference for school-like literate practices such as correct English forms eventually curtailed Sebe's participation in class.

Heli's Grade One[24] *teacher*

Heli's ageing teacher almost always carried a cane as her tall frame towered above the close to sixty children sitting in her class. She saw in Heli an "indifferent" learner with an erratic classroom attendance to match, which she figured reflected a 'less than conducive' home background. In class Heli got more than her fair share of turns in highly directed whole-class question-and-answer sessions. The teacher also spent about 20% of the hour-long lessons at Heli's desk; a practice I took to reflect the teacher's 'misinterpretation' of my research needs and expectations. She freely code-switched between SiSwati and English in a loud baritone that rippled through the length of the hall, and demanded that her students speak up "like Grade One pupils are supposed to". She frequently instantly

[24]I only observed Heli in Grade One. She, among the four study children, did not attend pre-school.

administered corporal punishment to 'deviant' children. The teacher often publicly criticised and praised individual written failure and achievement respectively. She thought Heli was a "hopeless" reader and writer who merely "sang" the alphabet with the crowd without any understanding, but nevertheless liked "chatting" to neighbours and looked forward to mid-morning breaks when she and some first-graders were served small bowls of *samp* (boiled corn) and bean soup which she "relished".

Heli's individual profile, as I presented it above, clearly depicts her as a disadvataged child whose unfortunate circumstances impacted on her participation in school. Her teacher's description of her suggested that, in her opinion, Heli's poor background made her unteachable. It is such deficit views of children from low-income families that the NLS and related literature, whose theoretical resources informed my analysis, called to question in chapter two above. I will be arguing in chapters four and five below that Heli, like the other focal children had language resources during play at home and off-task in school, which teachers remained unaware of and never invoked.

The teachers' individual approaches to early literacy were characterized by both differences and convergences. While some opened up the official literacy curriculum space, albeit in a limited way, to accommodate children's preferences, out-of-school experiences and extracurricular needs, others paid no attention to children's out-of-school life, including their literacy and communicative repertoires. Some teachers viewed peer interaction as a disturbance and adopted an overtly disciplinary stance towards children's classroom behaviour. These approaches shaped how children came to interpret literacy learning in and out of class, as the detailed analysis in chapters four and five below illustrates. In line with the wider Swazi society's condescension and dismissal of children's activities, children in classrooms were positioned as novices who might learn everything they needed to know in school from their teachers. I now turn focus to the schools and the wider context in which the research took place.

3.4 The four research schools and the wider setting

All research schools lay within a 20 km radius of Manzini, Swaziland's largest central town (the official capital is the nearby town of Mbabane). They thus all fell under the jurisdiction of the Manzini Regional Education Office (REO). Manzini is the centre of Swaziland's industrial and commercial heartland, which makes it the most populated town following an ongoing urban migration as people leave an increasingly barren countryside to seek scarce employment in the urban areas. They settle in proliferating, shanty-town dwellings on the town fringes. In a bid to cash in on accommodation demand, homesteads in the vicinity, including Heli's and Sebe's, have put up all manner of housing structures to lease out to desperate tenants and their dependants and/or families. Poverty, desperation, and attendant moral decay have made Manzini the country's crime epicentre. I'm not sure if any teachers from my research schools lived in such depressing conditions during the study, but two of the focal children and their single mothers certainly did.

I chose to work in a total of four differently resourced schools in various geographical locations of the same Regional Education Office (REO). The decision to stay in one REO was to a great extent influenced by logistical and financial considerations. For instance, it would not have been logistically feasible for me to continuously and closely observe the four different children in four different schools and homes that were spread far apart. I looked at differently located, differently managed, and differently resourced schools in order to understand their early literacy philosophies enough to relate the findings to the wider educational context.

I thus chose to carry out research at one rural public school, one suburban public school, one suburban public school, and one rural preschool. The choice of one rural public school, one urban private school, one suburban public school and one rural preschool respectively, was by no means arbitrary though. Rural public schools are in the majority since seventy percent of the Swazi population reside in the rural hinterland as subsistence farmers. Secondly, rural public and urban private schools present contrasting characteristics, which directly influence children's early literacy learning. Rural public

schools enrol mainly children from low-income subsistence farming and working-class families. These schools rely entirely on limited government funding for their resources. Rural public schools charge relatively very low fees due to the economic constraints upon their clientele. These schools are therefore generally under-resourced. For example, classrooms are often overcrowded. Besides, teachers often come here as a last resort to wait for openings in better resourced schools. Rural public school teachers are thus largely demotivated. All of these factors suggest that children in these schools have access to limited learning resources and may not have enough individualized or committed attention from their teachers. The prescribed textbook is often children's only reading material in the classroom (Dlamini, 1999, Masilela, 1999). Deprivations in terms of personnel and material provision undoubtedly impact on how children experience literacy in the classroom.

Private schools are private businesses and they are in the minority. Private schools are all situated in urban and suburban areas. Unlike rural and even urban public schools, private schools enrol mainly middle-class[25] children, including children from non-SiSwati speaking foreign families. Even though private schools charge higher fees than rural and public schools, they now also attract a growing number of children from low-income Swazi families. As stated in chapter one, parents across the socio-economic stratum have come to associate private school education with better future prospects for their children. The reason for this outlook is that private schools are generally well resourced with well-stocked libraries, smaller class numbers, and they attract the best teachers from within and outside the country. Children have easy access to spoken and written English in and out of school. The medium of instruction is invariably English for all grade levels. There is a general tendency, as earlier alluded to, to conflate the speaking of English with better education and better life opportunities after school.

[25]In recent years, 'private schools' (often illegal) have mushroomed throughout Swaziland as the demand for schooling continues to outstrip available (legal) facilities. This is a new class of institutions which enroll anyone who can afford their fees. As a result, children who could not get a place at recognized public and private schools, enroll here. The facilities are often below standard and teachers are not always qualified. These are not the private schools I describe in this study and in one of which I observed a child.

Preschools, like private schools, are privately owned either by communities or individuals as private businesses. Their resources differ remarkably depending on whether they are urban or rural, as well as on the educational vision of the owners. Generally, all preschools are low-budget educational sites, as provision of facilities often reflects the owner's financial ability as well their notion of what preschool education is about. Urban preschools are under immense pressure to prepare their graduates for the stiff competition for limited Grade One places in good public and private schools. Emphasis is on basic literacy and numeracy, particularly in English. Urban preschools are generally better resourced than rural ones. Rural preschools, on the other hand, are relatively poorly resourced. Whereas they too must impart basic literacy and numeracy in both SiSwati and English, their graduates' selection into Grade One is not characterized by the same competition to which their urban counterparts are subjected.

The research schools were different in so many respects, and their different characteristics impacted the ways that the teachers mediated the school literacy experiences of the four children, as detailed in chapter five below. Only the urban private school, for instance, stored readers for children's daily use, which also ensured parental involvement through checking and signing a reading journal. Besides, where materials such as storybooks and print-rich wall displays in the rural public schools, children had restricted access to them. Urban private school children thus generally interacted more with print than their rural counterparts. In the next section, I discuss pertinent issues relating to my access to the children, homes, and schools in the research.

3.5 Access issues: initial challenges and breakthroughs

Undertaking a detailed study that involves human subjects presents numerous challenges. My fieldwork research not only took place over a substantial period of time, but it also required close contact, as already suggested. Access issues arose the moment I figured out what I wanted to do. As a Swazi parent myself I would not have taken kindly to any stranger wanting to spend time alone with my little son or daughter, on the pretext,

perhaps, of doing fieldwork for some possibly dubious university qualification. At the time of my study there was a spate of mysterious serial killings about which I was invariably reminded and grilled by prospective focal parents. I was therefore hardly surprised when most doors were repeatedly slammed in my face. It was mainly enlisting the assistance of teachers already trusted in the communities served by the schools that finally improved my prospects, but not before Fana's mother asked a teacher what was in it for her boy. Finally, securing four parents' consents didn't mean I had to stop treading carefully either. For instance, I had to exercise extreme caution when interacting with girls at a time when adult males sexually molested them in the bizarre conviction that sex with virgins somewhat cleansed one of the deadly Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which causes the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) that is threatening to wipe out the Swazi nation. I recall relating similarly cautiously to little girls in a small-scale fieldwork project in litigious California lest my actions were construed to be sexually inappropriate[26] (Dlamini, 2002). As a result, my interactions with girls were more distanced, further compounded by a self-imposed general inability to access children's bedrooms where most homework activities presumably took place. I simply could not bring myself to ask to be able to do this without raising parents' uneasily concealed suspicions. For indoor data I therefore relied on a limited range of self-recordings, some facilitated by parents.

There was less tension in the schools. However, being introduced to grade teachers by their respective administrations made me feel awkward as I suspected teachers might consider my study evaluative[27]. Such fears were visibly allayed with continued interaction with teachers, but not entirely without occasional 'jocular' jeers about my 'spying' agenda. Heli's teacher's particular aversion to being audiotaped gradually wore away with repeated assurances (which I had to be seen to be keeping) that it was the child's learning rather than the teacher's pedagogy I was after. In his new Grade One

[26]I spent nine months studying as a scholarship student at Berkeley, California, immediately prior to commencing my PhD research.

[27]One teacher actually jokingly accused me of spying on her on behalf of the Ministry of Education (MoE), while another initially resisted the idea of tape-recording during her lessons.

class, sometimes my heeding Fana's furtive requests for quick answers was potentially in conflict with the teacher's and school's instructional and management agenda. However, much as I frequently ignored Fana's requests in keeping with my minimally reactive stance, I occasionally had to respond both to minimize distraction and to convince Fana I was interested in his work.

Not everybody I encountered in children's home and community settings understood or accepted my research intentions; at least not immediately. Babe [Father] Dludlu, Heli's maternal grandfather, displayed a visibly unfriendly attitude towards my 'idle' little academic exercise. Originally suspecting a conspiracy between me and Heli's granny regarding Heli's sought involvement in the research, he subsequently only responded curtly to my greetings without even pausing from his work. He also took it upon himself to vehemently order Heli and other present children to abandon their chores and write on the ground as soon as I arrived each Saturday morning. Initially timidly holding back, I eventually mustered adequate courage to apologetically reason with him to let the children carry on with their work for that is precisely what I wanted to observe, rather than perfunctory writing that would otherwise not take place voluntarily. I strongly suspected Dludlu feared I would somehow pick up sensitive details about Heli's home life, including the beatings he frequently subjected her to, and there was no telling how I might use that information. Outside Heli's run-down home, I was twice stopped and interrogated by different groups of young men, drunk on *marula*[28] beer, who scrutinized my research paraphernalia and only let me alone once they had satisfied themselves that I was neither an investigative journalist nor a public health inspector.

As the fieldwork wore on, what former British prime minister, Tony Blair, (*Sky News*, 2005) had described as 'compassion fatigue' (with regard to aid donors, in his case) inevitably set in among some of my hitherto generally supportive hosts. For instance, I sensed emergent hostility in Sebe's teacher's sarcastic comment to children about their 'rich' uncle in response to children's questions about my new car. I knew I had

[28]This is a potent alcoholic drink home-brewed between February and April from the fermented ripe fruit of the indigenous *marula* tree in Southern Africa.

overstayed my welcome. Signs of growing impatience and loss of courtesy included Musa's family failing to tell me about a change to the Sunday school timetable during school holidays, which saw me spending an awkward, fruitless hour with strangers while the family sat in the main church service just 500 metres away. There was a growing sense that certain parents and teachers actually expected some form of compensation for their part in facilitating my study. For instance, Fana's mother asked me to help her find a job as a domestic at the University of Swaziland where I stayed. Earlier on, Fana's teachers had asked me to help them solicit donor funds from my USA contacts to enable them to extend the school's infrastructure and playing/learning activities. Earlier on, Heli's grandfather said he was "grateful" that I had come to his granddaughter's rescue. I never fully understood the meaning of this declaration from someone who remained aloof throughout my home visits. Fana's grandfather also expressed excitement that his grandson was associated with a "teacher", as though my contact with Fana would benefit him educationally. He provided drinks or food which he made sure we shared as we chatted about a variety of topics, including his life history. All of these challenges exerted enormous pressure on me, significantly increasing feelings of unease and uncertainty. I took solace in the fact that I did not make promises I never intended to keep from the outset, which might have raised false hopes and subsequently fuelled distrust among my various participants. It was then that Bogdan and Biklen's (1998) counsel to go slow and remain interested in this kind of research began to ring true.

3.6 Conclusion to the chapter

In this chapter I have recapped the study's pursuit of in-depth understanding of individual cases consistent with ethnographic inquiry, rather than seeking statistical representivity. I have also provided detailed individual profiles of the research children, which help illuminate the distinctive personal characteristics on the basis of which children were selected for the study and which positioned them to participate in particular ways in school and at home. I have also highlighted in this chapter the professional and personal attributes of the teachers with whom I interacted directly during the twelve-month long fieldwork. I have noted that though my focus was never on the teachers, the latter's

outlooks on and mediation of literacy became important in shaping children's respective participation. I have also described the research schools and the wider environment in which the research took place. Lastly, I have acknowledged the various access challenges with which I was confronted as well as the breakthroughs I achieved. In the next chapter I discuss the findings and argue that children brought with them from home to school a wide range of interactive communicative resources, which were nonetheless disregarded in their literacy instruction. I further argue that such disregard for children and their out-of-school repertoires was consistent with the general outlook on and treatment of children as passive, unquestioning learners by the wider Swazi society.

I adopted the following transcribing conventions for all data transcripts (figure 1) that I discus in the chapters that follow:

Transcribing conventions[29]

/./	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
…	Ellipsis points indicate interrupted utterances
N-O	Capitalized letters or words separated by hyphen indicate that letters or words were spelled 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 capitalized word or phrase indicate increased volume, e.g., shouting

[29]I am also putting the transcribing conventions in the Appendices for easy reference for the reader (see Appendix B).

[

[**(**A) single bracket(s) indicate overlapping speech

*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 whose gender I can neither recall nor determine from the tape; otherwise for any of the focal children I use their pseudonyms or their first letters in case of space shortage

T always stands for teacher

SIKA stands for me (Sikelela, the researcher; where there's acute shortage of space I use **S**)

H/T stands for head teacher

KIDS: stands for all other kids at once engaged in something other than focal activity at a given moment irrespective of gender

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

Chapter 4

Children's language resources[30]

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine evidence which shows that children in preschool and Grade One exhibited a range of language resources at home and in school. I first analyze the manifestation of children's language resources both during play at home and off-task[31] in school in order to show that these resources were already visible outside the official school or classroom setting. These resources related to particular events, practices and dispositions, including storytelling; teasing; simulation; manipulating rules of play to outplay peers; exaggerating one's abilities to psyche out competitors; aptly improvising play roles to suit disadvantaged peers; appropriating artefacts in literacy-deficient home environments to satisfy immediate play/writing needs; awareness of drawing/reading/writing limitations; and curiosity. I argue that the children's resources went unnoticed largely because of a general tendency that I observed in my research notes for adults to condescend to and to dismiss children and their activities as unimportant or as 'mere' play. Indeed, I consider this to be a generalized feature that I have observed across Swazi society, as discussed in chapter one earlier (see chapter 1, section 1.5), where I observed that adults work and children play and learn from older peers and their elders. Then I analyze those language resources which children manifested exclusively off-task in the classroom, i.e., those which were not also observed at home. These resources included the children's various ways of extending and relating book stories to their lived experiences. I argue that children's repertoires were disregarded both because there was a distinction

[30]By language resources, which I use frequently throughout the analysis in this chapter and chapters five and six below, I refer to the various creative ways in which children used the tool of language in asserting their intertetexual knowledge, abilities, interests, and intentions in different social contexts with peers and adults. The language resources I focused on in this research included storytelling; teasing; simulation; the ability to alter rules of play to suit a player's contingent intentions; the ability to exaggerate one's ability relative to peers; improvising suitable play roles for otherwise disadvantaged peers; converting artefacts in literacy-deficient home environments to satisfy immediate play/writing needs; awareness of one's literacy limitations; and curiosity, all of which were expressed through active communication or using language.

[31]That is, when the children engaged voluntarily in activities other than those officially sanctioned (on-task) and led by their teachers.

between what children already knew and could accomplish off-task and during free play and what they had to learn in school and because teachers generally saw children and their enterprise in the same dismissive light, as in the larger Swazi society, in which schools and teachers who were also products and agents of the same social system operated. In constructing an overview of children's out-of-school repertoires and their identical treatment at home and in school, I set up the basis for my analysis of the official literacy practices and their consequences for children's literacy development that follows in chapter five. I focus on children's language resources as part of my answer to the question around the communicative and literacy practices children brought from home to school with them and vice-versa and the extent to which these were drawn on or ignored at the level of literacy learning in school.

4.2 Children's language resources which recurred at home and off-task in school

In this section I analyze the language resources that the children manifested during peer play at home and off-task in school despite the absence of a literate environment or conventional literacy materials. I aim to show, through the ensuing analysis in the subsections below, that children displayed language repertoires during home-based play with siblings as well as during play with peers off-task in school. At home, children's resources remained invisible in their limited and predominantly one-way interactions with adults. In school, the same resources remained in the background because teachers distinguished between children's existing knowledge and what they were in school to learn. I argue that in both cases children's resources counted for little in a stratified sociocultural setting in which children were treated as novices who were expected to passively and unquestioningly learn everything they needed to know from the knowledgeable elders around them. My analysis begins with storytelling.

4.2.1 Storytelling: a family practice

Of the four research children, Fana stood out as the most prolific storyteller. In fact, Fana was the only child from whom I obtained storytelling data because none of the other research children told stories in my presence. He was particularly adept at the

traditional Swazi story or folktale[32] genre. He said he learned stories from such extended family members as elder cousins and uncles. From this declaration, storytelling was a regular feature of Fana's home practices. When I observed him at home, Fana was always in the company of his elder and younger sisters when he told stories. Fana's storytelling ability came out in his knowledge of the ritualized opening and closing sequences, his use of characters' names, characters' actual words, their songs, inflections, intonation or voice variation, and bodily and facial expressions, which made the stories both authentic and gave them needed dramatic effect. In the following extracts from my field notes and recorded, transcribed and translated observational data, Fana displays maturity and mastery of storytelling:

> Upon my arrival Fana's mother sent Lona to tell Fana to hurry back from a shopping errand since I was now around. I informed her that if I had known I would have gone to meet Fana myself as I might have got the chance to witness him transacting with shop personnel as well as with other children along the way. She commented that my work sounded really crazy (following children all over), to which we both laughed. I spotted and reached out to look at math worksheets (someone must have been working on them before my arrival) on the wall of the porch. Fana's mother took these inside (I wondered silently whose they were). Once Fana and Lona (7 years old) returned from the shop, Gcina (1 year old); Mau (9 years old); Linga (2 years old); Mthobisi (3 years old, apparently a member of the larger extended family) joined us on the porch of the apparently newly built house (already occupied but yet to be painted). Fana, Lona, and Mau told stories in turn (Fana actually told 2 stories today). At some point, even 2-year-old Linga began, "Kwesukasukela…" ["Once upon a time…"], which made me think that these children did this often. When I asked where they got the stories from, Lona said from "…babe" ["…father"], and Fana said from "…malume Mandla Mathabela" ["…uncle Mandla Mathabela"] (Fana told me that he got stories from an uncle when I asked him earlier in school). Fana's mother had offered me a cushioned stool, which I sat on with my back to a lounge window that partially opened to the

[32]In this thesis I use story and folktale interchangeably. For readability and clarity I'll use story from this point onwards.

porch. This position allowed me to see all the children on the floor as well as on the waist-high walls of the porch. Lona was first to tell a story. Fana was so impatient that he interrupted Lona's story several times before he got his turn:

FAN: 37 (no sooner have we thanked Lona for her story than Fana launches his) Kwasukasukela[33]

LON: 43 Ngifuna kucoca nayi ya ja

FAN: 44 E-e! Ngiyacoca kwasukasukela

ALL: 45 Coyi (we signal readiness by saying this]

FAN: 46 Bekukhona /./ bekukhona labanye bo, timfene nalogwaja /./ batsi kuye, "Yemadoda vele asitsengeni emakhuba" uh-uh ngicoca nayi ya, bekukhona labanye, tonkhe tilwane nje

FAN: 48 E-e, k'coca mine (to Lona who still attempts to tell yet another story) /./ OK, watsi logwaja, "Hha mine ngiyavilapha yemaja!" /./ "Angeke unatse ke" /./ "Ngitawumane ngitifunel'emant'ami nami kuleny'indzawo" (in a 'sobbing' voice) /./ "Umba wena umgodzi utawunatsa la" /../ Logwaj'wanga…

FAN: 50 Wagadza imfene, wakhava logwaja, ayikho, kute lutfo silwane lapha esigangeni /./ inats'emanti /./ bagadz'is'imfene, yagadza yagadz'imfene /./ imfene, phindze, ba, imfene /./ 'Ngicel'unginatsise mnganami', "Angifuni", "Ngicel'ung'natsise mnganami, awungivise phela mnganami" (makes a sipping sound), "Kumnandzi', natsa mnganami" /./ Wanatsa logwaga…! (emphatically)

FAN: 54 Lapho ke watsi, watsi, tsi, wakha, "Nginatsise mnganami, ngicel'unginatsise mnganami, ngicel'ung'natsise mnganami, ngicel'unginatsise mnganami" (I think he's allowed to drink because someone arrives and complains) /./ weta "Ngani wen'utsit'utawugadza la?" /./ Bamcosha /./ wema, wema nje lapha "Sawubona mnganami, sawubona mnganami" /./

[33]I have had to separate the SiSwati and English translation to make it easy to read the material. Otherwise, it would have been crowded and difficult to read. I started with Fana's original SiSwati version and the English translation follows in the paragraph immediately below.

Bas'gcobis'inovi, "Ubindzeleni, awuva kutsi ngiyakuvusela, ngitakushaya ngemphama phela mine" Namba sandla [onomatopoeic for the hand stuck on] /./ "Yewena ngitakushaya ngalesi lesinye" Namba sandla [onomatopoeic again] /./ "Ng'tak'khahlela" Ngci! Nama lunyawo [onomatopoeic for the foot stuck on too] /./ "Ngitak'khahlela ngale lelinye" Linamatsele /./ "Ngitak'luma nyalo" wanamatsel'umlomo, wamkhandza khona lapho logwaja /./ Batsi, batsi-ke logwaja, "Yeah namuhla lusuku lwakho lwek'bulalwa" /./ watsi, "Hhayi ngicela ningang'bulali" /./ batsi bayamkabha logwaja wazub'wahlala lapha, bakabha'indlov'iyodvwa /./ Watsatseka logwaja, watsatsek logwaja! Coyi coyi seyiphelili

FAN: 37 (no sooner have we thanked Lona for her story than Fana launches his) [Once upon a time]

LON: 43 [I want to tell this one of ja]

FAN: 44 [Uh-uh! I'm telling a story {remember}
[once upon a time]

ALL: 45 (we signal readiness by saying this)

FAN: 46 [There were once /./ other, baboons and a rabbit /./ and they said to him, "Hey guys let us buy hoes"] [uh-uh I want to tell the one of, there were just all animals]

FAN: 48 [Uh-uh, it's my turn] (to Lona who still attempts to tell yet another story) /./ [OK, and the rabbit said, "But guys, I'm lazy!"] /./ ["Then you won't drink"] /./ ["I'll find my own water source then"] (in a 'sobbing' voice) /./ ["Hey dig here so you can drink"] /../ [But the rabbit didn't…]

FAN: 50 [And the baboon watches over the little well to make sure no undeserving' creature drinks from it /./ and the rabbit asks the baboon, "Please let me drink my friend" and the baboon says, "No, you can't" and the rabbit says, "May I at least taste the water?" and the baboon eventually gives in, "OK drink my friend," "It's nice" and the rabbit sips (sipping sound)] /./ [And so the rabbit <u>drank</u>…!] (emphatically)

FAN: 54 At that point {the rabbit} then said, said, scooped, "Let me drink my

friend, please let me drink my friend, please let me drink my friend" (I think he's allowed to drink because someone arrives and complains) /./ he approached "But you promised to keep a keen eye" /./ they dismissed the rabbit who went and met an elephant who greeted him, "Hello rabbit, my friend" and when he didn't respond he complained, "Why don't you respond to my greetings? I'll slap your face!" He proceeded to slap the rabbit's face but his hand stuck because cunning rabbit had smeared a sticky ointment on his face /./ "I'll strike you with my other hand!" It got stuck too /./ "I'll kick you!" He did and the foot stuck as well /./ "I'll use my other foot!" He did and it too stuck in the rabbit's face /./ "I'll bite you!" He did and the mouth stuck, and the other animals found him all stuck on little rabbit's face] /./ [And they told rabbit, "Yeah today is your last day"] /./ [And he pleaded, "Please don't kill me"] /./ [And when they tried to chop the rabbit he leaped and they chopped the elephant instead] /./ [And the rabbit bolted for dear life! That's the end]
(Fieldwork Log – Fana, pages 40 – 42.)

Fana did not merely recite verbatim a story he had once learnt. Instead, he creatively reconstructed it and made it his own. The first indication of this remaking was when he chimed in with the "Indlov'ihlatjiwe, indlov'ihlatjiwe!" [The elephant has a thorn in its hoof, the elephant has a thorn in its hoof!], a repetitive refrain from Lona's story which had been told moments earlier. Repetitive songs punctuate most Swazi stories at regular intervals. They break the monotony of lengthy narratives and provide much needed entertainment and welcome shifts of attention for their child audiences.

Fana employed a sobbing voice (line 48) to signal his character's emotional state. For Fana, using the character's exact utterance was not effective enough. He still needed to adopt the tone in which the words were uttered to achieve their intended dramatic effect. He employed a similar narrative technique in his onomatopoeic depiction of how the character drank through a sipping sound, followed by emphasis on the word *drank* (line 50), the focal action at this point. "Watsatseka logwaja, watsatsek' logwaja!..." [And the rabbit bolted for dear life!…] (line 54) is a figure of speech,

which marked a climactic end to an already dramatic and surrealistic story in which the rabbit ran off after the other animals chopped away the elephant from the rabbit's tiny face, freeing the very rabbit they wanted to kill in the process.

Opportunities like this one to record one of the children telling a story were rare as I didn't get to observe family interaction inside homes, where intergenerational storytelling[34] took place. But from the children's explanations I could tell that storytelling was a popular, shared family practice in Fana's family. There was no evidence that similar storytelling practice happened in the other research families[35]. It was easy to conclude, though, that Fana and his siblings had acquired quite a repertoire of stories from their extended family to share with interested people (like me) whom they came in contact with. For instance, even two-year-old Linga already knew how to introduce a story to an expectant audience even if she still could not yet tell a story. Fana repeatedly chimed in when Lona told her story because he knew his sister's story (line 5), which was part of his own repertoire too. Lona would have told another story (line 43) had Fana not reminded her it was his turn (lines 44 and 48). Fana had just introduced one story when he switched over to a different one he preferred on this occasion (line 46). Close to three weeks later, I stopped the children from each telling me a story because I was not going to stay long and the setting was not conducive[36]. Notably, across the several occasions, none of the children ever told the same story twice.

[34]I did not witness any of these incidents of Fana's family storytelling because I observed the children only during the day when their father and uncles were out at work. I therefore could not establish from the elders who were said to be the source of the children's stories what they thought the worth of the practice was.

[35]As I stated under footnote 33 above, I only observed all research children during the day, a time when their elders were often not home. 'Evidence' or its absence therefore refers to the instances of storytelling that I witnessed or did not witness rather than its absolute absence at all times.

[36]This Saturday was only the second time I had found Fana's father at home, having first met him on a Sunday, when he consented to Fana's inclusion in the research. He switched off first the blaring radio when I joined him in the lounge, then the video he had put on when the children joined us. The children huddled up on a low stool next to the sofas and looked from each other to me in an unusual "what now" sort of way. They were each preparing to tell me a recorded story when their father rejoined his wife in an inner room. I told them we would do this another time since I had to hurry back to attend my daughter's preschool graduation in an hour's time. While this was true, I also found the contrived setting a little too stifling to reflect what the children really wanted to do on the day (See Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 49).

Fana participated actively and confidently at play and in class, as I will show in chapter five below. His active and confident participation included listening to peers, chiming in, and speaking in a clearly projected voice. Such participation showed him drawing on the narrative and genre resources that can be said to have developed from the family tradition of storytelling. Though learned from adults at home[37], these skills only came out during play with siblings and peers. Children's language resources emerged away from limited interactions with adults because it was only during peer play that children came to life, initiated both talk and activities, freely expressed their thoughts and intentions, and achieved internally valued and contested social ends such as getting and holding peers' attention and influencing the direction and result of play through talk and action.

In school Fana often told stories as he and his friends sat on a huge log and ate by the north fence of the school during midmorning break. In this excerpt, for example, Fana and Maswazi each told us a story:

> This was the fourth storytelling session that I observed this group engage in, in just over a month. Fana, (later) his closest friend, Maswazi, and three other boys sat on pieces of wood at their usual spot next to the fence. I was standing and eating a pear as Fana and two other boys sat and ate bread. When the two left, Fana asked me to tell him a story. I asked him to excuse me today and that I would tell it another day. He offered to tell me one himself. I went in to get my audiotape recorder. Up to three other boys came and went. Maswazi, who had just rejoined us, stayed to tell us his own story. They both did so, while seated. On this occasion, Fana told the story of a herd boy who asked his mother's permission to go and look after cattle. Once far away from home, he met an animal which demanded to have the biggest beast in return for grazing the herd on its land. When the boy said he had none, the animal demanded to see the boy's chief. However, when the boy and the chief got to the king, the

[37]Fana and siblings, the only children who engaged in storytelling in my presence, claimed that they learned stories from their elders.

king ate the chief up[38]. The boy ended up taking a lot of money back home. His mother demanded to know where the money came from, took it away and refused to give it to an animal which demanded its money back. She finally permanently resettled in a welcoming homestead where she had her own bedroom.
(Fieldwork Log – Fana, pages 22 – 24.)

Just like in the home-based stories, Fana enlivened his narrative with direct speech, voice variation, body language, etc. There were times when Fana added other features such as material from contemporary popular culture to his accounts. In the following storytelling session, for instance, Fana incorporated *tsotsi taal*[39] vocabulary into his story:

At midmorning break I again joined Fana, Maswazi and three other boys (later some girls joined us) at their usual gathering spot by the north fence. Fana wasted no time and told two stories back to back. He reminded me of my earlier promise to tell them a story. I told them a well-known standard one of a squirrel which tricked its granny into the cooking pot[40]. Fana told two more

[38]The story depicts a traditional Swazi setting where there is a king who is represented by chiefs in different regions of the country. According to protocol, the boy, a commoner, could not approach the king directly and therefore used the chief as his emissary. Apparently, the chief couldn't resolve the dispute between the herd boy and the aggrieved animal and owner of the grazing land. So he and the boy took it up with the king for adjudication, only for the king to eat the chief and offer the boy money in return for the delicacy. As it turned out, the money also belonged to the animal.

[39]*Tsotsi taal* is a lingua franca that originated in the suburban informal settlements or townships of South Africa during the apartheid era. It is a mixture of that country's eleven languages associated with the underworld whose members needed to prevent outsiders, including the state police, from understanding their conversations. Some of its features are now increasingly permeating mainstream discourse not only in South Africa but the entire Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, of which Swaziland forms part.

[40]The recurring motif of a small animal tricking much bigger animals is common in the African storytelling tradition. In an analysis of the prose narratives among the people of the northern part of Southern Africa, Central Africa, all the way to West Africa, for instance, Finnegan (1970: 337) discovered that the plots often involved tugs of war a in which a small animal such as a hare tricked larger animals, playing off against the other by, for instance, inducing them to enter the tug of war in the belief that they were pulling against the hare. Báyò Ògúnjìmí & Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah's (2005: 81) examination of varieties of folktales (e.g., dilemma tales, moral tales, & fairy tails) brought out thematic similarities. One Ibo folktale "Tortoise and Squirrel", for instance, bears striking

> stories. I noticed that in addition to varying his tone, standing, jumping, frowning in representing his characters, Fana also embellished his tales with occasional *tsotsi taal* vocabulary (e.g., *majita* meaning *gents* or *guys,* a term denoting sophistication and 'toughness' because of its links to gangster slang in urban South Africa) to characterize some of his dramatis personae's street or underworld discourse. The use of the term *majita* is popular among the suburban and urban Swazi youth as a signifier of their membership of a local youth culture which in turn has wider links beyond the local.
> (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 6.)

The introduction of *tsotsi taal* brings in another dimension to the rich storytelling tradition. Swazi stories are historically an ancient traditional practice, which has been passed on from one generation to the next. However, in line with this study's processual perspective on language and culture, Fana recreated a story that had been passed on to him by his elders by introducing contemporary material. A processual perspective holds that culture is dynamic, not static (See, for example, Street's 1993b argument that "Culture is a verb"). Fana invested the age-old story with his own intention and meaning. In the process, he appropriated the story into his own tale like a truly competent storyteller. He was no longer repeating someone else's story, but was telling his own, in a whole new way too. He made his characters visible through the body language he worked into his accounts. He also gave them a distinct voice with the appropriate variations, which made them audible, understandable, and believable at once.

Apart from storytelling, the children in the study also used language in a variety of creative ways to intimidate and gain advantage over their peers during free play at home and off-task in school. The next subsection focuses on teasing and simulation as some of the powerful ways in which children used language for the purpose of gaining an advantage over or ascendancy amongst their peers.

4.2.2 Language wizardry: teasing and simulation

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resemblance to Fana's tricking rabbit the recurring motif in both of which is the casting of the squirrel as always a cunning, tricky, and overly ambitious animal.

This range of children's language resources was evident during talk and competitive play at home and in school. They employed language play such as teasing in an effort to entertain onlookers, to get a peer into trouble, or to cause discomfort in order to outwit and outplay their playmates in the process. The children also used simulation or role play to gain advantage over their peers, to fill an emerging play role, and simply to participate using shared awareness of what it was possible to say and do in the imaginary world of play and in real life. I discuss each of these in turn.

4.2.2.1 Teasing

Teasing occurred sporadically and on various levels during play. It involved a child or children dramatically exaggerating others' physical features or behaviour; picking on a particular physical trait of a peer or sibling and caricaturing it; or comparing the child's behaviour to that of a culturally despised animal or character. The purpose of teasing was nearly always to make fun of the recipients and 'put them down'. The child or children on the receiving end rarely took it lying down, though. They often fought straight back. In this episode Musa and Fisokuhle engaged in a teasing duel:

> This was the last in a series of play activities that had kicked off with the shooting of marbles through a narrow goalmouth made by standing two bricks close together. In this activity Thabo, Vuyo, Mbali, and Mphile, watched as Musa and Fisokuhle engaged in a teasing duel. Musa and Fisokuhle took a piece of garden hose that had been lying on the ground all along. One child talked into one end as the other placed the other end of the hose in the ear and a 'telephone' exchange ensued thus:

FIS: 177 Wente lomgcondvo ingatsi yimilente ye *primus stove*! [You have legs like those of a *primus stove*!] (implying they're terrifyingly thin)

MUS: 178 (giggles)

FIS: 179 Besihamba nawe edrobheni sakhandza mkhulu wakho atsanyela ngesilevu e *Shoprite* [You and I went to town and lo and behold we found your grandfather sweeping the floor at *Shoprite* using his beard]

MUS: 180 (laughs)

FIS: 181 Wena unelibele enhloko, watsi umfundisi, "Khumula sigcoko!"

Wakhumula wena watsi, “Ncence, Mfundisi!” [You had breasts on your head, and Pastor said, “Take off your hat!” You took it off and said, “Feel like suckling, Reverend?”

MUS: 182 (laughs once more; his own words are inaudible because he stammers and uses a very low voice)

(Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 88.)

This teasing duel was unprovoked in the sense that it occurred outside any form of contest as the children were not even playing any more. The fact that it happened outside a game meant that the teasing was the game and contest itself in this instance. The children teased not in order to distract the other’s attention from an ongoing activity in order to gain advantage, as was usually the case. It was a test of each other’s quick wit and ability at wordplay.

The duel turned out to be a relatively one-sided contest as Musa’s own words were hardly audible apart from his laughter. Musa’s laughter showed that the children saw the teasing as light-hearted fun. For example, Fisokuhle’s simile “You have legs like those of a *primus stove*!”[41] (line 177) created an unlikely and very funny image of extremely thin legs. Anybody who looked like a *primus stove* would look really funny. Musa’s laughter showed that he was both an adversary in the duel as well as being part of the audience who were entertained by the clever repartee.

Sometimes, though, children enhanced the humour and effect of teasing by coming down hard on an opponent’s family member such as mother or grandparent. The goal was still to verbally wear one’s opponent down. Fisokuhle did exactly this when she caricatured Musa’s grandfather as sweeping a busy *Shoprite* floor with his beard (line 179). It is highly unlikely for a respectable old man to be found sweeping the floor of a busy mall, let alone using his beard as though he were crazy. The mere reference to an elder was transgressive but humorous, strictly within the context of a light-hearted teasing duel.

[41]A *primus stove* is a small inexpensive paraffin-fuelled flame stove on which only one small pot can be placed at a time. It is common among the poor who cannot afford bigger, more convenient cooking devices. It does have a bulging paraffin tank and three tiny stands protruding from its bottom.

Fisokuhle then employed a metaphor to suggest that male Musa not only "…had breasts…" but also had them "…on your head…" (line 181). It was a deliberate skilful exaggeration whose full effect emerged when Musa supposedly failed to take off his hat in front of a priest, as would ordinarily have been expected, only for his abnormality to be exposed the minute he was asked to take off his hat. When his secret was revealed, Musa attempted to implicate the priest by transgressively inviting him to suckle. Once again, the children had come to understand from participation in this childhood culture of teasing that it was acceptable to ridicule respectable adults like priests in this manner in this context.

A teasing duel in which two children square up against each other in the presence of spectators is uncommon in Swazi culture. Such robust verbal sparring has been reported among the African-American communities where they are known as "dating the dozens" (Smitherman, 1998). Though African-Americans widely accept the teasing duels as entertaining contests and tests of wits, some have resulted in serious physical fights nonetheless.

Sometimes children teased each other as a participating strategy to divert peers' and others' attention away from themselves, and towards someone else. They also jibed at another child's performance or utterance, or called them names or lied about them to get them into trouble. In the next excerpt, for instance, Fana lied about and teased a peer in order to get him into 'trouble' with a drunken adult passer-by:

> Fana and two older herd boys had arrived from grazing cattle and swimming. They joined about eleven other younger and older boys from the same community in climbing up a mulberry tree, picking and eating ripened mulberries. The boys talked to and teased each other. At one point, a man clad in an army camouflage cap and pants (a soldier who guarded the royal kraal and homestead situated a few yards from the tree), made a brief stop under the tree and looked up at the boys. He reeked of alcohol and talked to the boys in a drunken manner too:

MAN: 500 Yey' nine, nihlel'leni laph'es'hlahlen' *jou bliksem*[42] yi:? [Hey you, what are you doing sitting up in the tree you *bliksem* huh:?]

BOYS:501 (giggle)

MAN: 502 ( ) (picks up stick and makes as if to throw it up at giggling lot)

BOYS:503 (wild giggle)

MAN: 504 *Basop*[43] ng'yan'colela [Watch out I forgive you for now] (walks on toward the royal kraal some ten yards from the tree)

BOYS:505 (giggle)

BOY: 506 S'yabonga kus'colela [We thank you for forgiving us]

FAN: 508 As'bong' njengawe [We don't thank him like you] (to the boy)

MAN: 510 (stops, looks back up in tree) Utsin'yemfana? [What did you just say boy?]

FAN: 512 Kusho Thando nang'ya kati longale ngemuva [It's Thando that cat over there]

BOYS:517 (giggle)

(Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 100.)

This episode was an example of children's quick-witted reading and understanding of their social situation and clever use of language to enhance fun. As locals, Fana and peers knew this particular elder fairly well. They equally knew the fact that in his current state of mind he was joking and his threats therefore meant no one any real harm. Otherwise, there would not have been a conversation to begin with. Ordinarily, the man would have spoken and the boys would have obliged silently because children generally do not talk back at their elders. In this instance, the elder was culturally justified in chastising or even physically punishing the boys for playing a potentially dangerous game of climbing trees. The boys' "We thank you for forgiving us" (line 506) should be taken in this context.

[42] *Jou bliksem:* A common swearword across southern Africa meaning scoundrel, scumbag, bastard, useless child, etc. borrowed from Afrikaans, possibly via *tsotsi taal* in this case. The literal meaning of the saying is 'You lightning!', where *bliksem* is a corruption of the Germanic word, *blitzen*, meaning lightning.

[43] *Basop* is another Afrikaans word for be careful or watch out – a warning or threat.

Fana lied about the source of the utterance (line 512) to try and trick his peers and the man that he was not responsible for it. He also not only tried to implicate his peer by naming him the culprit instead; but he called him a cat too. Fana intended the name-calling as a challenge to his peer to defend himself from both the accusation and the teasing. However, the whole group understood the light-hearted spirit of the exchange. As a result of this mutual understanding, the peer did not defend himself. Instead, he joined his peers, including Fana, in laughing at the accusation and the entire potentially uncomfortable episode was also laughed off (line 517).

Minutes earlier a brief discussion had ensued between the few little boys under the tree and a girl who had just stopped by to draw water from a nearby tap:

> In this episode, the girl first wanted to know how young Fana had climbed up the tall mulberry tree. She subsequently established that another boy who looked no more than Fana's age, was actually much older and had therefore climbed up the tree unassisted. However, when the conversation turned to the boy's school performance, the girl not only referred to the boy as "It" but also said that he had failed 10 times or he would be in Form Five. Another boy in the discussion rejoined that the boy had actually failed 100 times – a clear exaggeration.
> (Fieldwork Log – Fana, pages 90 – 91.)

The boy whose school performance was the subject of the discussion could hear the conversation himself. The girl signalled her disagreeable attitude first by referring to the boy as if he were a mere thing "it". The girl could have conveniently avoided addressing the boy directly in order to insulate herself from blame and to avoid a confrontation. However, her whole attitude suggested that she probably did not even consider him a worthy conversational partner because of his woeful performance in school. From the exaggerated number of times (100 & 10) that the boy was said to have failed, he appeared to be really struggling with his schoolwork.

I found it curious that the question of one's school success or failure even arose in a context that clearly had nothing to do with school. Apart from being an example of

teasing, this episode also signalled the importance the children's community attached to one's success or failure in school. Except for Fana's mother[44], the parents of the children in the study generally did not directly involve themselves in their children's schoolwork. However, they still watched the children's progress very closely because they believed that school success paved the way to a better life. It was the duty of the schools to teach children to succeed, just as it was the children's duty to learn successfully. The parents' duty, on the other hand, was confined to the payment of school fees.

At times teasing also signalled children's unexpected[45] awareness of Swazi history and current political reality:

> This was the first conventional reading and writing I had ever witnessed Sebe and cousins engage in since the fieldwork had started almost a year earlier. Nonhlanhla, Feza, and Langa performed a school-like spelling callout on the porch of the main house while younger Sebe, who only occasionally got drawn to the reading, played with and held baby Andile nearby nearly all the time[46]. Teasing again occurred alongside the ongoing spelling activity, which the older children said they engaged in to practise for their oncoming end of year exams:

LAN: 95 Angitsi vele baka Dlamini basheshe…[Dlamini's are truly quick to…]

SEBE: 96 (yells)…

[44]She featured in both her children's self-recorded reading/writing sessions at home (see Fieldwork Log – Fana, pages 60 – 72; and Fieldwork Log – Fana, pages 72 – 76 respectively).

[45]At least to me and other Swazi adults because we generally aren't aware that children know a lot more than what we hear them say and see them do. This is so largely because we generally spend less time with children, talk less to them, and pay less attention to them and their actions than I did in this research context.

[46]Often retreating to the sidelines to do something different and occasionally joining in on an ongoing common activity was Sebe's typical mode of participating in home play activities, including reading and writing on the rare occasions that explicit literacy events became part of play. This is the reason that the episode is included despite Sebe's minimal participation.

LAN: 97 Bahlanye…[Go crazy[47]…]

FEZ: 98 ( ) 'MaShanganen' [( ) From the *Shangaans*[48]]

LAN: 99 'Nema:nga [You're ly:ing]

NON: 100 VELE BAKA DLAMINI SHEM' BABUY'

EMASHANGANENI…[OH YES DLAMINIS BROKE AWAY FROM THE *SHANGAANS*…]

SEBE: 101 (yells) MANG' [LIAR]

FEZ: 102 Vele [True] (emphatically)

NON: 105 Futsi baka Dlamini la kaNgwane {Swaziland} nabafuna tsine bangas'cosha k'sale bona [And another thing if the Dlaminis here kaNgwane {in Swaziland} wanted they'd chuck the rest of us out {of their country} and remain all by themselves]

FEZ: 106 Nine nonkhe n'maShangane (giggles) [All of you are *Shangaans*]

(giggles and glances wryly at me)

(Fieldwork Log – Sebe, pages 86 – 87.)

Feza sought to quickly counter Langa's claim that Dlaminis for some cultural reason deserve special treatment by retorting correctly that Dlaminis are actually *Shangaans* because they originally broke away from the black people of neighbouring Mozambique (see also chapter 1, section 1.5 for a detailed discussion). Swaziland has had a sizeable influx of largely illegal Mozambican immigrants since the outbreak of the civil war of the mid 1970s. Desperate to earn a living and to remain in Swaziland, the Mozambicans do all sorts of menial work for locals. Swazis generally look down

[47]Langa did not explicitly state what he referred to here. I inferred from the context that he was suggesting that Dlaminis, like all other Swazi clans, were culturally forbidden to do certain things. All Clan names in Swaziland have a totem or an animal that they respect and can't slaughter to eat. For instance, Dlaminis are not supposed eat sheep. If they do, they supposedly go mad. This is what Langa is referring to (line 97). From the flow of the conversation, the reference was mutually intelligible to all conversationalists.

[48]*Shangaans* in Southern Africa refers, often in a derogatory spirit, collectively to all the black people of neighbouring Mozambique who are scattered all over the region to escape socio-political and economic hardships back home. In reality though, *Shangaans* are only one of the many tribes in homeland Mozambique.

on and often ill-treat Mozambicans because of their lowly illegal immigrant status. Dlaminis, nonetheless, share ancestry with their royal family, the ruling class. Despite their varying economic standing, Dlaminis at least have some status because of their collective association, no matter how distant, with the ruling elite. To label Dlaminis *Shangaans* therefore almost amounts to an insult. The full effect of Feza and Nonhlanhla's teasing lay in the fact that Langa and myself were Dlaminis. That explains Feza's abrupt switch from referring to Dlaminis in general as *Shangaans* (line 98) to actually addressing her jibe directly at all the Dlaminis (line 106) present at the moment.

Feza giggled and glanced wryly at me (line 106) to signal both that she was including me in her utterance, as well as to acknowledge that under different circumstances it would have been inappropriate to tease me as her elder. In just one utterance, Feza quickly read her social surroundings to determine what it was possible and acceptable to say and to what effect in the presence of an adult with an unusual observer role. The children's wider awareness of their world, however, came more noticeably in Nonhlanhla's observation that Dlaminis are politically in charge in Swaziland (105). Nonhlanhla may have meant her observation that Dlaminis decide who can and who cannot reside in Swaziland only as an exaggeration to emphasize their control over everyone else's life. She may also have been stating what she had heard from elders. However, her observation did reflect political reality in the sense that the royal family has even in recent times evicted and banished people from the country for refusing to recognize a prince imposed on them by the king as their new chief. While the children's intention was to tease each other, their teasing reflected how much they knew about both their immediate peer play environment and the political dynamics of their wider social setting. As an adult, I first had to quietly locate myself inside the children's world of play long enough for them to relax and work out what they could and could not say in my presence. If I had assumed a more visible and active role, the children would have customarily relinquished all initiative at play and talk to me. It would have been difficult for the children to even engage in teasing in the first instance. I would not have known just how much knowledge of their immediate and wider world children revealed through language play such as teasing. Children also

created plenty of opportunity to display their linguistic repertoire through simulation, to which I turn below.

4.2.2.2 Simulation

Children's language resources also came out in simulated or pretend activities and roles. In the following excerpt, for instance, Sebe and playmates engaged each other in a 'car' racing contest. Their verbal exchanges revealed more knowledge about cars than one would normally have expected from children their age in this setting[49]:

> When Sebe and her closest friend, Nosipho, had finished their colouring exercise, they walked to wash glue off their hands in the bathroom, returned to get their schoolbags, went outside to eat and play. A 'car' race ensued when Sebe and Nosipho took on two boys who occupied the see-saw next to theirs:

SEBE: 101 BAYAS'SHIYA LABANTFU WENA [THESE PEOPLE WILL LEAVE US BEHIND {IF WE STOP}]

NOSI: 102 Mani s'tabagijimisa [Wait we'll catch up with them]

BOY: 103 Tsine ses'ye Mbabane ke naba…[We're now off to Mbabane as they…]

NOSI: 104 Akusiy'i Mbabane…[It's not Mbabane…]

BOY: 106 Hha seku Jozi! [Hah it's Johannesburg!]

SEBE: 108 Tsine siy'e Mbabane [We're going to Mbabane]

BOY: 110 S'yabashi, ya [We're outpacing them] (huffing)

BOY²: 117 Hha sey, seyiphelele /./ pet ( ) [Hah it has run out of /./ pet ( )]

SEBE: 118 Leyetfu isengakapheli pretroli [Ours hasn't run out of petrol yet]

BOY²: 119 'Tse ma [It's (onomatopoeic signal for very full)]

SEBE: 120 Ngiko nje sikihambisa kancane, sifun'…[That's why we drive slowly,

[49]There are many cars in Swaziland. But not all families have one, certainly not where most of these children came from. However, once again, as a Swazi adult, I had assumed that children from low-income families like the ones I studied, could not have had the close knowledge of cars that Sebe and schoolmates displayed here.

we want {to save fuel}…]

BOY²: 123 Niyay'bona nje leyetfu ngulok'tsi yenu ibham, igam'ke le, igam'ke les'tulo [You see ours it's because yours has broken its, has a broken chair…]

SEBE: 124 Ngiko nje iphelele pretroli [No wonder it ran out of petrol]

NOSI: 125 Yebo [Precisely] (giggles)

(Fieldwork Log – Sebe, pages 6 – 7.)

As they yanked the two see-saws fiercely up and down, each pair of 'drivers' had one thing in mind – gathering momentum, outpacing their opponents, and ultimately winning the race (lines 101 & 102). As usual, talk became part of and actually seemed to energize the contest.

It was, however, the children's emerging knowledge about cars and destinations that I found striking. The first example of this knowledge was the children's reference to long distances implicit in "We're now off to Mbabane…" (line 103) and "Hah it's Johannesburg" (line 106). I am not aware if any of these children had ever been to either Mbabane or Johannesburg personally. However, they were certain that it was possible to reach the two cities by car. The children transferred knowledge about cars and their ability to cover long distances to work with in the current simulated car race. The children's references to Mbabane and Johannesburg were also important in competitive terms. For instance, if the boys weren't headed for Mbabane, which was about 40 kilometres from their school, then they were on their way even farther on to Johannesburg, over 300 kilometres away from Swaziland.

The children's contest around who drove farther than the other took on a different dimension when it emerged that one of the 'cars' had run out of fuel (lines 117 & 118). In real life, a Johannesburg-bound car needs to drive faster and thus also consumes more fuel than one going to nearby Mbabane (line 120). The boy's announcement was a convenient excuse for slowing down and allowing their competitors to overtake them. The boy weaved in the children's shared knowledge about cars and fuel consumption so that when he claimed that their car also had a

broken seat (line 123), Sebe understood, “No wonder it ran out of petrol” (line 124). The effect of the boy’s excuse is that if his team went on to lose the race, it was because their car had a defect which slowed it down and increased fuel consumption. He cleverly solicited the sympathy of both their opponents and the spectators. In fact, the boys’ see-saw had a part missing at the fulcrum making it both uncomfortable and unsafe to play on. This fact incidentally justified the boys’ eventual inability to compete in both the simulation and the actual see-sawing contest. It can be said that in this instance the children successfully merged the imaginary world of play and the real world.

In some instances, however, children’s simulation succeeded more because of children’s adeptness at make-believe than because reality was captured in the simulated situation, as in the episode just described. In the following excerpt, for instance, Fana successfully simulated an alcohol-drinking adult role in order to dissuade a younger playmate from vying for his juice. However, Fana still did not look like an adult, just as the juice still did not resemble alcohol. Instead, it was Fana’s turn of phrase that created an imaginary situation which served his purpose:

> It was break time. Fana and classmate friends talked as they sat on a newly erected big tyre some 3 metres from the east fence of the school, well away from their rendezvous by the north fence on this occasion. Most of the boys had their bread tins and juice bottles out. The ensuing dramatic verbal exchange brought out Fana’s skilful use of language to escape a tricky situation:

MNC: 6 (3-year-old assistant teacher’s son, tries unsuccessfully to take someone’s juice bottle)

FAN: 7 Uzobamb’ibhodlela [“You’ll grab the bottle!”]

BOY: 8 (bottle’s owner) “Hamb’uyonatsa lapha” [“Go drink that one”] (points at Fana’s)

MNC: 9 (grabs Fana’s juice bottle and tries to wrench it off Fana’s grip)

FAN: 10 (tightens his grip) Akusiye lotjwala lobunatsa lapha lobu, uyeva? Ngu

tjwala lo, uyeva? Abunatfwa ngulabangaka. Uyabona nje kunatfwa ngitsi sina teacher uyabona? [This is not the alcohol the others have over there, you hear? This is real alcohol, you hear? It's not for people your age. You see it's only for teacher {researcher} and myself] (spills a trickle of the juice in Mncusi's hand)

MNC: 11 (retreats and lets juice drops fall on ground, babbles something not all too clear.) Aaa, suka! [Aah, go away!] (very articulately now)

KIDS: 12 (giggle)

(Fieldwork Log – Fana, pages 35 - 36.)

Young Mncusi was not yet officially in school. He took part in both the classes and other school activities because his mother, the assistant teacher, brought him and a baby sibling to school almost daily. Mncusi often walked from one group to the next out in the schoolyard during midmorning break, and in the process grabbed and drank anyone's juice. He had unsuccessfully attempted to do just that (line 6) when the juice owner diverted him toward Fana's juice instead (line 8). The cool and calculating Fana was, however, up for the challenge. He not only held tight to his juice bottle, but also devised a winning verbal strategy to defuse Mncusi's advances. The basis of the concept was to 'make believe' that the juice was in fact alcohol and that Fana was, unlike the slightly younger Mncusi, an adult. Underage Mncusi could, unlike 'adult' Fana, not drink the alcohol (line 10). The trick culminated in a rebuffed Mncusi mumbling as he retreated from Fana's giggling group (lines 11 & 12).

Notably Fana inventively drew on his knowledge of the real world and appropriated language to create an imaginary situation to address an immediate social challenge. In Fana's real world, adults rarely share anything with children, who are left to play among themselves most of the time. Adults strictly do not allow children to touch alcohol, and men certainly do not share it with boys either. Fana validated and strengthened his claim by inviting and recruiting me into the imaginary situation (line 10). While everyone knew that he was faking an adult identity, Fana assumed that I would play along and not contradict him. Fana signalled the effectiveness of his overall plan when he dropped a mere trickle of juice into Mncusi's palm. The drop of juice symbolized that small boys, unlike grown men, could only manage a taste of the supposedly potent drink.

On another occasion, roughly two weeks later, Fana, Mncusi and friends were involved in another simulated episode in the schoolyard which had a totally different and revealing effect on the playmates from the one just described, as this excerpt from my fieldnotes shows:

> The teachers were preparing children for a UNICEF-sponsored HIV/AIDS drama contest for all preschools in the community when I got here on this occasion. I sat and watched this rehearsal. When the children were eventually free to go out for break, I followed them to a now inviting schoolyard (a swing, a see-saw, a climber and sliding structure, and old car tyres had recently been erected for children to play and sit on). I followed Fana and friends to the tyres by the east fence, which had become their new break time rendezvous. As soon as the boys had finished eating they formed karate teams and traded blows. Fana effortlessly tackled an attacking 3-year-old Mncusi – his team mate - to the ground, remarking, "What is this {thing}? Is this {thing}a man?" Fana subsequently asked for more fighters to join him to strengthen his team. He later taunted Mncusi, "This man is weak" as the latter went down again following a further blow. When someone suggested, "Ayanda is dead!" Ayanda vehemently objected to this reference to death. Ayanda reiterated his objection to the subject of death when another boy announced, "I'm dead" later on, insisting, "You aren't dead, there's no death here!"
> (Fieldwork Log – Fana, pages 47 – 48.)

On this occasion, Fana and Mncusi were on the same karate team. However, perhaps owing to his younger age and inexperience, Mncusi was repeatedly tackled to the ground. Mncusi's apparent physical weakness prompted Fana to seek to recruit more members to beef up his team. Fana knew from his watching of TV and movies at home that karate was predominantly a robust men's sport. In this episode, he, unlike his team mate, Mncusi, was a man fit enough to participate in karate and compete with other strong men. Fana considered Mncusi to be so weak that he even referred to

him diminutively as a thing. Fana strongly believed that men are tough (and capable of imbibing strong drinks like alcohol, as shown in the previous example).

Repeated reference during these exchanges to the sombre subject of death brought out the children's different attitudes toward death as well as their collective awareness of the tension and boundaries between make-believe and real life. Ayanda strongly objected to the topic's insertion into their play. His objection was a reminder to his playmates that it was unacceptable to joke about death in Swazi society. In fact, Swazis generally attach so much seriousness to death that most households actually hide its occurrence from children. This is done to protect children who are considered to be too young and fragile to deal with death before their teens. The children's simulation here however illustrates that children were aware of both death and the fact that their society made it taboo for children to even talk about, let alone play with it. Parents had no way of finding out about this knowledge and only assumed children's ignorance because they generally did not discuss things like death with them.

At home with his siblings, Fana would sometimes alternate teacher and student roles. This simulation proved to be another context in which children explored and negotiated tensions between their 'fake' play world and the real world they were part of in school. One home-based instance of simulated teacher-child relationship was particularly illustrative of such negotiation:

> This was a self-recorded reading session at home. In it, Fana's eldest sister, Mau played teacher who beat her students (younger siblings, Fana, Lona, Gcina, and Linga) for miscuing certain words. When Mau miscued a word herself, Lona complained, "Hah, you teacher, how come we don't hit you when you screw up!" Fana's explanation that, "You don't hit your madam {teacher}, do you? Even if she {reads}, "Indlovu" {Elephant} and then says, "Hah, It's not!"" put the matter into perspective.
> (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 70.)

As I showed in an earlier excerpt (under teasing), the children were aware of the politics of their wider society. This example shows that children also understood the

asymmetry of power that characterized the skewed nature of the relationship between teachers and students in school. In the real 'undemocratic' world of school, teachers and pupils occupy different power spaces wherein only the teacher sets and enforces the rules that children unquestioningly obey. In this case, Mau – in her fake 'adult' teacher role – wielded unchallengeable authority. On another level, however, her teacher role remained precariously tenuous for as long as her 'pupils' perceived her as a child in their real world. The children's awareness of their lowly status and unfair treatment in school also came out in Musa's Grade Nought classmate's "Hey guys, teacher is coming late, we have to complain!" when their teacher suddenly did not show up, as seen in this episode:

> This Grade Nought class had been waiting for their teacher for some time. The children later learned from a Grade Seven schoolmate who stopped by that teachers were at a meeting. In the noise that ensued, including teasing and threats to report each other to the teacher for a variety of deviant behaviour such as the noise itself, Chichi announced, "Hey guys, teacher is coming late, we have to complain!"
> (Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 11.)

In both cases, the children would never actually complain directly to their teachers about what they perceived to be unfair treatment. They were able to do so here because in the one case the children straddled the boundary between the fake (simulated) classroom in which one of their own was in charge and the real classroom in which the teacher was in charge. In the other case, however, the children were afforded space to voice their opinions playfully by the teacher's unexplained temporary absence in a real classroom world.

These examples once again show that just like at home children were aware of their social circumstances in school at a deeper level than their teachers may have assumed. Children could not move around or out of the classroom without the teacher's permission. They all came to class at the same time and coming late was a punishable offence. Teachers, however, moved in and out of the classroom at will, and sometimes even came late without explaining themselves to the children who would

not question them anyway. As Heli's Grade One teacher put it, children "{wouldn't} notice" what was going on even when she suddenly altered their seating in order to facilitate my observation. Teachers apparently assumed that children's silent obedience indicated thoughtless compliance. However, these episodes suggest that children kept quiet because this was the established way of relating to their teachers; not because they were unaware of what was going on. Left on their own, children discussed and seemed to interrogate the nature of their life in school. In all instances, the children did something with words, with language and with movement. They did not simply recall and utter isolated words they had heard before out of context.

In a related instance of language play at home, as shown below, a simulated interview between Thabo and Vuyo degenerated into a 'physical fight', prompting Musa to assume the role of a law enforcing police officer who arrested the two to restore order:

> What follows is an episode from the transcript of a self-recorded play-based conversation between Musa's elder sister Vuyo and elder brother Thabo at home:

VUY: 56 Khuluma phela bhuti! [C'mon talk brother!]

THA: 57 YE SIS, NGINGATO KUSHAY', UNGATONG'CAPHATA KANJALO MINE NGITAKUSUKE…! [LOOK SIS, I'LL HIT YOU, DON'T MESS WITH ME LIKE THAT, I'LL…!] (yells)

VUY: 58 NGITAK'<u>SHAYA</u> PHELA MINE YEYI, YE-E-E! [ME, I'LL <u>HIT</u> YOU! HEY, I TELL YOU!] (a scuffle ensues as the two yell at each other and physical blows are heard)

MUS: 59 YOU, UNDER ARREST! (shouts)

THA: 60 NGIYACOLISA PHELA BHUTI…[I REALLY APOLOGISE BROTHER…]

MUS: 61 <u>YOU</u> <u>UNDER</u> <u>ARREST</u>! (emphatically)

VUY: 62 NGIYACOLISA PHELA BHUTI, AWU NGIYACOLISA…[I'M REALLY SORRY BROTHER, OH I APOLOGISE…]

MUS: 63 YOU UNDER ARREST, NONKHE! [YOU UNDER ARREST,

BOTH OF YOU!]

THA: 64 AWU, YINI, YEWENA MFANA! WENTANI? [OH MY! WHAT ARE YOU UP TO, YOU BOY?]

VUY: 65 WENTANI WENA MFANA? [WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, BOY?]

(Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 67.)

The two siblings alternated interviewer and interviewee roles. When it was Vuyo's turn to interview Thabo, the latter took exception to his younger sister's line of questioning, which resulted in a heated verbal exchange and physical fight. I tried to understand the unfolding situation through what the children said to one another on audiotape. I did not personally observe this child-recorded episode. It is thus their deliberate choice and use of language that facilitated my forming an opinion of what took place. Certain stylistic features made this episode a notable example of the children's effective simulation and enactment of their real life experiences through role play. For instance, Thabo adopted a suddenly high-pitched tone from the moment he took exception to Vuyo's questioning (line 57). The three children maintained this tone throughout the episode, lending it the desired dramatic effect. The children also used intonation as a semantic stress marker for their utterances (line 58). They added the use of such non-verbal signals as the physical blows to illustrate the meaning of their utterances too (line 58). They also frequently interrupted each other's utterances, a characteristic feature of arguments and fights (lines 57, 60, & 62). "YOU, UNDER ARREST!" (line 59), said in English, was almost certainly an intertextual borrowing from television or films watched, and the terse phrase carried with it echoes of the assertive authority of TV cops. Tensions between the simulation and the real world emerged as Thabo and Vuyo turned around to remind Musa that he was only a boy who could never actually arrest them (lines 64 & 65) when he insisted on arresting them (63) despite their earnest apologies (lines 60 & 62). The reminder signalled the children's awareness of the boundary between the imagined and real worlds. Musa's role as an authority figure was very tenuous since its validity lasted for as long as older Vuyo and Thabo were still prepared to recognize it. Apparently, Musa's dramatic language, which had become part of his linguistic repertoire, came from his watching of movies and TV soapies at home, many of them English-language

productions. Below I switch focus to the children's manipulation of rules of play in order to suit individual intentions, including cheating and enhancing fun.

4.2.3 Changing the rules of play

Apart from teasing and simulation, children also deployed their linguistic and semiotic resources in manipulating rules of play to outmanoeuvre peers as well as exaggerating their own abilities to psyche out competitors. In the description of the events that follow, Musa and playmates made it a point that the rules remained contingent upon their immediate intentions throughout. When not in school Musa and siblings regularly played different games with peers from their immediate neighbourhood. On this typical[50] occasion, the children first played a game of marbles for a sustained period before engaging very briefly in a series of four other play activities. I selected and analysed brief samples of data from different play incidents based on the degree their content typified children's orchestration of meaning-making resources at their disposal in making sense of and representing their world. The children first played an unfamiliar[51] game of marbles on the flat rough concrete patio. As Thabo – the only other boy besides Musa - related to me when I asked him, the aim of the game was to shoot one's marble between two bricks, which had been stood very close to each other for this purpose and were only separated by a marble in the narrow passage between them, which each scorer hit[52]. The marbles were tossed from a standing position some 10 metres from the two-brick goalmouth the players aimed for. After each throw the closest marble to the target gave its owner licence to shoot for goal first. Only the first three proceeded to this scoring stage. The shooting was done with a flick of a finger to roll the marble goalward. The one who scored last - they often missed - was eliminated and left the first two successful scorers to contest the decisive (final) game:

VUY: 23 Ngical'phansi, siya, siyajika, labanye nasebacedze k'jika

[50]These children had played similar games here and at Musa's home a number of times before. I first established this fact during my second visit (see Fieldwork Log – Musa, pages 1-2) following an initial one whose purpose was to inform Musa's parents of my return from the USA and intention to resume home observation.

[51]The game was unfamiliar to me in that I had neither played nor seen it before.

[52]The space between the two bricks was just enough for the marble and therefore no other object could possibly go through without hitting the marble in the goalposts.

> besesitsi 1, 2, 3, besesiyacala ku kora, lophumil'uphumile! [I'm starting over, we are, we are throwing, once the rest have finished throwing we'll {count} 1, 2, 3, and then we start scoring, whoever is out is out!] (fast-paced) /./ MANIN'! [WAIT GUYS] (prepares to toss her marble; the marbles clatter furiously as they gallop on the rough concrete surface followed by pacing footsteps)
> (Fieldwork Log – Musa, pages 80 – 81.)

Play in this and subsequent activities was characterized by a mix of language abilities such as code switching;[53] reference to local popular culture, including traditional Swazi (e.g., teasing) and Christian church influences (e.g., Christian songs), TV and radio); and schooling. In his study of children's play in the Western Cape province of South Africa, Prinsloo (2004) also attended to (among others) the ideological dimensions of children's interweaving of an assortment of meaning-making resources from an array of semiotic domains. One of his aims - to ascertain, for example, if by incorporating images, languages, and practices from school and other settings into play contexts children were constructing particular perspectives on school and social power – is directly relevant to my analysis here in that I also sought to understand if individual children's use of language indexed particular social positioning relative to their peers. Prinsloo also tried to understand children as meaning-makers and meaning-takers in specific, linked social semiotic domains. The children he studied established rules for playing at the start of play and continuously invoked and policed adherence to or deviation from them through intense verbal exchanges. The children seemed to derive fun and excitement largely from play-based talk, which included instructions and assertion of rules, yelled conversational blurbs and exclamations, chanting, humorous subversiveness, arguing, castigating, teasing (transgression), etc. I found similar dynamics in my research.

In the above excerpt, Vuyo made perfect sense to herself and her peers because these children were competent language speakers, as is generally the case with children who have reached the ages of four or five. I stress the point here because of my focus

[53]Code switching across English and SiSwati occurred spontaneously across cases. These children also interspersed play with song and rhymes,

on language as a resource that children used creatively and powerfully to achieve specific social ends. Vuyo's hasty declaration of the rules started a continuous discussion around rules that remained so provisional or fluid that intermittent discussion about the rules recurred as a meta-discourse about the rules of operation throughout the game. Vuyo's racing through the rules was acknowledgement on her part of her tenuous role as custodian of rules who therefore needed to make maximum use of a brief moment to spell out rules before her peers had an opportunity to challenge her. Clearly though, Vuyo's rush was also linked to the pressure of seeking to throw first, which she couldn't do unless the rules were already in place.

The other children did not immediately oppose Vuyo's rule-making. The negotiation and determination of how the rules actually applied commenced once play had started. In a later incident, for instance, the exchanges over the rules took on a twist that betrayed the fluidity and contingency of the very rules:

> Fisokuhle wanted to know who was farthest. Thabo shouted that it was Musa. Musa took his cue from one child's earlier reminder to count 1 up to 3, counted 1, 2, 3 and giggled before instantly shooting his marble, subsequently proclaiming, "Ngidlala mbamba nyalo" [I'm playing seriously now]. His proclamation prompted Vuyo to snap, "MBAMBA WANI? IMNANDZI LENTFO! [WHAT DO YOU MEAN SERIOUS? THIS THING IS FUN!?". Thabo accused Musa of "sweeping" his marble closer to the goal. Musa asked who was first before fresh throws were taken to mark resumption of 'serious' play.
> (Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 81.)

Thabo, who played the role of a self-appointed match referee from the sidelines, quickly determined from the positions of the marbles relative to the target that Musa should time out as per the agreed rules. Musa though was in no mood to time out just yet. In a flash he latched on to Vuyo and a peer's 1, 2, 3 positional count (lines 23 and 27 respectively) and used it as a cue to give himself an illegitimate licence to shoot for goal nonetheless, obviously twisting a call for him to time out to validate his flouting of the rules. Musa's reference to the rules was a deliberate ploy to implicate

playmates in his strategy. It also reflected Musa's competent reading of the social situation. If he had the backing of the rules, no matter how shaky, the chance that he would get away with cheating was significantly greater than if he did not.

On an intertextual level, Musa clearly orchestrated various semiotic resources to achieve his intended goal of cheating in the ongoing activity. For instance, in addition to working out what actions were likely to soften his peers' outlook on his transgression, he also conveniently transferred to the game his understanding of athletics contests (and perhaps that of his peers too), as suggested by his "1, 2, 3, set (giggles lightly)…!" (line 29) signal before shooting for goal. Wry giggling afforded Musa the humour he needed to underplay his cheating and to placate his peers' urges to counteract it. In other words, he became humorously subversive of peers' efforts to enforce rules at his expense. Musa's actions here demonstrated that the children made connections between contexts and had ways of expressing these connections which were mutually intelligible within the group. In this view, playing, like reading, may be characterized as a process of shuttling back and forth between the language of the work and a network of contexts that were not in the current work but were essential for its accomplishment (Harris et al, 2003).

Musa first engaged in the social work of making sense of the context he found himself in. He then went on to engage in the equally necessary intellectual work of determining the most effective means of delivering the blow and still achieving his purpose. The children's situated understanding of the social context shaped not only what they, as social participants, could do and say, but also the most effective media and modes of delivering those actions and words to fellow participants. Musa drew on communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Philips, 1972; Saville-Troike, 1989) gained through continuous participation in the childhood culture he shared with his peers, itself rooted in the wider culture in which these children interacted with adult and more competent members as well. Musa's declaration that "I'm playing seriously now" put his intentions beyond doubt. The full extent of his declaration was to nullify all initial throws and missed turns as mere muscle-flexing or warm-up exercises. It was an equalizing tactic that effectively meant starting over if not kicking-off a game that had, in effect, actually not yet resumed. What started as attempted cheating had

suddenly taken on total reformation of previously agreed rules. The timing of this revision of the rules was impeccable in the sense that it was very early in the game and the stakes were evidently lower than they might have been later on, hence Musa's shenanigans were met with only half-hearted resistance.

I observed a similar instance of applying rules selectively when Fana's peers repeatedly reported some of their playmates for overtaking at a break time sliding game despite the fact that even those who complained either tried to do so or indeed successfully did so themselves, as seen below:

> The children were once more out in the playground, differently engaged. I briefly stopped by the group playing on the newly erected slide before I followed Fana's group which headed for their usual spot at the newly erected tyres some distance away and later engaged in karate as usual. Children queued up and took turns at sliding. The children invariably disregarded the turn-taking rules and jumped the queue. They reported each other for cheating to the school aide who moved from one group to the next during the short break, to make sure everyone had something to eat as well as to maintain order.
> (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 53.)

I found it curious that children who themselves attempted to overtake considered it a breach of established rules when others gained advantage through similar means. Rules, as it turned out, held force only when others violated them. Children's negotiation of rules in this manner, as well as the contingency and fluidity of the same rules at play, altered the way in which the children played the sliding game. From an adult's perspective, the mode of participating became 'chaotic' when turns were not observed. However, the children pursued the developing pattern of play characterized by contesting turns, jumping the queue, and reporting each other with increased enthusiasm.

Vuyo's interpretation of what constituted fun in play resonates with research evidence which suggests that the object or motivation of children's play is their interest in the

process of playing itself rather than the outcome (Hakkarainen, 1999), itself influenced a great deal by adherence to or deviation from the rules of the game. In a board game like chess, for instance, children might pay little attention to the conventional layout of chessmen and derive plenty of fun from randomly removing pieces from the board and flinging them at each other much to the adult's consternation (Dlamini, 2002[54]). To the children play transcends preconceived rules to incorporate identifying and exploiting what Bomer (2003) described as the 'unintended affordances' of certain elements or aspects of a game to enhance fun. It is as children grow older that their interests partially yield to more conventional ways of participation. Thus as children are drawn into culture by a growing awareness of the materials and practices the wider culture values and therefore makes more readily available and engages in, children's interests and their active, transformative practice remain, but they are more applied to materials which are already culturally formed (Kress, 1997). Musa's question "Who's first?" (line 42) should be seen as a way of gauging the effect of his demolition of initial rules. He must have been gratified that his trick had worked when the marbles immediately hit the floor once more to mark resumption of "serious" play. Seen from a socialization and development perspective, the children's playing to their interests rather than to pre-established rules demonstrated children participating in their own socialization (Thorne, 1993). Research has emerged to challenge cultural determinism inherent in previous assumptions about development and participation as taking place in one direction and in a single form. There is now talk of multiple forms of participation in one's culture, which implies plural developmental pathways as well as many ways in which children contribute to the production of culture (Gee, 2004; Goodnow et al, 1995; Rampton, 1998). The children in the excerpt seemed to be re-creating culture as they learned to participate in the practice of the same culture that shaped their choice of actions and words in given social contexts. As Kress (1997) argued, culture may shape the children's interests and choices, but these are not simply determined. Miller and Goodnow (1998) have described children's transformative participation as development to the extent that it results in change in participation. The children altered the rules of participation and the game along with them. They can be said to

[54]I also observed this tendency during a micro ethnographic research project of children's participating strategies in the activities of a YMCA after-school programme in California's Bay Area City of Richmond, USA in 2002.

have completely appropriated the game in that they gave it new meaning and outlook (Bakhtin, 1994). In addition to flouting rules of play, the children also intimidated their playmates by exaggerating their performance or actual abilities, as I go on to discuss below.

4.2.4 Exaggerating performance and/or ability at play

In addition to bending the rules, the children also occasionally exaggerated their actual abilities in an attempt to psyche out their opponents. Switching between SiSwati and English, particularly in stating numerical value, has become integral to general SiSwati discourse. However, the code-switch to English in the following excerpt also signalled a significant change of attitude on the speaker's part:

MUS: 110 Classic, i classic ke le /./ utobona Jim Fletcher, hhayi! [Classic, this one is a classic /./ you'll see Jim Fletcher, oh boy!] (races after his galloping marble) /../ A, vele seng'dliwe mine, ang'kadlwa, ang'kadlwa [Ah, me I've already lost, no I haven't, I haven't] (first disconsolately, then assuredly as he watches the progress and eventual position of his marble)

MUS: 133 Mine ngishay'i classic bafana! [Me I play the classic, boys!] (boastfully)

KIDS: 111 (giggle)

The players were lining up to take fresh throws following a completed turn and scoring. In a bid to pep himself up as well as to threaten his competitors and thereby seize their attention, Musa described his impending throw as a classic. This exaggerated description, which he later reiterated (line 133), conjured up images of an impressive, extraordinary display. Classic may not exactly always carry this meaning, particularly in informal discourse. However, Musa's general bravado and assured body language suggested he had something special up his sleeve that his peers had neither seen before nor could match. He apparently delighted in using the term and successfully worked with its situated meaning, i.e., referring to something of exceptional quality.

"…You'll see Jim Fletcher…" (line 110) – Musa's favourite movie star – was a reference to film culture and deliberate shifting between the imagined context of movies and the real game of marbles. Musa presumed that the superiority of his next performance was of a class only fit for movie icons which his peers had no chance of emulating. The use of the English term classic shifted the language code along with a shift in context to create a complete mental picture of a performance out of the ordinary. He couldn't have been more competitive than that.

I also witnessed Sebe similarly exaggerating a peer's performance at the 'car' race, on the see-saw (as described earlier):

> The see-saw race 'cars' were gathering momentum when Sebe suddenly needed to scratch her back. This action left her with just one hand on the see-saw, prompting her and her partner to describe the act as "magic":

SEBE: 87 Lana ngiyenwaya, lana s'yanwaya [Here I'm scratching, here we're scratching] (giggles as she scratches body with one hand)

BOY: 89 An'kwati k'yekelela [You guys can't swing hands-free]

SEBE: 90 [Magic (chants along with swing)

NOSI: 91 [Magic (chants along with swing)

BOY: 92 Seluyekelele yini? [Is that hands-free?]

SEBE: 93 [(giggles) Magic (chants along with swing)

(Fieldwork Log – Sebe, page 6.)

Sebe did not even set out to perform the stunt of see-sawing with just one hand. Instead, she stumbled onto the stunt incidentally and rather luckily when she used one hand to scratch her body (line 87). Sebe capitalized on the fact that her opponent actually thought that she was unsuccessfully attempting to swing without holding the see-saw at all (line 89). She saw an opportunity to show off, together with her see-sawing partner, boasting that this was precisely what they were doing – a magical performance, which their competitors could not do (lines 90, 91, & 93). Now and again the children also improvised de facto play roles, through talk, that suited

playmates whose household responsibilities and/or current physical conditions would otherwise have prevented them from participating in ongoing play.

4.2.5 Improvising alternative play roles for disadvantaged playmates

The children showed acute awareness of their different household and individual circumstances when they improvised play roles that ensured that all their peers took part in ongoing play despite their restrictions. One instance of this awareness came out when Heli could not take an active part in two parallel play activities at home because of her babysitting responsibility, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> As soon as I arrived here today, Heli quickly went to her house, disappeared behind a wooden door of this one-room stick and mud apartment with a wooden window, and re-emerged with infant half-brother Gciya who had been crying frantically for some time. I rushed off to get a fresh pair of batteries from the car. I asked 5-year-old Boy to watch over my micro audiotape recorder and clipboard. When I returned, I replaced the old batteries, which I threw away, only for Boy to scramble to pick them up. He immediately initiated a game that involved two girls and one boy standing with legs wide apart along one end of an old corrugated iron sheet and one boy snapping with a finger and setting in rolling motion the battery cells through the spread legs from the other end, inches from where I sat on a brick. Meanwhile, Heli, who sat on an oilcan under a makeshift partially enclosed fireplace (enclosed by the back of a stick and mud structure, corrugated iron sheets, and bricks, all blackened by smoke), played mother to a separate group of children who played house. The battery cell game took place just a yard from the open end of the fireplace, parallel to the playing house game.
>
> (Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 21.)

I did not witness the children negotiating or agreeing on Heli's mother role in the playing house game. I only became aware of this role when the children addressed Heli as mother sometime later:

ZAN: 361 YE MAKE [HEY MUM] (to Heli; I deduce that she gets the mother role owing to inactivity imposed on her by having to sit and hold baby half-brother Gciya in her lap)

HELI: 362 Letsa la lol'swati…[C'mon bring the stick here…]

BOY: 363 MAKE, MAKE BAYAGANG'…[MUM, MUM THEY'RE WAYWARD…]

(Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 31.)

These children had played house in the fireplace shack before. For instance, an old woman that Heli called her other granny was to complain a week later[55] that the children always brought back discarded 'rubbish' for play purposes and made the yard filthy in the process. Heli may have played other roles depending on her situation on different occasions. On this occasion, she played the mother because she sat and baby-sat, a role that the children associated with mothering, possibly from observing their own and other children's mothers at the crowded, run-down residence. Heli understood this gendered[56] role to include watching over and disciplining her 'children' if they did something wrong. This was seen in her instructions for the children to bring her the stick (line 362). Boy confirmed the mother's extended role of policing the children when he reported the wayward behaviour of the other children to their 'mother' (line 363).

In a similar incident to the one just described, Fana swiftly assigned to an injured peer the inactive but important role of "boss" when his injured toe prevented him from participating in a karate session during midmorning break out in the schoolyard:

> It was break time. Fana and his boys-only group had since broken away from the larger mixed group at the slide. They had now formed competing karate

[55]The children played here and in front of granny's house exactly one week later, using an assortment of discarded materials, mainly cans, which they had retrieved from the trash pit just outside the yard (See Fieldwork Log – Heli, pages 47 – 64.).

[56]Swazi children generally see mothers caring for babies. I doubt these children would have assigned a boy a similar role.

> teams as usual. Before the karate session began, Mzomba, who sat leaning his back on the school fence and removed a plaster strip from a wound in his little toe, was designated the "boss" (by Fana) who sent out fighting teams to 'kill' opponents.
>
> (Fieldwork Log – Fana, pages 55 - 56.)

The children would ordinarily have contested a powerful role such as that of boss. However, they all accepted Mzomba as their boss because his injury meant that he could not do anything else. In fact, Mzomba's role proved to be just a label because he simply sat and watched passively without even shouting instructions to the fighters. Apart from identifying and assigning play roles to suit disadvantaged peers, the children in the study also appropriated artefacts in their generally literacy-deficient[57] home environments for literacy purposes.

4.2.6 Appropriating artefacts in the natural environment for literacy purposes

The home environments of the children in this study were not print-rich sites where print literacy events featured prominently. Nevertheless, the children occasionally appropriated artefacts as signifiers in their environment to satisfy immediate play, drawing, reading, and writing needs.

Sebe was five years old, in her second and graduating year of preschool (see chapter 3, section 3.3, for my background description of her). When not in school she stayed home with her grandparents, particularly with her grandmother, where she spent much of her time playing with older and younger children, most of whom were her cousins. Most play activities took place on the dusty ground under a tree some ten yards from the only gate to the barbed wire-fenced homestead. Only occasionally did the children play on the porches of either the main house or a smaller one overlooking it.

Sebe's homestead was not an environment where texts, reading or writing featured prominently. There were indeed some religious books around, which Sebe's

[57]In that they were not characterized by the availability of print materials that children could readily use for sense and meaning-making purposes like middle-class children in the English-speaking Western world are widely said to be able to do.

grandfather often read on his own during the day, sitting on the porch. There were also children's schoolbooks and a few family photographs, which I once saw Sebe's mother share for some five minutes with her daughter. I also once spotted a disused newspaper back number in the dusty yard. Otherwise, I saw no other printed matter over the twelve months that I had contact with Sebe and her peers. While the children recited rhymes and sang religious songs, among others their links to print were always tenuous.

This particular occasion[58] was characterized by a chain of sustained interlinked events where literacy featured in typically tenuous ways, all of which culminated from a game of sliding on and off my car bonnet – by far the day's central activity. Minutes after I parked the car under the tree the three children who were present that day left what they had been doing and started circling the car, scrutinizing its glasswork, exterior, and interior, and, in the process, occasionally engaged with print, as in this excerpt:

SEBE: 82 Nay' i *Thaymzi* [There's *The Times*] (peers through window and spots independent local daily; this was actually its Saturday weekly sister publication – *Swazi News* - lying in the backseat)

FEZ: 119 Hhay' lo bhuti k'lapha k' *Thaymz*! [Gee that brother there in *The Times*!] (talk switches to a picture in the newspaper that all children now look at)

LAN: 120 Ng'ban' ( )? [Who's it ( )?]

SEBE: 132 (hums) Hhaw' imot' ya Malume bay'bhale ngek'hlanganisa! [Hah they wrote Uncle's car in cursive! (rubs dust off red *Conquest* marking at the back of car; then lets go a rasping cough)

(Fieldwork Log – Sebe, pages 41 – 42.)

[58]This occasion was particular in that it was characterized by a string of somewhat sustained fairly explicit literacy events, something that was untypical of these children's home-based play.

I had no doubt from observing her reading efforts in school that Sebe could not yet read the *Times* on her own; i.e., she could not sound the words on the front page of the newspaper she (in)accurately identified. This observation immediately invokes the question what then was she reading or doing? If we only focus on conventional reading we are likely to come up with a narrow definition of reading and literacy and an equally narrow interpretation of Sebe's utterance. We should perhaps interpret Sebe's action of looking at and pronouncing the *Times* in view of the perspectives of Barton (2001), Kress (1997), and Harris et al (2003) that what defines and counts as literacy in a given society extends beyond conventional text to include other meaning-making devices. In any event, this was the *Times of Swaziland's* sister weekly, the *Swazi News* the size, colour, and layout of whose front page matched those of the former. Therefore Sebe could not have been reading the title of Swaziland's only independent and leading daily. It was not even there in this instance. Instead, she drew on her prior knowledge (her familiarity with the look of the *Times*) to make an educated guess, which turned out to be not quite accurate.

This literacy event was not an instance of quasi reading (Chittenden et al, 2001) either because neither Sebe's body language nor her voice modulation betrayed pretend reading. Hers was a clear case of contextualized print recognition (Mason, 1982, in Snow, 1991) in that she recognized a salient visual display the same way my daughter at three years always recognized a *Clover Danone* yoghurt despite her inability to read the label at that age. Sebe would probably not identify the newspaper's name without its format and colour. She similarly would not identify the words *Long Distance* if she encountered them anywhere else despite the fact that she always shouted them at the distant roar of a local bus by that name. While it is possible that Sebe was simply more familiar with the *Times* and might logically have called any newspaper the *Times*, that possibility becomes doubtful the moment one asks the question how come Sebe did not call any other bus *Long Distance*.

Explicit reading occurred when the children focused on and briefly discussed a picture they identified as representing an adult male (lines 119 & 120). Research elsewhere has identified contextualized print recognition as the first strand in pre-reading development (Mason, 1982, in Snow, 1991). Snow (1991) argued that moving from

such highly contextualized reading to relatively decontextualized reading, such as reading words in isolation or reading sentences in a book where the pictures cannot be mapped easily to elements within the text, involves a real transition. From what I observed in this and similar literacy events, Sebe had not made this transition.

Sebe and peers did not intentionally set out to read in this instance. Instead, the children's fascination with the car interior led to incidental reading because they discovered a newspaper which contained a picture for them to talk about. Other research has reported evidence of environmental literacy or environmental print (Cazden, 2001) in otherwise print-limited environments such as among the Kwara'ae people of the Solomon Islands (Watson-Gegeo, 1992) where children who had virtually no literacy materials at home were however regularly exposed to public signs in English and the local Pidgin at the hospitals and clinics, marketplace, airfield, and along the roads. Children also shopped with their parents in stores and used products at home (such as powdered detergent and tinned tuna) that had printed labels and instructions. At church and meetings they saw adults read from books and papers silently and aloud. Volk and de Acosta (2001) who refuted claims of an absolute dichotomy between home and school literacy, reported how Puerto Rican kindergartners in bilingual USA classrooms came to recognize a *Pepsi Cola* logo wherever they saw it because they encountered it regularly in their environment.

The children here, or any Swazi child three years and older, could recognize the widely visible *Coca Cola* logo. Sebe, on the other hand, did not even attempt to sound out the *Conquest* label at the back of my car (line 132). She nonetheless recognized it as print and focused on the print form. Sebe may not have been reading much at this point partly because her immediate household environment did not provide print material specifically for this purpose. However, aspects of her wider home and community lifeworld were already print or textually mediated (Barton, 2001) enough for Sebe to exhibit signs of emergent literacy (Clay, 1999) beyond her tentative efforts in classroom-based reading and writing. Literacy learning in school, as I show in the next chapter, did not make connections between what children already knew from home and what they needed to learn in school. Our contemporary world varies greatly as do the nature and spread of print practices across cultures. We nonetheless

probably all inhabit a world that is generally mediated by various forms of culturally meaningful graphic media.

While Sebe and cousins took advantage of the car and its contents, which I introduced to their home environment, for reading purposes, Musa and siblings actually used my clipboard and pencil to draw with, as the following excerpt shows:

> As soon as Musa, Thabo and I settled on the unfinished porch, I dared anyone who wished to write anything to get cracking. As soon as I laid my clipboard papers and pencil down, Thabo reached for them and started to draw a portrait of my car, which was parked just off the driveway, facing the dusty street and away from the home fence. Thabo now and again lifted his head from the drawing in order to check if he was still drawing my car. We had the car's right side view, and this is exactly what Thabo's drawing represented. Musa only started drawing his usual macho character when Thabo handed over the drawing materials to him and left the two of us alone briefly:

SIKA:		Yeah, ishey'phe njengayo [Yeah, it's shaped just like it]
MUS:	62	(giggles, points at various discrepancies in Thabo's drawing)
THA:	63	(coughs and steps aside, hands over drawing materials to Musa, leaves for the house)
SIKA:		Udrowa *les'kwaya*[59] sakhe Musa [Musa's drawing his usual tough guy]
MUS:	64	(giggles and continues to draw a guy with a hefty thorax and huge biceps)
SIKA:		(I cough twice, look on, curiosity gets the better of me finally) Sentani *les'khwaya*? [What's the tough guy doing?]
MUS:	66	( ) (speaks too softly)
SIKA:		*Les'khwaya* leso, lesi, ngisho lomuntfu lomdrowako, wentani? [That

[59]*S'khwaya* originates from the old-fashioned British title *Esquire* and connotes a muscular, macho, or powerful and influential male in local informal language. It was Musa's favourite drawing alongside the *Kompressor* or *sprinter* minibus. He drew the macho character both at home and in school.

tough guy, this, I mean the person you're drawing] (I point at unfolding giant on page)

MUS: 67 ( ) (erases pair of legs and draws new ones – the left one high up in the air at an almost 90º angle with the right one which stands firm on the ground – I think he executes a kick)

(Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 91.)

I never found Musa and siblings drawing or writing. Nor did these children ever initiate such literacy activities once I was with them throughout the fieldwork. I did however once see old school workbooks with elaborate drawing and writing which the children said they had done at home[60], a claim that I, however, could not confirm. For instance I saw Thabo's Grade Five book in which Musa had reportedly written *a*'s and other forms and drawn extensively. The drawings included two big-headed characters whose tiny legs visibly sagged sideways apparently beneath the heavy weight of their enormous heads. Not even the self-recorded interactions revealed that these children initiated writing and wrote on their own or with their parents. They did however tell me that they did homework, which I knew happened because they went to the same school as my daughter who had regular reading and writing homework that I always had to sign. I knew too that this religious family prayed and perhaps even read the bible together, though the self-recording did not reveal this practice[61]. I suspected that homework, prayers, and bible reading were considered to be too private and serious to be subjected to recording for my research purposes. In fact, the children's aunt, Noma, a university lecturer, once wondered why the children were recording her as well, instead of just themselves, as this excerpt illustrates:

[60]See Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 25. On the same day that Musa and elder sister Vuyo drew and wrote for the first time since the resumption of my home visits, Vuyo brought (from the house) an old notebook of Thabani's (elder brother) in which she and Musa said they had drawn and written (at home) extensively. On my second visit (Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 2.) Thabo had said that a book lying next to a mango tree that Musa was climbing before he joined us, was an old one of Vuyo's (insinuated that the latter had probably taken it there, as it had been lying there for some time).

[61]See Fieldwork Log – Musa, pages 37 - 39 and Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 78. I attended two Sunday school and one church session with them. The father was a church choir member while the mother conducted Sunday school lessons for younger children.

> Aunt Noma had come to fetch the children to spend part of the weekend at the university with her. She found them with an audiotape recorder and discovered upon asking that they were recording their conversation with her as well. She was the only adult from this family, apart from the children's nanny, who ever featured in the series of home or self-recordings.
> (Fieldwork Log – Musa, pages 63 - 64.)

Her concern made me think that perhaps this is also why the parents never featured in the children's recordings either.

Musa and siblings did not initiate drawing or writing in my presence either. In this excerpt I had provided paper and pencil and challenged them to write. I still included the children's prompted writing because there was a certain pattern about their occurrence and outlook which are important for my analysis. For one thing, the children did not write when there were no materials. Besides, each time I provided the materials, the children appropriated them to represent what was of interest to them. A logical conclusion is that if the children had materials at home for this purpose, they would have drawn and/or written just as they did with the materials I provided. However, not all the children waited for conventional literacy materials to draw or write.

Sometimes some of the children in the study did not wait until there were either a car with a newspaper inside it or the researcher's writing materials to use for their own literacy intentions. In the following excerpt, for instance, Sebe and cousins used twigs to scratch print on the ground. They thus appropriated artefacts in their natural environment for drawing/writing purposes, as this excerpt shows:

> The children had busied themselves circling the car, viewing and commenting on its interior and exterior, and sliding on the bonnet as usual. Their preoccupation with the car was broken when Langa proposed to write for me. Constrained by a lack of conventional writing materials, Langa improvised a way of still bringing his writing closer to me, which had the knock-on effect of drawing his peers into writing as well:

LAN: 881 Kube nje ngimbhalel'ephephe…[If only I could write it on paper for him…]

LAN: 883 Beng'tombhalela ng, bhal' ( ) [I'd write for him, write ( )] (leaves back of car, picks up a twig, approaches me, squats in front of me, begins to scratch his name in cursive on the dusty red ground)

FEZ: 884 Echuwi! /./ nam' aseng'tombhalela naku [Ouch! /./ let me also write him this] (writes 3 on ground next to Langa)

SEBE: 887 (first wanders about, searches ground, picks a wet twig, starts quietly scratching characters that resemble the numbers 1 2 3 on ground – the three children now form a triangular squatting position as they engage in respective writing tasks) Buka buka [Look look]

(Fieldwork Log – Sebe, page 62.)

Langa's, Feza's, and Sebe's desire to express themselves through writing (or to please me) was enough to induce them not to wait for conventional writing materials. This willingness to write in the sand contrasted sharply with the earlier example of Musa and siblings who waited until I provided pencil and paper before they drew and wrote. For Musa and siblings, the deprivation of writing materials was a hindrance. The same deprivation, however, resulted in Langa, Feza, and Sebe creatively working with what they had in order to communicate their thoughts to me. In Kress's (1997) terms, these children used what they had to hand in order to overcome their constraint. Their interests lay more in connecting with me through print than in the availability of conventional writing tools. The two sets of children's contrasting attitude to and use of environmental artefacts and externally provided materials indicates the socio-culturally situated nature of literacy. In other words, the absence or provision of conventional literacy materials does not necessarily result in the same literate behaviour for different children. They may not attach the same meaning to the materials and their interests may also be different. Below I turn my focus on Heli whose writing in my presence prior to the excerpt that follows, was always externally motivated and took place under different social and physical conditions.

Until I eventually interceded on Heli's behalf and pleaded with her grandfather[62] not to force Heli and cousins to write or engage in any activity on my account, he always took it upon himself to make her write either letters or spelling on the ground using twigs. When Heli's forced writing took the form of spelling callout, one of the children called out a word for all to write individually amidst protests of someone copying another. It seemed to me that the children's meaning of literacy was to write individually when someone instructed them to do so and mainly for purposes of assessing individual accuracy. The children did not initiate literacy or use it for the accomplishment of their own communicational intentions.

The only time that Heli and her cousins Swazi and Matega wrote in my presence without their grandfather's instruction was when he was not home when I arrived. This particular occasion was different in a number of other ways too, as this fieldnote excerpt shows:

> There was a slight drizzle as I drove to Heli's homestead on this summer day. I had meant not to stay on account of the weather. But I stayed because it stopped raining briefly when I arrived. Heli held her infant half-brother Gciya in her arms when I alighted and greeted her and her grandmother. When I next spotted Heli, she held a pink crayon stub in one hand. Heli, Swazi, and Matega had begun to write spelling words on the damp ground as usual when the rain intensified. I returned a chair I had been offered and prepared to leave when Heli's grandmother, invited me to join the children at a table inside the main house. It was my first ever time inside[63]. This was a crowded, stuffy sitting/dining room, with just enough space in the middle for four chairs

[62]After the death of her younger grandmother, Heli had moved in with her mother and half-brothers in a rented one-roomed stick and mud apartment in a crowded run-down residence, not very far from her late grandmother's. A few weeks later, Heli's entire family moved in with their surviving grandparents in a big homestead again not too far from the slums. Her aggressive workaholic grandfather lived here too and made Heli write each time I arrived.

[63]I had now been inside three of the children's houses. In each case I was only able to do this once. I was however never invited inside Sebe's house. In the three instances when I was invited inside, literacy featured in only one (at Heli's house but still in the absence of adults – grandma did not join us). This restricted access explains in part the limited parent-child data throughout the fieldwork.

around a wooden brown table in one of which I sat while the children crowded at one end of the table and prepared to draw/write. *A Tibiyo Taka* Ngwane[64] calendar stood on a wall. On the opposite wall hung a picture of the late King Sobhuza II[65] and a traditional Swazi maiden. I noticed that the floors were freshly polished in shiny brown. It was now pouring outside. Heli, Swazi, and Matega drew in used school workbooks using Swazi's crayon in turn. I gave them each one unlined white A4 paper to write on when they seemed to have run out of writing space. Matega had to leave when someone called for him outside. Heli and Swazi used a razor blade to sharpen the shared crayon and a pencil stub in turn. For the first time, they combined drawing and writing as they both captioned their drawings (see Figure 2). Heli drew two pink girls and wrote three versions of the same word next to them. [66].
(Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 102.)

[64]Tibiyo Taka Ngwane is a giant national development corporation held in trust for the Swazi nation by the King.

[65]King Mswati III's predecessor and father.

[66]Swazi, on the other hand, drew a woman and wrote *Mama* next to her, a baby next to whom he wrote *Bibi*, and an unlabelled car. I provide a detailed background description here in order to bring out the different conditions under which Heli and cousin, Swazi appropriated literacy for their own purposes. For instance, for the first time they had a table, paper, a pencil, and a crayon, which I had never seen them use before.

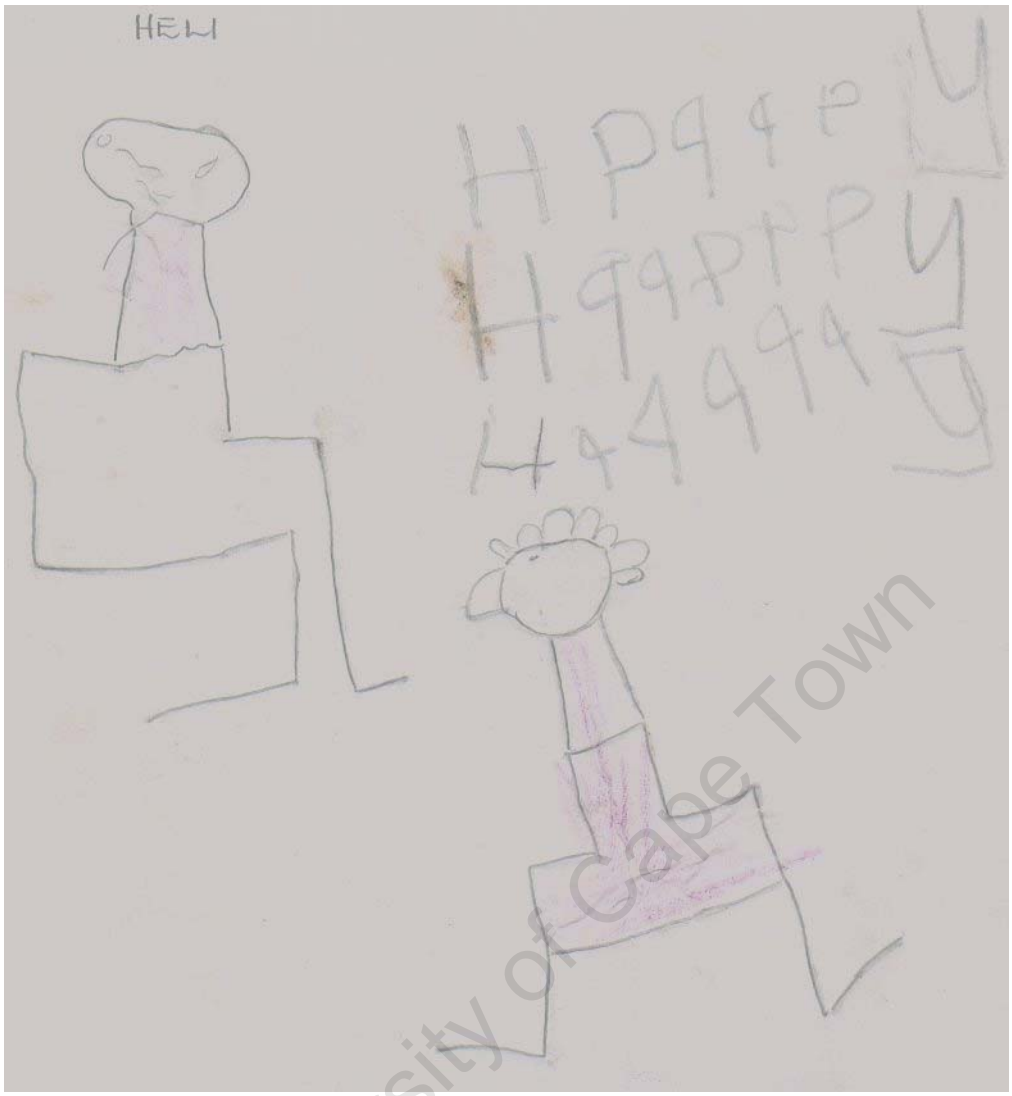

Figure 2: Heli's drawing of herself (28/06/03).

I initially had difficulty accurately interpreting the motivation behind Heli and Swazi's drawing and writing in this excerpt. The difficulty arose firstly from the fact that these children could have been already conditioned to start scratching letter-like characters on the ground upon seeing me. This is what their grandfather initially always told them to do. However, not only was their grandfather absent this time around, but Heli already had a crayon in her hand without being told to write in this instance. Besides, the writing on this occasion was markedly different from the usual spelling contests that normally characterized the children's reactions to their grandfather's emphatic instruction for them to write. Immediately we were alone inside the house, they abandoned the typical spelling project and drew instead. The

children's change of writing activity made me believe that left to their own inclinations, they would have opted to draw or expressed their intentions through other printed media instead of print-only spelling exercises.

The 'word' that Heli wrote three times did not look like her name at all. Instead, it looked a lot like she had tried to recall from memory the word Happy, and she got closer to the original each time. It is likely that Heli had seen a picture of children with the caption Happy, and had recalled it in this literacy event. Heli started all three sets of characters (words) with uppercase *H*. That indicated Heli's awareness that names begin with capital letters. In addition to that, Heli knew that her own name started with an *H*. There is no doubt that Heli's writing was at a stage where she was also trying to come to terms with letter writing conventions, e.g., the question of directionality as well as the position letters ought to take. An example of this struggle was her confusion of *p*s and *q*s. Heli seemed to have resolved the initial dilemma around the exact number of letters that went into her name when she settled for seven in the second and third attempts as opposed to six letters in her first.

What is significant is that Heli had the freedom to explore different possibilities with letters in trying to write her name (Clay, 1975), which, as I show in chapter five below, her classroom environment denied her. Even more importantly, however, was that the conventionally incorrect form of her writing did not hinder Heli from representing the intended message or meaning – writing her name. That, as I show in chapter five, represented another contrast to the classroom's exclusive emphasis on the correct form of a final product rather than its evolutionary process.

My estimations may not accurately capture Heli and Swazi's intended symbols (captions). These literacy events were, nevertheless, the closest example that I witnessed of children using writing to communicate personal meaning. This was the only time I saw the two children expressing themselves as meaning- and sense-makers through the use of print at home. They had never before appropriated either the environment or materials in it for literacy purposes or to express their own thoughts and intentions. They had always written because they had been instructed to do so, and only wrote exactly what they had been instructed to write. Below I show that

these children, who in various ways appropriated their literacy-deficient environments for literacy purposes, also knew their limitations when it came to drawing, reading, and writing.

4.2.7 Awareness of drawing/reading/writing limitations

The children displayed stark awareness of not only their linguistic abilities but also their limitations when it came to drawing, reading, and writing. In the following excerpt, for instance, Sebe acknowledged that her drawing attempts were still tentative:

> Sebe, Feza, and Langa had been working on separate drawings on the ground for some time. Sebe suddenly announced that she wanted to practise drawing a *sprinter*:
>
> SEBE: 979 (begins to sing) /../ ( ) awume seng'tow'fundzela k' drowa *sprinter* [wait I'm about to practise how to draw a *sprinter*] (begins to draw rectangular shape on ground)
>
> LAN: 980 ( ) Kute ( )…[( ) There's no ( )…]
>
> SEBE: 981 (very quietly more to herself as she draws on)
>
> LAN: 982 SIKHONA *SPRINTER* EMHLABEN' LESI…? [IS THERE A *SPRINTER* IN THE WORLD THAT…?]
>
> (Fieldwork Log – Sebe, page 65.)

Children are often keen to be thought of as more capable than they really are, especially to their peers. I was thus a little surprised when Sebe acknowledged that her drawing efforts were inexpert to her cousin and playmates. Her actions made me think that if she was unashamed to declare her literacy limitations to other children, she might be willing to make a similar declaration to her teachers if she was assured that they would not judge her negatively. I take Sebe's awareness into consideration

in my analysis of her teacher's treatment of her drawing, reading, writing, and spoken attempts in chapter five below.

The children sometimes expressed awareness of their limitations in less explicit ways than Sebe did in the excerpt just described. In the next except, for instance, Fana only came to realize that his concept of a week may not be well formed in the process of a conversation with me and her older sister, Lona:

> Fana, siblings, and I had been discussing and comparing Christmas in Swaziland and in Mozambique where Fana had spent the previous Christmas. The discussion later veered toward how long Fana figured he had been back home from Mozambique. He and his big sister, Lona, disagreed on the length of time Fana had been back, specifically Fana's notion of weeks:

FAN:	38	Batsi ngibuyanini? [When did they say I'd come back?]
SIKA:		Batsi ubya, emva kweliviki [They said you'd return after a week]
FAN:	39	Mine ngabuya sek'tokuba liviki [Me I actually came back after a little less than a week]
SIKA:		Wacedza two weeks [You were away for two weeks]
FAN:	41	Nyalo nje ng'tsi ng'cedze 5, wemaviki? [Don't you think I've now finished 5 weeks?]
LON:	42	Mm? [Huh?]
FAN:	43	Ang'tsi la ekhaya ngicedze 10 wemaviki? [I've been home now for 10 weeks, haven't I?]

> (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 80.)

Fana had been away for a Christmas visit to his relatives in Mozambique for two weeks. His account of how long he had been gone, however, ranged from a little less than a week (line 39) to five weeks (line 41) to ten weeks (line 43). Fana was negotiating the meaning of weeks because apart from the first estimation, the rest came in the form of questions. He sought to confirm or disconfirm from the more

knowledgeable people around him because he knew that they knew better than he did. From an emergent literacy point of view, Fana's measure of weeks did not match the conventional measure. He nonetheless still effectively communicated his meaning – that he had been home a while. Fana's uncertainty about the measurement of weeks did not mean that he did not know that he had been home for some days. I will show in chapter five below that though Fana displayed similar awareness of his writing limitations in class, the difference was that he quickly solicited correct forms from me and his friends instead of the negotiation he engaged in in this excerpt. As the discussion wore on, Fana acknowledged his reading limitations more openly in this excerpt:

> This was much later on the same occasion. The Christmas discussion had faded into the background as Fana, Lona, Linga, and Mau crowded a Times of Swaziland newspaper back number and gazed at a page showing several men and women in France sagging under the weight of a giant shoe they lifted shoulder high. Fana got the newspaper which had all along lain idle on the west wall of the porch, opposite a raised seat of a pile of bricks the children sat on in one corner of the porch. Fana passed the newspaper on to Mau when I challenged him to tell me its date of publication, since he couldn't read it himself.
>
> (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 84.)

Fana said not a word in this instance. His silent act of giving the newspaper to his older sister was enough to signal both his inability to read the date and his confidence in his sister's ability to do so. A clear pattern developed in that when faced with a writing task in school, as I noted already, Fana sought correct answers from me. He did the same here by passing the newspaper to his sister. I concluded that when faced with a challenging explicit literacy task at home and in school, Fana preferred to have someone more knowledgeable do it for him rather than make a tentative effort himself. His attitude contrasted with Sebe's belief in practising in order to perfect her drawing above.

There was a strong similarity between Fana's passing on a literacy challenge he was not sure of being successful in and Musa's reluctance to draw/write for fear of messing up during one of my home visits, as seen in this fieldnote excerpt:

> Musa and older sister Vuyo took a keen interest first in my clipboard, then my retractable pencil on this occasion. Vuyo drew and wrote first. Musa first resisted drawing/writing because "Ngitakona!" ["I'll mess up!"]. For this reason, he did not write or draw at all (initially). It was only after seeing Vuyo's free drawing that Musa was eventually drawn to the literacy events. Still circumspect, however, Musa resorted to drawing and label his usual and more familiar (favourite) characters, a muscular male and a *sprinter*.
>
> (Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 25.)

Musa too, unlike adventurous Sebe above, was not keen on venturing into unfamiliar territory and experimenting with other literacy possibilities than those he had already mastered. In chapter five below, I reflect on each child's awareness of their literacy limitations and how it figured in their official literacy learning in the classroom and with what sort of consequences for the children's literacy development. In the next subsection, I show that the children in the study were not just aware of their limitations, but they also exhibited various levels of curiosity and inquisitiveness, which I consider to be a valuable language[67] resource for learning.

4.2.8 Curiosity

The children in the study displayed curiosity at home and off-task in school. Of the four children Fana was the most curious and inquisitive,[68] as this excerpt shows:

---

[67]Curiosity and inquisitiveness were a language resource in that the children expressed it through talk or language use.

[68]In my first ever meeting with Fana's father he revealed that Fana was exceedingly curious and inquisitive and that he discouraged it because he found it disturbing. Generally, none of the parents in my research context spent long periods with or held sustained conversations with their children. This is yet another reason why parents hardly featured in the research. Like Musa's aunt who wondered if the children should be tape recording in her presence, Fana's mother jokingly said that my project of following children around was "crazy" because Swazi adults generally have no business mixing with or showing a keen interest in children and/or their activities (See Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 32).

I was just about to leave after watching the class colour in their "gifts for Jesus" cuttings-out distributed by their teacher when Fana noticed an AIDS badge that I had pinned to the top left front of my shirt:

FUN: 1 Yini loku, teacher? [What's this, teacher?] (lifts his right index finger to touch my AIDS pin/badge)
SIKA: Yi badge yami ye AIDS [It's my AIDS badge]
FUN: 2 Ye, e, eds? [It's for e, eds?] (stutters, sounds like he has neither ever seen an AIDS pin before nor ever heard of it)
(Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 21.)

Fana was very observant and curious.[69] This is the curiosity that Fana's father found to be disturbing and therefore discouraged. This stance did not mean that the father did not want his son to learn. Instead, he paid for him to learn in school, not at home.[70]

Musa was curious too. His curiosity came out more at home than in school. He and I interacted more directly at home than in school. In the following excerpt, Musa and Vuyo wanted to know what my clipboard was and what it was for:

Only Musa and Vuyo were here when I arrived on this occasion. They and I settled on the unfinished porch of the house, by then our rendezvous. As soon as I laid my clipboard on the low wall of the porch, the children were immediately attracted to it:

MUS: 1 Yini loku? [What is this?] (points to my green

[69]Further examples of Fana's curiosity and inquisitiveness were when he asked me what the "king's horses" in the *Humpty-Dumpty* rhyme referred to (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 26, lines 10 – 12) and when he wanted to know if my stylish micro audiotape recorder could be connected to a radio or TV (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 44, lines 1 – 2).

[70]When I met Fana's father he was in the company of two beer-drinking men who made it clear to me that if I had approached them with a request to study their child, they would have none of it. In fact, they said they would tell me, "Look man, I've paid school fees for my child to learn, not this…!" (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 33).

clipboard)

SIKA: Yi clipboard yami [It's my clipboard]

MUS: 2 [Kwani? [What's it for?]

VUY: 3 [Kwani? [What's it for?]

(Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 25.)

When I announced a little later the same morning that I had to leave because I had left my daughter at the doctor's in town, Musa wondered:

MD: 7 Utobuya? [Will you come back?]

SIKA: No

MD: 8 Bewuto? [But what were you here for then?]

Musa had already seen me use my clipboard in class. He nonetheless still wanted me to say what it was and what it was for (lines 1 and 2). He also wanted to know the reasons for my actions (lines 7 and 8).

Sebe too showed a lot of curiosity at home and off-task in school throughout the fieldwork. One morning at school she found me locked in the car holding a newspaper and, peering through the window, she wanted to know exactly what I was doing:

> The teacher was late and the children milled around the locked entrance while I sat in the car and read the *Times of Swaziland* and the *Swazi Observer* dailies in turn. I was reading the *Times* when Sebe and her small group of friends circled the car and peered through the windows and Sebe asked, "What are you doing over there, you are reading the *Times*?"
> (Fieldwork Log – Sebe, page 17.)

This was not the first time Sebe had sought to find out what was inside my car or recognized the *Times*, as I showed under appropriation of the environment for literacy

purposes above[71]. One of many instances of curiosity was also when she asked me, "HOW, HOW MUCH DID YOU BUY THIS CAR FOR?"[72]

Of the four research children, Heli was the most reticent. Yet even she showed glimpses of curiosity. In one instance, she asked to see a drawing that had lain on the ground while she and her peers played house at home, as this excerpt shows:

> A hand-drawn picture which lay on the ground suddenly attracted Heli's attention. She had just entered the fireplace shack and held a crying baby half-brother Gciya in her lap while she watched her peers playing house:

HELI: 451 Aw'letse la ng'funa ku, K'KHONA LENG'FUNA KUK'BONA /./ LETSA LA
[Bring it here I wanna, THERE'S SOMETHING I WANNA SEE /./ BRING IT HERE]

HELI: 519 Aw'ng'tsatsele [Please get me that {picture}] (to a 2-year-old girl who goes on to hold the hand-drawn picture in Gciya's face)
(Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 33 and page 35 respectively.)

Heli did not articulate her exact interest in the drawing. She looked at it briefly before she put it on the ground again, where it remained for the duration of the game. The children's curiosity is of importance to the extent that it is a potentially valuable resource for productive learning but is not commonly displayed openly in the presence of adults in Swaziland settings that I have observed. On-task in class, as I show in chapter five below, the children generally neither asked nor were they encouraged to ask questions. They listened to and did what the teachers told them to do. In the next section, I turn to those language resources which the research children exhibited exclusively off-task in school.

[71]See Fieldwork Log – Sebe (line 82), page 39. This time Sebe recognized the *Times* at home just three days after doing so in school.

[72]See Fieldwork Log – Sebe (line 659), page 55.

4.3 Children's language resources 'off-task' in school settings

These resources of story-telling, teasing, simulating, game-playing, and curiosity were visible neither at home in the presence of adults (as far as I could tell), nor in the official school setting. They were, however, visible on the fringes and edges of school activities and were often literacy-linked here, particularly in such events as those of independent reading.

4.3.1 Extensive exploration and negotiation of textual meaning

It was as I watched children engage in independent picture reading that I discovered how else they related to text and graphics on the pages of a book than simply sounding out the words. In the same reading, Fana and friends at times became so engrossed in their reading that they virtually found their way into the pages too, as this excerpt illustrates:

FAN: 28 (as he opens another page) Ye wena, ye wena, ulele kodwa tinkhomo ti, tindlu tiyadla le! [Hey you, how can you sleep when cattle are eating the houses over there!] (addresses picture on page) Konje kuhlala kudlala mjikeni, uyak'bon' teacher? Akungeni kona lapho, kuhlale kudlala mjikeni nje kona! [This thing just loves playing the swing no matter what! Do you see it teacher? It's not bothered, it just keeps swinging] (about a picture of a child in a crib that hangs from a tree while cattle devour grass thatch nearby)

SIF: 29 Naku kuyamdlala nyalo! [Here it is playing it {swing} right now!] (places finger on the picture)

ALL: 30 Kulele nje! [It's just sleeping!]

FAN: 31 Kutawuchamuk'umuntfu ahlale la galeni [Someone will come and sit on the branch!] (turns the page) Nayi i fireplace! [Here's a fireplace!] (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 27.)

As I indicated under simulation above (section 4.2), Fana was a regular herd boy. From Fana's own experience, herding was a serious responsibility that involved preventing cattle from destroying family and other households' food crops and

property such as the grass thatch on houses. Fana thus found it unacceptable for the child on the page to swing away while cattle helped themselves to the grass thatch of houses. The vigilant Swazi herd boy in Fana sprang to life as he castigated the nonchalant herd boy on the page (line 28). In real life Fana would certainly not be spared a hiding if he, as a supposedly watchful herd boy, let cattle in his care destroy household property at will. So, in plunging himself inside the pages of a book by addressing the character directly Fana also endowed the picture with animate attributes (Whitehead, 2002), a sign of the extent of his personal engagement with this particular story.

The meaning of the original story on the page was enlivened by the immediacy of the experiential, situated socio-cultural meaning it invoked. The different setting and other pictorial clues as to the different culture of the boy on the page were equally irrelevant to Fana at this moment. He was engaged in reading as a sense-making activity where he drew from the resources at hand and made sense of them from his own interests and experiences. All this ability to explore, weave, and shuffle between multiple semiotic lifeworlds in an effort to construct situated meaning out of the text in front of him were not visible in the decontextualized, teacher-led, whole class reading activities that constituted classroom-reading, as I illustrate in chapter five below. Nor were there many other examples where the content of the story related directly to his own life or experiences.

A little later Fana and friends went beyond immersing themselves in the story (Sipe, 2002) and personifying characters to include predicting future events in the plot (line 31). Research elsewhere has suggested that the ability to predict what is to follow in a story plays a significant role in the development of young readers and writers (Gregory, 1994; Heath, 1983).

Almost one month earlier, Fana had used the (picture) story on the page to launch a story of his 'own'[73], as this excerpt shows:

[73]Though Fana's story was still based on the original picture, the words he substituted for the original text transformed it into his own story. Fana was to read (recite) the full text without assistance (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 26, line 2) when he stumbled on the story again as he and his friends flipped through the pages of the same

It was mid-morning break and I did not follow the children outside but sat and chatted with the teachers instead. Children started to re-enter the room, drew individually or formed groups which either read a storybook (like Fana's group) or a small rhyme book[74]. The assistant teacher remarked, as I eagerly moved from one engaged group to the next, that during this free or break time, children's individual preferences and talents surfaced[75]. Fana's band of usual boys-only friends huddled over a picture in a storybook with the text:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

(A little girl stood face up, mouth wide open, and eyes dilated and excitedly pointed her left hand to bright stars in the blue sky, while a younger boy sat looking in the horizon). Fana took a good look at the picture before conjuring the phrase "Pointing far…!" (in English) without even attempting to read the actual words next to it.

(Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 4.)

Fana appropriated the story and negotiated his own meaning based on what he could make sense of. The meaningful images for him did not include print at this stage. Chettenden et al (2001) discovered that some children among those they studied in the USA became so familiar with certain images and text that they engaged in quasi or pretend reading whenever they encountered it. Fana, who later demonstrated

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rhyme/storybook during break time. On another occasion (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 20), Fana and four friends sat and lay on the carpet and marked off items as theirs, as Fana flipped through the pages of a stack of magazines during break time.

[74]The teachers kept these books in cardboard boxes in a corner next to the teachers' only table. Children had free access to the books and playthings during break time when they would be found strewn all over the dusty carpet.

[75]Though the teachers were aware that individual children had personal interests and preferences, they hardly tapped into these or allowed them to develop in the classroom because, as I show in chapter five below, there was a difference between what the children knew and wanted to do and what they were in school to learn.

familiarity[76] with the text that went with the picture, invented an original text in this instance.

I observed Musa read off-task in class just twice over the twelve months of the fieldwork. The second reading took the form of the regular read-aloud at the teacher's table. The first reading (in the excerpt that follows), was an exception in that Musa and a classmate engaged in a subtle process of shuttling between the pictures they encountered in a book and their knowledge of TV characters, similar to what Fana did in the foregoing excerpt. They constructed their own meaning during intermittent deviations from a cutting-out exercise they had been assigned by their teacher:

> The class had finished a spelling exercise and the children should ordinarily have gone out for morning break. But they stayed inside and most (including Musa's neighbour, Sicalo) were matching and colouring in *Workbook 2*. Others were doing *Alphabet for Africa*[77]. Musa and a few others were doing a cutting-out task with magazines and pairs of scissors when I returned from a few minutes' break. Scissors in hand and two magazines open in front of him, Musa shouted from his desk:

MUS:	1	YE TEACHER [HEY TEACHER], MUST I CUT ( )?[78]
T:	2	CUT THE THINGS IN YOUR BEDROOM, WHAT'S IN YOUR BEDROOM? TELL ME
MUS:	3	(flips through pages) I don't know
MUS:	5	(more to himself) There's Mr Bin![79] (points to a picture in one of the magazines he has open in front of him)

[76]On this occasion, a month and two weeks after he totally ignored the story text, Fana recognized and read almost the entire text without assistance (See Fieldwork Log – Fana, line 2, page 26).

[77]*Alphabet for Africa* was the children's regular rhyme and phonics book in this classroom.

[78]This was an English medium private school in which children spoke only English and were officially forbidden to speak SiSwati (Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 3.) A teacher on duty out in the playground during morning break repeatedly reminded children here to "speak in English" whenever the children uttered a SiSwati word. This was very early in the fieldwork.

[32]Mr Bin was a hilarious TV comedian, while Madam and Eve and Joe Mafela, etc., were characters in a South African TV comedy, *Madam & Eve* (line 13).

SIC: 6 Where's Mr Bin? (leans over even more now, temporarily abandons colouring in his own *Workbook 2*)

MUS: 7 Here (points to same picture) /./ (to teacher) TEACHER, I CAN'T FIND IT

T: 10 Go and ask for 3 magazines {from other class}

MUS: 11 (walks out and returns shortly with magazines)

SIC: 12 (once again by Musa's side)

MUS: 13 Madam and Eve /./ Joe Mafela! (points to colourful cartoon characters, immediately starts humming comedy's interlude as he turns the pages) Madam, Granny (points as Sicalo looks) /./ There's Michael Jackson! (points to a face inside a crossword puzzle)
(Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 19.)

Though this was free time, Musa's official task was to cut out pictures from magazines of items found in his bedroom (line 1). Musa had the opportunity to relate the pictures (and words) on the page to his direct real life experience through the cutting-out exercise. As Musa perused the pages however, what he saw evoked in his unofficial intertextual repertoire material that neither he nor his teacher could have imagined at the outset of the cutting-out task (lines 3, 5, 6, 7 & 13).

As I show in chapter five (section 5.4.2) below, this classroom was generally characterized by an ethos of relative child freedom[80]. The teacher had, in the spelling task that preceded the break time activities, uncompromisingly admonished child-child talk. In this excerpt, by contrast, the teacher allowed Musa and his peers to digress and follow their imaginations alongside the official picture-searching exercise. That the unofficial exploration even induced Sicalo to periodically abandon his own colouring-in task never seemed to worry the teacher this time around.

[80]For instance, the children once diverted the teacher from her prepared lesson to tell them the 'Goldilocks' story instead, which she read out to them. On a different day the children successfully asked the teacher to make them do spelling instead of a lesson she had prepared before coming to class. Her curriculum was, in this sense, somewhat 'permeable', to borrow Dyson's (1993) description.

It is noteworthy that the preceding spelling exercise that had kicked off the day had also been the children's suggestion. I concluded that the teacher's pedagogy was sometimes open to suggestion by any member of the classroom community. In Dyson's (1989; 1993; 1997) terms, this teacher's curriculum was sometimes permeable or accommodative of children's preferences. Her flexibility set enabling conditions for Musa and friend to indulge in unofficial networking of semiotic domains within an official magazine reading or cutting-out task. A primary enabling condition of course was the availability of materials like the magazines and pairs of scissors, without which neither the cutting-out exercise nor Musa and friend's unofficial escapade would have been possible.

Mr Bin (line 5); Joe Mafela, Madam, Eve, Granny, and Michael Jackson (line 13) were all imported from Musa and Sicalo's shared knowledge of popular TV and music icons. Musa underlined his familiarity with the *Madam and Eve* comedy by humming its familiar[81] theme tune as he flipped through the pages in search of seemingly elusive images of items in his bedroom.

Musa was turning the pages, it seemed to me, in search of more familiar hence more interesting material than the designated picture-searching and cutting-out task. Musa and friend had evoked personal meaning through matching magazine pictures to real life experience of popular culture. They had equally successfully appropriated the original teacher-sanctioned picture reading task into their own, only resembling the original one through the use of sanctioned materials and conventional tools. Musa, who initially solicited his teacher's directions (line 1), gradually withdrew to focus on his own search, only calling the teacher's attention once thereafter (line 7) before refocusing on the search and he did not again involve his teacher during this event.

Musa shouted both times he initiated interaction with the teacher (lines 1 and 7) and reverted to his normal voice when he engaged his neighbour, which signalled his ideological understanding of who he had the official right to address (Cazden, 2001), how, and when in the classroom. In reading the magazines and making connections

[81] At least to urban and suburban locals.

across semiotic domains the children were greatly assisted by their ability to straddle carefully the official and unofficial classroom worlds. Despite their relative freedom, the children still occupied a tenuous position in that tension clearly existed between their unofficial peer world and the official domain.

Research in different parts of the English-speaking world has shown that low-income ESL children's ability to engage with text in differential ways depends on the culturally varied textual histories (Stein and Slonimsky, 2001) they bring to the reading act, which determine the extent to which they relate to the material they are reading (e.g., Pransky and Bailey, 2002). According to this research, children's personal engagement can stop at the level of simply sounding out text on the page, as I show in chapter five below, or develop to a point where they infuse text with new, wide-ranging personal meanings, as we just saw in the excerpt above, depending on their emerging culturally formed understanding of the nature of the transaction between the reader and text (Whitehead, 2002).

4.4 Concluding comments

In this chapter I have analysed the language resources that the research children exhibited both during free play at home and off-task in school. These resources included storytelling, teasing, simulation, bending rules of play, exaggerating performance or ability, improvising play roles to suit disadvantaged peers, appropriating environmental artefacts for literacy purposes, awareness of literacy limitations, and being curious. I argued that these recurred at home and in school largely because a literate environment or the availability of conventional literacy materials was not a prerequisite for their manifestation.

I have also identified the children's tendency to extend story text to real life experience as the only resource that the children displayed exclusively off-task in school. I argued that this was the case primarily because the manifestation of this resource relied heavily on a literate environment as well as literacy materials. Both sets of resources had in common the children's freedom to initiate activities and express themselves in ways that brought out these resources.

I argued that at home with adults, as far as I could tell, given my somewhat restricted access to interaction between adults and children at home, children had limited opportunities to initiate activities or express what they knew. Children generally listened to their elders and did as they were told. Children's resources therefore remained invisible at home because no one paid attention to or took children seriously because of children's lowly status and dismissal of their talk and actions merely as child play. One of the questions that I address in chapter five is whether the teachers, on the other hand, took on board the semantic/linguistic resources brought with them into the classrooms and made use of these at all in their teaching of the children.

Chapter 5

Invisibility of children's language resources in the classroom

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I analyze classroom-based literacy practices that children engaged in 'on-task', that is, during organised classroom activity and discourse. I present and discuss data which show a telling contrast between children's participation in these activities and their levels of participation in the unsanctioned or off-task activities described in chapter four above. Whereas home and school are different social settings with distinct social functions, there were notable overlaps between home and school in my particular research context, in the ways that teachers in school and other adults, out of school, responded to and directed children. I first introduce and develop the conceptual framework I adopted in my analysis and observations of classroom practices. Such a framework facilitates my explanation of how and why teachers taught literacy in the way they did. In accordance with the NLS concern to identify the kinds of literacy practices that characterize a particular socio-cultural setting. I then describe the kinds of orientation to literacy and learning that the children were being introduced to and the likely consequences for their reading and writing careers in school. I argue that children's participation off-task was characterized by the freedom and ability to search for meaning, draw from intertextual repertoires[82] and weave them into current activities. On the contrary, the children's official tasks, did not allow or encourage children to draw on and incorporate what they already knew, and thus restricted the children to operating with the limited resources of the knowledge, language and literacy that they were still trying to acquire in school. I further argue that children's restricted participation in on-task literacy activities matched their limited and subdued interaction with their elders at home, which points to a strong correlation between the ways in which children were taught literacy in school and their general socialization in the wider Swaziland society.

[82]All those diverse multimedia and multimodal frames of reference or sources of knowledge (e.g., family relations, folktales, church songs and bible stories, teasing, *tsotsi taal*, games, herding, radio, television, and other experiences) that children might bring to bear on their negotiation of the meaning of classroom-based print and other literacy related material or activity.

5.2 'Peripheral normativity' versus the 'centre': an analytic framework

I have derived the overarching analytic frame for discussing the pedagogic practices I observed in my research setting from the literature that I synthesised in chapters one and two. I also make particular use in this chapter of the work of Blommaert et al (2006), and in particular on the concept of 'peripheral normativity' that they apply to a similar examination of school literacy in township schools in the Western Cape, South Africa. In addition I make use of a recently published study of early school literacy by Freebody and Freiberg (2008) where they apply a sharply analytical perspective on the socio-cultural and ideological dimensions of school literacy teaching.

Blommaert et al's analysis provides an account of literacy learning and teaching at a school set on the periphery with regard to middle-class schooling and English-language literacy practices. Their research site was a school located in a marginalized community that struggled with enormous socio-economic challenges. The learners and teachers at the school shared ideals of upward social mobility and regarded English as the facilitative tool for that spatial and social mobility. Blommaert et al (2006: 1) reported that the students' and the teachers' English writing demonstrated features of what they call 'grassroots literacy' or a "sub-elite literacy that was characterized by orthographic, syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic peculiarities", shared by the teachers and the students alike. The 'errors' could be described as systematic, normal, and normative because they constituted a 'positive' and productive mechanism through which the teachers effectively achieved their instructional objectives and to which their marginalized, diverse students could realistically aspire with the limited resources at their disposal. The teachers and children at this site could thus be said to have produced a local literacy through peripheral normative practice.

However, this school community's upward mobility ideals, based on the attainment of a 'downscaled' or locally valid form of English literacy, were problematic because they do not remain as valid and acceptable 'translocally' or across geographical and socio-cultural contexts (Blommaert, 2002). According to Blommaert et al (2006), the problem arises because local organizational imperatives which operate within local

possibilities and constraints to respond to pertinent local challenges are invalidated the moment they are seen only in relation to the centre of the world system (Blommaret, 2002) as 'peripheries' or 'margins'. A politics of semiotic stratification presumes the existence of a uniform, homogenizing system where places and the practices therein are ranked as 'good' or 'worse' relative to conformity to or divergence from the standards or norms of the 'centre' (e.g., from the Western middle classes) - taken to be the only valid ones and the ones that guarantee upward social mobility and success (Blommaert et al, 2006: 2).

The researchers argued against homogenizing approaches to differences in an already unequal society because they obscure and inaccurately present the local dynamics in peripheral parts of the system. They argued that while the spaces on the 'margin' or emergent norms which resulted from the localization of norms described above provided a solution for people on the periphery to the otherwise unattainable 'ideal' academic norms of the centre, they however failed to resolve the systemic inequalities and rift between centres and peripheries which are maintained and regulated (Blommaert et al, 2006: 22).

The study also showed 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, or in the field of language in general (Blommaert et al, 2006: 23). Nor is literacy dependent purely on individual effort or its absence. Instead, the researchers concluded that a more contextualized, fragmented, and localized perception is required that allows 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 et al, 2006: 23). My research sites in Swaziland were also peripheral schools and I found similarities between my research and Blommaert et al (2006). I therefore used Blommaert et al's (2006) study as a reference in developing a detailed, localized perception of the research schools, their ecological setting, and their embedding in the local environment. Below I develop a sub-framework for analyzing the localized classroom procedures that teachers erected and in terms of which they envisioned children's successful learning of the specific literacy practices I discuss under sections 5.3 and 5.4 below.

5.2.1 Regulative and pedagogic practices as interwoven: consequences for how children become readers and writers

In this section I analyze classroom management, which includes the physical and social organization of learning space, activities, and children's participation. Teachers used such control strategies as seating, turn-taking, and corporal punishment all of which constituted regulative practices that they saw as necessary to guide children's attention toward literacy learning, which I discuss under sections 5.3 and 5.4 later in this chapter. In order to conceptualize the place of the regulative practices in the teaching and learning of literacy in my peripheral setting, I further drew on Freebody and Freiberg's (2008: 26) concept of the 'mannerisms and debris' of literacy teaching and learning, which provided me with a useful meta-language for discussing the data from my classroom observations. The concept is a metaphor which signifies that literacy derives its meaning from the deliberate, specific actions of individuals in relation to others and the environment. Those actions are themselves regulated by culturally-determined and mutually intelligible procedures of participation, which include who decides, organizes, and deploys materials necessary to accomplish the social end of a given interaction. Freebody and Freiberg (2008: 17) argued that because literacy practices arise out of the "perceived needs within individuals and their communities", there is neither a singular 'compact' concept of literacy nor is there a single literacy solution across social contexts. Freebody and Freiberg's focus on contextual variability across literacy practices accords with the concept of 'peripheral normativity' and with the arguments from the NLS literature that I reviewed in chapter two. Freebody and Freiberg (2008: 26) thus argue that in order to understand events in which learning to read and write occur, there is a:

> …need first to understand the ways in which homes, schools and workplaces organize themselves through particular ways of relating, then ask how these events, such as literacy teaching and learning, happen not just *in* but *as instances of* the workings of these settings.

My point of departure in discussing the observed regulatory practices in classrooms is that these classroom management measures constituted a locally justified[83] disciplinary regime which directs children to react to teachers' stimuli in predictable response sequences. These regulative practices did not encourage children to explore and experiment with possibilities of literacy other than those predetermined by the teacher. Below I deal with each aspect of classroom management in turn.

5.2.1.1 Classroom management: physical configuration, participant structures, and coercion

I am concerned here to describe and analyse a typical physical environment in the research classrooms and point out ways in which it influenced how children learnt to read and write. I discuss each aspect of the physical classroom environment in turn below.

5.2.1.1.1 Displays

The physical setting and appearance of each classroom included wall displays or wall charts. According to each teacher, these charts were integral to their teaching of different subjects. Below is a fieldnote description of Heli's Grade One classroom on my third visit:

> It's easy to see stuff in every nook and cranny of the room above children's heads because they are all seated - in gendered rows of boys and girls. The top part of the back wall is cluttered with an assortment of displays, including a commercially produced number chart, a commercially produced alphabet chart, a picture of a girl and picture of a boy (both with labelled body parts), a days-of-the-week chart, a small vowels chart, a big vowels chart, an animal chart, and a "Silly Sipho" poster. The front left corner is home to brooms and

[83]The teachers had generally overcrowded classrooms for which effective classroom management was necessary for learning to take place. It was, however, the nature and extent of observed classroom control that I found to be restrictive in terms of children's development as readers and writers, particularly given that the children used language and literacy creatively in communicative interactions with peers off-task in school and during play at home. The regulative practices in the classroom ensured that the children concentrated on the successful learning of material on which their success or failure at the end of the year depended locally. In the process they ignored to make connections with and build on the children's creativity off-task and out of school, language and literacy competences which their later schooling and life were likely to require them to display.

> aluminium buckets. The front right corner houses an assortment of items that include popcorn (which the teacher sells to children at break) on a table and whose fried-oil scent wafts through the room, and a tray of eggs on a separate table. There are also cardboard boxes filled with stuff, small plastic bowls, and a spike abacus on top of a cupboard on the front left of the classroom and an aluminium bucket on top of it. A "Stop child abuse" *Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse* (SWAGAA) poster hangs from the same front left wall cupboard. A stack of cardboard boxes fills both back corners of the room. I am drawn back to the classroom goings on by the children's deafening "THA:NK-YOU-TEA:CHER" collective roar and trooping out when the teacher - cane in hand - signals for the 62 children to go out to the toilet. Backpacks and plastic bags are left on shared desks and individual chairs.
> (Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 3.)

By Swaziland standards this was a relatively print-rich classroom, if one considers the quantity of posters and wall displays. Even for a peri-urban public school, it had an abundance of educational materials and supplies. But what function they served was less clear. Heli's teacher referred her group of over 60 Grade One children to the animal chart just once during the twelve-month fieldwork. She made no similar reference to this or any other chart after that.

Similar displays were notable in the other research classrooms. On the walls of Sebe's classroom were sketches drawn by the teacher of all the 35-plus children together with their names. There were also cuttings-out of labelled objects like fruits and animals. Neither the teacher nor the children referred to any wall display during the fieldwork. The walls of Fana's preschool classroom had cuttings-out of apples and oranges, cursive and printed alphabet, numbers, and a road safety poster. The teacher once led a lesson on road safety based on the relevant poster. The teachers also referred the over 40 children to the number and alphabet charts respectively during individual writing tasks. Alphabet and word charts lined Musa's Grade Nought

classroom walls. Musa and his 16[84] classmates, like Fana, copied words from these displays during individual writing tasks. There is no doubt that the schools, despite their varying geographical locations and the different economic activities therein, invested in these display items – including commercial ones – for a particular purpose. When I subsequently asked the teachers in separate descriptive interviews[85], they each said that they had requested their respective head teachers to purchase the wall charts as part of the teaching aids they required to reinforce some of the concepts they taught children in their different subjects.

Apart from Musa's Grade Nought peers[86], however, no child initiated the use of wall charts in the other classrooms studied, which is consistent with the teachers' claim above that wall charts were their teaching aids. All the teachers mounted available displays high up on the wall; i.e., way beyond the reach of the five-, six-, seven-, eight-, and nine-year-olds who spent most of their classroom time seated anyway. When seen in relation to what Blommaert et al (2006) described as the wider system, the position of the displays relative to children's heights amounted to a peripheral practice, one that made classroom displays easily accessible only to the teachers rather than the children, for whose benefit the teachers bought or made them. In other words, posting the displays that high suited the teachers' role of determining how and when children could use classroom materials, as part of their task of maintaining order in classes with large numbers of students. As a result of that practice, the children did not readily access, appropriate and extend the meaning of pictures or words in displays to their own experiences or interests. As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the interactive and expressive ways that some of the study children had come

[84]Musa's Grade Nought class had 16 children as opposed to 20 children in Grade One. Among the scanty displays on the walls was a phonics chart. I did not stay long enough to determine the frequency of the use of displays here (Grade One) because I started observing the class toward the end of the fieldwork.

[85]I interviewed each teacher toward the end of the fieldwork in an effort both to follow up on observational data that I considered to be relevant to my thesis and to triangulate my data sources by checking the extent to which observations matched teachers' reasons for their pedagogic actions. I located the interviews toward the end in order to avoid drawing teachers' attention to what they might think they needed to change during the fieldwork. I feared that this awareness could disturb the respective research settings. With a few exceptions, each teacher in Swaziland's public primary schools teaches all the subjects (e.g., English, SiSwati, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Religious Education, Practical Arts, etc.) in his or her allocated grade or class.

[86] See Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 12 and subsection 5.4.1, pages 225 - 226 below for an example of a lesson in which Musa and Grade Nought classmates voluntarily copied three-letter words from the classroom wall charts.

to relate to available storybooks and playthings off-task or during free time in their classrooms was the shifting of meaning-making resources across their home, school, and peer play semiotic domains. Off-task in school and during free play at home, these children even appropriated artefacts in their generally low-print home environments for literacy purposes.

However, any explanation of positioning of displays should take into account that the teachers understandably also had a responsibility to preserve the scarce teaching aids. Moreover, such explanation should acknowledge a tacit mutual understanding between teachers and children that posters were for looking at either when the teacher said so or when an official task could only be accomplished by referring to the displays. From a local perspective therefore, the children's failure to take more advantage of classroom displays points not to deprivation on the part of teachers who provided and wished children to maximize their learning through classroom displays, but whose control of access to these materials apparently minimized children's use of them. Instead, the practice pointed to the application of localized 'mannerisms and debris' of teaching and leaning literacy (Freebody & Freiberg, 2008) in response to local needs. The difference between the approach of the teachers in Dyson's (1989, 1993, 1997), for instance, and that of the teachers in the present study is that the former allowed children to bring in semiotic material from the home and peer play settings to work with in the construction of texts in the classroom. For the children in my study, on the other hand, classroom displays were for use on-task when the teacher directed so and as she directed. The teachers provided displays to reinforce specific activities such as individual children drawing their favourite animals, and not for children to use anytime or interpret displays in any other manner. The question of deprivation only arises as soon as we contemplate what the regulative practice entails for children's development as readers and writers outside this particular setting. This question did not constitute what the teachers in my research regarded as literacy teaching and learning. I turn next to seating as another aspect of physical classroom management.

5.2.1.1.2 Seating

Seating was an important part of the general physical classroom setting and organization. Seating played a crucial role in determining how children saw and interacted with both the teacher and their peers (Cazden, 2001). Seating was instrumental in shaping how children participated in learning as individuals and as collective learners in the classroom.

There was a distinction between seating and movement in the research preschool and Grade One classrooms. In preschool classrooms individual children had regular seats designated for them by their teachers; but they were generally free to move about and work from different locations in the classroom, including sitting on the floor, depending on the nature of the activity. Grade One classrooms, on the other hand, were not characterized by similar flexibility of seating and movement. Children's seating was determined at the beginning of the year and remained fixed throughout. The only time the teachers altered seating was when I asked for a research child to be moved to facilitate my observation of him or her[87]. On my second visit to Heli's classroom, for instance, the teacher separated the seven children who had no preschool from the rest to help me identify a focal child. When I protested she assured me that the children "won't notice" as she claimed to swap seating randomly at the start of term anyway (thereafter children sat where they had been shown for the duration of the fieldwork).

Teachers sat children in rows of pairs to facilitate visibility and teachers' monitoring of participation in whole class activities and individual assessment. The seating arrangement helped to ensure that individual children listened to what the teachers told them and focused on the learning activity at hand without disturbance from their peers. Research elsewhere has indicated that in particular settings part of the teacher's job is to regulate attention by regulating even the child's body (Freebody & Freiberg, 2008: 31). In the next subsection I further develop the argument around how seating facilitated teacher-determined participant structures in each research classroom.

[87]For instance, I asked Musa and Heli's Grade One teachers to move them to the back of their respective classrooms for close observation of their participation in classroom activities.

5.2.1.1.3 Participant structures

Though children sat in pairs at each desk, there was no discernible teaching strategy based on paired or shared learning[88]. The observed rules could be summarized as follows: The teachers talked and the children listened attentively and did as the teacher instructed. If a child wanted a turn to speak, he or she raised a hand for the teachers to give permission to speak; otherwise all children sat quietly and waited for the next instruction from the teachers. Children could not talk to or help each other without the teachers' permission either. The classrooms were generally crowded places. The teachers needed rules to regulate their interactions with big crowds of exuberant children and the preferred strategy was based on the isolated passivity of individual children. The regulation was based on the strategy of producing docile bodies and highly circumscribed teacher-directed communicative exchanges. I address particular aspects of these regulatory processes below, those relating to teacher talk, student talk and corporal punishment.

5.2.1.1.3.1 Teacher talk

I asked each of the teachers to explain in separate open-ended interviews toward the end of the research the necessity of and amount of teacher talk in their respective classrooms. Musa's Grade One teacher explained that teachers of necessity first had to give a lesson and instructions (or talk) while children listened attentively. "Otherwise, how would they know what to do if they don't know what the lesson is or or indeed what the question is?"[89] she wondered. This teacher also elaborated that teacher talk should not exceed fifteen minutes per session because young children have very short concentration spans. Fana's Grade One teacher had this to say: "…lo lomntfwana if alalele le I think the information ingena kancono nges'khatsi alalele then utobesse uyay'sebentisa the time asakhuluma muva /./ yeah" […if the child is listening then I think s/he internalizes the information effectively when s/he is listening s/he will then use it when s/he talks later on /./ yeah][90]. Sebe's preschool teacher explained thus: "Wo ngiyona ndlela sifundzisa ngayo la lana kulegenge lengaka. Yona ikholwa kutidlalela /./ kuyaye kudzingeke kutsi uvele ubatjele kutsi

[88]Certainly not on-task.

[89]See Appendix A (pages 257-258) & Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 161. This is the only teacher who spoke to me and her class only in English throughout the fieldwork.

[90]See Appendix A (pages 257-258) & Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 173.

nyalo senta loku ubanik'ema directions bese bayalandzela, kungenjalo kungaba lukhuni" [OK this is the way we teach children this age {preschoolers}. They are just content playing all the time /./ it becomes necessary then that you tell them what we are supposed to do all the way and give them directions so that they can follow, otherwise it could be chaotic][91]. According to Heli's Grade One teacher, "Uma thishela akhuluma umntfwana k'fanele alalele kuze lothishela eve, kuze lom lomntfwana eve kutsi ubutani, atokhona k'phendvula, ngete sakhuluma sobabili, ngete savana" [When the teacher talks the child has to listen so that the teacher understands, so that the child understands what the teacher is asking, so that he or she can answer, we can't both speak at once, it would be hard to understand each other][92]. Teachers therefore saw themselves as having a responsibility to guide children toward particular learning after which they would assess individual understanding. Children, on the other hand, had a responsibility to first listen and later respond in an orderly manner to the teachers' questions. The teachers justified teacher talk as a pedagogic practice necessary for pointing children to the educational point of each activity, which they would miss and fail in subsequent assessment if they were not told or if they did not listen attentively. In Freebody and Freiberg's (2008: 19) terms, then, the apparently mundane and natural acts of literacy teaching in these classrooms were in fact "enactments and reconstructions of relational, cultural, ideological and moral patterns". These patterns constructed literacy in schools as primarily a practice of passive recall in ritualized ways. Teachers similarly ensured orderly participation by way of enforcing rules for turn-taking, to which I turn next.

5.2.1.1.3.2 Taking turns to speak

Teachers used turn-taking to regulate child talk in their lessons. In Heli's Grade One classroom the teacher frequently invoked the need for children to bid for speaking turns as a way of orderly participation. In the following excerpt, for instance, the teacher insisted that the children raise their hands if they wanted a speaking turn:

T: 30 SAGCINA, KODV', SAGCINA NINI KODVWA LA SKOLEN'?

[91]See Appendix A (pages 257-258) & Fieldwork Log – Sebe, page 125.

[92]See Appendix A (pages 257-258) & Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 99.

[WHEN LAST, BY THE WAY, WHEN LAST WERE WE HERE IN SCHOOL?]

P: 31 NGA [LWES'HLAN'…[ON FRIDAY…]

PP: 32 [LWES'HLANU…[ON FRIDAY…]

T: 33 NG'FUNA TANDLA [I WANT HANDS]

PP: 34 (immediately go quiet and most raise hands and look expectantly and snap fingers to attract the teacher's attention)

(Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 65.)

Though the teacher occasionally gave speaking turns to children whose hands were not raised[93], raising hands was still the acceptable way of seeking a turn. Children in this classroom had even come to regard any form of child talk as punishable deviance if it was not sanctioned by the teacher. In policing the established rules of turn-taking, the children also signalled collective understanding that each of them was accountable to both the teacher and the children as a 'cohort' for upholding participation procedures (Freebody & Freiberg, 2008).

In Fana's Grade One classroom the teacher also sometimes reminded the children to raise their hands if they wanted to speak. In this excerpt, she did just that when the children responded to her question all at once:

> The children had finished a colouring-in exercise and were now trying to describe the pictures the teacher was showing them in a book that she raised and held open to them:

T: 725 UYAGCEBA [S/HE IS MAKING UP A BED] /./ ASESIBASHON' NGESISWATI NJE K'TSI WENTAN' BENTAN' LABANTFU LAPHA [LET US SAY IN SISWATI WHAT S/HE THEY ARE DOING THESE PEOPLE] PICTURE 2

PP: 726 [UYAKOROBHA [S/HE IS SCRUBBING {THE FLOOR}]

P: 727 [LONA UYAGCEBA LON' UYAKOROBHA ()…[THIS ONE IS

[93]Teachers explained in separate descriptive interviews that they involved children whose hands were not raised in order to encourage and ensure that even shy ones got opportunities to participate.

MAKING UP A BED THIS ONE IS SCRUBBING THE FLOOR ()…]

T: 728 HHAYI ASENIME [NO WAIT]

P: 729 teacher…(with raised hand)

T: 730 BOSE N'PHUCUKE MAN [BE CIVILIZED MAN]

PP: 731 (more hands are raised)

(Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 153.)

This was the second largest class after Heli's and it was really becoming difficult to pick out what the close to 60 voices were saying, prompting the teacher to invoke the rules of participation and to restore order.

In Musa's Grade One classroom similar rules of participation to Heli and Fana's classrooms applied. The difference was that Musa's teacher was even stricter and more particular about the children's adherence to the rules, including how they should greet a teacher when she entered the classroom. In this excerpt, she drilled the children on how to greet and behave toward the headmistress:

> Musa's teacher was preparing to leave the classroom, having collected the children's math workbooks. She had to give way to the headmistress's weekly phonics session. She duly reminded her class before she exited how to greet and behave once the headmistress entered the room:

T: 199 So three people will receive lollipops, Andiswa, Chichi and /./ Musa /../ remember when she {headmistress} comes in, you're supposed to?

PP: 200 Stand up…

T: 201 And say?

PP: 202 Good-morn…(dirge)

T: 203 Not "Good, morning, Ma'am" say [Good morning Ma'am

PP: 204 [Good morning Ma'am

T: 205 (as she prepares to leave classroom) Same way () you speak to me () you speak the same way to her as you speak to me alright? /../ "GOOD MORNING MA'AM" ALL AT THE SAME TIME, YOU DON'T SAY GOOD MORNING WHILST YOU'RE STILL STANDING UP,

YOU STAND UP YOU WAIT A SECOND AND THEN SAY "GOOD MORNING" ALL OF YOU AT THE SAME TIME, REMEMBER SAY THANK YOU WHEN YOU'RE () THE TOILET, "THANK YOU MA'AM", DON'T SAY "THANK-YOU-MA'AM" (dirge), "THANK YOU MA'AM", REMEMBER THAT[94]

PP: 206 (murmur)

T: 207 'KAY (finally exits)

(Fieldwork Lo – Musa, pages 146 – 147.)

In this classroom there were formal, ritualised ways of receiving teachers in class. There was also a required way of seeking the teacher's attention for any reason. This included a well cadenced "Excuse me Ma'am", a waiting for a response, followed by the child standing and stating her business, followed by "Thank you, Ma'am", and a leaving of the room or a sitting down again, depending on the nature of the request and the teacher's response. Unlike in the other classrooms, the teacher here did not have to remind her 20 children that they could not speak out of turn. There was no case of unsanctioned or child-child talk or collaboration, to which I turn next.

5.2.1.1.3.3 Child-child talk or collaboration

At times, unsanctioned child-child interaction was totally unacceptable to teachers. For instance, the teacher in Musa's Grade Nought classroom forbade child-child talk when children were working individually. Children were supposed to focus singularly on their own work and allow others to work quietly as well. The teachers' view was that it was not possible for children to be productive while interacting with one another.

According to Musa's Grade One teacher, who had totally stamped out unsanctioned child-child interaction in her class, Musa's participation changed over time from a "very positive" and "very confident" student[95] to a timid one who "…never starts a

[94]The teacher had earlier in the same lesson made the children greet her properly when she was not satisfied that they had done so as she entered the classroom (Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 141).

[95]See chapter 4, section 4.3.1, pages 186-189 for an example of Musa's initiative in appropriating a teacher-sanctioned cutting-out exercise for his own purposes. See also subsection 5.4.1 , pages 227-228 later in this chapter for Musa's initiative in volunteering to contribute in class.

thing without…getting a go-ahead from the teacher."[96] She attributed the regression to Musa trying "…too hard such that he now appears like, a soldier, you know, like he he he he's in an army…When you, speak to him he quickly stands up…stands too rigid, upright, uprightly rigid and a, doesn't look like a, a next per the next person wouldn't be comfortable looking you know looking at such a child."[97] The disciplinary regime which the teacher had introduced and enforced to ensure that children were orderly and ready to learn without distraction had the unintended effect of turning him into a tentative student who reacted only to the teacher's directives.

Fana's assistant preschool teacher once told me that children had individual preferences and talents, which surfaced during free time or breaks. She was, however, quick to point out that they as teachers did not tap into these personal inclinations because they were constrained by the necessity to drill the children in the activities on which they were going to be tested for entry to Grade One[98]. These activities included serious reading and writing of one's name, alphabets, and numbers, and memorizing the accurate responses to such conversational questions as "Good morning my boy/girl, how are you?", "What is your name?", "How old are you?", and "Where do you go to school?"[99] While research elsewhere has recognized children's ability to collaborate or engage in peer-teaching with their peers and remain individually productive (e.g., Chittenden et al, 2001; Dyson, 1993, 1998), the success of teachers in my study was measured by their ability to help children pass at the end of the year[100].

Notably, while the children in Dyson's studies used their faked or imagined and real classroom neighbourhoods to readily reach out to and support each other's composing, the children in the present study waited to be directed toward

[96]See Appendix A (pages 257-258) & Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 156.

[97]See Appendix A (pages 257-258) & Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 155).

[98]See Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 4.

[99]See Fieldwork Log – Fana, pages 5 and 7 for examples of Grade One entry interview rehearsals at Fana's preschool.

[100]That level of success was more likely to be achieved if teachers focused on drilling children collectively in specific assessment targets than if they spent a lot of time entertaining individual children's interests and talents. These are important, as one acknowledged, for children's overall literacy development in and out of school. But they were not what would make children succeed in their current classes

predetermined individual tasks despite their proximity to one another. While the children in Dyson's study freely collaborated and used literacy to forge and manage relationships with one another, the children in my study learned that one focused on a specific group-learned school task, which concluded with individual assessment. Below I turn attention to the use of the cane to enforce classroom discipline as a means of micro-managing (Freebody & Freiberg, 2008) and ensuring that children did what they were in the classroom to do at all times. I thus draw attention to the coercive dimensions of the relational, cultural ideological, and moral patterns that underlie this form of school literacy.

5.2.1.1.4 Corporal punishment and the authority of elders

Swazis generally expect their children to defer to their elders at every turn (Kuper, 1963: 53) and without question. Children are thought to learn everything they need to know in life from their elders. Children cannot challenge or question adult authority. To do so is to be disrespectful, a sign that the child is not being brought up properly (Kuper, 1963: 53). Adults have used the cane as a corrective measure for unacceptable children's behaviour at least since the birth of the Swazi state in the 19th century. Teachers administer corporal punishment to a child in the classroom if they perceive him or her to be behaving in disrespectful ways or acting in ways that might distract the child and/or others from learning effectively. The frequency and scale of corporal punishment in each classroom depends on the individual teacher's outlook on classroom management and children's discipline[101].

In Heli's Grade One classroom, the teacher's cane was almost always visible, and the teacher caned 'deviant'[102] children frequently in my presence. In this excerpt, for instance, the teacher caned a child for being silent while his classmates chanted body parts:

[101]The Ministry of Education (MoE) has guidelines for the administration of corporal punishment in schools. However, these guidelines are rarely accessible to teachers as they are often locked away in the head teachers' offices.

[102]Deviant behaviour included failure to speak out loud when responding to the teacher's questions, failure to read, count, or recite when the teacher instructed a child to do so, chewing gum in class, and others.

The teacher had led the children in the touching and labelling of different body parts. She then asked them to say "Head and shoulders…" together. When she discovered that one boy, Zikalala, was not chanting, she instructed him to do so alone. When he got stuck, the teacher repeatedly caned him while the 51 other children present on the day watched:

PP: 335 HEAD AND SHOULDERS KNEES AND TOES, KNEES AND TOES, HEAD AND SHOULDERS KNEES AND TOES, WE ALL TURN AROUND TOGETHER…

T: 336 Zikalala sing, ngoba phela wena siyahlabela wena nj'uthulile nj'ubukela tsin', aw'phangis' hlabela [Zikalala sing, because we're singing and you just remain quiet and watch us, c'mon sing] (to a boy just behind the font row)

Z: 337 (silent)

T: 338 HEAD AND SHOULDERS ZIKALALA

Z: 339 Head and shoulders knees and toes knees and toes (in low voice), (silence)

T: 340 E, ang', aw'ng'phe l'swati, siyahlabela uthulile nje Zikalala uyasibuka nje a, kute nje lakwentako akahlabel' akentini (gets stick from a kid, approaches Zikalala) /./ aw'hlabeli ngan' ma tsine s'hlabela? /./ Uma senta intfo s'yenta sonkhe (as cane lands three times on boy's body) [Er, would you, bring me a cane, we're all singing and Zikalala just keeps quiet and just looks at us, he's just doing nothing he's not singing he's not doing anything (gets stick from a kid, approaches Zikalala) /./ why don't you sing when we all sing? When we do something we all do it (raised cane lands on Zikalala's body in very quick succession at least three times)

Z: 341 (raises both hands to cover his body, looks (coweringly) at teacher, cries out as blows sting his skin)
(Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 47.)

It was a punishable offence to remain silent when other children were chanting in this classroom. The teacher had instructed the children to chant as a way of learning how

to label their body parts. Zikalala had disobeyed the teacher's instruction. He had thus disrespected the teacher and for this the teacher caned him to deter him from repeating the insolence.

In yet another lesson,[103] the teacher struck a girl with her pen on the head for not speaking loudly enough:

> This was an exercise involving each child copying into their workbooks sets the teacher had drawn on the board, inserting a digit representing the number of members in a set in the appropriate column. The teacher repeatedly struck a girl with a pen on her head for failing to write and for speaking too softly:

T:	441	( ) BHA:LA [WRI:TE] /./ 1 /./ nga la kukahl' [this side is fine] (strikes her head with red pen]
GIRL:	442	(sobs)
T:	443	( ) LO 2 ( ) [THE TWO]
GIRL:	444	(sobs on)
KID:	445	(approaches teacher)
T:	446	Yin'? [what is it?]
KID:	447	( )
T:	448	Aw'hlale phasi mntfwana [sit down child] (indignantly)
PP:	449	(slight hullabaloo)
T:	450	Ng'funa naba labang'kacedzi [I want those who haven't finished]
PP:	451	(more hullabaloo)
GIRL:	452	(sobs on)
T:	453	( ) Yini kona les'guntu lobhala ngaso ngalapha ke? [What's this stump you're writing with what about this end?
GIRL:	454	( )
PP:	455	(hullabaloo)
T:	456	KHUL'MA KAKHUL' E MNTFWANA [SPEAK UP CHILD]

[103]There were numerous other instances of beating in this classroom. For instance, the teacher caned another girl later in the same lesson for failing to speak up (Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 85). Minutes later, the teacher caned yet another child for chewing gum in class (Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 86). Caning occurred in almost all observed lessons in this classroom.

(indignantly as she strikes her repeatedly with pen)
(Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 78.)

This particular child annoyed the teacher by first failing to write the number of members in a set (line 441) and then failing to speak up when the teacher addressed her (line 456). The teacher's message was clear: you write when I tell you to do so and speak up when addressing me. Failure to comply incurred a beating.

I did not witness the use of the cane in the other research classrooms. There was, however, enough reference to its use, either from the children or threats from the teacher. Musa's Grade One teacher never caned a child in my presence but I got anecdotal reports from children that she did when I was not there. In Fana's Grade One class, the teacher occasionally threatened to beat naughty children, though she never carried out the threat in my presence. I do not recall the teacher in Sebe's class ever threatening to hit a child. All the teachers, however, acknowledged that they used the stick, to varying degrees, in separate descriptive interviews with me.

It was at home that Sebe's mother once gave her daughter a thorough beating with a wooden spoon for insulting[104] me. Heli's grandfather said he resorted to the stick because, like her mother, Heli was not used to the hard work that staying with him entailed after they had moved in with him[105]. "…bati ku ferefa nje…" [all they know is to scrub concrete floors…]. This was in reference to Heli and her mother's suburban habits as opposed to the ploughing, weeding, looking after livestock, tending the garden, harvesting, etc., that went with Heli's grandfather's subsistence farming. Not used to this kind of work, Heli often made mistakes or absconded. Heli's grandfather beat her for failing to perform some of her household chores, e.g., staying at home and keeping chickens and cattle away from the maize cribs.

Heli's Grade One teacher justified one of such beatings, as this excerpt illustrates:

[104]See Fieldwork Log – Sebe, page 157, for the incident in which Sebe referred to my "anus" and her subsequent beating by her mother for 'insulting' an elder.

[105]See Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 11 for the appropriate fieldnote.

The rest of the children had gone out for their regular morning toilet break. Heli and a few others had stayed inside. The teacher used this time to ask Heli why she had missed school the past few days. Heli explained that she was hurt when her grandfather beat her for running away and not sleeping at home. The teacher had this warning for Heli:

T: 160 Hhay' man' ye Heli ungabohlal' es'cashin' uhlale le endlini ekhay' uyeva? [No Heli man, don't stay with the tenants, stay in the house at home you hear?] (Swazi and Matega are still standing by teacher's side, listening and watching)

HEL: 161 Mm-mm (agrees)

T: 162 Ngiko nje mkhul' ak'shay' ngob' uyak'fun' ak'fun' ak'fun' ak'fun' angak'tfoli /./ uyeva yin'? [That's why grandpa beats you because he looks for you, looks for you, looks for you and never finds you /./ do you hear?]

HEL: 163 Mm-mm (agrees)

T: 164 Ungakwenti lok'lala et'cashin' /./ uyabona nje manje es'kolen' k'tsi bow'ngekho /./ onkhe lamalanga? [Stop this sleeping at the tenants' /./ You see right now you've missed school /./ all these days?]

HEL: 165 ()

T: 166 Wak'limata mkhulu? [Did grandpa hurt you?]

HEL: 167 Mm-mm (agrees)

T: 200 Hhay' bo Heli ungaboba l'hlata () (to Swazi and Matega) ha'n'hlale phansi nin' [No-no Heli don't be mischievous () (to Swazi and Matega) you go and sit down]

(Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 113.)

The teacher identifies the fact that Heli got a thorough beating from her grandfather because she disobeyed him by running away and sleeping at a tenant's. Heli had, in fact, run away in order to escape another beating. In this particular research setting adults beat children as a way of helping them to mend their bad ways and to learn to obey their elders. They assume that such beatings will in turn make children grow up to be responsible adults who know how to raise their own children. The same practice

comes across as child abuse when seen from the perspective of the 'centre' of the world system (Blommaert et al, 2006).

The teachers adopted the regulative practices which I have discussed in this section as a necessary means to ensure that children focused on and successfully learned the material that they were in the classrooms to learn in the first instance. I discuss the specific pedagogic practices which the regulative practices discussed above were both integral to and constitutive of (Freebody & Freiberg, 2008) in sections 5.3 and 5.4 below. I turn my focus in the next section to chanting as the principal way in which children learned how to read in their respective classrooms.

5.3 Learning to read as various forms of chanting

In this section I analyse instances of children's teacher-sanctioned classroom-based reading. I argue that the kind of reading that took place in my study classrooms put an exclusive emphasis on saying out individual words. I argue that the chanting prepared children to crack the phonological code, a focus that was sufficient for children to succeed to varying degrees in their classrooms. However, the same practice was clearly not optimal for developing children's ability to construct meaning in ways that would make them successful readers in their further schooling and beyond, as I describe more fully below. There were four distinct but related types of classroom reading, namely, the class reciting collectively, secondly, an individual child reciting for the whole class, thirdly, an individual child reading for the teacher while other children waited their turn, and, lastly, an individual child randomly picked by the teacher to read to the whole class. I discuss each category of reading in turn below. Due to space constraints I show one typical lesson per child.

5.3.1 Reciting as a whole class: conforming to the group collective

Group chanting was the dominant mode of learning in my research classrooms. Group chanting constructed each child as a performing member of an ensemble. The teachers measured children's learning through their ability to participate in the ensemble. In the following excerpt, for instance, Heli and classmates chanted in unison the number of members in a given set:

The children had just finished an exercise in which individuals volunteered to write a digit that the teacher had assigned between 1 and 5. The teacher then first drew two sets on the board, explained that these were sets and that in the one set there were two members. She went on to ask individual volunteers to say how many members were in the other set. Each time a child answered correctly, the teacher either repeated the response for the class to say in unison after her, or simply asked them to say it again:

T:	324	HANDS UP[106] /./ HOW MANY MEMBERS ARE IN THIS SET?
PP:	325	(hands are raised)
T:	326	YES SALIWE
SAL:	327	This is a set
T:	328	NO HOW MANY MEMBERS ARE THIS SET? (to Phumzile) Yes Phumzile
PHU:	329	There are four members ()…
T:	330	THERE ARE FOUR MEMBERS, GOOD, THERE ARE FOUR MEMBERS LET'S COUNT THEM (points to each member in turn)
PP:	331	ONE-TWO-THREE-FOUR
T:	332	HOW MANY MEMBERS ARE IN THIS SET?
PP:	333	They are…
T:	334	THERE ARE FOUR MEMBERS
PP:	335	(wild roar) THERE-ARE-FOUR-MEMBERS
T:	336	HOW MANY MEMBERS ARE IN THIS SET?
PP:	337	THERE-ARE-FOUR-MEMBERS (even louder)
T:	338	HOW MANY MEMBERS ARE IN THIS SET? (switches to the other set)
PP:	339	THERE-ARE-TWO-MEMBERS
T:	340	HOW MANY MEMBERS ARE IN THIS SET? (the same)
PP:	341	THERE-ARE-TWO-MEMBERS

[106]This was one more of numerous reminders that children first had to raise their hands if they wanted to be considered for a turn to speak in this classroom (see subsection 5.2.1.1.3 above for a full discussion of participant structures in the research classrooms).

(Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 119.)

The essence of the lesson was the children's ability to recognize sets and to count the number of members in each set. The teacher made the children collectively repeat the correct responses to her questions in an effort to help each child remember. If the children could retain and remember the responses from the group chant, they had learned how to tell sets apart.

Fana's Grade One teacher also frequently employed group chanting. In the following excerpt, she conducted an outdoor practical lesson on *in front* and *behind*. Literacy learning in this context involved English language drills as much as coding and decoding of print exercises.

> This was the first lesson I had observed the teacher conduct outside of the classroom. The children took their chairs to a spot by the south fence of the school. Here they laid their chairs down and stood in pairs in a big circle. Then the teacher asked one child in each pair to stand in front, leaving the other behind him/her. The teacher then asked one child in each each pair where he or she was standing relative to her partner or the teacher. If a child failed to state their position correctly, the teacher gave the correct position and all the children repeated it after her. If the child was correct, again the teacher reinforced this by restating it for everyone to say after her:

T: 337 Wandile where are you standing?
WAN: 338 (silence)
T: 339 I AM STANDING BEHIND MY TEACHER
PP: 340 (murmur)…
T: 341 Where are you standing Wandile?
PP: 342 (all join in) I AM STANDING BEHIND MY TEACHER
T: 343 Wandile is standing behind the teacher
PP: 344 Wandile is standing behind the teacher
T: 345 Where is the teacher standing?
PP: 346 (silence)
FAN: 347 The teacher is standing in front [of Wandile

PP: 348 [of Wandile

T: 349 Good /./ the teacher is standing, in [front of

PP: 350 [front of (join in)

(Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 143.)

Like Heli's Grade One teacher, Fana's Grade One teacher also reinforced a child's correct response by repeating it and then making the whole group repeat it after her a number of times. The point was again to model the correct sound and make the whole class say it to make sure all children finally got it from the group rhythm. A slight variation was that the chanted words described children's own actions.

In Sebe's preschool classroom group chanting occurred regularly alongside questions directed to individuals. In this excerpt the teacher gave a lesson on wild-life conservation:

> In this colouring lesson on wild-life conservation Sebe's teacher conducted a whole class question-and-answer session involving her posting a picture card or holding up a stuffed animal and Sebe and her 14 other graduating classmates chorusing its name. Before that, however, the teacher led the children in a choral refrain:

T: 231 WALKING THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

PP: 232 WALKING-THROUGH-THE-WILDERNESS (they chorus in usual slow dirge-like fashion, sound out each word distinctly)

T: 233 WHAT CAN I SEE?

PP: 234 WHAT-CAN-I-SEE? (in similar fashion)

T: 235 I CAN SEE A MONKEY

PP: 236 I-CAN-SEE-A-MONKEY

T: 237 LAUGHING AT ME AND ( ) A TREE

PP: 238 LAUGHING-AT-ME-AND-( )-A-TREE

T: 239 WALKING THROUGH MLILWANE

PP: 240 WALKING-THROUGH-MLILWANE

T: 241 WHAT CAN I SEE?

PP: 242 WHAT-CAN-I-SEE?

T: 243 I CAN SEE A ZEBRA

PP: 244 I-CAN-SEE-A-ZEBRA

T: 245 LOOKING AT ME AND ( ) A TREE

PP: 246 LOOKING-AT-ME-AND-( )-A-TREE…(etc.)

Then the question-and-answer followed:

T: 263 What is this? (holds up toy model lion from among others in a big plastic dish)

SEBE: 264 L'BHUBES' [IT'S A LION] (Sebe's voice stands out, as it usually does, in the vernacular)

P: 265 BHUBES'…[A LION] (hesitant, in vernacular, almost alongside Sebe)

GIRL: 267 IT'S A L-I-O-N (loud and confident)

P: 268 LI-ON…

T: 269 THIS IS A…

PP: 270 L-I-O-N (in slow dirge-like fashion)

(Fieldwork Log – Sebe, page 25.)

The teacher must have been recalling or recreating the refrain (lines 231 - 245) because she certainly was not reading it from anywhere. Through the group-chanted refrain the teacher set the tone for the mode the rest of the lesson was to take. The refrain also set the frame for the children to learn as a collective unit. There was, indeed, generally a lot of reciting in the research preschools. Reciting included the rhymes, memory verses, songs, etc., that teachers made children memorize and say off by heart. This session was therefore not different. I noted, however, that, apart from the absence of either a drawing, text, or action, which grounded the chanting in the earlier excerpts that I examined, there was no difference between the reciting in Grade One and preschool. In all cases the point was clearly to memorize as a group in order to learn how to say a target sound.

5.3.2 Individual reciting to the class: individual assessment of group-learned chanting

Sometimes chanting took the form of individual children being called upon to recite as the whole class watched and listened. The point of individual performance was to assess individual children's mastery or lack thereof of group-learned chants. In Heli's Grade One class reciting as an individual public performance was a regular activity, as this excerpt illustrates:

> The teacher had spent quite some time asking children about Ascension Day[107]. She then announced that she needed individual volunteers to count out loud up to 10 to the class, making sure that they used their fingers as they called out each digit. Heli's hand was, as usual, not raised when the teacher called upon her to count. Heli had similar difficulty counting out loud from 1 to 10 on her fingers. This was despite the fact that she had heard other children do so before her:

T:	150	HHA! Very good MABALEKA (to class) N'YAMUVA? [DID YOU HEAR HIM?] (to another kid) YES
KID:	151	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 (claps)
T:	152	VERY GOOD VERY GOOD, (to another kid) YES MOTSA LAPHO [YES MOTSA OVER THERE]
MOT:	153	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 (claps)
T:	154	YES HEL' ECELEN' KWAKHE [YES HELI NEXT TO HIM] (Heli's turn again)
PP:	155	(giggle)
HELI:	156	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9 (claps, frowns)
PP:	157	(excited hullabaloo, giggle)…
HELI:	158	10 (claps again, very tentatively now)
T:	159	Way'dibha [You blew it]
PP:	160	(even wilder hullabaloo)
		(Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 70.)

[107]This was Tuesday, the first day of school since the Easter break which had started on Friday the previous week.

This was one typical example of Heli's participation in activities where she was asked to perform for her peers and the teacher in class. It was not hard to tell that Heli, unlike most of her much younger classmates, had challenges related to her lack of preschool experience which had prepared other children in her class for this kind of reciting in school. A notable feature of such solo performances was the involvement of the other children as not just quiet spectators but active participants through murmurs or giggles when the performance veered from the norm, for instance. The teacher's "DID YOU HEAR HIM?" (line 150) remark can be interpreted as her direct invitation to the class to participate in assessing individual performance. Assessment in this (and a previous) lesson emphasized the individual's ability to coordinate the sound uttered with appropriate body movement (i.e., each word denoted a body part). The involvement of the other children in assessing individual performance reaffirmed that the individual remained responsible to the entire group for demonstrating learning through acceptable participation procedures. There was a definite pattern in this teacher's handling of her lessons in this classroom; she first made the whole class recite the material she was teaching before making individuals recite for the class. The teacher expected individual children to learn how to say things in unison which they would then say out on their own while the class listened. As the excerpt shows, however, children like Heli still had not quite got it, despite having heard this chant a number of times before.

Teacher-led collective reciting or chanting like the one described in the excerpts above can be positively and effectively applied when the purpose is reciting poems, rhymes, songs, as was the case in my research preschools. It can facilitate children's learning from and sustaining each other in the learning because those who already know distribute the knowledge of the sequence to new members of the group (Prinsloo and Stein, 2003). It has been observed, for instance, that:

> Reciting with others, often in rituals with predictable patterns and melodies, provides a scaffold that enables children to participate as competent people in collaborative literacy events. They can actively engage with members of their communities around significant texts at a time when their [own] literacy skills are just developing (Volk and de Acosta, 2001: 208).

In all the excerpts above, the teachers used group chanting to ensure that children with different levels of exposure to classroom-like behaviour all eventually knew how to behave in ways that would help them succeed in class. Most of the children would develop the ability to recognize and say out individual words and numbers and to recognize numbers as well as count from 1 to 10 and subsequently pass their end of year examinations. However, the benefits of such reciting are very limited if it is the primary or even exclusive mode of teaching reading, as was the case in my research setting. Recognition of individual words and sequences of utterances in this way directs children to engage with texts as sites for performed recollection, rather than as sites for thought, creativity, interpretation and meaning-making.

5.3.3 Reading for the teacher

Sometimes teachers made individual children read to them. This kind of reading took two forms; namely, reading at the teacher's table and reading at the child's desk while the teacher stood close by and monitored the reading.

Reading at the teacher's table was a common feature only in Musa's Grade Nought classroom. In the following excerpt Musa's reading of an illustrated story had an exclusive phonological focus with no noticeable attention to meaning or storyline:

> When it was Musa's turn to read to/with his Grade Nought teacher in class, I turned my audiotape recorder on, turned to face them, opened the clipboard on my lap, and had my pencil ready to record striking observations. Seeing my manoeuvres, the teacher – who held the book for Musa - moved Musa toward me (they faced each other just across from me now, so close I could see some of the words, though I'm not sure how many pages Musa read in the end, I thought about five pages of typically scanty text). The whole crowd approached us and some even attempted to touch the audiotape recorder. The teacher and I silently waved them all away, as the reading commenced:

T: 1 Go and stand over there and read for me, I want to hear you

		nicely (pulls Musa to stand just across from me, points to each word for him with a pen)
MUSA:	2	(reads) We, like…
T:	3	Wait, wait! (stops him)
MUSA:	4	(silence)
T:	5	Who (pauses for Musa to read the next word she points pen to)
MUSA:	6	Who, will /../ (long pause; scans pictures with his eyes)
T:	7	come
MUSA:	8	come, out to, to, play /../ (long pause)
T:	10	(reads) with (lets Musa take over)
MUSA:	11	with, us? Said, said Anne and Adam. (silence)
T:	15	This (stops) This is (lets Musa continue)
MUSA:	16	great, Ellen, not (stops)
T:	17	or
MUSA:	18	or, said Mum (interrupted by noise, then reads on) This is great, said Adam. N, not for me, said Adam. Did
T:	21	(reads) Down
MUSA:	22	Down we go, said Ellen. Look au (stops)
T:	23	(reads) out
MUSA:	24	(carries on) out Mum /../ We come, said Adam. Look out Mum (interrupted by noise again, then reads on) They like all s /../ not
T:	27	but
MUSA:	28	or ( ) (he's done)
		Fieldwork Log – Musa, pages 30 – 31.)

This kind of reading where a child read at the teacher's table was exclusive to this classroom, where it was also a regular routine, although usually not for recording purposes, as in this instance. The school stocked a variety of children's readers, which they also took home, to read in turn. Parents signed where children had read, noting areas of difficulty for the teacher's attention. Each child would then read for the teacher before they went out for morning break. It was the only one of the research schools with an organized English reading programme, which involved parents and/or

guardians. From my observations, this was the only school too, which had readers specifically for children's home and classroom use. It was also the school that most aspired to middle-class schooling practices[108].

The teacher focused on the surface features of the text, in a form of 'recognition literacy' (Hasan, 1996). There was no apparent sense of story from either Musa's reading attempts or the teacher's promptings. When I asked the teacher to explain the point behind this kind of reading in an interview with me, she responded thus:

T: 117 OK we do want the child to understand the story. But I think our main aim, because these children are still at the concrete operational stage where they use things as they see them, is not the meaning. We want them to be able to, to sound out the words. Take for example the stories of, the books about Jane and Peter

SIKA: Uh-huh

T: 118 One child may not even be able read the word you see, but {s}/he looks at the picture and and and take what's in the picture and think, like most of the time you find that Peter and Jane are playing, you see that

SIKA: Mm-mm

T: 119 What is the child looking at? {S}/he is interpreting what's in the picture "They are playing a ball." What what is {s}/he looking at? The picture, so {s}/he takes what's happening in the picture to mean what is written on the page /./ you see the child thinks. I it is not a matter of the teacher just wanting the child to know what "come" means, "Peter is playing" what does that mean? So um, most of the the time you find that the child isn't isn't concentrating on the words as such. {S}/he focuses on the picture and takes what's in the picture and convert it to the text, you you understand that?

SIKA: Mm-mm

T: 120 So in that situation you just have to, the children should should just

[108]Middle class practices in the context of this study included the provision of class readers, children's constant interaction with print, the direct involvement of parents in children's reading via the checking of children's reading and the signing of reading journals, etc.

ignore the words /./ not really understand what they mean, they are going to understand the the words <u>through</u> the pictures

SIKA: Mm-mm

T: 121 That when you say “They are playing” oh here s/he is indeed kicking /./ which means to play means to kick {in this context} /./ what? The ball /./ the ball is that round thing /./ you understand? (Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 162.)

As far as Musa’s teacher was concerned, children’s reading developed through stages of maturity (in a loosely Piagetian fashion). At the concrete operational stage children focused more on the illustrations for support or understanding. This is why the teacher wanted to make sure that the children could sound out the words and pick up the meaning from the pictures as they went along. Hers was not exactly a phonics-first approach because it was not a case of developing letter-sound relations before attending to meaning. Instead, she taught the sounds of individual words and let the child work out the meaning of the text from his or her interaction with the illustrations. In other words, sounding out the words complemented the illustrations in facilitating the child’s construction of textual meaning.

Indeed Musa sometimes stole a glance at the pictures when he encountered a difficult word (lines 6 - 8). However, it was difficult to tell both if such glances helped his reading of the words and if they enhanced his understanding of the story. There was no indication at any point of the reading that the teacher checked for understanding either. The reading also contrasted in significant ways with the interactive and expressive way in which Musa read with classmates off-task in the classroom. When they read independently in the classroom, Musa and peers transported meaning-making material from diverse intertextual resources, resulting in the complete appropriation of the story at hand. During such reading, the meanings of story pictures extended beyond the story text to include characters Musa and peers had encountered in their watching of TV, in particular. The kind of literacy that was normative in the classroom, in contrast, was one which did not take account of children’s out-of-school reading tendencies and abilities. Children sounded out the text on the page in class and perhaps made sense of the illustrations, in passing, because this is what counted

as reading in this particular setting. The multimodal, multi-semiotic resources at hand were hardly drawn on, while the focus was on decoding text items one by one, with almost no attention to sense-making, meaning-making or depth of reading.

When children read individually in Sebe's Grade One class, it was often at the individual child's desk where the child read the word the teacher pointed to with either a finger or a cane or a metre stick. The teacher would move from one seated child to the next for this purpose. In the next excerpt the teacher had made a lengthy stop at Sebe's desk to listen to and watch Sebe read:

> The teacher had already told the children to take out their SiSwati textbooks and have them open in front of them when I entered the room. Sebe, next to whom I sat in the middle of the room, had hers open where there were *la le li lo lu*, other *l+vowel* combinations and words. The teacher made her first stop here and immediately pointed to text for Sebe to read:

T:	6	Ng'ban' lon'? [What word is this?]
SEB:	7	() (individual children can be heard reading "*la*" "*le*", etc., in the background)
T:	8	Lona-ke? [And this one?]
SEB:	11	Ng' *la* [It's *la*]
T:	12	Lona-ke? [And this then?]
SEB:	13	*le*
T:	14	Lona-ke? [And this?]
SEB:	15	*li*
T:	16	( )
PP:	17	(individuals can still be heard vaguely reading aloud/chanting in the background)
T:	18	*L-a-l-a*
SEB:	19	*L-a-l-a* /./ *l-a-l-a*
T:	20	Mm-hh…
PP:	21	(murmur)
T:	22	Lona-ke? [And this one?]
SEB:	23	(silence)

T: 24 K'yafanana naloku naloku naloku… /./ ng'ban'? [It's the same as this and this and this /./ what is this…?]

PP: 25 (individual reading aloud continues in the background)

SEB: 26 ( )

T: 27 Hhe? [Huh?] (raises voice slightly)

SEB: 28 (silence)

T: 29 Utsite la ng'bani nang'? [What did you say this was here?]

SEB: 30 (very low mumble)

T: 31 Lona-ke? [And this?]

SEB: 32 *le*

(Fieldwork Log – Sebe, page 159.)

The focus of this reading was clearly still the child's ability to sound out text. In both this and the previous excerpt there was apparently no attention to meaning or continuity of message as the teachers led children in an episodic sounding out of individual words.

5.3.4 Individual reading to the class

Another instruction practice involved a child being chosen by the teacher to step up to the front to read out the characters that the teacher had written on the board. The teacher would point to them with a metre stick, as this excerpt illustrates:

> I had meant to catch up with Heli and classmates outside at midday break, but the teacher told me that the children would not be going out as food wasn't yet ready. So I stayed in class to observe an *ad hoc* lesson on *sa se si so su*. The teacher first wrote *sa se si so su* on the chalkboard, asked the class to say what these characters were, and then asked children to raise hands for her to pick individuals to read out the phonic fragments that she pointed out with a metre stick. The teacher made a point of also picking children whose hands were not raised. Heli was one of them in this instance:

T: 135 SITSI SA SE BESES'TSI BAN'? [WE SAY SA SE AND THEN SAY WHAT?] (accompanied by thud of stick as T points to characters in turn on board)

HELI:	136	(silence)
T:	137	YE HELI USACABANGA LE: LABOW'HLALA KHON' EMAHLABATSINI, BEN'DLALA? [HEY HELI YOU ARE STILL THINKING ABOUT WHERE YOU WERE STAYING AT MAHLABATSINI, WERE YOU PLAYING?]
HELI:	138	( )
T:	139	HE? [HUH?]
HELI:	140	(barely audible)
T:	141	HE? [HUH?]
HELI:	142	( )
T:	143	SITSI SA SE BESE S'TSINI? (to class) CLASS [WE SAY SA SE AND THEN SAY WHAT (to class) CLASS
PP:	144	(roar) SI:: SO:: SU:: (as T points to each in turn)
T:	145	S'CALE KE YES [START OVER YES]
PP:	146	(roar) SA:: SE:: SI:: SO:: SU::
T:	147	S'FUNDZELE KE HELI K'TSIWAN'? [READ FOR US THEN HELI WHAT DO WE SAY?] (starts to point to characters on chalkboard)
HELI:	148	(much louder) SA (silence) SE (silence)
PP:	149	(hiss very quietly) si si si…
T:	150	SOL' AWUVA NJE LABA NGES'KHATS' BAKHULUMA AW'LALELE KE S'TOPHINDZA S'CALE ( ) ANG'FUNI K'CABANA NAWE YE HELI, ULALELE NJE K'TSI BATSIN' (to class) AS'FUNDZ' [YOU STILL JUST DON'T HEAR WHEN THEY TALK NOW YOU LISTEN SO WE CAN START ALL OVER ( ) I DON'T WANNA QUARREL WITH YOU HELI, YOU JUST LISTEN TO WHAT THEY SAY (to class) LET'S READ] (points on board)
PP:	151	(roar) SA:: SE:: SI:: SO:: SU:
		(Fieldwork Log – Heli, pages 106 -107.)

Just like the chanting in earlier excerpts, Heli had to say out the text on the board that she had learnt by way of group-chanting (line 150), although she was now reading

alone to the teacher. The teacher encouraged chanting of visible text because she believed that children eventually chanted with understanding if they saw the text they were chanting, as she explains in this excerpt:

> The teacher had been asking different individuals to say out various *l*+vowel sound combinations. She was now concluding the lesson, commenting on the class's performance, specifically assessing the effectiveness of the children's collective chanting of text that she had written on the board for them to see:

T: 560 (to a child who just successfully sounded out *la le li lo lu*) VERY GOOD /./ SIT DOWN /./ NGUMSHON'SA LANGA /./ (back to class) () KUTSI KUB'AKUKHO LOKU LABANYENTI NGABE KABATI /./ KUTSI NJE *L* LAW'MHLANGAN'SE NA *A* NGU *LA*, *L* LAW'MHLANGAN'SE NA *E* [NGU *LE* [(to a child who just successfully sounded out *la le li lo lu*) GOOD /./ SIT DOWN /./ IT TAKES YOU SO LONG /./ (back to class) () THAT IF WE DIDN'T HAVE THIS MANY OF YOU WOULDN'T KNOW /./ THAT WHEN YOU COMBINE *L* WITH *A* IT BECOMES *LA*, AND WHEN YOU COMBINE *L* WITH *E* [IT BECOMES *LE*]

PP: 561 [NGU *LE* [IT'S *LE*]

T: 562 *L* NAW'MHLANGAN'SE NA *I* NGU *LI* /./ LABANYE NJE BA BAFUNA KUTOTSATSISA *LA*, KUKAHLE KONA NGOBA BAYAFUNDZA KODVWA NJE LENTFO ISENG'KANGENI LAKUBO ENGCODVWEN', KUTSI UMAKUNJE KUNJE MAKUNJE KUNJE [THAT WHEN YOU COMBINE *L* AND *I* IT BECOMES *LI* /./ SOME OF YOU JUST LOOK FOR CLUES HERE ON THE BOARD, THAT'S FINE BECAUSE YOU ARE LEARNING BUT THIS WHOLE CONCEPT STILL HASN'T BEEN INTERNALIZED, THAT IF IT'S THIS IT'S THIS IF IT'S THIS IT'S THIS]…

(Fieldwork Log – Sebe, pages 173 – 174.)

The teacher's valorising of group chanting is that it props up or scaffolds individual performance (line 562). The writing on the board helps those who still have not quite got the collective rhythm to associate the sound they hear and say with the letter combinations; the same way that Musa's Grade Nought teacher above thought story pictures aided understanding. The teacher believed that the children who first struggled and needed group support, subsequently demonstrated successful internalization of the material by reciting it off by heart; i.e., without seeing the words or hearing them from others.

The teacher's explanation in this excerpt helped me to put her characterization of Heli's counting as merely "…singing that song…"[109] in an earlier interview with me into its proper perspective. When she made this observation, I first perceived her to be contradicting herself and in fact being critical of her own encouragement of chanting in her reading lessons. From the explanation in the excerpt, however, the teacher was simply pointing out that at that particular moment Heli, who had not yet mastered the counting sequence, was "singing" along until such time that she could recite the numbers in the appropriate order unassisted. This analysis gives rise to the need to answer the question: What is print for in this setting? In this particular setting teachers set up children to be able to recognize print and say out the sounds they represent in order to satisfy the teacher that learning had taken place. Children who demonstrated that level of competence will be successful in these classrooms.

However, successful letter-sound recognition is not necessarily all that the children in such a relatively low-print environment would need in order to develop print awareness (Dyson, 1989, 1993, 1997; Fereiro, 1984; Kress, 1997; Stein & Slonimsky, 2001). For instance, the children might recognize and sound out given words but not have a clear idea of what print is for and how it links to children's drawing or other ways of making meaning (e.g., the range of out-of-school language resources discussed in chapter four above). Reading for coding has been identified as such a narrow channel of literacy that it offers children a minimal and reductive view of the purposes and potential of literacy, stifles children's own meaning-making potential, and transforms them into uncritical readers of otherwise inherently critical text

[109]See Appendix A (pages 257-258) & Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 96.

(Cairney & Ashton, 2002). It also reduces children to meaning-making novices in that it prevents them from making connections between the text they read and their real-life experiences. In other words, it prevents the meeting of worlds and minds in the classroom (Bakhtin, 1994). Next, I focus on children's writing as the copying of spelling of individual words.

5.4 Writing: the copying and reproduction of single words

In this section I focus on the dominant form of writing in which children engaged in the research classrooms. Children's writing in my research classrooms involved drill in the correct reproduction of individual words. There were two dominant forms of such writing; namely, copying the teacher's writing and, secondly, spelling exercises. I argue that though such writing was enough for children to satisfy the assessment requirements of their teachers, it did not promote the development of composing or interpreting abilities that children's later learning would demand.

5.4.1 Copying the teacher's writing: modelling correct word forms

When children copied the teacher's writing the idea was to model the correct word forms for children to write, advancing their literacy learning from the word recognition discussed earlier to actually reproducing familiar words in writing. To this end, the children in Musa's Grade Nought class practised writing three-letter words regularly[110]. In the excerpt that follows, Musa and classmates individually volunteered to write a three-letter word called out by the teacher. Notably, all of the volunteers copied their respective words off charts displayed on the classroom walls to the left and right (east and west) of the chalkboard:

> As soon as the N2 teacher[111] entered room she asked volunteers to come and write any 3-letter word on the chalkboard in turn. I heard a child ask, "Are you our teacher now?" Musa first wrote *caw* which he changed to *cow*, turning to look it up on the west wall (by the door), after the teacher had asked, "Is that

[110]Spelling drills, another regular writing activity (see subsection 5.4.2 immediately below), often tested children's ability to write these three-letter words without seeing them, a sign that they had mastered them.

[111]N2 is for Nursery Two. The substantive Grade Nought teacher was away on this day.

> how we write *cow*?" Next he wrote *car*, took a seat, and then asked to go out. Phiwe wrote *fox* and *hen*, and made no attempt to hide the fact that she copied them both off the east wall to her immediate left, despite shouts of "You're copying!" from her classmates. Musa shouted, "Teacher, please me!" to signal that he wanted another turn (this time to write the three-letter words picked and sounded out by the teacher. He sniffed "Mf!" and swiftly jerked his body, and faced the front when the teacher ignored his request. When he did eventually get a turn to write *elephant*, he put down *e,* waited and turned to look it up on an illustrated chart to his left before writing each of the rest of the letters successfully.
> (Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 13.)

First the children had to think up their own three-letter words. Then the teacher called out her own choice of three-letter word for children to write. The emphasis of the exercise was thus to check children's retention and recognition of three-letter words. The three-letter words were often the same that the children called out in their phonics sessions. Each child could be heard repeatedly saying out the letter sequence of the three-letter word he or she was attempting to write, which suggested that children used their phonics drills to support their writing. Teachers who otherwise forbade children from copying from each other notably allowed children to copy off the wall displays. It was therefore acceptable for children to copy from the teacher's writing and displays the same thing that they could not copy from their classmates. Children were assumed to learn, not from and with their peers at all, but only from the teachers who apparently had the knowledge and authority to model the correct word forms for children to copy. Musa had many other copying activities in Grade Nought.

Fana also engaged in a lot of copying in his preschool class, as this excerpt shows:

> When I settled by Fana's side he had written numbers 1-19 on the flipside of an A-4. He told me he had copied them directly off the front wall when I asked how he had done it. I sat and tried to copy his writing as close to his original as possible to preserve his number formation in my notes. He had encoded every number impeccably but for his 8, which looked like a bean seed

or a poorly formed, overturned uppercase *B*. This is despite the fact that he had formed the 8 of his 18 perfectly (apparently by adjoining two 0s one on top of the other. Fana took his finished product to the teacher and then reported back to his friends and to me:

FAN: 1 Utse Teacher "Good", wase utsi angibhale ligama lami [Teacher said "Good", then she said I should write my name]

The teacher wrote Fana's name which Fana then sat and copied, trying to place each of his letters below the teacher's, one at a time. He wrote *f-u-n-* and a letter that looked like *-h* or *-b*. He realized that it did not match the teacher's *e*. So he stuck his right index finger in his mouth, dampened it with saliva, withdrew and used it to rub the 'undesired' form. But this space was now blotted (darkened), so he skipped it before he added *e-k-a* to complete his first name.
(Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 18.)

Once Fana had finished writing his first name, he needed to add his surname before he could go out for midmorning break. So he lifted his head and asked me:

FAN: 2 Bese kulandzelani, Teacher? [Then what next, Teacher?]
SIKA: (after a quick look down his writing) Sibongo [Surname]

FAN: 3 (puts down *m* without hesitation) Bese? [Then what?]
SIKA: *a*
FAN: 4 (looks up on north wall next to us and writes it) Bese? [Then what?]
SIKA: *n* (I underline the one in the 1st name the teacher wrote for him)
FAN: 5 (puts it down) Bese? [Then what?]
SIKA: *y*
FAN: 6 (looks up, says out alphabet on wall till he comes to *y*) Lo orange? [The orange one? (*y* is indeed coloured orange)
SIKA: (I nod agreement)
FAN: 7 (starts to write it down) Kuba ngu *z* emva kwa *y*? [Is it *z* after *y*?]

SIKA: Yeah

FAN: 8 (completes *y*) Bese? [What next?]

SIKA: *i*

FAN: 9 (pauses, pulls face) Lokunelichashata? [You mean the one with a dot?

SIKA: (I nod)

FAN: 10 (puts it down)

SIKA: *k* (without waiting for Fana to ask)

FAN: 11 (checks *k* on board before he writes it)

SIKA: *a* (again without waiting for question)

FAN: 12 (writes it immediately, joins the other children to go out and eat and play)

(Fieldwork Log – Fana, pages 18 – 19.)

Fana was certainly under pressure to finish his official writing task so that he could join his classmates for midmorning break outside. However, this exercise's exclusive emphasis on copying correct forms even if these made no sense to children also encouraged children to just seek to quickly get things right so that they could then engage in more interesting activities. As I illustrate under subsection 5.4.2 immediately below, Fana was to continue this tendency to furtively and quickly solicit correct written forms from me and his peers in Grade One the following year. Children were increasingly learning that it was not worth it struggling through the arduous trial-and-error process of achieving correct forms if their teachers were satisfied with seeing the correct forms irrespective of how children achieved them in the first place.

Fana had engaged in similar copying exactly a week earlier. The principle, i.e., to emulate the teacher's modelled writing, remained the same. Just like Musa above therefore, Fana also copied off his teacher's writing and from the wall displays. The teacher's writing and wall displays modelled the correct letter forms for children to learn to write from. When it came to copying therefore, Musa and Fana's teachers used wall displays as teaching aids which propped up children's writing of individual words (see subsection 5.2.1.1.1 earlier for a detailed discussion of the use of wall charts).

In Heli's Grade One class children also engaged in a lot of copying of the teacher's writing. In the following excerpt, Heli and classmates copied the teacher's writing of *ba be bi bo bu*:

> This was to be my first close observation of Heli's participation in class. It was unrecorded as I had not started using the audiotape recorder for the first few encounters (though I always carried it). The teacher first wrote *a e i o u* on the chalkboard, asked individuals to identify individual vowels, made the class chorus all the vowels, before individuals read them aloud. Later on, the teacher assigned individual children to write *u* and *e* in their workbooks. The teacher then switched focus to *ba be bi bo bu*, which she wrote in vertical order on the board. The teacher started by explaining that when *b*, which she pronounced as /bu:/ combines with *a*, which she pronounced as /*a*:/, they become *ba*, which she pronounced as /*ba*:/. Then it was writing time again in individual workbooks. "Sicala emgceni lobovu" [We start on the red {margin} line], announced the teacher after cursorily scanning through a number of workbooks with her eyes. Heli opened the middle of a lined small workbook with really narrow line spacing. "Lo *b* unesisu lesikhulu, singembili hhayi ngemuva – akusito tibunu" [The *b* has a big tummy, it's in front not behind – it's not buttocks], observed the teacher again after another glance at certain pupils' workbooks up front. The teacher came round to look in Heli's workbook. After looking at Heli's attempt, the teacher wrote *ba be bi bo bu* in red at the top of Heli's page. Heli's own attempt looked like *bad* but the protruding tip of the *b* was a lot shorter than that of the *d*. Heli kept erasing her attempted *e*, which actually nearly resembled a schwa (∂) below the teacher's. The teacher told her to write directly below her own writing. The teacher even held Heli's hand in hers and dragged it to produce *ba be bi bo bu* with the teacher's red pen. Then Heli attempted *b*s with the teacher's help. Left to write on her own, Heli's attempted *b*s clustered toward the right margin (she didn't write directly under the teacher's examples then). Then she erased her attempts and produced a line of *b*s which increasingly resembled *p*s. The teacher held her hand again, dragged it to produce a proper *b*. The teacher left

> Heli to try again on her own. Heli finally got her *b*s right (she brought her work to me on the teacher's advice).
> (Fieldwork Log – Heli, page 5.)

It is fair to point out that for Heli and all the children who had had no preschool experience, properly forming letters was an unfamiliar task. Such children needed the teacher's close attention. However, the teacher could not give them all the close assistance they required because there were simply far too many children for her attention anyway. Heli got the teacher's attention in this instance because of her status as my research child. Heli had engaged in similar copying six days earlier, involving the digits 4 and 5. It was as though children first had to learn how to write the letters and numerals before they could learn how to use them, in much the same way as they learned to sound out words before they learned how to write and use them.

Sebe copied her teacher's writing of her name from the top of her worksheet or almost on a daily basis. She still could not properly copy out her teacher's writing of her name by the time she graduated from preschool.

5.4.2 Spelling drill: assessing individual mastery of correct word forms

Spelling drill was by far the most common writing activity in my research classrooms. In Musa's Grade Nought class, for instance, it took the form of competition to finish first and score higher than others, as this excerpt shows:

> The teacher had just finished reading the children the "Goldilocks" story in direct response to their request for her to *tell* it to them. The teacher assigned Musa to distribute spelling books. Musa then got a pencil and a rubber from Phiwe, wrote numbers 1-9, actually gave the 9 a *p* form and only added 10 much later down the left margin. He wrote *man*, *wax*, *mat*, *fan*, *ham*, *bam* for *dam* (he probably didn't hear this correctly or was unsure of the *b-d* difference), *bag*, *hat*, and *pen* as the teacher called them out in turn. He then took his work to the teacher, and scored 9 out of 10 and missed out on the teacher's routine "Clap hands for … for getting 10/10" accolade. Musa

actually checked the previous page of his spelling book for the correct spelling of each word he wrote.
(Fieldwork Log – Musa, page 16.)

The children's motivation for spelling contests was the prospect of earning the teacher's praise for the top scorer. Spelling contests tested children's ability to remember and reproduce individual words without seeing them. Musa copied his because he would still get the teacher's sought-after praise for getting the correct spelling despite having copied. Children had come to realize that getting things right was more important than how it happened. Musa's next spelling session was at the request of one of his classmates.

Most children had really taken to the spelling drills. These children included Musa for whom spelling represented another opportunity to outscore classmates, get the teacher's praise, and their peers' applause. The popularity of spelling transcended the boundaries of the classroom. For instance, when Musa got opportunity to write at home, he went for the spelling of three-letter words[112].

Spelling callout was a popular activity in Fana's Grade One class too. The following excerpt contains the only one I witnessed during my observation of just a few lessons toward the end of the fieldwork:

The class was as usual full of activity today. The teacher wrote and underlined first Grade One[C] (sic) in the top left corner of the board and then 9 April 2003 in the opposite corner. Each child had a batch of unlined white A5 piece of paper on one of which they put numbers 1-12. After a series of different written activities, children were grouped into five. Each group faced its own spelling words for individuals to write on their respective pieces of paper:

T: 1 Le group lebey'la [The group that was here] (pointing where Fana's

[112]See Fieldwork Log – Musa, pages 31 – 33 (02/12/02) for an instance of home-based spelling callout in which Musa asked big brother Thabo to call out three-letter words for him to write without seeing.

group initially sat) *bala* [write *bala*].

FAN: 2 (to me) Ye Teacher, ng'muphi *bala*? [Hey Teacher which word is *bala*?] (lowered voice).

SIKA: (I don't know what to do) Ek'caleni [The one at the beginning] (uneasy whisper, all the spelling words are in the children's workbooks open in front of the groups)

T: 3 (approaches, looks down at Fana's writing)

F: 4 (writes *bala* correctly, confirms with me, always covers his writing with his left hand, finds me busy writing when he wants to ask how to write other words and turns to his friend instead)

(Fieldwork Log – Fana, page 134.)[113]

Once more, though children sat in groups, they were not supposed to help each other find the correct words in their workbooks. Fana's desire to get all the words correct saw him secretly seeking assistance from both me and his peers from whom he however hid his own writing. There was, however, evidence that to Fana spelling had come to represent writing in general. For instance, when he chose to write with siblings at home, Fana, like Musa above, opted for spelling.

The only time I witnessed Sebe and cousins use schoolbooks at home, they engaged in spelling[114]. The children said that they were preparing for their end of year exams. Similarly, until the last day of home observation, Heli and cousins had always engaged in spelling, though on the prompting of their grandfather.

Teachers in all the foregoing activities apprenticed children to a form of writing that required them to memorize and retain single words which they would be required to reproduce correctly during assessment. Teachers therefore first modelled the words which children copied and subsequently followed this copying with writing the words without seeing them in spelling exercises. Children consequently adapted to this

[113]I could not stay long enough to observe further lessons because Fana's arrival in Grade One came very near the end of my 12-month observation of him. This spelling was therefore one of very few lessons that I managed to observe.

[114]See also my fieldnote reference to Sebe and cousins' home-based school-like spelling session in chapter 4, subsection 4.2.2.1 above, for example.

restricted channel of writing, e.g., by adopting spelling as their writing activity of choice when they got a rare chance to use conventional writing materials at home. Later in their school careers; however, children will be required to use literacy in more creative, imaginative, and functional ways than simply recalling certain and reproducing individual words. Among the objectives specified in Teacher's Guide of the new International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) textbook, for instance, these learners will be required to write friendly letters where they use contractions such as can't; write notices; write situational compositions; write business letters and letters to newspapers expressing unhappiness about something; write witness or report statements; write notes (including friendly); write memos, CVs; give directions; read critically materials from different sources; distinguish between information, i.e., true, false, or a matter of opinion; use different reading skills for different texts (e.g., skim text for gist and general understanding; scan text for specific information); determine the overall meaning of a text; identify specific details in context; recognize what is explicitly stated and infer what is implied; recognize and interpret discourse markers for improved understanding (such as linking words, punctuation, and graphics) (Hlophe et al, 2006: v-xi). The corresponding SiSwati IGCSE syllabus for junior and senior secondary has similar guidelines (GoS, 2006).

As I showed in chapter four earlier, the children in the study already used language and even literacy in a variety of creative ways off-task in class and during play at home. Some of them even ingeniously appropriated artefacts in their relatively low-print home environments for personal writing and communicational purposes. There was, however, clearly no room for children's off-task resources in official activities. Children were in school to learn what their teachers taught them; not to demonstrate what they already knew from elsewhere. Teachers therefore made no connection between writing in class and children's out-of-school resources, which might have extended children's writing beyond copying and spelling correctly.

It must be noted that teachers transmitted to their students not simply chanting, copying, and spelling in their teaching of literacy. They also transmitted semantic/linguistic resources brought with them from their own textual histories

which they, unlike the children, were free to bring on board and make use of in their teaching of the children. Teachers formulated literacy activities and organized children's participation in terms of regulative practices informed by how they understood the relationship between teacher, child and literacy learning.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter I have shown that teachers adopted regulative and pedagogic practices in the research classrooms which were dictated to them by the need to control and channel the attention of large numbers of potentially exuberant children to the learning of specific reading and writing practices. For example, teachers erected participant structures that facilitated top-down modelling of target word sounds and word forms in a way that made the regulative and pedagogic practices interwoven parts of one instructional purpose. I have also shown that the interwoven nature of the observed regulative and pedagogic practices had the intended effect of children acquiring the level of reading and writing that was required for them to succeed in the literacy learning context of their current classrooms. However, the same literacy became insufficient when one takes account of the wide variety of creative and meaningful social uses to which subsequent schooling and life would demand that children put to use their limited literacy repertoires. Finally, I have also shown that a significant effect of the classroom disciplinary regime was to make children react only to teacher stimuli, which resulted in children not initiating anything on-task. The end result of all this restriction was that children held back and failed to transfer to official literacy activities the same interactive communicative ways in which they used language and literacy off-task in school and during play at home. The disjuncture between children's out-of-school resources and the restricted focus of their literacy learning represented the missing link between relative success in early schooling and literacy applications in later schooling and beyond school.

Chapter 6

Effects of home and school deprivations on children's literacy development: summary and conclusions

6.1 Introduction

In this closing chapter I synthesize findings emerging from my foregoing analysis in chapters four and five and draw conclusions. In examining the findings and drawing conclusions, I consider what the findings reveal about the practical realities of my particular research setting at the level of the classroom and its wider socio-cultural context, which gave rise to the observed regulative and pedagogic practices. I also ask how applicable are propositions from the wider literature in seeking to improve practice in the research classrooms. I first recap the research question that I set out to answer through this study in order to keep it in focus in concluding as to the extent to which I was able to answer it. Finally, I identify the study's limitations, and recommend further action that would advance this kind of research.

The study's major task was to establish empirically the orientations to language, literacy, and communicative practices Swaziland's low-income ESL children in rural and suburban public schools and those in urban and private schools brought to school from home and peer interaction contexts: What were the orientations to language, literacy, and communicative practices that these children brought home and to peer interaction contexts with them from school; and what were the emergent literacy orientations that the same children brought with them to school and to what extent were these drawn on, recognized, or ignored at the level of classroom interactions around literacy and learning?

6.2 Deprivations at home and in school: consequences for children's literacy development and school careers

My ethnographic search for empirical answers to the question above unveiled specific deprivations at the home and school domains of my research children, which

accounted for the development of a localized or sub-elite form of literacy in the peripheral classrooms that I observed. Teachers, who were both products and agents of the localized literacy form drew on their own experiences of it as well as from their conceptualization of what it meant to teach and raise children in their wider Swazi socio-cultural setting. The teachers employed regulative practices that were designed to initiate children into acceptable membership of their classroom and school communities as well as their larger local communities. Adults in my research setting regarded children as inexperienced novices, as evidenced by their smaller sizes and inexperience relative to adults. Children were also regarded as incapable of serious or meaningful physical and intellectual activity on their own. In other words, adults regarded children's activities diminutively as 'play' as opposed to their own serious 'work' (see Dyson, 1985; Kress, 1997; and Thorne, 1993, for similar claims from different contexts). For this reason, adults treated children as acquiescent apprentices who learned everything passively from adults. A one-way, top-down mode of knowledge transmission from adult to child facilitated such learning, in which the child deferred to the adults who also had unquestionable authority to initiate the learning. For instance, in recognition of their different statuses and children's respect for their elders, parents generally did not engage children as conversational equals or partners (for similar findings from other societies, see Heath, 1983; Ochs, 1988). The subordination of child knowledge and initiative to adult authority was the established and widely accepted relationship between adults and children.

Thus when children deferred to their teachers in the classroom context of literacy learning, they did so as a continuation and acknowledgement of a mutually intelligible adult-child relationship. The continuation of such a relationship around the learning of reading and writing in the classroom shows that learner-teacher roles happen not as a detached academic end, but rather as part of and in the service of what teachers and children are doing as a social community whose roots extend to institutionalized relationships outside the immediate micro social context of the classroom. Researchers have previously suggested that it is unhelpful to try and study what goes on in classrooms as though these learning sites existed autonomously and independent from the pressures that their wider society exerts on them (Erickson, 1986; Freebody

and Freiberg, 2008; Heath, 1983; Watson-Gegeo, 1993). Literacy is indeed a located social practice in that it serves the socio-cultural needs of the society, or of groups of people within a society, who put it to use and from which it derives its situated meaning (Barton, 1994, 2001; Street, 1984, 1993). Literacy practice is more than just the acquisition of reading and writing. It is also about how individuals and communities have come to interpret and use these resources in the pursuit of social goals in their daily lives. What people practically do with literacy is a measure of the manner in which they have taken hold of a literacy within in a community or within in a social domain (Besnier, 1993; Volk & de Acosta, 2001). Children held back in my research not because they were ignorant or lacked initiative. They did so in order to signal their acknowledgement of the logistic procedures of participating both in the classroom and beyond. Adults regulated and policed children's adherence to set modes of participation through strict regulative practices including beating into compliance those children who deviated from the norm. When children complied and held back, they were regarded as well-behaved, respectful members of their wider community who were also more likely to do well in their classrooms.

However, when children held back and subordinated their interests, talents, and aspirations to the authority and initiative of adults and teachers, children's communicative repertoires which included creative ways of making language work for them in particular social interactions with their peers (e.g., storytelling, teasing, exaggeration, simulation, wider awareness of their lowly social status and broader politics, improvisation, bending play rules, awareness of limitations, and curiosity) remained invisible to adults in and outside the classroom. This in effect meant that adults had limited firsthand knowledge of children's interests, resources, capacities and limitations. Instead, adults, who controlled the resources that children needed to realize their full potential in institutional domains, assumed both children's ignorance and assumed total control over what they needed to learn, as well as how and when such learning should take place. Adults' lack of awareness of children's resources meant that they could not support or scaffold their further development at home and in school, inadvertently suppressing the optimal development of independent thinking,

creativity, and initiative - abilities that children's subsequent schooling and post-school life challenges would increasingly require them to demonstrate.

Unintended deprivation at home also took the form of lack of parental involvement in children's schoolwork. Parental involvement ordinarily began with the individual family's ability to enrol children in preschool in order to prepare them for school. In the case of single-mother families, the child was further disadvantaged in that the mother often had inadequate resources to provide for her child's educational and other needs. As Polakow (1993) argued with regard to the children that she studied in USA classroom contexts children's deprivation that arises from single motherhood together with socio-economic constraints, puts such children at-risk socially and educationally. The children's disadvantaged backgrounds qualified them for inferior educational tracks. Their teachers, in turn, made little effort to educate children whose 'dysfunctional' families or family pathologies they blamed for the children's educational problems in the first instance. In my study, the child of a single parent who was struggling economically was clearly disadvantage by her lack of preschool and other material deprivations relative to her much younger classmates' preparedness for school-like behaviours such as reciting, writing letters, numbers, and words, and labelling things in English (see chapter 3, subsection 3.3.1 and chapter 5, sections 5.3 and 5.4 for Heli's profile and her wide-ranging literacy difficulties respectively).

Lack of family involvement in children's schoolwork across the children in my research manifested itself in the extent to which parents or guardians did not see a tutoring role for themselves with regard to their children's schooling. Swazi parents generally do not consciously coach their children in school-like behaviour. Whereas parents valued education and wanted their children to succeed in school, the parents in my research located the education of their children in schools where they paid for their children to go and get it. In effect, there was only one literacy (Prinsloo and Bloch, 1998) – the strictly regulated decontextualized chant reading and individual copying or what Vygotsky (1978) aptly described as "dead language", that characterized literacy learning in my research classrooms. Parents did not go out of their way either to model school ways for children to follow (Heath, 1982, 1983) or

even provide materials such as books and educational toys for home use, which are widely believed to foster literacy among the middle-classes of Western societies. As I discussed in chapter one (sections 1.5., 1.6, and 1.7), schooling in Swaziland has been shaped by colonial and post-colonial dynamics. The large differences between everyday language and literacy resources and those of schooling must be seen in this light. It is thus hardly surprising that parents do not feel at ease with helping access the alien resources of schooling, despite their appreciation of the rewards that might flow from school success.

The children in my study grew up in relatively low-print home environments where they utilized what Bomer (2003) described as the unintended affordances of natural artefacts such as twigs and the ground for informal play, reading, and writing purposes. Their added challenge was the absence of ambient literacy at home for them to find reason to initiate and engage in sustained literacy activity out-of-school (Comber, 2003), while at the same time no connection was made between school literacy and children's out-of-school meaning-making practices. There was also little attention in school to what children knew in SiSwati but which they still could not express in English – a language rarely encountered in home settings. In summary, home and school were separate social contexts and served distinct functions in the socialization of children, despite their similar disregard for children's resources.

My findings point to the need for parents and schools to communicate possible points of intersection, should either party perceive a need to collaborate for the benefit of children's literacy. Such two-way communication might deter teachers from demeaning parental involvement. Otherwise, daily life activities in the homes of my research children were not so print-dependent that they would be significantly disrupted without recourse to literacy. For this reason, unless teachers explicitly expressed the need for parents to play a tutoring role, parents had no intrinsic reason to automatically play such a role.

Similar two-way communication between children and teachers would benefit both, more so because the children not only partly knew their limitations, but also

demonstrated curiosity that teachers could take advantage of in their quest to establish precisely where children were at, in terms of individual communicative ability on which to build literacy learning (Clay; 1999; Heath, 1983).

The curious children in my research classrooms would also have benefited from each other's diverse language repertoires, interests, and learning styles had child-child collaboration often complemented individual work (Chittenden et al, 2001). While teachers were compelled to prepare children for the all-important individual end-of-year assessment to determine progression to the next grade, an exclusive individual focus is in sharp contrast with the NLS's "social turn" (Gee, 1998) on which this study draws and according to which success or failure in learning in general and literacy learning in particular cannot be an individual's responsibility because one's society (or, in this case, classroom community) plays a large part in shaping how the individual interacts with and relates to literacy in the first place.

6.3 Limitations of the study

This study was necessarily limited in its focus and restricted by time and resource constraints. As an ethnographic-style enquiry of limited scale and duration the study focused on case studies whose in-depth description and analysis may not be generalizable on every point to the larger early literacy situation in the Swaziland context. However, to return to the point made by Mitchell (1984: 239) which I quoted in chapter three, I have found lots of "telling" evidence of how early childhood literacy works in and out of school in Swaziland contexts. "From this point of view, the search for a 'typical' case for analytical exposition is likely to be less fruitful than the search for a 'telling' case." The study did raise issues that should provoke wider research with a view to understanding and attending to a research area that has not previously received attention in this part of south-east Africa.

6.4 Recommendations

This is the first detailed ethnographic-style study of children's early literacy development in Swaziland. There is a need for more similar studies to be carried out in classrooms elsewhere in the country to facilitate broader in-depth understanding of

what goes on in early childhood literacy settings in the country. There is a need for a thorough-going research approach which seeks to transcend the restricted access of this single-authored study in respect of home-based literacy practices, particularly the lack of parental involvement in their children's schoolwork. For instance, parents could be interviewed more closely about their outlook on children's schoolwork and detailed study of family life, which I found difficult to access, would be most useful. Such further research could also help bring out what parents perceive to be their role in their children's learning of literacy, what they consider to be the strengths and limitations of their current involvement, and what they think schools and teachers could do to assist.

Most teachers are also parents of school going children. Further research is therefore necessary to the extent to which the home environment of teacher parents are more print-rich than the homes of ordinary parents like the ones I studied. The findings of such research could inform ways in which teachers and parents could collaborate to turn print-deficient homes such as the ones in the current study into print-rich environments. It appears, from children's ability to appropriate artefacts in their print-deficient homes for literacy purposes, that a change in the dominant ways of thinking about and seeing all children's home environments and the communicative resources therein might be essential in efforts to bridge the gap between print-deficient and print-rich homes.

Finally, this study has definite implications for teacher training. Further research could seek to establish what teachers really do in response to the actual teaching and learning needs of their literacy classrooms as opposed to theories derived from their training. Teachers in the current study elected to apply methods of teaching literacy that defied both those propagated in the wider literature on children's early literacy development and the Ministry of Education's official policy. Subsequent research needs to establish ways of dovetailing policy to classroom practice for the ultimate benefit of children's literacy development. This recommendation is important in the light of the finding that teachers used alternative teaching methods which, however, still did not build on all children's resources, which remained invisible to them.

Appendix A

Descriptive interviews with four teachers

Schedule (adapted from Chittenden et al, 2001: 17)

Dates: 19/06/03; 26/06/03; 24/06/03; 25/06/03

Time: Untimed (estimated 30+ minutes)

Setting: Grade Four classroom; Grade One classroom; Grade One classroom; Grade One classroom

Data source: Fieldwork Log – Musa (pages 152 - 163); Fieldwork Log – Fana (pages 158 - 175); Fieldwork Log – Sebe (pages 111 - 126); Fieldwork Log – Heli (page 89 - 101)

Recorded by: Sikelela Dlamini

Definition: By descriptive interview I refer to scheduled one-off interviews (at least 30 minutes long) with each focal teacher toward the end of the fieldwork. The interviews offered a means of obtaining the teachers' perceptions of focal children's literacy development, based on the following categories suggested to the teachers:

1. Salient observations (significant observations the teacher has made over time about the child as a learner in general)

2. General behaviour topics
   A. Physical/gestural characteristics
   B. Affective expression
   C. Relationships
   D. Activities
   E. Method of working
   F. Summary of progress in school-related work (other than reading/writing?)

3. Language and reading topics
   A. Listening patterns
   B. Language (speaking)
   C. Language (writing)
   D. General writing patterns
   E. Reading competence, strategies, skills

4. Observation-focused topics/questions (those topics/questions based on my observations which sought the teachers' insight and clarification regarding children's participation in official classroom activities)
   A. Amount of teacher talk relative to child talk
   B. Use of corporal punishment (rationale)
   C. The place of stories/folktales in official literacy learning
   D. The availability and use of classroom wall charts and displays

E. Amount and extent of chant reading
F. Participant structures (rationale for observed rules of participation, e.g., challenging children whose hands are not raised to answer questions)
G. Alternating between SiSwati and English (e.g., teachers freely code-switched while children couldn't)

Useful guidelines

- Teachers' consent to interviewed and audiotaped to be expressly sought and obtained
- Each teacher to see and review these guidelines (where necessary) well ahead of interview
- Teacher to organize observational notes or other records, and collect work samples that are typical or typically revealing of focal child's participation
- Interviewer to prepare a description of the teacher's schedule of instruction during a typical day (based solely on observed sessions), inventory books and other instructional materials available in the room and draw a floor plan to show the (typical) classroom arrangement (e.g., seating)

Appendix B

Child	Age (at start)	Family type	School type	School location	Grades child was observed		Average class size
Musa	7	Both parents	Private	Urban	Grade Nought	Grade 1	18
Fana	5	Both parents	Public	Rural	Preschool	Grade 1	55
Sebe	4	Single mother	Public	Rural	Preschool	Grade 1	50
Heli	9	Single mother	Public	Rural	Grade 1	Grade 2	63

Table showing the type of the schools the children attended, socio-geographic context of school, and demographic details of children and schools.

Appendix C

Name of child	Time spent (hrs)		Data type	
	Home	**School**	**Home**	**School**
Musa	20	17	Observational	Observational
Fana	22	24	Observational	Observational
Sebe	5	6	Observational	Observational
Heli	7	10	Observational	Observational

Table showing distribution of research attention across children and sites and over time, including data gathered, and time spent, in the varied locations, with varied children/families/schools.

Appendix D

Transcribing conventions

/./	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
…	Ellipsis points indicate interrupted utterances
N-O	Capitalized letters or words separated by hyphen indicate that letters or words were spelled aloud by the speaker
No	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 capitalized word or phrase indicate increased volume, e.g., shouting
[	
[	**(**A) single bracket(s) indicate overlapping speech

*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 whose gender I can neither recall nor determine from the tape; otherwise for any of the focal children I use their pseudonyms or their first letters in case of space shortage
T always stands for teacher
SIKA stands for me (Sikelela, the researcher; where there's acute shortage of space I use **S**)
H/T stands for head teacher
KIDS: stands for all other kids at once engaged in something other than focal activity at a given moment irrespective of gender

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