THE NESTED CONTEXTS OF LANGUAGE USE AND LITERACY LEARNING IN A SOUTH AFRICAN FOURTH GRADE CLASS: UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY PRACTICES

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examines language and literacy practices in English as a second language (L2) in a South African 4th grade classroom, and to a lesser extent in the foundation phase grades (grades R-3), where literacy was in the students’ home language, Zulu. Although I was interested in the 4th grade class as a whole, to illuminate my understandings of the students’ practices in this class, I chose six focal students. Through performance assessments in Zulu and English, I examined the focal students’ strengths and weaknesses in these languages. In addition, I tried to gain insights into their home language and literacy practices, and also establish if there were any tensions between these practices and the school language and literacy practices. Throughout the study, I was guided by sociocultural and cognitive-linguistic theories of language and literacy.

I collected data from the focal students—four of which I used to present findings—the 4th grade teacher, the foundation phase teachers, the principal, and the parents/guardians of the focal students. Data collected at the school included observational notes in the 4th grade class and in grades R-2; video recordings in the 4th grade, interviews with the focal students and participating teachers, students’ writing samples, and students’ performances in reading and writing tasks. Data collected in the students’ homes included informal discussions and formal interviews with the parents/guardians. I used a constant comparative method (Straus & Corbin, 1990) to analyze the data.

Findings from the classroom observations in all the grades revealed that the teachers’ instructional practices limited students’ learning of literacy. The classroom data in the 4th grade showed that although some students demomstrated potential agentive learning, there was almost no room for such learning. On the other hand, the data from the performance assessments revealed that despite the students’ differences in their performances in both Zulu and English, they all showed evidence of transfer of skills across the two languages.
However, this cross-linguistic transfer of skills did not get sufficient support as evidenced by the teacher’s interviews and the limited use of bilingual strategies in the classroom. Despite the limiting context of bilingual and biliteracy learning at the school, interviews with the students’ parents/guardians and students about home language and literacy practices showed that the students’ homes provided the students with contexts and opportunities that supported development of bilingualism and biliteracy in complex and flexible ways.

The implication of this study is that to be effective teachers of bilingual and biliterate students, teachers need to be equipped with academic and professional knowledge in L2 and L2 literacy pedagogy. Finally, teachers and researchers should find out about students’ home language and literacy practices and build on these in supporting language and literacy learning of these students.
This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of the late Isabel Mkhize, my dearest Mother, and my siblings: the late Mduduzi, my eldest brother, Thembelihle, Dumezweni, Lungile, Sazi, and Senzo, my nieces and nephews. Nina baseMbo!
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of Problem

In most parts of the world, especially in developed countries, literacy is used as an indicator of how well an education system is serving the nation. This is usually measured through standardized tests at the international, national, and state/provincial levels. Furthermore, in these countries, there is a proliferation of literacy research that documents literacy development, learning, and teaching. By contrast, in African countries there is still a noticeable shortage of literacy research (Paran & Williams, 2007; Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007). However, this situation appears to be slowly changing as indicated by large-scale studies, such as Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality II and III undertaken in 2000 and 2007 respectively across some African countries. Furthermore, within individual African countries some studies have been conducted at the national level (Department of Education, 2006a, 2006b; 2011) and others at the small-scale level, especially by small groups of researchers or individual researchers (Asfaha, Beckman, Kurvers, & Kroon, 2009; Pretorius & Currin, 2010; van Staden, 2011). In addition to the African-based studies, some African countries have participated in large-scale international literacy studies, such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2006).

In general, the above mentioned studies show that students in African countries have low literacy skills. In the PIRLS (2006) study, a study that assessed literacy skills of students in grade 4 in which 40 different countries across the world participated, the two African countries that took part in the study performed poorly (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). Moroccan 4th graders ranked 39, obtaining the mean score of 323 points while South African 4th graders ranked 40, achieving the lowest mean score of 302 points. In both cases the scores were well below the fixed international mean score of 500 points. While one may
argue that the poor performance of African students in the test may have been due to some cultural and linguistic biases of the test, in the case of South Africa one would have expected the students to do better given that the test was translated into 11 South African official languages and most students took the test in their first languages (L1s). A similar pattern is reported in SACMEQ II and III, studies designed to evaluate the quality of basic education in Southern and Eastern African countries (Moloi & Strauss, 2005; Moloi & Chetty, 2010). In these studies the researchers found that in 2005 and 2007, South African 6th graders obtained the mean score of 492.3 and 494.9 points in reading respectively, points that are below the regional mean score of 500 points.

Even more disturbing is the fact that this trend of poor literacy performance still continues. The annual national assessment (ANA) conducted in 2011, the first South African standardized national assessment in reading and numeracy, shows that the national average performance for grade 3 students in literacy is 35% whereas in grade 6 the national average performance in languages stands at 28% (Department of Basic Education, 2011). These results are not different from those obtained from the Systematic Evaluation Reports (Department of Education, 2006a, 2006b) in grade 3 (Foundation Phase), grade 6 (Intermediate Phase), and grade 9 (Senior Phase) respectively. For example, the Systematic Evaluation Report (Department of Education, 2006a) shows that in grade 3 the national average score for reading and writing was 39% and the national average score for listening comprehension was 68%.

As the above studies show, there is a consistent trend—about half of the South African students struggle with reading. However, the fact that the majority of the students struggle to read for meaning is more disturbing (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Moloi & Chetty, 2010). Moloi and Chetty, in their analysis of the SACMEQ III dataset, reported that the national mean score of grade 6 students who could read at grade level, that is, who
could extract meaning and read at higher levels, including interpretive, inferential, analytical, and critical reading, stood at 49.9% in 2000 and 51.7% in 2007. The results from ANA are even more troubling—only 21% of 3rd graders could read for meaning and answer questions that reflect their understanding (Department of Education, 2011). Evidently, these studies show that South African students struggle with higher-order reading skills, the very skills they need for academic achievement and for developing into critical citizens.

As troublesome as the results in the above studies are, it would be misleading to treat South African students as a monolithic group. The achievement gap between South African students is wide due to a number of factors, including students’ home languages, languages of instruction, geographic location, and socio-economic status (Fleisch, 2008; Moloi & Chetty, 2010; Department of Education, 2006a, 2006b). For example, both Systemic Evaluation Reports show that students who took the tests in their home language, where the home language was the same as the medium of instruction, achieved significantly higher scores compared to students whose home language was different from the medium of instruction, and who then took the test in a second or third language. Broom (2004) reported similar results. She found that 3rd graders whose home language was English, the language of instruction and the language of the test, obtained substantially higher scores in both oral and written tests than those whose home language differed from English. In short, these studies demonstrate that literacy issues are also tightly linked to the language question, raising a question about the interaction between literacy and language proficiency on the literacy performance of the majority of the students.

While the above studies point to the language problem, factors such as the former departments of education, geographic location, and socio-economic status of students are implicated on the literacy achievement of South Africa students (Fleisch, 2008; Moloi & Chetty, 2010). The Western Cape Department of Education (2004) reveals that students from
the Cape of Education Department, a former White department, significantly outperformed students from the former Colored (people of mixed race) and Black education Departments. For example, while grade 3 students from the former White Education Department achieved the average score of 97.8% in literacy, students from the former Colored and Black Departments obtained average scores of 81.5% and 66.5% respectively. Since most students from the former Colored and Black schools tend to come from poor urban and rural areas due to the segregationist policies of the past which impoverished these communities, not only do these studies suggest the effect of racially segregated literacy learning, but they also show the interplay between geographic location and socio-economic status.

Sadly, recent studies show that geographic location and socio-economic status of schools continue to be significant factors in the literacy achievement of South African students (Department of Education, 2011; Moloi & Chetty, 2010). Moloi and Chetty reported that grade 6 students from Gauteng and the Western Cape provinces, provinces which are mainly urban, rich, significantly outperformed grade 6 students from Limpompo, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape, all largely rural, poor provinces, in both reading and math in 2000 and 2007 respectively. In addition, regardless of the region, the socio-economic status of the school greatly affected students’ reading and numeracy performance, with students from schools with a higher socio-economic status scoring significantly higher than students from schools with a lower socio-economic status.

In summary, the studies cited in this section show that, in general, while the majority of South African students perform poorly in literacy, this situation is worse among black students, especially those from urban townships and rural communities. Evidently, in order to address this problem, there is a need for research in literacy learning and teaching on South African students from these communities. Understanding literacy practices of these students will help teachers, researchers, and policy-makers address the literacy challenges.
Purpose of Study

In this study I explored literacy practices in English in a 4th grade classroom in a black public rural school. In most black urban and rural public schools, 4th grade marks the beginning of learning in English in all subjects; however, students’ home language continues to be offered as a subject up to grade 12. Prior to 4th grade, subjects are taught in an African language and English is offered as a subject. The 4th grade, therefore, marks an important transitional period with regard to the medium of instruction and academics.

Specifically, I examined the literacy events in which the teacher and the students participated in teaching and learning reading and writing in English respectively. In addition, I focused on how the teacher and the students used students’ L1 to enhance reading and writing. Furthermore, I paid attention to the resources that were available to the students and the teacher, and how they employed these resources to read and write in English. Through conversations with the students and the teacher, I tried to understand the meanings they made of the literacy practices in this class. Because assessment can provide insight into what students know and can do as well as what they do not know and cannot do, I also included performance assessment, in which I evaluated the students in both Zulu and English. Assessing the students in both of their languages allowed me to learn about their strengths and challenges in each of their languages. This is particularly important because when educators and researchers know the strengths and weaknesses of bilingual students in each of their languages, they are in a better position to address the needs of these students and improve their learning.

In addition, since language and literacy practices that occur in the 4th grade classroom are influenced and shaped by language and literacy practices in the earlier grades, on a more limited basis, I documented the nature of instruction given to students prior to the 4th grade. Moreover, through home visits to the families of the focal students and interviews with their
parents/guardians and the students, I tried to gain insights into the students’ family language and literacy practices. I was also interested in finding out if there were any tensions between these practices and the school language and literacy practices, and what these tensions meant for students’ learning. Throughout the study, I sought to show how socio-political and cultural factors influence the students’ learning of language and literacy in this class and in other similar contexts in South Africa.

**Research Questions**

In this in-depth qualitative study I examined the lived experiences of the students and the teacher in a 4th grade class in a black rural primary school. The critical guiding research questions were:

1. What language and literacy practices occur in the learning and teaching of English as a second language in a grade 4 South African classroom?
2. How do the students and the teacher experience these practices within this classroom?
3. How do the students perform in reading and writing assessments in Zulu and English? What can we learn from their performance?
4. What tensions exist between school literacy and other literacies? What are the meanings of these tensions?
5. What are the social, cultural, and political factors that influence the students’ learning of reading and writing in this class?

**Theoretical Frameworks**

I situated my study within three theoretical frameworks: (1) a cognitive-linguistic framework, (2) a sociocultural framework and (3) a continua of biliteracy framework. A cognitive-linguistic perspective helped me to understand how the students used their languages, Zulu and English, to learn literacy in English, how these languages influence one another, and most importantly, how that shapes the students’ learning of literacy. In addition,
this perspective allowed me to understand cognitive and metacognitive strategies the students used in their learning. On the other hand, a sociocultural framework enhanced my insight into how the students socially constructed knowledge about learning literacy in English, and how the school and home linguistic and cultural resources mediated their learning of literacy in general, and in English, in particular. The continua of biliteracy model played a role in facilitating my understanding of the complex ways in which the co-existence of the students’ languages, literacies, and cultures shaped the development of the students’ biliteracy and bilingualism.

**Cognitive-linguistic framework.** A cognitive-linguistic perspective on literacy acquisition of a second language adopted in this study underscores the significance of a native language (1979, 1981, 1996). Cummins’ *Cognitive Underlying Proficiency* (CUP) model explains that there are common skills and knowledge that underlie cognitively demanding tasks across languages. Based on this model, Cummins hypothesized that there are common skills and knowledge that transfer across languages, an assertion made in the *Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis* (LIH). This claim implies that skills and knowledge acquired in one language can transfer to another language.

To a large extent, this hypothesis has been used to explain L1 reading skills transferring to an L2 reading, especially at a sub-word level. More specifically, researchers have addressed the transfer of L1 phonological knowledge to L2 reading (Jongejan, Verhoeven, & Siegel, 2007; Lekgogo & Winskel, 2008). For example, Lindsey, Manis and Bailey (2003) carried out a longitudinal study on the reading abilities of 1st grade Spanish-speaking English language learners. Using sound mapping and sound categorization measures, they found that phonological awareness in Spanish was the main predictor of word recognition in English by the end of the 1st grade. The role of phonological awareness in facilitating L2 reading has also been found in non-alphabetic languages (Chen, et al., 2004;
Chow, McBride-Chang & Burgess, 2005). For instance, Chen et al., in their study that compared onset-rime awareness and tone awareness of monolingual Mandarin students and bilingual Cantonese-Mandarin students found that bilingual students outperformed monolingual students, suggesting that their phonological awareness in Cantonese, a non-alphabetic language, enhanced their learning of onset-rime structures in Mandarin, another non-alphabetic language.

In addition, cross-linguistic transfer has been reported at the word level (Garcia, 1998; Proctor, August, Carlo, & Snow, 2006). Jimenez, Garcia, and Pearson (1996) compared reading processes of 8 successful bilingual and biliterate Latino students to those of 3 less successful bilingual and biliterate Latino students and 3 monolingual English-speaking students in the 6th and 7th grades. Using think-aloud protocols, they found that when successful Latino students came across cognates when reading in English, they were able to use their Spanish knowledge to figure out the meanings of the Spanish cognates. By contrast, the less successful bilinguals failed to use this strategy. In other words, they could not transfer their L1 vocabulary knowledge to facilitate reading in the L2. This suggests that the ability to access cognates may be influenced by bilinguals’ level of proficiency, a point that is consistent with Cummins’ Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH).

According to the LTH, for the transfer of skills to be effective, readers have to reach a certain level of proficiency in an L2. This suggests that there is a reciprocal relationship between L2 reading and L2 proficiency (Asfaha, et al., 2009). This relationship underscores the complexity of cognitive and linguistic factors involved in the acquisition of L2 reading. As Bernhardt (2005) argues, learning to read in an L2 draws from knowledge sources that “operate synchronically, interactively and synergistically” (p. 140). This complexity is also highlighted by studies that have found that instead of reading skills transferring from an L1 to an L2, as most studies have found, reading skills can transfer in both directions (Dworin,
2003; Reyes, 2001). Toloa, McNaughton, and Lai (2009), in a study that investigated reading comprehension levels of bilingual and mainstream Samoan 9 to 3 year olds after an intensive English reading comprehension intervention program, found that not only did the bilinguals improve in English reading comprehension, but they also performed better in the L1 reading comprehension measures. As the researchers argue, this suggests that the students transferred L2 reading strategies to reading in the L1.

Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) noted a similar bidirectional transfer. In this intervention study, the 7th graders were exposed to more reading materials in English than in their L1, seTswana. Pretorius and Mampuru argue that the fact that the students who did better in the English reading comprehension tasks also performed better in the reading comprehension tasks in Tswana suggests that the bidirectional transfer was due to the availability of the reading materials in English. These studies show that bidirectional transfer may be enhanced by a range of factors, including instructional practices and availability of materials. Evidently, learning to read in more than one language is a complex process that requires researchers to “think creatively and flexibly about the populations at hand and the design of their research, in order to examine theoretically and practically important questions” (Deacon & Cain, 2011, p. 5).

In sum, using a cognitive-linguistic framework as discussed above, I tried to understand how the transfer of literacy and language skills across the students’ languages took place, and how the students’ competence in their languages, especially in English, affected the transfer in this context—a context that is very different from those often discussed in most literature.

**Sociocultural framework.** Contrary to a cognitive-linguistic orientation where the mind plays a crucial role, conceptualization of literacy as a sociocultural practice puts social and cultural contexts at the center of literacy. In this respect, construction of knowledge and
meaning does not only take place in the mind of an individual; rather, people create knowledge and make sense of literacy as they interact with others in cultural contexts. This understanding has been largely influenced by Vygotsky’s (1978) theory on learning and development in which he claims, “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level; between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)” (p. 57). This assertion implies that knowledge exists after it has been constructed through human interaction. Vygostsky also maintains that learning during an interaction occurs through some apprenticeship whereby knowledgeable others support children move towards the zone of proximal development (ZPD); that is, drawing on the assistance of the adults, children gradually learn to do certain tasks on their own.

In the classroom context, during the initial stages of assisted learning or scaffolding—to borrow a term first used by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976)—students are given opportunities to construct knowledge under the guidance and assistance of the teacher. When they begin to show an understanding of what they are learning, the teacher gradually withdraws support in order to allow them to stretch their learning potentials within their ZPD. However, this co-participation does not necessarily occur in a linear order nor is it always between a child and an adult. The relationship may be fluid and complex as both experts and novices assume learning and teaching roles “at different points in time and across many situations” (Guitirrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner, 1997, p. 369). For example, students can learn from other students, or a teacher can learn from students (Angelova, Gunawardena, & Volk, 2006; Moll, Saez, & Dworin, 2001). Therefore, in classrooms that are informed by a sociocultural theory, social interaction among participants is complex as participants forge dynamic collaborative relationships.

Furthermore, a sociocultural theory of learning encourages participants to draw from a range of resources and materials as they mediate learning in a given context. In this regard,
just as school resources and materials are important in learning, so are students’ home resources, including their languages. Therefore, students’ home and literacy practices are not liabilities; rather, they are resources that support students’ learning (Bloome, Katz, & Solsken, 2000; Moll & Gonzalez; 1994; Stein & Mamabolo, 2005). For example, Manyak (2001), in a study that reported literacy learning of Spanish first and second graders, show how the students benefitted from being allowed to draw from both Spanish and English as well as from their everyday life experiences as they created what they called the Daily News. He argues that when hybrid language practices and experiences are used in the classroom, they legitimize “the use of English and Spanish and redefine the lexicon, humor and local knowledge of the students’ informal discourses as important meaning-making resources” (p. 320).

Similarly, Solesken, Willet, and Wilson-Keenan (2000) and Stein and Mamabolo (2005) illustrate how students, teachers, and communities can benefit from classrooms where there is an appreciation of diversity. They contend that the integration of classroom language and literacy practices with that of the community validates all students’ language and literacy learning, especially those students who may be perceived as marginal. Solesken et al., in a study that examined hybrid language practices of first/second graders from a heterogeneous urban city, show how inviting parents to the classroom to share their expertise in different fields, such as quilting and storytelling in any language, created opportunities for the students to assert and express themselves in oral and written language as they drew on the parents’ resources. They describe how one student who was labeled as struggling successfully integrated the content of the family stories told by some of the parents to her personal stories in her academic writing. In this respect, she used family stories to affirm her affiliation to the school and the community.
Several studies maintain that not only does the crossing of textual and contextual boundaries enrich our understanding of literacy as a complex socially situated practice, but it also brings to light how literacy practices across contexts are transformed as participants engage in literacy activities in ways that serve their own purposes (Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004; Solesken et al, 2000). Stein and Slonimsky (2006) contend that the blending of home and school literacy practices orientates students towards different forms of worldliness. In their study, they examined the literacy practices of 3 families in an urban setting in South Africa, focusing on how the children and their family members drew on the families’ diverse resources. They showed how in one of the families the grandmother juxtaposed “Little Red Riding Hood and the Jackal” story to a well-known South African folktale, Tselane. Most importantly, they demonstrated how the grandmother shifted from the school discourse—demonstrating, modeling, and asking yes/no questions—she used to tell the English story to an interactive discourse as she drew parallels between the two stories. They argue that not only did the mixture of the “African traditional storytelling practices and contemporary Western-style story reading expose the child to ‘different forms of knowledge in different modes, in different languages, and in different cultures” (p. 137) but it also benefitted the child. It introduced her to the complexities of literacy that are part of the increasingly cosmopolitan world.

In sum, in studies that are informed by a sociocultural theory construction of knowledge and meaning is complex, and texts and contexts are fluid. In this respect, normative and prescriptive language and literacy practices are replaced by practices that promote a link between local ways of knowing and formal academic knowledge (Bloome, et al., 2000; Gregory, et al, 2004; Guitirrez, et al., 1997). The teacher makes conscious and strategic efforts to encourage the use of students’ everyday languages and cultural knowledge as they learn literacy in the classroom. To paraphrase Gutierrez and Larson (1994), teachers
draw from students’ *maleta* (suitcases) that are full of their languages, beautiful cultures and many others valuables. Because students’ language and cultural knowledge are viewed as resources, visiting students’ homes in order to learn about the different language and literacy practices in which they engage is important. The visits help teachers to gain insight into how these practices shape and influence students learning in general, and in the classroom in particular.

In brief, using a sociocultural perspective enhanced my insight into how the students used different cultural tools in the classroom and in their homes to construct meaning in their learning of literacy in their languages, in general, and in English, in particular. In addition, and most importantly, this framework highlighted how the home and the school contexts mediated students’ learning.

**Continua of biliteracy framework.** The main theoretical claim that underpins this framework is that relationships between literacy practices and processes in two or more languages are complex, interdependent, and interactive (Hornberger, 1989, 2002, 2003; Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000). In this model, the intersection of language and literacy occurs along the continua among four different sets of biliteracy namely; contexts, media, content, and development. The concept of continua suggests that all points in the different sets are interrelated: there are no dichotomies and binaries; rather, there is fluidity in literacy practices and processes between different languages.

In the context continua of biliteracy, context involves micro and macro structures that are marked by variations along the monolingual-bilingual and oral-literate continua. Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester (2000) and Hornberger (2002, 2010) argue that power and ideological relations are implicated between languages. They identify two ends of power: the traditionally less powerful end and the traditionally more powerful end. They also contend that the traditionally more powerful tend to privilege macro, literate, and monolingual
contexts of biliteracy whereas the traditionally less powerful end usually focus on micro, oral, and bi/multilingual contexts of biliteracy. This implies that languages and literacy practices do not carry the same value in the official markets (Bourdieu, 1991).

Despite the tendency to favor the traditionally more powerful end by not properly recognizing the traditionally less powerful end, especially in the predominantly English-speaking countries (Macedo, 2000; Stritikus, 2006), several scholars in countries with a history of colonization, show that “standard English” is no longer the only privileged norm; there are multiple norms (Bokamba, 1982; Collins & Blot, 2003). In this polycentricity, English has become localized and carries the experiences of the local people. The localization of English suggests that local people are inscribing themselves in the English language and literacy practices. The implication of these practices for teachers and researchers is that they can no longer use the native norm as a yardstick for understanding students’ language and literacy practices; they should consider the local contexts as well.

In the media continua of biliteracy languages that have linguistic structures that range from similar to dissimilar and whose scripts vary from convergent to divergent interact in complex ways, and students’ exposure to languages and literacies range from successive to simultaneous practices. The main argument in this component of the continua, therefore, is that fixity and stability of languages and cultures is no longer sustainable nor is it desirable in the globalized world (Lo Bianco, 2000; Pennycook, 2010). In other words, blending of languages, literacies, and cultures should be understood as everyday communicative practices. In language and literacy education this calls for challenging legitimacy of one language variety. In other words, students should be allowed to draw on multiple linguistic and cultural resources.

Several studies have shown that encouraging students to use more than one language enhances their literacy development and cultural identity (Gort, 2002; Reyes & Azuaru,
For example, Stein (2008), in a multimodal project she conducted in one primary school in a black multilingual township in South Africa, found that allowing the students to tell their stories in any of their languages, and writing about them in their languages before translating them into English helped the students to assert their gender and cultural identities. Evidently, supporting the use of different languages that range along the continua encourages meaningful learning rather than reproduction of knowledge.

In terms of the content of continua of biliteracy, language and literacy practices that range from majority to minority experiences and knowledge, literary to vernacular genres, and decontextualized to contextualized texts are central to meaning-making. The content continua of biliteracy challenge normative perspectives that downplay and dismiss other forms of knowledge and experiences. In this respect, normative English and academic knowledge are not the only yardsticks for academic learning and success; learning is about meaning-making, reflection, and exploration that are grounded on students’ multiple experiences and identities (Hornberger, 2010). Hybrid practices that support students’ learning are encouraged. For example, in a study of hybrid language practices involving 1st and 2nd graders from an urban heterogeneous community mentioned earlier, Solesken, et al. (2000) found that a student who had been labeled a struggling reader was able to interweave classroom and community’s knowledge, including stories told by parents who had been invited in class, in redefining herself as a competent reader and writer. As Hornberger asserts, such transformation is possible “when teachers stretch their classroom practices to allow for students’ emergent identity negotiation, language styling and mixing, and mediation between popular culture and official curriculum” (p. 557). Clearly, in these classrooms, othering practices and perspectives have no place (Janks, 2010; Lee McKay, 2010).

In the continua of development of biliteracy, interaction between L1 and L2 skills, oral and written skills, and receptive and productive skills is central to students’ learning
Homogenizing language and literacy practices are replaced by heterogeneous practices that support local and global approaches to language and literacy learning (Lo Bianco, 2000; Lee McKay, 2010). Language and literacy skills influence one another in complex ways; influence no longer flows from the center to the periphery; it is bidirectional (Pennycook, 2010; Toloa et al., 2009). However, this is possible if teachers support flexibility in the use of different languages and literacy practices (Moll, et al., 2001; Reyes & Costanzo, 2002). Furthermore, in developing biliteracy, the written language is one of the many communicative practices and texts; other texts include performative, spoken, and visual texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003; Stein, 2008). As Stein and Mamabolo (2005) found, blurring the boundaries between the written and oral text and drawing from other modalities extends beyond enriching students’ learning; it can “provide[d] concrete evidence of their sophisticated understandings of their social conditions and their aspirations for the future” (p. 30).

Given the fact that the continua of biliteracy framework problematizes some of the normative knowledge and practices about biliteracy acquisition, I used it in this study to try and understand the complex issues that arose from the students’ bilingual and biliteracy contexts and learning.

In summary, the three theoretical frameworks I used helped me to better understand the complexities that are involved in the students’ learning of literacy in general, and in English in particular, in their sociocultural contexts where English is not a dominant language. In the following section, I briefly discuss some of the concepts that are central to this study.

Definition of Terms

Bilingualism has been defined from different perspectives over the years. Bloomfield (1933) defines bilingualism as “native like control of two languages” (p.56). Other scholars
have rejected this definition; rather, they view bilingualism as the ability to use a second language at any level of competence (Bialystok 2001; Bialystok, McBride-Chang, & Luk, 2005). This perspective allows researchers to accommodate different kinds of bilingualism, including balanced, partial, sequential, and simultaneous bilingualism (Cummins, 1981; Dworin, 2003; Reyes & Costanzo, 2002). In addition, some scholars agree that any discussion of bilingualism should consider sociocultural, historical, and political contexts that influence bilingualism (Muthwii, 2004; Obondo, 2007). In this respect, bilinguals should not be viewed as two monolinguals in one person but unique beings who use their languages in different ways as called upon by diverse contexts and needs (Grosjean, 1989). This is the perspective that I adopted in this study. I considered the sociocultural, historical and political contexts that influenced and shaped the learning of the English language and literacy by the students. The students were sequential bilinguals who had high proficiency levels in Zulu and were learning the English language and literacy.

*Biliteracy* is generally defined as the ability to read and write in two or more languages. Reyes and Costanzo (2002) view biliteracy as “some degree of mastery of the fundamentals of speaking, reading, and writing (e.g., sound-symbol connections, conventions of print, assessing and conveying meaning through oral or print mode, etc) in two linguistic systems” (p. 146). Dworin (2003) adds that biliteracy may “develop either simultaneously or successively” (p. 171). These definitions suggest that biliteracy involves different levels of mastery in reading and writing in more than one language. Like bilingualism, the acquisition of biliteracy is influenced by sociocultural, historical, and political contexts in which literacy in the two languages is learned (Moll, et al., 2001; Reyes, 2001). More importantly, literacy skills learned in one language can transfer to the other language in a nonlinear way; that is, they can transfer bidirectionally (Dworin, 2003; Reyes, 2001; Toloa et al., 2009). In this study, I used the term biliteracy to understand how literacy skills learned in Zulu and English
helped the students to learn literacy in both languages, also taking into account the sociocultural, historical, and political contexts within they learned literacy.

*First language* (L1) refers to a person’s native language or mother tongue. Usually, it is the language that a child learns from birth. In this study, this concept was used interchangeably with the term home language, mainly because the South African curricular documents use home language.

*Literacy* has been defined from different perspectives over the years. In some circles, literacy is viewed as a cognitive-linguistic activity (Gottardo & Mueler, 2009; Tunmer & Hoover, 1992). From this perspective literacy is a “matter of cracking the alphabetic code, word-formation skills, phonics, grammar, and comprehension skills” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2002, p. 33). In this autonomous model (Street, 2001), literacy is “devoid of social contexts and political implications” (Larson, 1997, p. 439). However, there has been an acknowledgement that in as much as literacy is a cognitive-linguistic process, it is also a sociocultural practice that is “embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles” (Street, p. 7). This standpoint maintains that literacy learning should be understood within the sociocultural context of the classroom, the school, the community, and other sociocultural structures that influence literacy learning. This view, together with a cognitive-linguistic perspective allowed me to capture complex and rich literacy practices of the participants.

*Second language* (L2) commonly refers to a language that a person learns after the first language or mother tongue has been learned. However, several studies have shown that this relationship may be complex, indicating a continuum rather than a clear cut phenomenon (Bialystok, 2001, Hornberger, 2010; Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000). By and large, this continuum is influenced by numerous factors, including sociocultural, acquisitional, and language use (Asfaha, et al., 2009; Gregory et al., 2004), resulting in different proficiency levels among L2 learners. In this study, the students were acquiring English, their L2, mainly
in the school context, with limited exposure to natural contexts. Furthermore, given that they had not had much instruction in the English literacy in the previous grades, they may be viewed as emergent bilinguals. Finally, although the South African curricular documents use the term first additional language to refer to students’ L2, in this study I will employ the term L2.

**Outline of Chapters**

This study consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 describes the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions that guide the study. I also discuss the theoretical frameworks that underpin the study, and I end the chapter by defining key terms central to the study. Chapter 2 begins by giving a brief overview of the literature on the history of literacy among black people, dating as far back as the pre-colonial era to the present. I also address current education language policies, classroom language use, and literacy culture in black South African schools. The next section focuses on the discussion of the literature on reading and writing from cognitive-linguistic and sociocultural perspectives. Chapter 3 explains the approach I used in this study and data sources, procedures, and analysis. The chapter ends with the discussion on how I established trustworthiness of the study. Chapter 4 presents findings on the teacher’s instructional practices and how these are nested within the contexts of other instructional practices in the school. Chapter 5 discusses findings on the focal students’ language and literacy practices in the classroom and in their homes and also shows how these contexts influenced the students’ learning across these contexts. Chapter 6 focuses on the students’ performance assessment in both Zulu and English across different texts. The final chapter, chapter 7, presents discussions of the findings, implications and limitation of the study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Several studies have questioned the view of literacy as just a set of cognitive skills. The argument is that literacy is also a set of social practices that are influenced by sociopolitical and cultural contexts in which they are embedded (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984, 1995). Furthermore, another assertion is that inasmuch as literacy practices are shaped by the contexts of which they are a part, they simultaneously shape these contexts; that is, the relationship is dialectical (Pennycook, 2001; Stein & Mamabolo, 2005; Street, 2001).

In this review of the literature, I discuss the broader sociopolitical, historical, and cultural contexts that shaped and still continue to influence the language and literacy practices of Black South Africans. This background is important given the history of the struggles over language issues in South Africa and the fact that literacy is always “located in time and space” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 23). Because language and literacy development and learning is also a cognitive-linguistic process (Bialystok, et al., 2005; Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007), I also discuss the development of language and literacy processes from a cognitive-linguistic perspective as well.

Historical Background of Education in South Africa

Pre-colonial and colonial education. Long before the arrival of Westerners in Africa, Africans had their own cultures and traditions and these were transmitted from one generation to another by word of mouth. The family played a central role in educating young children through examples. For example, women would teach their daughters house chores and men would expose their sons to out-door activities such as hunting and farming. As the children grew older, they participated in different community ceremonies and rituals where they were taught responsibilities, history, and values preparing them to be responsible adults.
in their communities (Keto, 1990). In this respect, “There was always a congruent relationship between the training and the lifestyle which the young people encountered when they left “school” . . . it did not socialize them for alienation” (Keto, p. 20).

Among other things, the wisdom of African people was captured in oral literature that included folktales, proverbs, idioms, riddles, legends, myths, epics, praise names, and praise poems (Ntuli & Swanepoel, 1993). Through oral texts, “African people could teach and enlighten generations about the traditions and cultures of Africa. They could warn and scold those who went against the norms of the society” (Mkhize, 1998, p. 31). For example, folktales were used to teach children moral values and stimulate their thinking about natural and environmental phenomena (Msimang, 1986). Evidently, oral tradition and other forms of indigenous knowledge were powerful. However, the arrival of colonial rulers resulted in the denigration of these knowledge systems (Abdi, 2003; Draper, 2003). Anything African was viewed as barbaric and savage; hence, the colonizers took it upon themselves to domesticate “the mind of the savage” African (Goody, 1987).

Although the Dutch, the first colonizers in South Africa, arrived in 1652, serious attempts at replacing the indigenous education of the African people through formal schooling started to gain momentum in the 1800s, and even then the colonial governments only provided limited funding to the missionaries who ran missionary schools for African people (Hartshorne, 1999). Despite differences in the educational policies and practices among the missionaries, they all shared a common objective—to use education as a tool to evangelize to the Africans (Jefferson, 1973). As a result, religious education and moral-related subjects were at the core of the missionaries’ education. In these schools memorization and recitation were the main methods of teaching and learning (Nkabinde, 1997). With the ascension of the National Party (NP) to power in 1948, the missionary schools that were somewhat liberal lost funding from the government, and most of them were
closed and were taken over by the government (Cross & Chisholm, 1990; Hartshorne, 1999). This marked a significant turn in the history of the education of black South African people under the new government policy, the infamous Bantu Education of 1953.

**Bantu education and the mis-education of black people.** Bantu education was part of the broader Afrikaner ideology that was informed by a “fundamentalist Calvinist religious belief . . . and a strong conviction that racial equality and inter-mixture were both unpleasant and contrary to God’s will” (Jefferson, 1973, p. 79). To enforce this ideology, the government passed several segregationist legislations to keep the different racial groups separate, with the Whites being the supreme racial group. In education this white supremacy belief was fostered through the Christian National Education philosophy that emphasized that “mixing of different languages, cultures, religions, and races is contrary to God’s law” (Jefferson). Verwoerd, the Minister of Native Affairs and the architect of apartheid, who later on became the Prime Minister, did not mince his words about the role that Bantu education had to play in ensuring that black people remain inferior to white people. In one of the parliament statements, he said:

> The Bantu must be guided to serve his community in all respects. There is no place for him in the European community above the levels of certain forms of labor. Within his own community, however, all doors are open . . . Up till now, he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and practically misled him by showing him the green pastures of the European but still did not allow him to graze there (Gerber & Newman as cited in Nkabinde, 1997, p. 7).

Evidently, the draconian Bantu education policy was intended to under-educate black people so that they could serve subservient roles (Hartshorne, 1999; Nkomo, 1990). Unlike the missionary education that focused on a selected few Blacks (Opland, 2003), Bantu education was a “mass schooling for Africans” (Cross & Chisholm, 1990, p. 53), especially
in the primary grades. The emphasis was on religious education—something that was consistent with the Christian National Education philosophy—and menial subjects while mathematics and other mathematic-related content areas were neglected. To ensure that the Christian National Education philosophy thrived, African languages in schools were used as a tool to divide and rule Africans; the aim was to ensure that black schools remain divided along the ethnic and cultural lines (Jefferson, 1973).

Furthermore, unlike White, Indian, and Colored schools; Black schools had inadequately prepared teachers (Christie, 1992; Cross & Chisholm; 1990). In fact, teachers were prepared in training institutions that were divided along the racial lines. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s while White student teachers who were training to teach in the primary grades attended teacher-training colleges and those who were training to teach in high school attended universities, Black teachers were trained in teacher-training colleges, whether they were training to be primary-school or high-school teachers. These colleges were like an extension of high school with teachers receiving very little academic and professional knowledge, at the most only two years of training. From the early 1980s, this situation slightly improved with Black teachers in teacher-training colleges spending one more year. However, the quality of teacher-preparation did not improve much as evidenced by, among other things, the continued under-performance of students in Black schools (Macdonald, 1990a, 1990b).

In addition to poorly prepared teachers, Black schools were under-funded. For example, in the 1960s the per capita expenditure cost for a white student was about 15 times compared to the per capita expenditure cost for a black student (Jefferson, 1973) All these factors attest to the black child’s “mis-education”, to borrow Woodson’s (2005) words regarding the education of African-Americans in the US around the 1920s and 1930s. Not only did the government neglect the education of black people, but it also turned a deaf ear to
any complaint. For example, against their will, black students had to take half of their subjects in English and other half in Afrikaans in secondary school. This imposition, specifically the use of Afrikaans, resulted in the rebellions that started in SOWETO in June 16, 1976, and spread throughout the whole country, turning schools into war zones.

**From crises to transformation.** The escalation of the protests made it difficult for the government to turn a blind eye; hence, it introduced some reforms. In secondary schools Afrikaans as a medium of instruction was no longer compulsory and in primary schools African languages as media of instruction were restricted to the first four years after which students could switch to English. Furthermore, the government set up a number of commissions to investigate the status of education in black schools, including the De Lange Commission in 1980 whose recommendations included equal opportunities for education for all South African people. For most students, teachers, and parents these attempts were not enough; they wanted the overhauling of the whole education structure (Jansen, 1990). So the resistance against the government continued. The police, soldiers, and armored vehicles became a common sight in township and urban schools. Education was on the verge of collapsing, with students shouting “Liberating before education” (Christie, 1992).

Contrary to ideological hegemonic practices that often characterize most official institutions in democratic countries (Gramsci, 1980), in the apartheid South Africa, hegemony was exercised both ideologically and physically. The use of violence as a coercive measure indicated that the school as an ideological apparatus of the state had failed (Gramsci). To a large extent, this was due to human agency among black people. They refused to be turned into “cultural dupes” (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005); instead, through resistance they chose to redefine and reposition themselves in the face of brutal oppression. As Freire (1986) argues, education can either be used as a tool to encourage the youth to conform to the current system or it can be used as an instrument to
encourage transformation. With the demise of the apartheid government in 1994, black South Africans opted for the latter.

The main transformation occurred in 1997 when the democratically elected government merged nineteen Departments of Education that were divided along the racial, ethnic, and geographical lines into one National Department. Similarly, in public schools segregation along the racial lines was abolished. This meant that students were allowed to attend any public school of their choice. Almost invariably, it was black students from traditionally disadvantaged schools that moved to traditionally advantaged schools, which were mostly White, Indian, and Colored. This was not without challenges for all groups. For traditionally black schools, this impoverished the schools because parents who were resourceful by supporting the schools financially in various ways lost interest in these schools (Arenstein, 2003). On the other hand, for traditionally advantaged schools, the movement led to the increase of teacher-student ratio and challenged the teachers in these schools because they had to teach a diverse student population, for which they were not prepared (Broom, 2004; Lessing & Mahabeer, 2007).

Although free movement of students across different schools was based on the democratic principles that are consistent with the vision of the new government and the National Department; that is, in a democratic society students are entitled to education in a school of their choice, this has had unintended consequences. It has further widened the academic achievement gap between the haves and the have-nots. In most cases, students from the previously disadvantaged schools continue to struggle academically whereas students from the previously advantaged schools thrive (Moloi & Chetty, 2010; Mullis et al., 2007). Hence, Fleisch (2008) argues that South Africa is a nation with two education systems: one that is succeeding in educating its students in reading and mathematics in the primary grades,
and another one that is struggling to do so. Evidently, this “bimodal distribution of achievement” (Fleisch, p. 3) is not serving the nation well.

Similar to primary and secondary schools, teacher-training colleges for the various ethnic and racial groups were desegregated and teacher education curricula and programs were restructured. This transformation posed challenges because most of the different teacher education institutions had divergent identities, ideologies, and resources due to the history of institutionalized racism (Parker, 2003; Wolhuter, 2006). In the earlier stages of the transformation (1994-1999) the focus was on aligning the teacher education sector with the global trends through bureaucratic and technical measures, such as the national policy frameworks for the new teacher education system (Kruss, 2009). The policy frameworks culminated into the incorporation of all the racially segregated teacher-training colleges into 21 South African universities and the introduction of new qualification programs for pre-service teachers: a four-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) for teachers with a three-year degree, and an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) for teachers who had a four-year nonprofessional degree.

Just as there was transformation in the pre-service teacher education sector, the National Department, working with the universities that provide teacher education, took various measures to transform in-service education sector by introducing and supporting different programs, including distance teacher education. However, some of the programs have been found to be lacking rigor in developing teachers’ academic and pedagogical knowledge, especially in institutions with the concentration of Black African teachers (Kruss, 2009; Hemson, 2009). Evidently, if the quality of teachers does not improve, especially in teacher education institutions with a majority of Black African pre-service and in-service teachers, the teaching force that tends to serve the vast majority of Black African students in
rural and township schools, the academic achievement gap between the privileged and the under-privileged will continue to widen, an undesirable situation for a democratic society.

Just as the democratic South Africa brought about drastic changes in the teacher education sector and in the student population in the schools, the apartheid school curriculum underwent a complete overhauling. At the beginning of 1998, the first post-apartheid national curriculum, Curriculum 2005 (C2005), was adopted by all schools. C2005 was based on an outcomes-based education (OBE) approach, an approach that emphasizes learner-centered learning, activity-based learning, collaborative learning, independent thinking, critical thinking, and integration of different learning areas (Boschee & Baron, 1993; Spady, 1994). This was a significant shift from the old curriculum that encouraged passive learning, rote learning, content-driven learning, and racially segregated curriculum (Msila, 2007).

Although this was a promising curriculum policy, the practicalities of implementing it posed a series of challenges, resulting in the Minister of Education appointing a Curriculum Review Committee, two years after its implementation. After consulting with the main stakeholders, the Committee found that one of the main reasons teachers were struggling with the curriculum was that the language of the curriculum was complex and very technical, making it difficult for teachers to understand what was expected of them. Another finding was that it lacked the specifics of the content to be taught. For a country that had a history of disparity in terms of teacher professional and academic knowledge due to the legacy of apartheid, this finding compounded the problems. For example, it did not explicitly and systematically address the teaching of basic skills such as reading, writing, and numeracy in the primary grades, something which primary teachers complained about (Lessing & de Witt; 2002). This was a problem because “Children do not learn outcomes in a vacuum. Curriculum content is a critical vehicle for giving meaning to a particular set of outcomes” (Jansen, 1999, p. 152). Based on these findings, the Committee recommended that the
curriculum design and language be simplified so that teachers can understand it and be able to implement it. Another recommendation was that content in all the subjects be clearly specified and assessment requirements be clarified and be aligned to the content. In addition, the Committee advised that learning and teaching materials, including textbooks should be provided by the department instead of relying on teachers to design their own since this led to big inconsistencies in quality levels (Department of Education, 2000).

The above recommendations prompted the Minister of Education to appoint a Task Team to review the implementation of the revised curriculum. In keeping with the democratic values, the Team consulted with all the main stakeholders. One of the key problems the Team identified was that the outcomes-based approach was still undermining the central role of content. Another important finding was that teachers in the intermediate phase were overloaded. In addition, not only were students in grade 4, the beginning of the intermediate phase, transitioning from learning in their home language as the medium of instruction to English as a medium of instruction, but they were also expected to make a shift from learning 3 subjects to 8 subjects. To address these concerns, the team recommended that outcomes and assessments standards be replaced with a comprehensive curriculum and assessment policy in which content is detailed in each grade. Another recommendation was that if English is going to be the medium of instruction from grade 4 onwards, it should be introduced earlier and subjects should be reduced.

Based on these recommendations and others, the Department made several changes to the Revised National Curriculum Statement. Of these changes, the most significant one is the scrapping of the outcomes-based approach and its replacement with “a single, comprehensive and concise Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) that will provide details on what content teachers ought to teach and assess on a grade-by-grade and subject-by-subject basis” (Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). The streamlining of the curriculum was
despite the political tensions in some sectors due to the allegiance to the outcomes-based approach (Department of Education, 2009). The new national curriculum policy, CAPS, is introduced gradually in the different phases. In 2011 it was first implemented in the Foundation Phase (grades R-3) and will continue to be phased in at the other grade levels.

In sum, the discussion in this section shows that the education of black people in South African has always been characterized by considerable shifts in the curriculum philosophical orientation, control, and purposes, resulting in significant changes. During the apartheid period the government had an absolute say. In contrast, in the democratic South Africa diverse voices are welcomed. As demonstrated in the above discussion, this has not gone without challenges. Nonetheless, one hopes that the issues will be addressed so that education can lead to a productive and just South African community.

**Education Language Policy, Classroom Language Use, and Literacy Culture**

Given the history of the struggle over language issues in South Africa, including the brutal killing of students during the 1976 SOWETO riots over the refusal to learn in Afrikaans, the post-apartheid government wanted to avoid a similar situation. As soon as it took over, it engaged the South African people in long consultative language debates about the status of the South African languages in the official domains. This process culminated into eleven South African languages declared as official languages (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). These languages include nine indigenous African languages, English, and Afrikaans—the latter representing the only two languages that were officially recognized prior to 1994.

This official multilingual approach was extended to education. In general, the Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 stipulates that students’ home languages should be used for learning while students get access to effective learning in additional languages. Specifically, the LiEP advocates for the use of the home language as the language
of learning and teaching (commonly known as medium of instruction in most literature) in
the foundation phase (grades 1-3). Furthermore, the LiEP and the Revised National
Curriculum Statement (RNCS) of 2002 (Department of Education, 2002) recommend that in
cases where parents choose another language as the medium of instruction after the
foundation phase, the home language should continue to be offered as a subject in the
subsequent grades. The RNCS also adds that in these cases the language that will be the
medium of instruction after the foundation phase should be introduced as an additional
language as early as grade 1. In most black schools this language is almost invariably
English. In some schools, instead of introducing English as a subject, they choose English as
the medium of instruction as early as the first grade. This is despite teachers’ limited
proficiency in English (Cassoo & Fleisch, 2000; Evans & Cleghorn, 2010). Nel and Muller
(2010), in their study that analyzed errors of final-year-student-teachers who were registered
for a Second Language Acquisition module and errors of their students, found that student-
teachers errors transferred to the students. This suggests that if teachers are not proficient
enough, this will affect students’ learning of English, perpetuating a vicious cycle.

Interestingly, English remains popular among most black parents in South Africa (de
Klerk, 2000a, 2002b; Stein & Mamabolo, 2005). That indigenous African languages have
been accorded an official status does not seem to have persuaded some parents to have their
children educated in African languages, not even in the early primary grades. The
unpopularity of African languages is, in large part, due to the legacy of apartheid (Banda,
2003). During the apartheid era the regime used African languages for political reasons to
sow division among African people. In addition, the regime used these languages to offer
inferior education to black people.

This legacy of apartheid can still be felt because it created the hegemony of English
that exists today. Some parents believe that the sooner their children are introduced to
English at school, the better (de Klerk, 2002a; Stein & Mamabolo, 2005). Furthermore, they believe that early introduction of English will ensure that their children acquire high levels of English proficiency that will maximize opportunities for their children to move up the socio-economic ladder (de Klerk, 2000, Hunt, 2007). Interestingly, some parents among these do want their children to learn African languages, but only for cultural identity and maintenance—a behavior that is also prevalent in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Igboanusi, 2008; Muthwii, 2004; Obondo, 2007).

Similar to the perceptions of some black parents, some teachers promote the hegemony of English at school and in the classroom, especially in the English-medium schools (Chick & McKay, 2001; de Klerk, 2002b). The teachers’ argument is that since these schools are meant to teach in English, there is no room for African languages, particularly in academic settings although students may use these languages in non-academic contexts. In fact, the use of African languages in the classroom in these schools is viewed as an academic deficit.

Chick and McKay (2001) reported that despite the English-only discourse, some students did code-switch between English and Zulu, not only outside the classroom but in the classroom and for academic purposes as well. This counter discourse behavior shows that students are not passive participants in their learning; rather, they are actively positioning and repositioning themselves through resistance, agency, and multiple identities (McKay & Wong, 1996; Pennycook, 2001). Chick and McKay also noted that the counter discourse was embraced by some of the teachers, especially the young ones. The teachers stated that strategic use of Zulu was helpful in “making the academic content of lessons accessible to limited-English-proficiency (sic) learners, and for encouraging their participation in group discussions” (pp. 400-401). Evidently, the students and the teachers regarded switching between Zulu and English as a resource and not a problem.
While code-switching is strongly discouraged in some academic contexts as shown in the above-mentioned studies, in most black urban and rural schools where teachers and students share a common L1, code-switching is one of the scaffolding resources on which teachers and students draw in negotiating meaning during learning and teaching (Probyn, 2009; Setati, Adler, Reed, & Baboo, 2002). In Setati et al. study the teachers argued that if strategically used, code-switching does not necessarily distract students from learning English; instead, it enhances it. Furthermore, the teachers maintained that during the initial stages of the exploration of concepts, code-switching can facilitate a better understanding of the concepts as students move from informal talk to formal discourse-specific language. They also explained that code-switching provided the students with a comfortable environment where they could freely share their ideas. In this regard, code-switching lowered the affective filter—to use Krashen’s (1985) term. Krashen contends that in order for students to learn successfully, they need environments that are less stressful.

Despite the academic benefits of code-switching, it remains controversial, even among black teachers (Probyn, 2009; Setati et al., 2002). Some teachers suggest that it should not be used in the classroom, especially in cases where the examination is in English (Broom, 2004; Muthwii, 2004). Probyn contends that the confusion may be attributed to the fact that in most South African institutions that prepare teachers the role of code-switching remains unexplored. As a result, most teachers do not know how to embrace code-switching and use it meaningfully to scaffold students’ learning. Those who use it feel like they are “smuggling the vernacular into the classroom” (p. 123). The lack of teachers’ knowledge about how to support and nurture students’ learning through code-switching is unfortunate because language is a tool that mediates learning (Vygotsky, 1978). In this respect, strategic and purposeful use of code-switching may facilitate students’ learning.
In fact, when students do not understand what they are learning, not only do they have problems with performing academically, but they also struggle with developing a literacy culture that enhances literacy skills (Matjila & Pretorius, 2004). This seems to be the situation with most South African students, especially those who come from disadvantaged communities where there are less written materials and libraries (Banda, 2003; Ntuli & Pretorius, 2005). That these students have limited exposure to written texts makes them lag further behind their urban counterparts who are reported to read more, including reading for pleasure, and reading materials such as reading magazines and newspapers (Matchet, 2002). Matchet also expresses her concern that even in cases where students happen to read informational texts, the genre that is mostly associated with dense abstract language; they typically choose texts that are context-embedded, such as sports magazines for boys. She argues that these materials do little to prepare students for academic learning. Given that the students in Matchet’s study were middle school and secondary students, this pattern is disturbing. It is also troubling to note that there seems to be no study on reading attitudes and interests of younger South African students in the early primary grades, at least, based on my search of the literature. I argue that the lack of knowledge about young students’ literacy culture and interests may make it difficult for teachers to support the development of these students’ literacy abilities.

While having an insight into the broader issues related to language policy in education and language use and literacy culture in South African schools as discussed here is important, understanding cognitive-linguistic processes and sociocultural practices that shape literacy is also crucial. Therefore, in the following section I discuss language and literacy development and instruction, showing how these processes and practices influence reading and writing development and instruction.
Literacy Development and Instruction

Although reading and writing are inextricably intertwined, in this section I discuss them separately. Teasing them apart this way allows me to highlight specific processes and practices that are involved in each of these literacy activities. Starting with reading and then writing, I review international and South African literature that is relevant to these topics.

**Reading and writing processes.** From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, there is a general consensus that reading constitutes decoding and comprehension (Gottardo & Mueller, 2009; Manyak & Bauer, 2008). Another general agreement is that decoding focuses on mapping spoken language to written symbols of a language. On the other hand, reading comprehension deals with the meaning of the written symbols of a language. While both decoding and reading comprehension are important for successful reading, decoding tends to play a critically important role in the early stages of reading. The beginning reader must apply knowledge of letter-sound relationships in recognizing words and must also understand that words can be broken down into phonemes and phonemes are represented by letters in alphabetic languages. The degree to which the beginning reader develops this phonological awareness will have an impact on the reader’s reading ability in subsequent years (Lipka & Siegel, 2007). Given that the focus of this study is the 4th grade classroom and that students at this level are expected to read to learn rather than learn to read, I pay attention to the literature that discusses what is known about reading comprehension of students in bilingual and multilingual contexts.

**Reading comprehension in the primary grades in international studies.** Several studies show that being able to decode words is not sufficient; bilingual and L2 students need to read with comprehension (Gottardo & Mueller, 2009; Verhoeven, 2000). In this respect, reading comprehension is a crucial component in literacy learning and academic achievement in these students. Despite this significance, reading comprehension continues to be a
challenge to most bilingual and L2 students (Nakamoto, Lindsey, & Manis, 2008; Toloa et al., 2009). Research shows that there are several factors that influence reading comprehension in bilingual and L2 students (Jimenez et al., 1996; van Staden, 2011). One of these is the students’ prior/cultural background knowledge about an L2 topic (Baleeta, 2005; Garcia, 1991; Parry, 2005). This is knowledge about the world that the reader brings to the text. Such knowledge helps the reader to understand the text and make inferences about specific events and concepts in the text.

Droop and Verhoeven (1998), using a reading-aloud protocol, retelling, and questioning methods in different types of texts, such as a neutral text, a text based on the Dutch culture and another text emphasizing the Turkish and Moroccan cultures, found that all students performed better on the texts that reflected their cultures. However, in the text that reflected a neutral culture, the Dutch students outperformed the minority students. These researchers concluded that the performance by Dutch students in the neutral test suggests that, in addition to cultural background knowledge, students need to reach a certain level of language proficiency in order to benefit from reading with comprehension—an argument consistent with the linguistic threshold hypothesis (Cummins, 1981, 1996).

The activation of prior knowledge in itself and by itself is not enough; the knowledge has to be relevant to the topic in question (Baleeta, 2005; Parry, 2005). Garcia (1991), in the study of the factors that influence the English reading performance of the Spanish-English bilingual students mentioned above, found that one of the reasons the bilingual students did poorly in the prior knowledge test was that sometimes they activated inaccurate schemata. Baleeta reported that Ugandan bilingual students committed a similar error when they answered questions about a French hawker, The Parisian Hawker. Instead of interpreting the hawker as a street entertainer as intended by the passage, the students evoked their cultural knowledge of a hawker in Uganda—a poor and unreliable person—thus misinterpreting the
entire passage. This suggests that in order for bilingual students to benefit from using their cultural background knowledge, this knowledge must be appropriate to the given context and the students must understand that “no two experiences are identical” (Parry, p. 313).

Furthermore, L2 reading comprehension may be influenced by students’ vocabulary knowledge (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; Proctor et al., 2006; Tonzar, Lotto, & Job, 2009). There is general consensus among researchers that word knowledge is complex and consists of many dimensions, including breadth and depth knowledge (Quian, 2002; Wallace, 2007). On one hand, breadth involves knowing many words in a language by encountering them in many different contexts. On the other hand, depth refers to deep knowledge of the meaning of words, and this knowledge “takes place in many steps” (Nagy & Scott, 2000, p. 270). It involves “all word characteristics such as phonemic, graphemic, morphemic, syntactic, semantic, collocational and phraseological properties (Quian, p. 516). Evidently, breadth and depth in word knowledge make vocabulary acquisition more challenging for bilingual and L2 students.

Verhoeven (2000), in a study that examined the development of reading and spelling in Dutch in native Dutch-speaking and non-native Dutch-speaking students in grades 1 and 2, found that while the non-Dutch-speaking students kept up with the native Dutch-speaking students in decoding skills, they struggled with vocabulary and reading comprehension. The results indicated that the non-native Dutch-speaking students needed to acquire Dutch vocabulary, suggesting that L2 vocabulary plays a significant role in understanding L2 text. Similar findings are reported in older students (Nakamoto et al., 2008; Proctor, Carlo, August, & Snow, 2005). In a longitudinal study that involved bilingual Spanish-English 3rd and 6th graders, Nakamoto and colleagues found that English and Spanish letter-word identification predicted English decoding skills, but oral language skills—including vocabulary in Spanish—did not predict the students’ reading comprehension in English. This
suggests that the students needed to acquire English vocabulary in order to perform well in the English reading comprehension test.

Some studies have shown that cognates across languages can facilitate vocabulary development in L2 (Jimenez et al., 1996; Tonzar et al., 2009). The argument is that students can transfer their knowledge of semantic and sometimes structural properties across languages. Proctor et al., (2006), in a study that investigated interaction between Spanish vocabulary, English fluency, and English reading comprehension, found that bilingual Spanish-English 4th graders with good Spanish vocabulary knowledge read English words faster than those with poor Spanish vocabulary knowledge. Of importance, the good readers outperformed the poor readers in English reading comprehension. The researchers attributed this performance to the students’ ability to use cognates to mediate their reading in English, and therefore increased their reading comprehension in English. The fact that only good Spanish readers were able to take advantage of cognates when reading in the L2 suggests that the successful use of cognates requires that students be proficient in both languages—a finding also reported in Jimenez et al., (1996) study. In sum, the above discussed studies show that in order for bilingual and L2 students to access meaning in L2 texts, they need to have good vocabulary knowledge in an L2.

In addition to prior knowledge and vocabulary knowledge, reading strategies also contribute to reading comprehension (Pressley, 2000; Raphael, & Au, 2005). The use of reading strategies involves active reading that includes thinking, questioning, monitoring, and evaluating one’s reading, among other things (Cunningham & Allington, 2006; Toboada & Guthrie, 2006). Students who use a variety of reading strategies engage with the text at a deeper and a broader level (Handsfield & Jimenez, 2008; Parry, 2005). Jimenez et al., (1996), in a study that investigated reading strategies used by bilingual Latina/o students and English monolingual 6th and 7th graders, found that both successful bilinguals and successful
monolinguals shared the same strategies, including the use of prior knowledge and inferencing; however, the successful bilinguals also used bilingual strategies such as translating, code-mixing, code-switching, and searching for cognates, and thus increased their comprehension. Orellana, Doener, and Pulido (2003) noted similar strategies among Mexican-American immigrant students. When these students translated official documents from English to Spanish—paraphrasing—for their parents, they used translation and also paraphrased the documents.

Based on her work in teaching and testing bilingual students in Nigeria and China, Parry (2005) argues that students’ reading strategies may also be influenced by the broader literacy culture of bilingual students. Drawing on the interviews with the Nigerian students after an English reading test, Parry concluded that the main reason the Nigerian students focused on prior knowledge in the reading comprehension test was due to their oral culture background that tends to emphasize broader issues rather than individual words as in the bottom-up strategies that she noted among the Chinese students where attention to reading and writing tends to be on minute details about individual characters, letters, and words. Evidently, when teachers of bilingual students implement reading comprehension strategies in their classrooms they need to take into account students’ sociocultural contexts and experiences in order to support “multiple pathways for accessing students’ cultural and linguistic knowledge” (Handsfield & Jimenez, 2008, p. 458).

In summary, the above discussed studies demonstrate that the development of reading strategies in bilingual and L2 students need to be understood as a process that involves many interrelated factors, most of which need to be taught explicitly to these students. Furthermore, given that some of the knowledge can be transferred across languages, teachers should create instructional contexts that support transfer of skills.
Reading comprehension in the primary grades in South Africa. Similar to the studies mentioned above, studies conducted on reading comprehension in students who are learning English as an L2 in the South African contexts show that reading comprehension is a challenge to these students (Howie, Venter, & van Staden, 2006; Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007; 2010). Mullis et al. (2007), in the analysis of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 2006 data found that while some of the bilingual and L2 South African 4\textsuperscript{th} graders could decode English words well, the majority struggled with making meaning of what they were reading. Of significance, the students’ poor performance in the reading test was despite the fact that the test was translated into African languages. As a result, African language-speaking students took the test in their L1 while native English-speaking students wrote it in English. Based on a grade-by-grade analysis of the strategies used for developing reading skills in the early elementary grades in South African schools; Howie et al. attributed students’ reading comprehension problem on the test to the neglect of higher-order reading skills during instruction. They found that identifying main ideas in texts, comparing texts with personal experiences, and comparing different texts were generally introduced in grade 4. In addition, most curriculums did not teach making generalizations and inferences at all.

The fact that South African students have a problem with reading comprehension, especially with higher-order reading skills in both English and their home languages, is also reported in other studies (Pretorius & Matchet, 2004; Smyth, 2002). In a study on reading ability in seTswana and English, Matjila and Pretorius (2004) found that, in general, the reading performance of biliterate 8\textsuperscript{th} graders was low in both languages. However, it was in reading comprehension, especially on the questions that called for referential and anaphoric knowledge that the majority of the students had the most challenge in both languages. Another important finding was that, overall, the students read slowly for their maturational
level in both English and seTswana, their home language. These researchers argue that this might be due to the fact that the students were not getting enough practice in reading in both languages given the general lack of reading materials, particularly in disadvantaged schools and communities.

Contrary to the results mentioned in the above discussed study, Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) found that bilingual and L2 7th graders performed better in English than in seTswana, their L1. In this intervention program, the students participated, among other things, in extensive reading of fictional and non-fictional texts in both English and seTswana although seTswana had fewer books. These researchers attributed the students’ better performance in English to the students reading more in English due to the availability of the English material compared to the seTswana material. Evidently, this bidirectional transfer of skills suggests that the availability of reading materials in an L2 plays a role in enhancing reading comprehension in an L2.

In addition, some studies indicate that poor reading comprehension in disadvantaged South African students might also be the function of the lack of academic language proficiency (Ntuli & Pretorius, 2005; Smyth, 2002). As Cummins (1996) asserts, not only do students need proficiency in L2, they need a certain kind of proficiency namely, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Given that CALP requires that students rely on decontextualized language in which fewer contextual clues are used to encode abstract concepts and language properties, it is not surprising that students who lack this kind of language struggle with reading comprehension. Broom (2004), in a study of 3rd graders from historically racially segregated schools, found that while the performance of students from the previously advantaged schools and previously disadvantaged schools in the oral language test was not that wide, the performance gap between the two groups in the reading test was significant, with students from the previously advantaged schools outperforming students
from the previously disadvantaged schools. This suggests that students from the previously disadvantaged schools had not acquired sufficient academic language proficiency that was important for them to understand the written language.

Ntuli and Pretorius (2005) obtained similar findings in the storybook reading intervention study. Using story recall and free storytelling to assess language and literacy development skills in Zulu, Ntuli and Pretorius found that grade R students, the experimental group, performed better than grade 1 students, the control group, in the language development tasks and literacy tasks. Of significance, grade R students outperformed grade 1 students in all storybook recall tasks—tasks that require students to show their comprehension of the story in addition to their acquaintance with story schemata. As Smyth (2002) noted if students are to succeed in literacy learning, teachers need to move away from focusing on oral language and structural properties; they need to pay attention to how languages can be used to facilitate academic language proficiency that help students to better comprehend texts for academic purposes.

In summary, the studies reviewed in this section show that reading comprehension is a process that interacts with a number of factors, including reading skills, language proficiency, and exposure to reading materials. Because bilingual and L2 students may need multiple encounters with these factors in order to enhance their reading comprehension skills, teachers need to create instructional contexts that support the development of these skills.

*Writing development in the primary grades in international studies.* Although writing has not received as much attention as reading (Harper, Platt, Naranjo, & Boynton, 2007), it is as important as reading. In fact, reading and writing are inextricably intertwined. Like reading, writing needs to be encouraged in all students, including bilingual and L2 students. Research shows that when these students are provided with multiple writing opportunities to participate in different writing activities in supportive contexts, they develop
writing skills (McCarthey, Garcia, Lopez-Velasquez, Lin, & Yi-Huey; 2004; McCarthey, Yi-Huey, & Cummins, 2005).

Studies on emergent bilingual and L2 students demonstrate that when these students are encouraged to express themselves in meaningful writing activities instead of meaningless copying activities, they come to view and understand writing as a tool for meaningful and authentic communication (Kenner, Kress, Al-Khatib, Kam, & Tsai, 2004; Yaden & Tardibuono; 2004). Moll et al. (2001) studied writing development in two Spanish kindergartners. They found that although the students were writing unconventionally – using phonetic forms – they were able to discuss their writing in relation to their lives. For instance, when one of the kindergartners was asked about her writing, she was able to relate the writing to a garden project in which she was taking part. In this respect, the student understood that people write to convey a message.

Similar to younger bilingual and L2 students, older bilingual and L2 students need to be provided with opportunities and contexts where they are encouraged to write. McCarthey et al. (2005) conducted a two-year study on the writing opportunities in Mandarin-speaking 3rd and 4th graders who were learning to write in both English and Mandarin at school and at home respectively. They found that those students who were given writing opportunities and supported to write in each of these contexts improved in their writing development. For example, the students who were encouraged to write in English in the English classrooms showed improvement in the English grammar, punctuation, sentence complexity, rhetorical style, and voice. Likewise, the students who received support to write in Chinese showed some improvement in Mandarin compared to those students who did not receive such support.

In an earlier study that was part of the above-mentioned study, McCarthey et al. (2004) observed that the support that the Mandarin-speaking students received in writing in
this language was not enough. The students wrote in Mandarin only in the Mandarin classes, and they were not encouraged to use Mandarin in the English classes. This neglect of the students’ L1 is unfortunate because several studies show that not only does the use of L1 enhance the development of writing skills in bilingual and L2 students, but it also helps these students to construct their bilingual and bicultural identities (Reyes, 2001, Reyes & Azuara, 2008). Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) noted that this usually happens in classes where students and teachers express their thoughts and interests freely as they engage in different learning activities in an unrestrictive space.

In summary, the above-discussed studies suggest that teachers need to create supportive writing environments and opportunities that encourage bilingual and L2 students to express themselves in meaningful ways. When this happens, not only will these students come to appreciate writing as a meaningful and authentic learning activity, but they will also be encouraged to explore their bilingual and bicultural identities. Furthermore, supportive writing contexts will encourage bilingual and L2 students to develop as critical writers who are able to ‘write the word’ and ‘write the world’—to paraphrase Freire and Macedo (1987).

Writing development in the primary grades in South Africa. Although there is insufficient research on the learning and teaching of reading and writing in the educational contexts in South Africa in general, writing seems to be hard hit by this paucity. A few studies that have been conducted on writing in the primary grades show that there is a tendency to pay attention to meaningless drills and copying of written language (Gains, & Graham, 2011; Puddemann, Mati, & Mahlalela-Thusi, 2000). In a study that focused on the challenges in language and literacy instruction among the first graders in English-Afrikaans medium and African language medium schools, Puddemann et al. found that in both groups of schools learning to write was mainly characterized by copying of letters and words from the board. These scholars also noted that in some cases the teachers stressed neat
handwriting. Evidently, in these classes the students were not encouraged to write to communicate meaning.

Writing continues to be viewed as a mechanical skill even in the upper grades. Students are not encouraged to explore ideas in meaningful contexts (Hendricks, 2004, 2009). Hendricks (2004), in a study of 7th graders on English L2 writing practices in a historically disadvantaged colored school and a historically advantaged white school found that in both schools writing consisted mainly of guided and controlled grammar exercises. For example, in the latter school the students used writing to learn about direct and indirect speech, including punctuation in these grammatical structures. Furthermore, Hendricks noted that the students’ writing in both schools was characterized by poor linguistic complexity. The students’ struggled to embed subordinating clauses in order to express complex relationships between ideas in their writing. In addition, she found that students’ writing was limited to personal narrative pieces; students hardly wrote impersonal factual texts; also, most of them used oral, colloquial language. Hendricks argues that these practices are troubling because the students were at the beginning of the senior phase, and according to the RNCS framework, they were also expected to develop academic language in writing.

Despite the challenges discussed in the preceding paragraphs, some studies show that in some schools teachers do provide supportive contexts for purposeful and meaningful learning of writing (Bloch, 2002; Stein & Mamabolo, 2005). In these contexts teachers encourage students to draw from their linguistic and cultural resources. For example, Bloch reported that junior primary students in mixed classes with L1 speakers of Afrikaans, English, and Xhosa students in an English-medium school who were encouraged to write in any language of their choice were able to engage in authentic writing activities, including responding to the letters written by the researchers and one of the research assistants. In addition, the students participated in interactive writing with their teachers through journal
writing. Bloch maintains that the students learned that writing is an authentic activity whereby the writer communicates a meaningful message.

Newfield (2011) and Stein and Newfield (2004) show how multiple communicative modes can enhance students’ writing development. In these studies, grade 1 and 2 students from a poverty-stricken primary school in the outskirts of Johannesburg engaged in exchanging letters with peers from a Manhattan elementary school in New York. Of significance, not only did the students use written English, but they also incorporated drawings and pictures of themselves and their families. Stein and Newfield argued that by integrating multiple modes of communication, the students “participated in constructions of cultural identities that have projected them out of their local worlds, into a new space for enunciation and narratives of self” (p. 33). Furthermore, Stein and Newfield contend that since the students learned about similarities and differences about their lives and contexts through their writing, the writing activities encouraged critical literacy. In brief, these studies demonstrate that authentic and supportive contexts can facilitate the development of writing as a meaningful communicative tool.

Taken together, the studies discussed in this section suggest that teachers need to go beyond skills-based instruction in writing. They also need to create contexts and opportunities that encourage students to view writing as an authentic literacy activity in which people participate to communicate meaningfully—as shown above, South African students are capable of engaging in such writing practices.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I showed how the broader educational, socio-political, and cultural contexts in South Africa influenced and still continue to shape language and literacy practices of students in general, including the learning of literacy in the 4th grade. Furthermore, I discussed how these contexts interact with cognitive-linguistic processes involved in
language and literacy learning, drawing from the local and international studies. More importantly, I also underscored the challenges in literacy learning and instruction in general, and in English in particular, in most South African schools, especially in black rural and urban schools. In the present study, therefore, I build on the existing research on language and literacy instruction in South Africa, specifically in black rural and urban schools.
Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter I describe the approach, research procedures and analysis I used to understand the language and literacy practices of the participants namely, the focal students in the 4th grade English language classroom and in their homes, the 4th grade teacher, and to a lesser degree, those of the literacy teachers in the foundation phase and the principal. Furthermore, I discuss how I assessed the students’ biliteracy skills in English and Zulu. As indicated before, the critical questions guiding in this study are:

1. What language and literacy practices occur in the learning and teaching of English as a second language in a grade 4 South African classroom?
2. How do the students and the teacher experience these practices within this classroom?
3. How do the students perform in reading and writing assessments in Zulu and English? What can we learn from their performance?
4. What tensions exist between school literacy and other literacies? What are the meanings of these tensions?
5. What are the social, cultural, and political factors that influence the students’ learning of reading and writing in this class?

A Qualitative Case Study Approach

Classrooms are sites where students and teachers construct meaning about learning and teaching respectively. The meanings are dynamic in the sense that participants are always engaged in redefining and renegotiating earlier meanings in relation to the local contexts. Regardless of whether or not participants are aware, the classroom context interacts with the broader sociocultural factors in complex ways. In this respect, learning becomes a complex
phenomenon. It is in light of these complexities that I chose a qualitative case study approach for conducting this study.

In a qualitative study approach researchers seek to explore and understand a phenomenon in its complexities, richness, and depth as experienced, understood, and constructed by participants in their social contexts (Erickson, 1986; Stakes, 2005). Being immersed in social contexts where naturally occurring behavior and practices take place help qualitative researchers to better understand the social reality as experienced and understood by participants (Heath & Street, 2008; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). In other words, qualitative researchers focus on learning about participants’ perspectives or emic perspectives; that is, how people who are being studied make meaning of their social world. In this regard, qualitative researchers are concerned with the process of meaning-making (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Furthermore, qualitative researchers take into account that participants perceive social reality in different ways because they may have different experiences. Consequently, qualitative researchers accept that there is no single meaning of reality but multiple meanings (Patton, 2002). So as bricoleurs or quilt makers, piecing together different pieces of the studied phenomena (bricolage) (Denzil & Lincoln, 2005), qualitative researchers try to represent the lived experiences of participants in a detailed manner that gives the reader “vicarious experiences” of participants (Stake, 1995).

Using a qualitative case study, I tried to understand the learning of the English language and literacy in the 4th grade class, paying attention to the classroom social context and the meanings and experiences that the participants made as they engaged in learning. In addition, I focused on how learning in the local classroom context interacted with the broader socio-political, cultural, and social contexts. In this respect, I examined the nested contexts surrounding the English language and literacy practices of the participants.
Field Entry

How a researcher gains access into the field of study is critically important because it “will have a significant effect on the nature and quality of the data collected, on the insight into the organisation and its members that the investigator is able to gain, and, ultimately, on the trustworthiness of the findings” (Shenton & Hayter, 2004, p. 223). These words influenced the steps I took to secure entry into the school that I had identified as a possible site. While there are many strategies for entering the field (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Johl & Renganathan, 2009), at the initial stage I chose an informal one—making informal telephone calls. Since I was in the US and I wanted to conduct a study in South Africa, making telephone calls was an ideal option. Specifically, I called a relative and explained that I was looking for a school where I could study English language and literacy practices in a 4th grade classroom. She suggested a school where she was teaching. She explained that this was a good choice because the principal is usually open to new experiences, and she trusted that I would work well with the 4th grade teacher, whom she described as welcoming and always willing to help and learn. After we had had several conversations about this topic, the relative finally approached the principal, and as she had indicated, she was receptive.

A telephone conversation with the principal marked the beginning of the formal process of the entry. I first introduced myself and explained that I was interested in coming to the school to study English language and literacy practices in the 4th grade classroom. Although she did not have many questions, she inquired if my study was going to disrupt the normal routine of the classroom. I assured her that this would not be the case because I would be quietly taking notes and videotaping as the teacher and the students continue with their everyday learning activities. Since I wanted her to have a full picture of what I was coming to do, I sent her a simplified version of my proposal. We both agreed that once I arrived in
South Africa before the schools closed for the end of the second term, I would come and talk to her in person.

As agreed upon, a week before the school closed, I was at her office. She had a copy of my proposal, neatly filed. After briefly talking about the excitement that was all over the country about the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup, which was going to be held in about two weeks, we switched to my study. Again, I explained the purpose of the study, the methods I would use to collect data, and how I would keep all the data anonymous and confidential. I also stressed that participation for all participants would be voluntary. In addition, I emphasized that I was not there to evaluate her administration or the 4th grade teacher, but to learn from them what it means to learn literacy in the English language in the 4th grade in that school. She seemed satisfied and told me that she had spoken to the 4th grade teacher, and the teacher was excited although a bit anxious.

The following day, I came to the school to meet with the 4th grade teacher. She admitted that she was not sure what to expect. As I had done with the principal, I explained my study and assured her that I would not be evaluating her, but I would be learning from her and the students about what it means to them to learn literacy in the English language in the 4th grade class. Although she seemed a bit puzzled about my study, she welcomed me and guaranteed me that she would do her best to support me—a promise she kept. Because the schools were closing and the teachers were busy with the grades, I did not get an opportunity to visit the 4th grade class. This was unfortunate because the visits would have given me a chance to start thinking about all the logistics and other study-related matters, including the selection of focal students. Nonetheless, I had a smooth entry.

As for the entry into the families of the focal students, I first sent a letter with the focal students asking the parents/guardians for an appointment to introduce myself in person and explain the proposed home visits. I also enclosed a short form where they had to indicate
the date and the time they would like us to meet. The letter and the form were written in Zulu, the language which all the parents could read as indicated by the students. Within two days, all the focal students had brought back the form, and all the parents/guardians had given me the appointment date.

On my first visit to each of the families, using Zulu—the language I used throughout the study with the parents, except in a few cases where we switched between Zulu and English when the parents/guardians chose to do so—I first thanked the parents/guardians for the opportunity, and then introduced myself, stressing that I was a student, not a teacher. I went on to explain that I wanted to visit them at their homes in order to learn from them about their perspectives on how their children were learning the English language and literacy at school. I also indicated that we would talk about the family’s language and literacy practices because understanding home experiences may shed light on children’s learning, and thus help teachers and researchers to use the knowledge to provide students with better learning. Although the other parents/guardians seemed to have understood why I wanted to visit their homes, one of them appeared to have confused me for a social worker. She started pouring out her frustrations about her child, one of the focal students. I explained to her that I was not a social worker, but a student myself. Nonetheless, I encouraged her to visit the school and express her concerns. She welcomed the idea with some reservations, explaining that she might not be able to do so because of her job commitment. Besides this incident, all the parents/guardian assured me of their support and I also assured them that I would not share any of the information from our discussions with the teacher(s), the principal, or any school officials. Before leaving the home, all the parents signed a consent letter and we scheduled appointments. In brief, I had no difficulties with securing the parents/guardians’ permission to have conversations with me in their homes.
Research Site

Community and school contexts. The school in which I conducted this study is a rural public primary school (grades R-7/K-7 in the US) located in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It is one of the primary schools in a school district that has 114 schools. Almost all the people in the area are Zulu-native speakers. This near-homogeneity is, in large part, due to the Group Areas Act (1950) of the National Party. Under this segregationist Act, different racial groups were allocated to partitioned areas and racial integration was strictly prohibited. Despite the demise of the National Party in 1994 and all its segregationist laws, most areas, especially townships and rural areas, still remain racially and ethnically segregated under the democratic South Africa. Not surprisingly, almost all the people in the community where the school is located are black and native speakers of Zulu.

In general, the community is poor. Some people are working in a nearby mall and a small industrial area. Others are self-employed—sell fruits and vegetables in the streets and in the market mall; and still others are unemployed. There is a small percentage of a middle class, consisting mainly of teachers, nurses, and government clerks. Despite the socio-economic disparities among the community members, most families have access to electricity, running water, and toilets. Although the previous homeland government provided these facilities, they were not accessible to most people as they are now under the current democratic government. Providing these facilities was part of the government’s Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP).

Specifically, the school is located in a small rural neighborhood and about two kilometers away from a small township—a place that was designated as a reserve for black people working in urban areas or government offices during the apartheid era. Whereas most of the families in the rural neighborhood are poor, with unemployed or self-employed adults, most families in the township are middle class families, with nurses and teachers as heads of
the families. The majority of the students who attend the school come from both of these neighborhoods.

The school is a four-winged brick building painted with the school colors. The four wings are built around a concrete-covered area that is used for assembly purposes and as a playground. Three of the wings have classrooms that are arranged by grade-level, from grades 1 through 7, and the other wing is an administrative block. Grade R was housed in an old building which is parallel to one of the wings. At the back of this block, there was a vegetable garden which fed the students. In addition, three of the classrooms had been converted into the kitchen, the library, and the computer room. The kitchen was used to cook for the students since the school had a feeding program. The students were fed at midday. However, if there was more food, they could have another serving after school. I learned that for some of the students, these meals were the only meals they had for the whole day.

As for the library, although it had colorful posters about health issues, political history, and the importance of reading, there were few books. In fact, most of the books were textbooks and almost all of them were in English. Similarly, a few fiction books were written mainly in English. The school had no qualified librarian; one of the teachers served as one. She helped the students with borrowing the books and also taught library use during library sessions. Each class had a thirty-minute library session per week. Next to the library, there was a computer room. Although the computers were old, they were working; however, there was no internet. Similar to the library session, each grade had a thirty-minute session per week. The computer teacher taught word processing skills.

The administrative block has offices for the principal, the vice-principal, the heads of departments, the secretary, and the teachers’ lounge. The secretary’s office was the only office with a computer in this block. On the other hand, the principal’s office had a photocopier and an extended telephone line from the secretary’s office. Walls in both offices
were lined with notices about official school matters from within the school, the school
district, the provincial, and the national departments. Most of these were in English. In
addition, there were a few personal notices by faculty and staff members. All the offices were
catered for by two employees. There were also two other employees who tendered the
grounds. In addition, three security guards took turns—night and day shifts—to guard the
school. The school is fenced and gated. It also has electricity, running water, and pit toilets.

The principal had worked at the school for more than twenty years: first as a
classroom teacher, mostly teaching the intermediate phase (grades 4-7), a vice-principal, and
then a principal. Like the principal, some of the teachers had been at the school for a very
long time; however, there were also relatively new ones. Overall, there were 33 teachers,
including the principal, the vice-principal, and three heads of departments. On the other hand,
there were 1059 students, and each class had approximately 40 to 50 students. At the time of
the study the school fees was R200.00, approximately $30.00 per student per year.

The language policy of the school was consistent with the official Language-in-
Education Policy of 1996 (Department of Education, 1997). At the foundation phase, Zulu
was used as a medium of instruction in all the subjects, and English was introduced as a
subject in the second grade. In the intermediate phase students switched to English as a
medium of instruction in all the subjects and continued to be taught Zulu as a subject.

**Fourth grade classroom context.** The classroom as a physical and a social context
provided the space and the time in which the English language and literacy events were
enacted. Specifically, it was located in the intermediate block, and it was one of the three 4th
grade classes. There were 41 students in this class—20 boys and 21 girls, and they were all
native speakers of Zulu. The desks were arranged in neat rows, facing the front of the
classroom. Most of the girls sat on the left-hand side and the boys on the right hand-side of
the classroom. In most cases two students shared a desk, and this was in part due to necessity.
The space between the rows allowed the teacher to move through the classroom, especially when she monitored and graded classroom work and homework.

On the left side of the room there was a tall metal cabinet and next to it was the teacher’s desk. The teacher used the desk mostly for keeping her bag off the floor. On a few occasions, she sat at her desk to grade the students’ work. The cabinet stored textbooks for the different subjects, including the English textbooks, which were mainly used for reading comprehension lessons. There were not enough copies for each person in the classroom and students who sat together shared a book. Before each comprehension lesson the teacher would take out the textbooks, pass them out to the students, collect them at the end of the lessons, and stored them in the cabinet again.

On the right side of the wall, there were two charts: the class schedule and the inventory chart listing the number of girls, boys, and the class furniture. The back wall had two big colorful commercial posters. One poster was about the scriptures and the buildings of the different South African religions: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, African religion, Judaism, and Baha faith—everything was written in English. The other poster had pictures of different plants, all labeled in English. Next to the plant poster, there was a calendar written in English, and beside it was a chart written in Afrikaans, displaying how to write personal information, such as students’ first and last name, age, gender, and date of birth. The chart next to it was written in Zulu and was about nouns: the definition and a few examples of nouns. I noticed that during the course of the year, the teacher and other teachers who taught other subjects would add some posters and charts. For example, the English teacher created a chart of the poem the students were learning and displayed it in the room. Similarly, the Life Orientation teacher posted a commercial poster with the pictures of vegetables and their labels, all in English.
In this class English language and literacy instruction was offered in the morning for 60 minutes only on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. Sometimes the teacher would teach two different lessons in one day. On such occasions she would break the time into half, assigning each lesson 30 minutes; for example, 30 minutes for reading and 30 minutes for spelling. This was particularly the case towards the end of the year as she was trying to cover the syllabus. For the most part, the students worked as a whole group, with the teacher directing many of the activities. There were a few cases where the students worked in groups.

Participants

To choose participants, I used purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). This means that I purposely selected participants who I identified as having a potential to give me rich data that would allow me to have an in-depth understanding of the language and literacy practices of the participants. Primary participants were the focal students and the 4th grade teacher. Secondary participants were grades R-2 teachers and the principal, and tertiary participants were the parents of the focal students. The 3rd grade teacher opted out of participating and therefore no data was collected at that grade level. In the following paragraphs, I describe how and why I choose these participants.

Primary participants

The students. Given that there were three sections of grade 4 and were all heterogeneously grouped, with the help of the 4th grade English teacher, I chose one section from which I chose focal students. However, before choosing the focal students, I observed the entire class for two weeks, looking for students who would provide me with different opportunities to learn more about what it meant to read and write in English in that classroom. In other words, I was looking for students who would allow me to capture “vicarious experiences” (Stake, 1995) and “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of learning to read and write in that class. Because two weeks was not enough time to know the students
well, I consulted with the teacher regarding the eight focal students I had chosen. I made sure that the focal students represented different levels of proficiency—three were high achievers, two were average achievers, and the last three were low achievers. Because there were no standardized tests at the time of data collection, I relied on my own observations and the teachers’ opinions.

Although I initially chose eight focal students, by the end of the study I had six. I lost two students early in the study because their parents were not going to be available for home visits and interviews. Towards the end of the study, a month before the end of the year, I also lost another student who had to leave the school due to family issues. Because this student had participated in the study for four and a half months, I continue to consider her as one of the focal students although she only participated in the Zulu narrative performance assessment tasks.

For the purposes of the findings presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6, I chose only four of the focal students. In selecting the four focal students, I paid attention to their level of participation in the different language and literacy events and their performance levels in class. Two of these students were the most active and seemed very engaged, one was somewhat active and appeared to be somewhat below average performance, and the last one was the least active and seemed to be the one who struggled the most. This variation allowed me to see how students with varying participation levels and abilities learn. One student I did not choose was similar to the last student: she was passive in class and appeared to struggle with most of the class activities and tasks. As for the 6th student, I excluded her because she participated in only one performance assessment. In the following section, I present the profiles of the focal students.

*Noma.* Noma lived in a modern six-room house that belonged to the church where her aunt, her guardian, was a pastor. The home was well-fenced and the grounds were well-
tended, with a well-looked after vegetable garden. The house had electricity and running water. It was also well-furnished. In the living room there was a big cabinet that displayed different items, including neatly-lined books, mainly textbooks; a television, a music system, and a DVD. On the wall, there were pictures of family members and some prominent political leaders. Living with Noma and her aunt were her older cousins—two young males who were primary school teachers, at other schools, and a young girl who was doing grade 11 in a school next to Noma’s school. They all commuted to schools by bus.

This was Noma’s first year living with her aunt. Before then, she was living with her mother and two of her older siblings in one of the big cosmopolitan cities in the country. According to Noma’s aunt, there was some misunderstanding between her parents, which led to Noma failing the 4th grade the previous year. While living in the city, Noma attended a multiracial school where only English was taught, so at her current school she was receiving formal instruction in Zulu for the first time. Nonetheless, she was orally proficient in the language since she had always been exposed to spoken Zulu at home and in the community. Noma’s aunt and cousins were concerned about her literacy skills in Zulu. They encouraged her to read Zulu daily newspapers and the Zulu Bible in addition to the English newspapers and magazines—all of which were readily available in the family. Furthermore, the family provided her with a place to do her school work, a study room at the church. Obviously, Noma’s current family context provided her with the support she needed for doing her school work.

*Dudu.* Dudu lived in a relatively old five-room house. In the living room, there were two three-seat couches and a television stand with a television on the upper compartment and a DVD player on the lower compartment. The wall was covered with family portraits, some very old and others recent. Next to this house, there was a modern seven-room house that was under construction. Dudu was excited about it and explained that she liked it because it was
going to have a study, so she would be able to sit comfortably and read. Far east of this house, there was a water tap that was installed by the government as part of the RDP mentioned earlier, so water was readily available in the home. In addition, the family had electricity, and the entire premises were well-fenced.

Dudu was living with her grandmother, who was uneducated, a sibling, who was completing grade 7, and an older cousin, who had recently passed grade 12. Her mother was working as a registered nurse in a hospital in one of the big cities. She returned home at least once a month. I met her once during one of the home visits. Like the grandmother, she showed great interest in her children’s education; she often called the children to ask about school work. Dudu’s father, who also lived in the city, was unemployed at the time but had a post-grade 12 diploma. In addition, Dudu had an uncle who had a junior degree from one of the US universities in the Northeast. Dudu told me that he gave her a copy of Ben Carson’s *Gifted Hands* (1990) as a gift, and this was her favorite book. Furthermore, Dudu shared with me that she read Zulu and English magazines and newspapers, all of which were bought by her older cousin, who also helped her with school work, together with her older sibling.

*Muzzi.* Muzzi lived in a four-room house built by his parents, not one of those four-room houses that were built by the apartheid regime. The home was well-fenced and the grounds were well-looked after. Most of the yard, including the driveway, was covered with concrete. Like all the houses in this area, the family had access to electricity and running water. Inside the living room, there were two couches and a wall unit (cabinet) that ran from corner to corner. At the center of the unit there was a big television, and in the compartments below there was a DVD player, a music system, and a DSTV (cable) decoder. This was the only family among the families of the focal students that had cable TV.

Muzzi was living with both parents and four siblings. Both parents were teachers. His father was the head of Department in one of the schools in the district, and his mother was on
sick leave and was recovering. Muzi was the youngest child; two of his older brothers were
going to the same school as Muzi. His eldest brother was in grade 12 in the neighboring high
school, and his only sister had graduated from high school the previous year. On many
occasions when I visited the family, I would find the parents reading Zulu and English
newspapers. In fact, there was a corner that had a pile of newspapers. The parents explained
to me that their intention was to make the newspapers easily accessible to the children so that
they could practice reading. However, Muzi did not seem interested. His mother told me that
he spent most of the time playing soccer and watching television, a fact that he confirmed in
the subsequent interviews.

S’khona. Unlike the other students whose homes were well-fenced and had well-
tended grounds, S’khona’s home was not fenced and the ground had patches of green grass
and worn-out grass. In a typical traditional Zulu setting, members of the family lived in the
same yard although they had established their own families. S’khona’s uncle lived in a four-
room house; his aunt lived in a one-room house, and his mother lived in a three-room house,
the only house to which I had access. The house had two bedrooms and a living room. The
living room was almost empty, with only two old worn-out wooden benches that could seat
about 4 people each. There was nothing on the wall. Although there was no television in the
living room, I learned that S’khona had free access to television and a DVD player in his
uncle’s house. Like the other families in the area, S’khona’s family had electricity and a
water tap next to one of the houses.

Although S’khona had a big family, there were three children from his biological
mother, and he was the eldest; the other two were not going to school yet. His mother was the
only parent in his life and was working as a cashier in one of the shops at the local mall. Her
schedule was so tight that on a few occasions we had to meet during the lunch hour at her
workplace instead of meeting with her at her house. S’khona’s mother was aware of the
challenges that her son was facing at school in general, and with English and literacy in particular. However, she did not seem to have a clear plan as to how to help him nor did she have the time to go to school to discuss his problems. In addition, unlike the other students who reported to have easy access to newspapers and magazines, S’khona’s family did not buy these materials although sometimes his aunt would bring old Zulu newspapers home to be used as a toilet paper. All these factors seemed to have confounded S’khona’s difficulties at school as evidenced by him repeating the 4th grade.

In the following table, I provide a summary of the students’ background information, recapturing important information.

Table 1

*Summary of Students’ Background Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of years at the school</th>
<th>Living with parent/guardian</th>
<th>Occupation of parent/guardian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Noma</em></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dudu</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muzi</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mother and Father</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>S’khona</em></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Student repeated a grade

*Fourth grade teacher.* Since there was only one English teacher who taught all the three sections of grade 4, I had no problem in choosing the teacher. The teacher, Miss Kubheka, a local resident, had taught at the school since she started teaching 12 years ago. She had taught grades 2 and 4, and this was her 4th year of teaching English in the 4th grade. Miss Kubheka had a four-year professional qualification in School Management and no qualification in teaching English as L2 or in literacy, let alone L2 literacy. In fact, she
explained that she started teaching immediately after completing grade 12 with no professional training whatsoever. It was during the course of her teaching that she acquired professional training in School Management, and this was through distance education, a common education mode offered by some South African universities as an alternative to traditional face-to-face education. In these institutions teachers are sent materials to study on their own and then write exams. Sometimes the universities organize face-to-face contact between students and professors; usually, this occurs during school holidays and takes about three to four weeks. Most of these programs were initiated in the 1980s to address poor professional and academic knowledge in teachers, especially Black teachers. However, there seems to be concerns that some programs in these institutions are failing to equip teachers with adequate academic and professional knowledge (Herman & Pillay, 2009).

Despite Miss Kubheka’s lack of professional training in teaching English as L2 and literacy, after several interactions with her, I noticed that she had an inquisitive mind, and was always eager to learn from a range of resources, including her colleagues and books. In addition, she was deeply committed to the general welfare of the students. For example, on one occasion I observed her giving a pair of shoes to a very needy boy. What was most striking is that she did it in private; the other students did not know about it. In fact, she tried to hide it from me as well. I, being an inquisitive researcher, skilfully found out about this, careful not to invade the privacy of the teacher and the student.

Secondary participants

*Grades R-2 teachers and the principal.* Although I had invited the 3rd grade teacher, she declined to participate and did not give any specific reason. I therefore only have data from grades R-2. With the exception of grade R teacher who had taught for nine years, grades one and two teachers had taught for more than ten years in the primary grades. However, they all had a three-year diploma in primary education. Similar to the 4th grade teacher, grade one
and two teachers started their teaching with no professional training. After teaching a couple of years, they went back to school where they acquired a professional diploma in primary education. Because they were training to teach in the primary grades, they did not specialize in any subject; they took language and literacy courses as part of the curriculum: the curriculum did not emphasize English as L2 and L2 literacy issues. This also applied to grade R teacher. The overall picture here is that although the teachers had some training in language and literacy issues, this training may not have adequately prepared them for the student population they were going to teach.

The participation of grades R through 2 teachers in this study was crucial in helping me understand some of the English language and literacy practices in the 4th grade since grades R through 3 provided a foundation. On the other hand, including the principal gave me an insight into how she conceptualized the learning and teaching of language and literacy at the school. Having an understanding of her philosophical beliefs and orientations allowed me to understand the support she offered the teachers and the students in their teaching and learning of language and literacy, in general, and in the 4th grade, in particular. Like the other teachers, the principal was a seasoned teacher. As mentioned before, she had worked at the school for more than 20 years: first as a classroom teacher, mostly teaching the intermediate phase (grades 4-7), a vice-principal, and then a principal.

**Tertiary participants**

*Parents.* Because parents/guardians mediate students’ learning in general and at school, I also invited the parents/guardians of the focal students to participate in the study. For each focal student, I asked only one parent/guardian; hence, I ended up with six. From these families, I gained insights into their perspectives and experiences regarding what it means to be literate and learned about the language and literacy practices of the families. I
used this insight to deepen my understanding of the focal students’ learning to read and write in English in the 4th grade.

In keeping with the regulations of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I explained to the students, the teachers, and the parents the purpose of the study, the methods I would use to collect data, how I would keep all data anonymous and confidential, and how I would disseminate the findings. In addition, I informed the participants that participation in the study was completely voluntary.

**Researchers’s identity.** I chose to adopt a reflexive approach in talking about my identities in relation to this study. This stance allowed me to acknowledge that as a researcher, I am not objective. I bring to the study my lived experiences that shaped and influenced the research questions, the methods I employed in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data, a point well noted by several scholars (Denzil & Lincoln, 2005; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Weis & Fine, 2000). Consistent with this argument, I briefly describe myself in relation to the study.

I am a black South African woman and a Zulu native speaker who grew up in the apartheid South Africa in rural communities that were predominantly Zulu-speaking. In line with the segregationist policies of the apartheid government, I attended schools that were all black and almost exclusively Zulu-speaking. However, we learned English as an L2. It was first introduced as a subject from grade 2 and then as a medium of instruction in grade 5. At this grade, we were also introduced to Afrikaans, another European language. This means that I learned to read and write in three languages at school. Like many black rural and urban township schools, all the schools I attended were poorly-resourced, with under-prepared teachers. As a result, underachievement and dismal failure were common.

After graduating from a teachers’ college, I taught in a black township high school and a teacher’s college. In both institutions I taught English as an L2. During my tenure at
these institutions, I pursued undergraduate and graduate studies with one of the distance education institutions and a residential university. After qualifying in these institutions, I landed a job in one of the universities where I taught Zulu as a first and an additional language before coming to the US where I am currently a graduate student in language and literacy studies. Evidently, I have a long history and a range of experiences in language teaching. It is these experiences that motivated me to pursue my studies in language and literacy issues, and for the purposes of this study in the 4th grade class.

The students in this study were living in a rural community and were all Zulu native speakers as I was during my youth. In addition, they were attending an all-black school with predominantly Zulu-speaking peers and teachers. Furthermore, they were learning English as an L2 and this language was formally introduced at school. Similar to the students, I also shared some experiences with the teachers. Like I was during my days as a practicing teacher, the teachers were teaching in an all-black school and nearly all of them were Zulu native speakers. Furthermore, except in the foundation phase and in Zulu classes, the teachers were teaching in English, an additional language, struggling to make the content accessible to the students as I had done many years ago. Evidently, the similarities between the students and the teachers and me make me an insider. However, some of my experiences complicate this status. They make me an outsider as well.

The fact that I have never taught in a primary school limits my understanding of what it really means to teach students at that level. In other words, that I also taught English as an L2 like the teacher I observed is not enough. I taught English in a high school and at a teacher’s college, contexts that are clearly different from the context of my focal students and the teachers. This means that I may not have related to some of the challenges and complexities that are involved in teaching in that context. Furthermore, that I had lived in a big city for about a decade before coming to the US undermines my understanding of some of
the experiences of living in a rural community that my participants had. Finally, and most importantly, that I am a graduate student means that I have theoretical and academic knowledge and experiences which the teachers did not have; in this respect, how the teachers and I conceptualize language and literacy issues may be somewhat different.

As for my participant observer role in this class, I helped the teacher with class logistics such as making photocopies, distributing and keeping track of the supplies. I did not teach the class nor did I get involved in disciplining the students. Limiting my role in this way allowed me to pay close attention to the classroom activities.

Given the complexity of my roles as I discussed them above, I tried to tread cautiously. For example, while I was aware that my insider status may have helped me to better understand some of the practices, I was careful. I took into account that every situation is experienced differently by participants as they constantly make efforts to negotiate and renegotiate meanings in their cultural contexts (Eisenhart, 2001). In other words, like speed bumps (Weis & Fine, 2000), the reflexivity stance encouraged me to be cautious of my identities. It also compelled me to continually interrogate preconceived notions, expectations, and aspirations I had which had the potential to influence the study.

**Pilot Study**

Before I assessed the students, I conducted a case study on one of the students in the 4th grade class who was not one of the focal students. This was between September and October of 2010. The focus was on the oral reading and reading comprehension strategies the student used in the narrative and expository texts in both Zulu and English. It also paid attention to cross-linguistic issues. In general, I found that the student performed at grade-level in the oral reading and reading comprehension tasks in the Zulu narrative and expository texts. She could use a range of strategies, including making personal connections and use of background knowledge.
On the other hand, the student had some difficulties with the English texts, especially with the reading comprehension tasks. In fact, she battled more with the narrative text than the expository text. In the narrative text, vocabulary and long, complex sentences appeared to be the main problems that contributed to the student not comprehending most of the questions. Because of these issues, the text was replaced by another text that was shorter and had relatively simple vocabulary, and this was the text that was used to assess the focal students. Overall, in both English texts, the student relied on the illustrations, indicating that she was compensating for her limited English proficiency. In addition, she used a lot of code-switching in both texts, suggesting that English was her weaker language—a finding that is consistent with findings from other studies (Jiménez, et al, 1996; Yambi, 2010).

**Data Sources and Collection Procedures**

The main sources of data for this study were classroom observational notes, videotapes, interviews, students’ writing samples, curricular documents, performance assessment in Zulu and English, and home visits. I collected all the data myself between July 26 through December 15, 2010 (See Table 2 for the summary of data sources and frequency of data collection). In the following section I discuss the data collected at school first and then the data collected at home.
Table 2

**Summary of Data Sources and Collection Frequency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Language(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field Notes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade R</td>
<td>3 sessions (3 X 40 mins.)</td>
<td>Zulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>3 session (3 X 60 mins.)</td>
<td>Zulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>2 sessions (2 X 60 mins.)</td>
<td>1 Zulu/1English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>52 sessions (25 X 60 mins.; 27 X 30 mins.)</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Video Recording</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>35 sessions (20 X 60 mins.; 15 X 30 mins.)</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interviews</td>
<td>6 Initial interviews (6 X 30 mins.)</td>
<td>Zulu-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Exit interviews (6 X 45-60 mins.)</td>
<td>Zulu-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Interviews</td>
<td>3 Interviews (3 X 45-60 mins.)</td>
<td>Zulu-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades R-2 Teachers</td>
<td>1 Initial interview (1 X 45 mins.)</td>
<td>Zulu-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Final interview (1 X 90 mins.)</td>
<td>Zulu-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1 Interview (1 X 40 mins.)</td>
<td>Zulu-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Interviews</td>
<td>11 interviews (11 X 40-60 mins.)</td>
<td>Zulu and Zulu-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Visits</td>
<td>29 visits (29 X 40-60 mins.)</td>
<td>Zulu and Zulu-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Assessments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Narrative Text sessions (6 X 45 mins.; Zulu; 5 X 45 mins.: English)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expository Text sessions (5 X 45 mins.; Zulu; 5 X 45 mins.: English)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Narrative writing sessions (5 X 30 mins.; Zulu; 5 X 30 mins.: English)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student writing samples</td>
<td>(54 writing samples per student; July-December)</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official Curricular Documents (Work schedules and workshops files)</td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Data collection at school.** Data collected at the school consists of classroom observational notes, videotapes, interviews, students’ writing samples, curricular documents, and performance assessment in Zulu and English. I discuss each of the data collection methods in the sections that follow.

**Classroom observational notes in the 4th grade.** In order to observe literacy practices in the English language enacted by the students and the teacher in the 4th grade class, I visited the class 3 days a week for an hour each day, from mid July but only started collecting data from July 26 through December 15, 2010. During this time, I documented 52 lessons. I specifically focused on how the focal students interacted with the teacher and other students in multiple literacy events in this class. Paying attention to the interactional patterns and the literacy events helped me to learn the meanings and understandings of what it means to learn and teach literacy in the English language in this context. Because student-teacher interaction is mediated through language, and language is a cultural tool (Vygotsky, 1978), noting how the students and the teacher used Zulu—the home language of the students and the teacher—shed light on some cultural values that shaped the learning and teaching of literacy in that context. Moreover, I took notes on how the students and the teacher used other resources such as textbooks, students’ sociocultural knowledge and experiences in supporting the learning of literacy in English in that class.

Furthermore, I supplemented the class observational notes by video recording the class lessons. Although the initial plan was to video record all the English lessons, I ended up with 35 video recorded lessons out of the 52 lessons due to frequent electricity outage and some logistical realities in the classroom. Besides frequently zooming in on the teacher and the focal students, especially when the students were engaged in various literacy events, I also captured a wider angle, shifting the lens across the entire classroom. Not only did this allow me to put the literacy behaviors of the focal students in context in relation to a range of
literacy events and activities in the classroom, but it also helped me to record the physical setting, which is also vital in understanding literacy learning. In this regard, my video recording was consistent with the theoretical orientation of this study that in order to understand literacy learning, it is crucial to take into account the broader context.

**Classroom observational notes in grades R-2.** In addition to observing the English class in the 4th grade, I visited grades R through 2, three times each for about 60 minutes per lesson, documenting the language and literacy activities in these classes. As I indicated earlier on, I did not observe the 3rd grade class; the teacher did not grant me permission. The aim of these visits was to learn about the teachers’ instructional approaches to literacy instruction and the students’ literacy activities in these classes. Gaining insight into the instructional approaches and literacy activities in these classes was important because language and literacy practices learned in grades R through 3 laid a foundation for language and literacy practices in the subsequent classes.

**Interviews.** I also conducted semi-structured interviews. The interviews helped me to understand the participants’ practices from their perspectives. This is particularly important because in a qualitative case study participants’ emic perspectives provide the researcher with rich data from which the researcher can learn about the complexities of a phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Specifically, I interviewed the focal students, the 4th grade English teacher, grades R-2 literacy teachers, the principal, and the parents of the focal students. I audio taped all the interviews and transcribed them verbatim later.

**Focal students interviews.** I conducted two formal, semi-structured interviews with individual students (See Appendix A for the interview questions). One was at the beginning and one towards the end of the study. Each interview lasted for about 30 to 45 minutes. In order to ensure that I got as much data as possible, I used any of the language(s) with which
the students felt comfortable; almost invariably, we switched between English and Zulu, with most of the code-switching being dominated by Zulu. In the first interview I was interested in getting to know the students, especially learning about their language and literacy practices before formal schooling and in the earlier grades before the 4th grade. We focused on the stories they were told as young children, TV programs they watched, anything they remembered reading, writing, and drawing, and what they found interesting or not interesting and why. Learning about the students’ initial literacy activities and practices enhanced my understanding of how these activities and practices influenced and shaped their literacy practices in the 4th grade.

In the final interview I wanted to find out from the students about their experiences in learning to read and write in English in this class. We paid attention to the materials they read and wrote as well as the successes and problems they encountered. Furthermore, I asked the students their views and experiences on the use of Zulu in English reading and writing. We also talked about the support they would like to receive in order to be better readers and writers. Finally, we discussed their out-of-school literacy activities and practices, such as the TV programs they watched, the radio stations and programs they listened, and the materials they read for pleasure. Learning about the students’ school and home literacy practices helped me to make sense of the complexities involved in their learning of literacy in their contexts. This is particularly important because literacy practices tend to permeate contexts, resulting in hybrid practices that defy the privileging of schooled literacy over other literacies (Stein & Slonimsky, 2006; Street, 2001; Volk & de Acosta, 2003).

From time to time, I also had informal discussions with the students, asking for clarification for behaviors related to their literacy learning. In order to avoid misrepresenting these discussions, I documented all informal conversations on my journal immediately after our discussions and incorporated them into the field notes later.
Fourth grade teacher interviews. Similar to the focal students, I conducted two formal, semi-structured interviews with the 4th grade teacher. One was at the beginning and one at the end of the study (See Appendix B for the interview questions). The first interview took about 60 minutes and the second one lasted for about 2 hours. In both interviews we switched between Zulu and English, depending on the language with which the teacher was comfortable at a given moment. In the initial interview I asked the teacher about her goals in teaching literacy in English in this class, focusing on the successes and challenges in meeting these goals. I also asked her about the approaches, strategies, and resources she used when teaching the students. On the question of resources, I also wanted to know how she integrated students’ sociocultural knowledge and experiences, including Zulu, their L1 into their learning. Another important question was how she balanced the planned curriculum as stipulated in the curricular documents and the curriculum that was enacted in the classroom. I also wanted to find out how she negotiated the tensions and the meanings the tension had for the learning of the students.

In the final interview, I asked the teacher to share with me the goals she achieved and those she did not accomplish, and what she thought contributed to the successes and challenges. We also discussed the role that switching between English and Zulu played in her teaching, paying attention to how she thought it helped or did not help the students in learning literacy in English. Furthermore, we talked about the strategies she used to help the students to decode and comprehend the texts. In addition, we discussed how the parents supported the students’ learning of literacy, in general, and of English, in particular. Finally, we talked about what she thought she needed to do to improve her teaching of literacy in English, and thus enhance the students’ literacy development in this language.

In addition to the formal interviews, I had informal conversations with the teacher from time to time, especially in cases where I needed clarification regarding some literacy
activities and practices that I found confusing and puzzling. To make sure that I did not misrepresent these conversations, I documented them on my journal immediately after our discussion and incorporated them into the field notes later. Along with the formal interviews, the informal discussions deepened my understanding of the situation and helped me to avoid imposing my theoretical and conceptual biases and assumptions.

Grades R-2 teacher interviews. I had only one formal, semi-structured interview with these teachers individually (See Appendix C for the interview questions). Similar to the 4th grade teacher, during the interviews we switched between Zulu and English, depending on the language with which the teachers were comfortable. I asked them about their goals in teaching literacy in their respective classes, focusing on the successes and challenges in meeting their goals. In addition, I was interested in finding out about the approaches, strategies, and resources they used when teaching the students. Since they were teaching literacy mainly in the Zulu language, the native language of the students, I asked them how they integrated other sociocultural resources of the students in order to facilitate students’ literacy learning. Another question was about how they dealt with the tensions between their everyday teaching and the expectations as stipulated in the official curricular documents. Furthermore, I wanted to know how they negotiated these tensions while ensuring the best interests of the students. Understanding the language and literacy practices of these teachers was important because grades R through 3 are a foundation for literacy learning and practices in later classes.

Principal interview. I had only one semi-structured interview with the principal (See Appendix D for the interview questions). We also switched between English and Zulu, depending on the language she used. I tried to find out her understanding of what constitutes learning of literacy, in general, and in English, in particular. This assisted me to better understand the literacy activities and strategies she supported in promoting literacy in the
school, in general, and in the 4th grade, in particular. I also asked her to share with me the successes and challenges she faced in her attempts to ensure that the students acquired literacy.

**Performance assessment.** Because I was also interested in finding out what the focal students knew and could do and could not do in both English and Zulu, I assessed them in these languages. Adopting a bilingual perspective (Dworin, 2003; Garcia, 2000; Toloa et al., 2009) allowed me to know the strengths and weaknesses of the students in each of the languages. Having an insight into what students know in their languages helps researchers and teachers to learn about the skills students use in each of their languages and across the languages (Asfaha et al, 2009; Jimenez et al, 1996).

In this study, the assessment of the students included reading and writing. Specifically, in reading, for each language I used a narrative text and an expository text. For writing, I used wordless pictures about specific topics that were sequentially arranged. The narrative text I used for the reading tasks is a picture storybook *Kudaladala* (Sibiya, 2004), a translation of Daly’s (2003) book. It has 839 words. On the other hand, the narrative text I used for the English tasks is *At The Crossroads* (Isadora, 1991), also a picture storybook with 427 words. For both languages, I used the expository text *Changing Materials* (Oxlade, 2008). The reason for using the same text is that I could not find an expository text written in Zulu that was at the students’ grade-level due to the scarcity of expository texts written in Zulu. I, therefore, translated the first 5 chapters of *Changing Materials* into Zulu for the Zulu reading tasks and used the remaining 5 chapters for the English tasks. The Zulu text has 476 words and the English text has 584 words. The translated version of the text was checked by two independent language teachers from two different schools in South Africa. In addition, all the texts were given to the same teachers plus another one to determine the level of difficulty of the texts in relation to the students’ grade level. They rated the texts according to
the following categories: easy, just right, and difficult for the grade level. With an exception of one teacher who indicated that the English expository text might be difficult for the students, all the teachers agreed that all the texts were just right for the students’ grade level (See Appendix E for the samples of the texts).

Specifically, the reading tasks in both languages involved two categories: oral reading and reading comprehension tasks. For the oral reading assessment, I analysed the students’ miscues; that is, the deviations from the texts the students made when they read the texts. Miscue analysis is a method used to examine on-line processing behaviors of readers during oral reading of the text (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987; Kucer, 2010). They help teachers and researchers to know the various cueing systems—phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic cues—readers use as they process the text. For the reading comprehension, I focused on the students’ think-aloud comments and reading comprehension questions. Thinking-alouds have been found to play a crucial role in revealing strategies that readers use as they make sense of the text (Caldwell & Leslie; 2010; Garcia, 1998; Jimenez et al., 1995). All the think-alouds were prompted because the students had to talk about their think-alouds after they had read designated segments in the texts.

As for the reading comprehension questions, I included a variety of questions, ranging from explicit text-based questions to general background knowledge questions. Specifically, I used Raphael and Au’s (2005) framework. This framework explains that there are two sources that are required to comprehend a text namely, the text and background knowledge and experiences. To tap into these sources, we need to distinguish between In The Book and In My Head questions. In the former, answers are found in the text, whereas in the latter, answers lie outside the text. These categories are further divided into subcategories. In the Book category has Right There (explicit text-based questions) and Think and Search questions (explicit text-based inferences) while In My Head category has Author and Me
(implicit text-based questions) and Me questions (general background questions). Using different kinds of questions and tools allowed me to check for the students’ comprehension of the texts at different levels, including a range of cognitive and metacognitive strategies the students used to comprehend the texts (See Appendix F, G, H, and I for the reading assessment protocols).

Similar to the reading assessments, I assessed the students in writing in both English and Zulu, starting with Zulu and then English. However, I assessed them only on narrative writing. For each language, I gave the students wordless pictures that were about a specific topic (See Appendix J and K for the pictures). The assessment involved two tasks: the oral telling of the story using pictures that was followed by students’ writing of the story. For the oral telling part, I paid attention to how the students incorporated their oral narration into their writing. In other words, I was interested in how the students used oral telling as a scaffold to organize their thoughts about the topics.

In order to assess the students’ writing, I adapted a writing rubric designed by McCarthey et al. (2005). The reason for adapting this rubric is that it was specifically designed for English language learners around the same grade as the focal students. Another reason is that it has categories that clearly describe students’ competence levels, and thus help us to learn about their strengths and weaknesses in writing. This tool has the following categories: grammar/punctuation, sentence complexity, rhetorical style, and voice. The grammar/punctuation category focuses on tenses, subject-verb agreement, capitalization, and other punctuation marks. On the other hand, sentence complexity deals with a variety of sentence structures, including simple, compound, and complex sentences. The rhetorical style category includes word choice, coherence, organization, and events/ideas. The last category is the writer’s voice.
In adapting this rubric, I left out the writer’s voice because of the nature of the tasks. The students were required to talk and write about stories based on the pictures I had provided, so they may not have been particularly interested in the topics although they knew a lot about the topics. As a result, they may not have been able to talk and write about the topics with a distinctive personal style that would engage the reader. In addition, the nature of the writing instruction they received had never exposed them to this feature. In addition, I split the rhetorical style category into two categories namely, organization and ideas/meaning. Organization subsumes coherence and ideas/meaning includes word choice. In this respect, organization deals with how the students organized their writing, with special reference to the clarity of information in the introduction, the middle, and the conclusion, and coherence focuses on how the students used transitional words and other cohesive devices to enhance coherence among the different parts of their stories. On the other hand, the ideas/meaning category deals with ideas and supporting details in the students’ writing as well as the words they used to capture the ideas. As a result of these adaptations, I ended up with these categories: grammar/punctuation, sentence complexity, organization, and ideas/meaning (See Appendix L for the writing rubric). The rubric was used for both Zulu and English tasks.

Following Yambi (2010) and because of the bilingual approach I adopted in the assessments, I also added a cross-linguistic transfer category. Unlike in the above mentioned categories where I assigned quantitative points, for the cross-linguistic transfer category, I simply indicated whether or not the students transferred skills across their languages in their writing, and then provided a qualitative analysis in the finding’s section, focusing on how the students’ languages influenced one another.

I assessed the students individually in a room that I had arranged with the teacher. In addition, all the assessments took place outside the regular English lessons. In all the
assessment tasks, I started with Zulu and then English. The assessment took place over a period of five weeks between November and December. In the first two weeks I focused on the narrative and expository texts in Zulu, and in the following two weeks, I concentrated on the narrative and expository texts in English. Each assessment session took about 45 minutes. In the final week, I assessed the students on writing, again in both languages, starting with Zulu. Each writing session took about 30 minutes (See Appendix M and N for the writing assessment protocols in Zulu and English respectively).

Before assessing the students in reading, I modeled for them what I wanted them to do. Using the texts that were different from the ones for students’ assessments, I looked at the title of the text, read it aloud and made predictions about what the text might be about. In addition, I looked at the pictures in the text and made predictions. Then, I briefly read the text, stopping at designated points that were marked by numbers, and talked about what I was thinking as I was reading those segments, modeling a thinking-aloud strategy. The modeling took between 10 to 15 minutes. After the modeling, I gave the students a copy of the book and remained with a copy of the text. I asked them to do what I had done. They had to look at the title and make predictions and look at the pictures in the text and predictions as well. During the oral reading, I marked the miscues the students made on a separate piece of paper while following their reading in my copy. I also paid attention to the students’ physical behaviors, such as using fingers as pointers. In addition, during the oral reading, the students had to stop at the sections marked by the numbers interspersed throughout the text and share with me what they were thinking as they were reading the parts prior to the numbers. After every think-aloud, I asked them a few set of questions that were intended to check for comprehension. They repeated this until they finished reading the text. I audio taped all the students’ reading and transcribed them later on for analysis.
Similar to the reading assessment, I started by modeling to the students what I wanted them to do in the area of writing. Using pictures with hidden words, I told a story. I then asked the students to tell me how the pictures helped them to understand the story I was telling them. I probed to make sure that the students understood the story. In cases where some students were confused, I clarified the confusion. Following this, I asked the students to do the same. They looked at the pictures I showed them and then told a story orally based on the pictures. This served as a way for the students to plan their writing. After they had orally stated what they wanted to write about, I asked them to write down the story, giving as much details as possible. I allowed the students to revise and edit the stories before collecting them. I audio taped the oral narration part of the assessment and transcribed it later.

**Students writing samples and curricular documents.** I collected writing samples from the focal students. The aim was to analyze the samples so that I could get a better understanding of what constitutes writing and learning to write in this classroom. Moreover, I asked the teacher to share with me some curricular documents and texts, and I also printed others from the internet, such as the Revised National Statement Curriculum. In analyzing the curricular documents, I paid attention to how the planned curriculum in these documents was enacted in the classroom, focusing on the meanings that the participants assigned to both the planned and enacted curriculum.

**Data collection at home.** Data collected at the homes of the focal students included home visits and interviews with the parents/guardians. I discuss each of the data collection methods in the sections below.

**Home visits.** Because the broader sociocultural context plays a crucial role in understanding the language and literacy practices of participants (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Stein, 2008; Street, 1984, 1995), I also visited the families of the focal students. The main theoretical rationale behind these visits was that language and literacy practices vary
according to sociocultural contexts in which they are embedded; and most importantly, these variations show complexities and richness of the respective contexts, suggesting that there are no literacy contexts that are inherently poor (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Stein & Mamabolo, 2005; Street, 2001). The main aim of the home visits, therefore, was to have informal discussions with the parents/guardians of the focal students in order to learn about the complexities and the richness of the language and literacy practices in their homes, and how the home practices influence the students’ learning of literacy at school.

Furthermore, visiting the families in their homes was important for establishing a good rapport with the parents/guardians. It encouraged the parents/guardians to open up to me during the formal interviews I had with them as I learned more about the language and literacy practices in their families, and how these shaped the literacy practices of the focal students in their learning of literacy, in general, and of English, in particular. Although I had initially planned to visit each family eight times during the entire data collection period, this was not always possible due to availability issues with some of the parents/guardians. So the visits varied between 5 and 8 for the whole data collection period.

**Parent interviews.** I also interviewed the parents of the focal students. Although I had initially planned to have only one formal interview with each of the families, given the fact that I wanted to delve more into the issues and the parents/guardians were cooperating, I decided to have two formal interviews with each parent/guardian. In both interviews, I used Zulu, the parents/guardians’ native language, and sometimes switched between Zulu and English, depending on the parents/guardians’ preferences. Both interviews lasted for about 40-60 minutes.

The aim of the first interview was to learn about the day-to-day literacy practices in the families. I asked the parents/guardians about their engagement in various literacy events and activities such as story-telling, language games, watching TV, listening to the radio, and
everyday reading and writing activities in the families. Because I was also interested in learning about the children’s school literacy activities before the 4th grade from the parents/guardians’ perspectives and experiences, I asked them to share with me their recollections of the literacy activities in which the students participated. Such activities included the stories the students were taught—whether the students liked those stories or did not like the stories and why the parents thought so; what the children were taught to read and write, and whether the children liked reading and writing and why.

In the second interview, I was interested in learning about the language and literacy practices of the focal students in the 4th grade from the parents/guardians’ perspectives and experiences. Among other things, we talked about what the children were reading and writing and the successes as well as the challenges that the parents’ observed their children to be encountering in these activities, and what they thought they and other family members could do to support the children. We also discussed the parents’ views on the role of Zulu in their children’s learning of literacy in English. Knowing parents’ views on the development of bilingualism and biliteracy helps us to understand the support parents give or do not give on this issue (see appendix O for the questions—initial and final interview questions). In sum, having an insight into parents/guardians’ perspectives and experiences is important because several studies have shown that literacy beliefs and understandings of parents of young bilingual and L2 students influence and shape the kind of support parents give their children, in general, and at school, in particular (Reyes & Azuara, 2008; Stein & Slonimsky, 2006).

Data Analysis

In analysing the data, I used a constant comparative method (Straus & Corbin, 1990). Consistent with this method, I began with the analysis during the collection of the data in the field. While I was observing the English lessons and conducting interviews and having informal discussions with the participants, I jotted down some regular patterns and questions
arising from these situations, and made comments. Not only did this help me to start
developing broad coding categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), but it also encouraged me to
think critically about what the literacy activities and practices in the school and the home
settings mean for these contexts as well as for the broader socio-political and cultural
contexts and realities.

Specifically, in analyzing the classroom observational data and the interviews, I chose
the literacy event as the sociolinguistic unit of analysis. Instead of adopting a limited
description of the literacy event as the situation that involves interactions around the written
text (Heath, 1983), I opted for a broader definition where “literacy events . . . pinpoint
specific events involving different literacies . . . the use of multiple mode of communication;
writing, speech, image and the body in performance” (Stein & Slonimsky, 2006, p. 119).
Furthermore, these “events are observable episodes which arise from literacy practices and
are shaped by them” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). As these definitions suggest, literacy
events occur beyond the written text; they may involve other texts as well. In addition,
literacy events are instantiations of literacy practices; that is “the general cultural ways of
utilizing written [and oral] language which people draw upon in their lives” (Barton &
Hamilton, 1998; p. 6). In this respect, literacy practices are about norms, values, beliefs,
ideas, actions, and understandings about the use of literacy in sociocultural contexts (Bloome
et al., 2005). Given the role of literacy events in understanding literacy practices in a
sociocultural context and across sociocultural contexts, using the literacy event as an analytic
concept helped me to make sense of the literacy practices of the participants in their contexts
in this study.

In line with the constant comparative method, as I analyzed the data I constantly
moved back and forth between the different sets of data (i.e., the field notes, the interviews,
the students’ writing samples, the video tapes, the assessments, and the curricular
documents), looking for regularities and recurring patterns in the words, patterns of behavior, and thinking of the participants. I read the different data sources several times, at least 4 times. Reading the data many times helped me to refine the categories and subcategories. For example, when I revisited the initial analysis and looked at the categories and subcategories, I coded earlier on during the “open coding” stage (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), I found that some of them were broad and others were redundant. In other words, this “focused coding” (Dyson & Genishi) allowed me to refine the categories and subcategories I had already identified and to look for new emerging ones I may have missed.

Furthermore, as I analysed the data, I did a within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2009). For example, after developing the categories and subcategories of the recurrent patterns and regularities in individual English lessons, I checked these patterns across all the lessons. In this respect, while the within-case analysis helped me to learn more about what was going on in the individual lessons, the cross-case analysis allowed me to make generalizations and note irregularities, all of which were important factors for learning about the literacy practices in the contexts of the participants.

After refining, reconciling, clustering, and collapsing the categories and subcategories across all the data sources, I developed themes or assertions that answer the research questions and are consistent with the theoretical orientations that inform this study. Themes that emerged from the analysis of the 4th grade teachers’ instructional practices were developing oral language fluency as the goal for language and literacy learning, using students’ L1 as a scaffold to support language and literacy learning, and using writing as a tool to reinforce language and literacy knowledge. On the other hand, themes that emerged from the students’ formal learning in the classrooms included: being engaged and self-confident, assimilating and appropriating classroom practices, fluctuation—a matter of interest or a red flag? and resisting or struggling? Because I was also interested in the
students’ home language and literacy practices and how these interacted with their classroom practices, themes that emerged from home data included: using both languages as meaning-constructing and identity tools, engaging language and literacy learning through diverse ways and texts, stories as a resource for language and literacy learning, and literacy beyond the printed word. For the students’ performance assessment, the main themes I identified were that the students did better in oral reading across the genres than in the reading comprehension tasks, the students’ performance in the reading tasks was generally low, especially in the expository text in both languages, and the students’ performance in writing was much lower, particularly in English. Through all the processes I have mentioned in this section, I weaved “together pieces of data into a patterned quilt, an interpretive case study” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 111).

**Building Trustworthiness**

In order to establish the trustworthiness of the study, during data analysis I triangulated the data and verified field notes and interviews with the teachers and the parents. Triangulation of the data involved revisiting all the data sources (i.e., the field notes, the interviews, the students’ writing samples, the video tapes, the assessments, and the curricular documents) several times, looking for confirming and disconfirming evidence across the sources (Stakes, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The more evidence I found on a particular assertion within a single source and across the different sources, the more confident I was that the assertion is a fair representation of the data. However, in cases where I found disconfirming evidence, I looked into what the discrepant evidence suggests about the phenomenon and the study (Erickson, 1986).

As for verification of the field notes and interviews with the teachers or member-checking, I shared the classroom observational notes and the interviews with the teachers to check if the notes and the interviews were a true representation of what took place in the
classrooms and of what they said during the interviews. Similarly, I asked the parents to check if the notes I took during the home visits and the interviews were a true record of the conversations I had with them. Although three of the parents/guardians read the interviews themselves, one indicated that she asked someone to read out the interviews for her before verifying them. Triangulating the data and doing member-checking increased the trustworthiness of the study (Denzil & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Just as I had made sure that the analysis of the data is credible, I also ensured that in writing up the findings I provide a fair representation of the data. I constructed analytic narrative vignettes and used quotes from the different sources. Doing this allowed me to provide supporting instantiations of the assertions, and thus give the reader a “vicarious experience” (Stake, 1995) and a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the case. In sum, through all these measures, I believe that I was able to put together an interpretive case study from which we can understand the particularities of the language and literacy practices of the participants in this study, which we can compare to the particularities of other participants in other studies in similar contexts, and thus have an ahistorical understanding of language and literacy learning in non-dominant English contexts.

**Chapter Summary**

A qualitative case study approach that informed this study helped me to gain an insight into the complexities, richness, and depth of the participants’ language and literacy practices as experienced and understood by the participants in their contexts. By using different methods, including interviews, field observations, video recordings, analysis of students’ writing samples and curricular documents, I was able to capture “vicarious experiences” (Stake, 1995) and “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of the participants in the different language and literacy practices across the different contexts. Furthermore, through triangulating the data and doing member-checking, I tried to address ‘the crisis of
representation’ issue (Denzil & Lincoln, 2005), and thus increased the trustworthiness of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Stake, 2005).

In the following chapter, I discuss findings on the instructional practices and beliefs of the 4th grade teacher in the English language class. Because her instructional practices did not occur in a vacuum but within a nested context of the larger sociocultural context of the school, I also show how these interacted with the instructional practices and beliefs of the other teachers, especially the foundation teachers and the principal.
Chapter 4

Teacher’s Instructional Practices in the 4th Grade Class

This chapter presents findings on the instructional practices of the 4th grade teacher in the English language class. Given that teacher instructional practices are shaped by the teacher’s beliefs about language and literacy learning (Davis, Konopak, & Readence, 1993; Opoku-Amankwa & Brew-Hammand, 2011; Vaish, 2012), I also discuss the teacher’s beliefs about language and literacy learning in this class. Furthermore, because individual teacher instructional practices are mediated by the broader sociocultural context of the school, including instructional practices and beliefs of other teachers, I also included data from the foundation phase teachers and the principal. Since the literacy event is the sociolinguistic unit of analysis of the classroom sociocultural context as I indicated before, I start by giving a brief discussion of the literacy events in the learning and teaching of the English language and literacy in the 4th grade class. Following this, I present themes on the instructional practices of the teacher.

Literacy Events in the 4th Grade Class

The main literacy events in this class were: recitation of poems, grammar instruction, reading instruction, vocabulary instruction, and writing instruction. Each of these events varied across different lessons because in a moment by moment enactment of a literacy event “there are tensions and conflicts between the tendency for continuity (reproduction of extant classroom cultural practices and social structures) and change” (Bloome et al., 2005, p. 52). Of the five literacy events, the recitation of poems occurred most frequently, with lessons beginning with the students reciting one or two poems. With the exception of one poem, which some of the students taught their peers, the poems—four of them, including a song—were all selected by the teacher. They were short and had simple structure.
Another predominant language event was grammar instruction. When the teacher taught the different grammatical structures (e.g., adjectives, verbs, comparatives, and tenses), she rarely used a book or handout. Rather, she generated most of the sentences herself, which she wrote on the board. Then she would explain the rules that apply to the grammatical structure in the sentences. Sometimes she would allow the students to construct their own sentences; and, in most cases, it would be after she had given them a few examples of the structure being learned. In general, the sentences were constructed out of context of any content the students were studying and the students were drilled on their structure regularly. As part of instruction, students were asked to orally repeat the sentences several times.

Reading occurred when the students were engaged in reading comprehension texts from the textbook. At the beginning of a reading comprehension lesson, the teacher would pass out copies of the textbook, a copy for each desk. The reading of the text took place in one of three ways: the teacher would read a story aloud, ask individual students to read it, or have the students read it chorally. Following this, she would invite the students to identify unfamiliar words and then she would provide explanations, using various scaffolding strategies. Sometimes the students would also offer explanations. After this, the reading aloud of the story by either the teacher or the students would start all over again; hence, the majority of the time was spent on reading aloud the text. At the end of the lesson, the teacher would assign the students some reading comprehension questions from the textbook.

Most of the stories in the textbook were narratives, and two of them were folktales adapted from African folktale collections. There were only two informational texts in the book. One was a summary about Mother Teresa’s biography and the other text was a story providing a brief description of Johannesburg. In general, the length of the stories ranged between one page to one-and-a-half pages, and most of them had illustrations in black and white. The pictures were not of great quality and the teacher often complained about this.
For the most part, vocabulary instruction took place within the context of the reading passages. Attention to vocabulary was often given when the students identified the words they did not understand. In addition to this practice, the teacher taught vocabulary out of context. This was particularly the case when she used exercises from the back of old grammar books. For example, the topic might be: Names of baby animals. A list of statements describing each baby animal would follow. The teacher and the students would read the list aloud, with the teacher stressing that the students memorize the list.

In the case of writing instruction, most of the tasks were a follow-up to some activity that had been taught; hence, they were mainly based on the reading comprehension passages, grammar, and vocabulary. The textbook was the main source for the reading comprehension writing activities. For the grammar writing activities, the teacher generated most of the sentences herself and the students added or change some component of the sentence. Sometimes the teacher allowed the students to construct their own sentences that fitted the general guidelines. Writing during vocabulary instruction comprised of students writing down unrelated words and their definitions from the board.

In the following section I present themes on the instructional practices and beliefs of the 4th grade teacher. I also show how these are nested within the broader school context, specifically the instructional practices and beliefs of the foundation teachers and the principal.

**Developing Oral Language Fluency as the Goal for Language and Literacy Learning**

From the very first time I met the teacher, she made it clear that her main goal for teaching English in the 4th grade class was to foster oral language fluency. In the first interview, she said, “My main goal is that my learners must be able to express themselves wherever they are. In the future, they must be able to speak English well.” She reiterated this in the final interview when she complained about not achieving this objective: Kodwa
The main problem I had was that a few students were able to express themselves fluently. The majority were afraid of speaking in English. Evidently, the focus on oral language practice in this class, be it in reading, writing, grammar activities, or recitation of poems that I observed in most of the lessons was no accident. This was consistent with the teacher’s belief of what it means to teach the English language.

In the teacher’s view encouraging the students to recite poems every day was one of the ways to ensure that they practiced oral fluency in English. In fact, all the time I was in that class I observed that almost every lesson started with the students reciting the poems the teacher had taught them. Out of the 3 poems that the students recited almost every day, I observed her teaching 2 of these—the other one was taught before I started conducting the study. On both occasions, the teacher stressed expression and prosody. For example, when she taught *The Cupboard*, a poem about a cupboard that contains lollipops and Banbury cakes and has a grandmother as a keeper, she encouraged the students to act out some words. For instance, when the students mentioned a “slippery knee” of the grandmother, they had to pretend as if they were slipping or sliding on the floor. Similarly, when they came to the word “fat” describing the grandmother, they had to stretch their arms to show the big size of the grandmother.

The emphasis on using gestures to interpret the poems seems to have been the main strategy the teacher used—there was no discussion of the poems. For instance, when she taught the students a song, “Father Abraham”, she did not tap into the students’ background knowledge about this topic despite the fact that the majority of the students were likely to be Christians given the dominance of the Christian religion in the region. She simply said, “So class, today we are going to sing a song. The song is about father Abraham.” She then spent
an extensive amount of time teaching the students the words of the songs and how to use gestures to express the meaning of the words in the song. For example, when the students came to the line: “Right arm, left arm, right foot, left foot,” they swung their arms and stamped their feet.

As the above examples show, the focus on learning poems in this class was on how to perform them along with oral language use. In fact, in the initial interview the teacher explained:

Into engiyithanda ngokuthi uma ufundisa i-poem bagcina be-understanda lento oyishoyo. Uyabona, bedlala nangayo. Agcine umuntu ekhuluma isiNgisi engaboni ukuthi usho i-poem. Kube lula. Ayaluthambisa kahle kahle ulimi, ake ngisho njalo. (What I like about teaching poems is that the students end up understanding what you are saying. They play with the language and end up speaking English unintentionally, thinking that they are reciting a poem. Poems help to develop fluency).

Evidently, the poems were a means to promote fluency in daily oral language practice rather than a tool for encouraging students’ engagement in meaningful discussions and activities. Unfortunately, not all students participated. While most of the girls would recite the poems with enthusiasm and excitement, demonstrating that they understood what they were saying, the majority of the boys would mumble the words and simply rely on the rhythm of the poems. In this respect, they missed out on the opportunity the teacher had created for them to practice English.

Similar to the 4th grade class, poems were also recited in the other classes I visited—grades R-2. In all the lessons I observed in these classes the lessons started with the students saying the poems they had memorized. Just like in the 4th grade class, they also acted out the poems. The 1st grade teacher explained:
Amapoems noma kungawesizulu ayabasiza ukuthi bajwayele ukukhuluma eklasini, ngisho nalabo abangajwayele ukukhuluma. Futhi abafundisa nezinto ezithile zolimi njengesigqi namanye amagama abangawazi. (The poems, although they are in Zulu, help the children to get used to talking in class, including those who hardly talk. They also teach them some aspects of the language such as rhythm and unfamiliar words). Evidently, the teachers across the grades viewed recitation of poems as one of the means to support language learning regardless of the language.

Similar to the repeated recitation of the poems, I noted that across the grades I visited reading of other texts was marked by repeated reading. In the 4th grade class, a typical reading lesson would begin with the teacher reading a story aloud to the students. For the most part, she would read slowly, enunciating words clearly, and with expression. Almost invariably, her reading would be followed by several rereading of the text read in a variety of ways. Sometimes, the teacher, together with the students, would do echo reading—the teacher reading a sentence first followed by the students reading the same sentence just a few seconds after her. In other instances the students would chorally read the entire story without her assistance. Most of the time, such reading would be incoherent and inexpressive as most of the students failed to chunk the phrases appropriately, using suitable intonation and rhythm. I observed that even the good readers would be plunged into this way of reading. In addition to the students reading as a whole group, sometimes the teacher would nominate individual students, who would take turns, to read in front of the class. Most of the time this would be after the teacher had read the text aloud; on a few occasions it would be before she read the text—in these cases she would select the good readers. The following excerpt from the student’s textbooks about Sandile, a little boy from a rural town, playing on the sand on the hills of Johannesburg is a typical example of how the teacher and the students performed oral reading:
Teacher: Who wants to come and read the story for us? Anyone who wants to come and read the story? It must be a boy this time. Hands up!

[Mandla and other boys looked around the class, seemingly expecting someone else to go forward.]

Teacher: [nominating the student] Yes, Sihle come.

[Sihle walked to the front and started reading the story.]

Sihle: Then Sandile saw the white hills of sand. The sand did not look like earth. It was hard! Deep [reading “furrows” as something like “foerrows”]

Teacher: [interrupting Sihle] Deep furrows.

[Sihle did not repeat this after the teacher; he simply continued reading the story and the teacher did not say anything.]

Sihle: Ran everywhere down the sides. Themba began to climb up the dump. Sandile [mumbling the word “struggled”]

Teacher: [offering the word] Struggled

Sipho: [repeating the word] Sandile struggled after him. “Now I’m going to show you something really nice,” sayed Themba [reading “said” as “sayed”]

Teacher: [interrupting and cuing all the students to repeat after her] Class, said!

Students: [repeating the word after the teacher] Said

Teacher: [cueing Sihle] Said Themba.

Sihle: [repeating after the teacher] Said Themba. On the other side of the huge hill lay a piece of sheet iron.

Teacher: [interrupting] On the other side of the huge hill. Say huge.

Students: [in unison] Huge

Teacher: Again.

Students: Huge
Teacher: If something is huge it means it is big (stretching her arms to show the meaning of the word huge) Yes, it’s a huge hill.

Although Sihle did not read word by word, sometimes his reading was flat. There was little expression in his voice suggesting that he understood what he was reading. He seemed to be simply saying the words he had learned to recognize. However, this was not always the case. Some students struggled remarkably as shown in the following example:

S’khona: This is Mr. Brown, the farmer. He lives [pronouncing this verb as an adjective]

Teacher: [offering the correct pronunciation] Lives. He lives . . . Uyabona-ke ukuthi ubungalalele? (Do you see that you were not paying attention?) [reprimanding him.]
S’khona: [grinning] He lives in Bloemfontein [reading word for word]. We

Teacher: S’khona ! Where are you? [walking towards him and then standing next to him] Teacher: [asking asking S’khona] Where is we?
S’khona: [pointing to the word "he"]

Teacher: [pointing to the word as well] He. This is he.
S’khona: He is three children [reading word for word].

Teacher: [correcting him and still standing next to him and pointing at the words as he was reading] He has three children.
S’khona: He has three children. His weef’s [reading wife as weef]

Teacher: His wife's
S’khona: His wife's name is Maria.

As these examples show, the oral reading of the texts was marked by the teacher’s constant interruptions, either to correct the students’ pronunciation or to explain the meaning of words. Seemingly, her focus was on developing reading fluency. Repeating the words after the teacher helped the students to learn to recognize them on sight and to correctly use
the right intonation—some of the essential elements in fluency development. The fact that the teacher regarded oral reading fluency as central to reading is clearly captured in one of her goals. She stated:

\[I \text{ think the easiest one [goal] is reading. It is easy to improve them ukuthi bafunde, just to give them izincwadi bafunde every day. Uye ubone ukuthi uma befunda bahamba ngerow—ile row efundayo, ile-row efundayo, ile-row efundayo. Kodwa-ke eklasini ngiye ngithi uma ngifundisa icomprehension, uye ubone nawe isikhathi sincane. Ngeke ngikwazi ukufundisa ingane nengane. Uyabona ukuthi u-end up ezinye izingane zingafundanga. Futhi aseneli isikhathi sokubacorrecta kahle.}\]

(I think the easiest one [goal] is reading. It is easy to improve reading, just to give students books to read every day. You must have noticed that in class, the students take turns, reading one after the other. But the time is not enough. Not all of them get a chance to read; others end up not having had a chance to read. There is also not enough time for me to correct them).

The above quote shows that the teacher’s understanding of reading is limited to reading aloud, which sometimes takes a round robin style. In addition, and most importantly, the fact that she thought that merely giving the students books to read makes reading easy suggests that she understood reading as decoding and recognizing words, a point that is supported by many interruptions in the above examples and in many other reading lessons I observed. This view, therefore, explains why she did not engage the students in meaningful discussions of the texts.

Just as I observed the 4th grade teacher and the students did echo reading—the teacher reading a sentence first followed by the students reading the same sentence just a few seconds after her, I noted the same literacy behavior in the English reading lesson in the 2nd grade as illustrated below:
Teacher: Yes. Now you are going to read after me. Sumaya’s tooth [reading aloud].

Students: [reading after the teacher] Sumaya’s tooth.

Teacher: “Owwww” cried Sumaya. “My tooth hurts!”

Students: [reading after the teacher] “Owwww” cried Sumaya. “My tooth hurts!”

Teacher: “We must go to the dentist,” said Sumaya’s mother.

Students: [reading after the teacher] We must go to the dentist,” said Sumaya’s mother.

[The teacher and the students continued to do echo reading until the end of the text].

Teacher: Now, let’s summarize the story. I’m summarizing the story; I’m making it short.

[The teacher waited for a few seconds for some students who were making noise to keep quiet.]

Teacher: [talking slowly] The story is about the tooth.

Students: [chiming in] Tooth.

Teacher: [raising her finger] It’s one tooth but two teeth. The story says Sumayi had a tooth that was aching. She went to see a doctor for teeth. We call her a dentist.

Students: [chiming in] Dentist.

Teacher: Mother accompanied her to that place called a surgery.

Students: [repeating after the teacher] Surgery.

Teacher: The doctor saw what?

Students: Hole.

Teacher: Yes. [opening her mouth and showing the students one of the teeth in her mouth]. She saw a hole. Wabona imbobo (She saw a hole). The doctor filled it with something called a filling.

Students: [chiming in] Filling.
Teacher: The doctor said: “No more sweets.” You must . . .

Students: Brush.

Teacher: Yes. You must brush your teeth every day.

Students: [chiming in] Every day.

Teacher: Very good. Amazinyo agezwa kanjani? (How do we brush teeth?) Show us how to brush teeth.

[The teacher nominated one student to come forward and show the class how to brush teeth. Student: [Using his finger as a toothbrush, the student moved his fingers across his mouth].

Teacher: Good. How should we brush teeth? Samu.

Samu: [also using a finger as a toothbrush, the student moved her finger in small circles across the mouth].

Teacher: [moving her fingers in small circles across her mouth] Yes. When we brush our teeth, we must move the brush in circles [moving her finger in small circles].

Sixubha amazinyo like this-ke bangane bami (This is how we should brush teeth my friends.) We take water and throw it away. Ungagwinyi (Do not swallow the water).

As the above example shows, in addition to echo reading, the 2nd grade teacher and the students summarized the text. Not only that, the teacher also connected the topic to the students’ prior knowledge: she asked them to demonstrate how to brush their teeth. This post-reading activity increased the 2nd graders’ level of participation. On the other hand, not once did I observe the 4th grade teacher doing any post-reading activity with the students except asking them to answer reading comprehension questions, most of which were from the texts. Evidently, this discrepancy shows that although the teachers shared some of the practices, others differed from teacher to teacher.
That oral language fluency was central to the 4th grade teacher is also evidenced by her focus on the students repeating grammatical structures as well as using the right intonation. For example, in the following extract on the lesson about the formation of questions in English, the teacher ensured that the students used the correct intonation. In addition, by asking the students to repeat the sentences, she made sure that they practiced this structure. Furthermore, she stressed that the students use a question mark to indicate that the sentences were questions. In this respect, not only did she teach English fluency in its oral language form but also in its written form.

*Teacher:* Let us change these sentences into a question form [referring to the sentences she had written on the board]. Change the statement into a question form [pointing at the first sentence]

*Students:* [chiming in] Question form

*Teacher:* [a brief pause] Muzi

*Muzi:* Is there a big umbrella [saying the sentence with a flat intonation]

*Teacher:* Uh? [suggesting that he should repeat the sentence]

*Muzi:* Is there a big umbrella [repeating the sentence with a flat intonation]

*Teacher:* Your voice [inaudible] Is there a big umbrella? [using a question intonation]

*Muzi:* [repeating the sentence with a flat intonation] Is there a big umbrella

*Teacher:* Is there [raising her voice with a question intonation] It seems as if you are not asking a question. Yes. [nominating another student]

*Dudu:* [with a question intonation] Is there a big umbrella?

*Teacher:* Yes. Class!

*Students:* [in unison] Is there a big umbrella?

*Teacher:* Again!

*Students:* Is there a big umbrella?
[The teacher turned to the board and wrote the sentence under the second column while saying it aloud. She did not put a question mark.]

*Teacher*: [turning to the students] Okay class. Is this sentence correct?

*Students*: No.

*Teacher*: What’s wrong? What’s wrong here? Ya, Bheki.

*Bheki*: Question mark

*Teacher*: There must be a question mark, here [putting the question mark between “big” and “umbrella” in the sentence]. So there must be a question mark where?

*Nonhle*.

*Dudu*: A question mark at the end of the sentence.

*Teacher*: Yes. There must be a question mark at the end of the sentence. [putting the question mark at the end of the sentence]

As the above example shows, in a typical grammar lesson, the teacher would write some sentences on the board she had generated in order for the students to practice a structure she was teaching. In most cases the sentences were out of context, providing the students with little opportunity for learning how the structure works in real context. Furthermore, the fact that the students had few opportunities to compose their own sentences limited their chances to practice the structures. In brief, while the teacher’s emphasis on the students practicing the language structures through repetition may have enhanced their learning of the grammatical structures, and thus facilitated their oral language development, not providing meaningful contexts and limiting students’ self-generated sentences may have undermined students’ successful learning of the structures.

In conclusion, this discussions shows the development of oral language fluency was at the center of language and literacy learning in this 4th grade class. The recitation of the poems and repetition of grammatical structures therefore created opportunities for the students to
practice oral language fluency, with the teacher playing a central role in modeling fluency. In addition, oral fluency in reading played a significant role. The teacher paid attention to the students’ correct pronunciation of words during the reading of the texts and provided a model for word pronunciation, sometimes at the expense of meaning. As I showed in the discussion, like the 4th grade teacher, the 2nd grade teacher demonstrated that she believed that developing fluency in reading is important. However, unlike the 4th grade teacher, she also showed that she understood that students should be given a chance to interact with texts in meaningful ways. The consistencies and inconsistencies between these teachers underscore the complexities involved in learning and teaching in this context.

Using Students’ L1 as a Scaffold to Support Language and Literacy Learning

Throughout the 6 months I was in the 4th grade class, I observed the teacher incorporating Zulu, the home language she shared with the students, into a variety of literacy events and activities, especially during the reading and vocabulary lessons. In the first interview, she explained:

*IsiZulu ngisazakala ukuthi ngikwazi ukubachazela ukuthi bakwazi uku-understanda because ukuba mina nabo asixhumani ngesiZulu singagcina singa-understandanga unomphela ngoba sometimes ngiye ngithi uma ngifika egamemi elinye ngithi ngiyabachazela in English, ngiyalinganisa, bangakhoni uku-understandana.*

(Zulu helps me to explain things to the students so that they can understand what they are learning. If we were not able to communicate in Zulu, they would not understand me. Sometimes when I try to explain a word in English, they do not understand).

The fact that Zulu played a significant role in enhancing the students’ understanding of the English lessons was evident in a number of reading lessons when the students were doing reading comprehension passages. As a usual practice in that class, after the teacher had read a text aloud, and sometimes after the students had read the text as well, the teacher
would ask the students to identify words they did not know. Although the teacher used a variety of strategies to offer the meaning of the words, most of the explanations included Zulu. For example, when the students were reading a text about Sandile playing on the hills of sand in Johannesburg, they indicated that they did not know the meaning of the word “bottom”. The teacher gave this explanation: “Bottom. Uma into itop isuke ila (If something is on top, it means it is here) [raising her hand high up], bottom ila (If it is at the bottom, it is here [lowering her hand almost below her knees] Iphansi (It is at the bottom).” As this explanation shows, not only did the teacher use Zulu, but she also used gestures to ensure that the students understood the meaning of the word. The teacher did the same thing when she explained the word “huge” in the story about the folktale about the cat which refused to come indoors. When she came to the word “huge”, she opened her arms wide to show the size of the elephant mentioned in the story and also said, Indlovu yayinkulu kakhulu. (The elephant was huge).

I noted that sometimes the teacher would connect a word explanation to the students’ background knowledge. In Sandile’s story mentioned above, the teacher explained “ancestors” as follows: “Abakini abangasekho. Nihamba niyoshisa imephfo emakhaya, angithi? Abomgogo, abomkhulu, abobani. Uma ukhuluma nabantu abangasekho (I mean the deceased in your family. You burn incense, isn’t? You call on your grandfathers, your grandmothers, and other deceased family members. You talk to them). Given that the majority of the students possibly knew about this Zulu cultural practice, whether or not they practiced it, this explanation may have helped the students’ to tap into their cultural knowledge. In the text about how the red ants outwitted the snake, not only did the teacher use Zulu to help the students understand the word “coil” as in the snake coiling its body around the eggs of the partridge, but she also drew a sketch of a mosquito coil to further clarify the meaning of this word. This is illustrated in the following example:
Teacher: Another word you don’t understand?

Nikiwe: [volunteering the word] Coil.

Teacher: [moving her hands around her waist] Coil is to move around. Ukuzisongela. Angithi niyabona inyoka isongelekile. Niyayazi icoil. Imosquito coil, lena esiyibasa uma kwenzenjani? Uma kwenzenjani? (The snake coiled itself. Do you know a coil, a mosquito coil? By the way, when do we use a mosquito coil?)

[The students mumbled some words I could not hear. The teacher went to the board and drew a sketch of a coil].

Teacher: Siyisebenzisa uma kwenzenjani? (When do we use a mosquito coil?)

Some Students: [responding to the teacher’s question in unison] Siyisebenzisa uma kunemiyane. (We use a coil when there are mosquitoes).

Teacher: [showing the students the sketch of the coil] Siyisebenzisa uma kunemiyane. I-coil isongene. Nenyoka niyayibona laphayana? (We use a coil when there are mosquitoes. Like a mosquito coil, this snake has coiled its body here. Do you see that? [showing the students the picture of the snake in the book and the sketch on the board] Le nyoka isongene. Ya. (This snake has coiled its body here) [showing them the picture of the snake in the book again] This snake has coiled itself.

I noticed that when the teacher was explaining this word, some of the students nodded their heads, suggesting that they were following the teacher’s explanation. In fact, when she was drawing a sketch of a mosquito coil on the board, I overheard Nikiwe telling Noma, her desk mate, that she knew a mosquito coil. They used to use it when they were living at Mangi, an area that is usually infested by malaria. The fact that using Zulu aided to engage the students at some level is also evidenced in the following example when Sihle, with the help of the teacher’s explanation and demonstration, offered an ideophone, ubuhixihixi, to
explain the word “jerk” to his friend—an explanation that also captures the sound that the train makes as it jerks.

Teacher: Before we continue, are there any words that you do not understand?

Zodwa: Jerk.

Teacher: [moving her hands in a jerking manner] The way something moves. To jerk is a sudden sharp pull out or twist. *Niye nibone indlela isitimela esihamba ngayo?* (Have you ever seen the way the train moves?).

Sihle: [talking to Muzi, his desk mate, loud enough for the teacher to hear] *Ubuhixihixi* (jerky).

Teacher: [talking to Sihle] Yes, Sihle. *Ubuhixihixi.* (It means to move in a jerking manner).

On a few occasions, I noted that the teacher tried to involve the students in word explanation by asking them to connect the words directly to their experiences. For instance, in a lesson that was based on people’s occupations that were listed on a handout, when the teacher came to the word “minister”, she made these comments:

Teacher: One who preaches in church is a minister or priest. Who can tell me? What is the meaning of the word preach?

[There was a brief short pause, only Zinhle and Nonhle’s hands were up.]

Teacher: [nominating Noma although her hand was not up] Noma. *Ngikukhomba ngamabomu ngoba* your aunt is a priest, is a minister (Noma, I am calling on you on purpose because your aunt is a priest, is a minister.) [Noma simply laughed].

*Ngiyamangala uma ungakwazi* (I am surprised that you do not know.) Ya (Yeah).

[nominating Zinhle] Yes, Zinhle.

Zinhle: To preach *ukushumayela* (It is to preach.)
Similarly, when the teacher explained the word “chemist” from the same list, she drew the attention of Vusi to the word Chemist because she knew that Vusi and his mother had recently been to a doctor and a chemist.

*Teacher:* One who sells medicine is a chemist. Class.

*Students:* [repeating after the teacher] One who sells medicine is a chemist.

*Teacher:* Ikhemisi is a person. *Angithi? Siyamazi sonke uKhemisi walapha oPhaphe.*

*Ngubani?* (A chemist is a person. Do you understand? Do we all know the pharmacist here at Phaphe? Who is he?)

[The students started talking among themselves and none raised a hand]

*Teacher:* *Kusho ukuthi aniguli nina. Ngubani? Vusi! Wena nomama wakho kade niseKhemisi niyolandza imithi yakho. Ngubani ikhemisi?* (It means you guys don’t get ill. Who is he? Vusi! You and your mother went to the chemist to get your prescription. Who is the chemist? )

*Vusi:* UKhulu? (It is Dr. Khulu).

[The other students laughed.]

*Teacher:* UKhulu? (Is it Dr. Khulu?) Khulu is a doctor. *Bakithi animazi? Uma usuphuma kwadokotela sekuthiwa hamba uyothatha le mithi ekhemisi.* (You don’t know him? The person you go to after the doctor has written you a prescription.)

[Some of the students talked among themselves, seemingly conferring the answer with one another].

*Nomsa:* UGamede. (It’s Mr. Gamede).

*Teacher:* Yes, uMr. Gamede. (It’s Mr. Gamede).

As most of the above examples show, when the teacher used Zulu to explain the meaning of unknown to the students, she incorporated other strategies such as gestures, demonstrations, drawings, and students’ cultural background and personal experiences. Using
these strategies alongside Zulu may have reinforced the students’ learning of the words, a point that the teacher captures well in this quote:

*Kanti ukuba beyingekho le common language yesiZulu bebezogcina ngempela sometimes bengazanga moma sengigesturisha nomagengidemonstratha, nomasengenzeni. So ngibona sengathi kuyasisiza. Sikwazi ukuxhuma lapho singa-understandananga khona.”* (If we did not have Zulu as a common language, the students would end up not understanding the explanations. Sometimes not even gestures and demonstrations would work. So using Zulu really helps me to ensure that the students understand).

Although the teacher used Zulu to explain unknown words, particularly during the reading and vocabulary lessons, during the writing lessons she used it mainly to give the students instructions about how to go about writing the exercises. For example, after the reading comprehension lesson about Lile and her mother going to do shopping, the teacher explained, *Ngifuna ukuthi nigcwalise izikhala ku lombuzo.* (I want you to fill in the missing words in this question). Sometimes the teacher used Zulu as a class management tool when some of the students were off-task during the writing exercises. In large part, the teacher’s limited use of Zulu during the writing lessons may be due to the fact that writing in that class was used as a tool to reinforce skills that had been learned. The students did not write to explore ideas and express their experiences, activities that would have supported using Zulu for learning purposes. Nonetheless, when the teacher used Zulu for pedagogical purposes as discussed in the previous paragraphs, it seems to have facilitated students’ learning. In fact, Zulu appeared to have laid a foundation for learning the English literacy for some of the students, a point well captured by the 4th grade teacher:

*Kusho ukuthi ukufika kwabo bazi isiZulu kuba lula ukuthi bangene kwenye ilanguage.*

*Kube lule ukuthi bangene esinGisini . . . Ngaphandle-ke kwalo wo ozofika engasazi*
Students’ knowledge on how to read and write in Zulu makes it easier for them to learn another language; I mean to learn English . . . except those who come here not having mastered these skills in Zulu. It takes such students a while to learn these skills in English. For example, Mqoqi has a problem with English because he does not know Zulu. He cannot distinguish Zulu words from English words . . . In fact, most of the students who fail to read and write in English are those students who Miss Khanyile reports to have a problem with the Zulu literacy as well).

The teachers in the foundation phase echoed a similar view. For example, in response to my question about her views on the learning of literacy in Zulu in the foundation phase, the 1st grade teacher said:

*Noma ngingakaze ngifundise e-intermediate kodwa ngiyaye ngibone ukuthi ingane esuke lapha kithi kade yenza kahle, ikwazi ukufunda nokubhala isiZulu, uma isifike e-intermediate ijwayele ukwenza kungcono esiNgisini. Kusho ukuthi bayasizakala. Bayabenefitha.* (Although I have never taught at the intermediate phase, I have noticed that children who graduate from us having learned how to read and write in Zulu, do better in reading and writing in English when they get to the intermediate phase. It means they benefit from learning in Zulu).

Contrary to the views of these teachers, the principal insisted that teachers should use English all the time when teaching in English. In her view, there is no role for students’ L1 in English and other content subjects taught in English. She put it succinctly as follows:
Mina angikuthandi ukuthi kusetshenziswe isiZulu . . . i-English is wide. Ungakwazi ingane ukuyichazela usebenzisa yona i-English uqobo by demonstrating, using teaching aids until ingane i-understande. To me, kuwukuyilimaza ingane ukuthi ufake isiZulu . . . Ngibona ukuthi uyayibambezela uthisha ukuthi ingane imasterishe ilanguage ngoba izofuna ukuthi njalo uma uthisha efundisa aphinde ngesiZulu.

Angikuncomi nje nhlobo nhlobo. (I do not like it when the teacher uses Zulu to teach English . . . English is wide. The teacher can use English itself and other strategies such as demonstrations and teaching aids until the student understands. I think it is damaging to the student to use Zulu . . . In my view, it delays the student to master English because the student becomes dependent on Zulu; every time the teacher must translate things into Zulu. I do not recommend it).

In sum, despite the contradictory views between the principal and some of the teachers on the role of Zulu in the learning of literacy, especially in English, the above discussion suggests that the use of Zulu in the 4th grade class may have facilitated the students’ learning, particularly their learning of vocabulary, an essential component of language and literacy. Furthermore, that the teacher also incorporated other strategies such as the use of gestures, demonstrations, drawing, students’ background knowledge and personal experiences may also have made the input more accessible and comprehensible because bilingual and biliterate students learn better when they exposed to multiple strategies (Harper & de Jong, 2004; Echavarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; 2008 ). However, the limited use of Zulu for pedagogical purposes in writing may have undermined the students learning because writing, like other literacy events, needs to be supported by a variety of strategies.
Using Writing as a Tool to Reinforce Language and Literacy Knowledge

The whole five months I observed English lessons in the 4th grade class, I noticed that almost every lesson ended with a writing exercise. Usually, these writing exercises took between 5 to 15 minutes of a 30 or 60 minute-session. The teacher explained:

“It is important that the students show me if they understood what they learned. So, writing helps me to do that. Kungisiza ukuthi ngibone ukuthi ubani uzwile futhi ubani akezwanga. Uma nginesikhathi ngikwazi kubuyela emuva. (Writing helps me to know which of the students understood what we were learning and which ones did not understand. If I have time, then I can go back).

The teacher added that writing also served as evidence for the school management team that teaching and learning has occurred. She put it thus:

_Uyabona uma seyifika iHOD izothi nxe ngicela ukubuza ukuthi this week . . . Ufuna i-evidence akafuni . . . angizukumthathel'ingane zixo-acta ukuthi this week Mam bestixile ku-oral. Kahle kahle kithina u-oral awusebenzi kakhulu. U-oral-ke bayawuthanda bona angisho njalo ngoba bayafisa ukubona ingane isho lokhu nalokhu. Kodwa futhi uma sekuphansi. (When the HOD asks what I have done for the week . . . she wants evidence . . . I’m not going to tell her that we have been acting, doing oral work. Oral work is not enough evidence although they like to see students talking and doing different things with spoken language. The most important thing is writing).

Given the above comments, the fact that most of the writing that occurred in that class was a follow-up to some activity that had taken place in the previous lesson is not surprising. In fact, most of the writing activities involved the students practicing some structures they had learned, especially from the reading comprehension texts, poems, grammar, and vocabulary—the main classroom literacy events.
Specifically, for the grammar writing activities, the students had to identify grammatical structures, such as verbs, adjectives, nouns; choose the correct grammatical structure between alternatives in a given sentence; fill-in blank spaces with appropriate grammatical structures; and change sentences from one grammatical form to another. In fact, in most of the grammar writing exercises the teacher would write sentences on the board she had generated herself. Most of these sentences were unrelated and out of context. I noted that most of the time when she was facing the board, still writing the sentences, some of the students would be off-task—talking among themselves about things that were not related to school work, giggling, especially the girls, and playing spin with money coins, particularly the boys. Sometimes the teacher would notice these behaviors and call the students to order, but sometimes she missed them. Once she was done writing the task, she would turn to the students and ask them to read the instructions and the sentences aloud as she pointed to each word with a ruler. The following excerpt illustrates what typically happened:

Teacher: Take out your exercise books and write the work on the board [referring to the sentences she had written on the board]. She walked around the class, checking if the students were writing the assigned task. After a few minutes she went back to the board.]

Teacher: [pointing to the instruction below the notes] Now, read this!

Students: [reading the instruction chorally] Finding the main ideas and use the correct question words—who, what, when, where.

Teacher: [offering a Zulu explanation] Kusho ukuthi uzobhala isentenisi bese uyalehlukanisa usebenzise imibuzo njengoba ngenzile (It means you are going to write the whole sentence and then break it up into different parts and use the different question words as I did.) [referring to what they did during the lesson].

Teacher: [pointing to the first sentence] Now, read!
Students: [reading the first sentence] Mrs Grace Jacobs of [stumbling on the word Bellville]

Teacher: [offering the word] Bellville

Students: Bellville [repeating this twice].

Teacher: It’s the name of a place. Read again!

Students: Mrs Jacobs of Bellville celebrated her one hundred and thirty birthday at the weekend.

Teacher: Next!

Students: [reading in unison] Nelson Mandela fought against . . . [They stumbled on the word apartheid]

Teacher: Apartheid [repeating this word twice] What’s the meaning of apartheid?

Hawu! Anazi? (What? I can’t believe this! You don’t know?) Ubandlululo. (It’s segregation).

Students: Ubandlululo [repeating this twice after being prompted by the teacher]

Teacher: Wayelwa nobandlululo. (He fought against segregation).

Students: [reading the whole sentence as the teacher pointed to each word in the sentence] Nelson Mandela fought against apartheid.

Students: [reading the next sentence, with the teacher pointing at the words] Thabo announced his . . . [The students stumbled on the word engagement]

Teacher: [offering the word] Engagement

Students: [repeating after the teacher and then reading the whole sentence]

Engagement. Thabo announced his engagement.

Teacher: What’s an engagement? [The teacher waited for a few seconds, but there was no response] If you promise someone that you will marry them.
Teacher: You are going to write the whole sentence and then the question words.

**Uma umuntu engezwanga abuze.** (If you did not understand, ask.) You are going to write the whole sentence and break it using four questions words.

As this example shows, the students would read the instructions and the sentences aloud, with the teacher pointing at the individual words in each sentence. Not only did this support the students’ oral reading of the sentences, especially struggling readers, but it also helped the teacher to identify words that seemed to be unfamiliar to the students, and therefore explain such words. However, the fact that in most cases she did not create opportunities for the students to engage with words at a deeper level undermined the students’ learning of the words. For example in the above excerpt when she explained the word “apartheid”, she could have asked the students what they knew about this word. Probably, some students would have shared their knowledge. Taking it further, she could have asked the students to talk to their parents, find out what the parents knew and then let the students generate their own sentences based on the information. In this respect, the students would have had an opportunity to participate in a meaningful way while deepening their knowledge of the word.

As mentioned previously, another writing component in that class was spelling. Almost invariably, the teacher would teach spelling after some reading activity. In other words, she used it as a tool to reinforce the words she had taught, especially key vocabulary from the reading comprehension passages or poems. When teaching spelling, most of the time the teacher would write the selected words on the chalkboard and then ask the students to read them aloud. After this, she would ask them to spell out each word while she pointed at the word. Although the students usually spelt out the words in unison, in some cases she would randomly select individual students, and some of the students would struggle. To help the struggling ones, she would ask the other students to spell out the words, modeling for
their peers. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from the story about Sandile playing on the hills of sand in Johannesburg:

Students: [reading chorally] Furrows.

Teacher: [pointing at the word] Spell the word.

Students: [spelling out the word] F. U. R. R. O. W. S.

Teacher: Again.

Students: [spelling out the word again] F. U. R. R. O. W. S.

Teacher: [asking the students to read the following word on the board.] Another word!

Students: [in unison] Dump

Teacher: [nominating a student and pointing at the word] Vusi, spell the word.

Vusi: [spelling out the word] D.W. [stopped and looking frustrated]

Teacher: Hawu! [expressing surprise]


Nonhle: [spelling out the word] D. U. M. P.

Teacher: Vusi [asking the student to try again]

Vusi: [spelling out the word] D. U. M. P

Teacher: Another word!

Students: [reading the word in unison] Steep.

Teacher: [calling on another student] S’khona

[For a few seconds, S’khona just stood there, staring at the word, and then he spelled it out.]

S’khona: [spelling out the word] S. T. E. E. P.

Instead of the students spelling out words, sometimes the teacher would select individual students to write words on the board she had called. If a student got the word right,
she would ask the whole group to repeat it several times, sometimes while she pointed at the word. Whereas some of the students had no problem with getting the words correct, others struggled. For example in a spelling lesson that was based on the poem *The Cupboard* the students had recited, the teacher nominated S’khona to write the word “good” on the board. For a couple of seconds, S’khona stood there staring at the board and then started writing the word. But before he finished—he had written “guu—he was interrupted by other students who were laughing at him, shouting, *Hawu!* expressing their surprise that he could not spell the word correctly. The teacher reprimanded them: “Don’t say *Hawu!* He is trying.” Looking disappointed, S’khona walked back to his seat and another student got up and wrote the correct spelling. In the same lesson, another student spelled “key” as *khi* and had to be corrected by another one. Again, the other students laughed at him and the teacher scolded them.

Although the teacher was supportive of these students, she did not have a follow-up on their misspelling of the words. These misspellings were not random; the students had used the Zulu spelling. In Zulu “good” would be spelled as *gudi* and “key” as *khi*. What seems to have happened here is that the students transferred their phonological knowledge of Zulu into English. In other words, they were using Zulu graphophomenic cues to learn the English spelling, suggesting active learning on their part. However, their strategy was misleading. In the exit interview, while the teacher acknowledged the facilitative role of Zulu in the students’ learning of English, she complained that the struggling ones seemed to over-rely on Zulu and therefore got confused:

*Kusho ukuthi ukafika kwabo bazi isiZulu kwenza ukuthi kube lula ukuthi bangene esiNgisini. Noma-ke njengoba kade ngisho ukuthi sometimes kuyabaconfuza abangamaslow learners ukuthi babone ukuthi sekafanele sishintshe. Umuntu asale esenalokho ukuthi “Theyibuli. (That they come knowing Zulu makes it easier for the
students to learn English. However, as I indicated before, sometimes this confuses them, especially the slow learners. They fail to realize that they need to change; for example, instead of using the English spelling for “table”, they use the Zulu spelling theyibuli).

Perhaps, if the teacher had drawn clear contrasts between the Zulu and English spelling, this would have minimized the confusion in some of the students.

As for the reading comprehension writing activities, the students had to answer reading comprehension questions. Typically, this would come at the end of the reading of a story. In almost all the cases, without engaging the students in any discussion or activity about the story, the teacher would ask them to answer the questions on their journal. Most of the questions required that the students use a one-word, one-phrase or one-clause answer, especially in the case of “who” and “what” questions. For example, in the story about Mother Teresa, three out of four questions read as follows: (1) Is Mother Teresa still alive? Write a sentence that tells you this. (2) Name two things that Mother Teresa did to help poor people and children? (3) Is Calcutta a country or a city? How do we know? As these questions show, all that the students had to do was simply to locate sentences that contained the answers in the story.

Other lower-level thinking questions occurred in the fill-in blank space exercises. These were mostly summaries of the stories provided in the textbook. In general, these summaries focused on the factual information about the stories; in only one summary did I observe the students being asked for syntactic and semantic knowledge. Even then, in this story, which was about Sandile’s train trip and about him in Johannesburg, sometimes the students had to choose between two alternative answers provided in the text. They did not generate the answers themselves. Evidently, the filling-in exercises were as less cognitively demanding as the “who” or “what” questions that the students usually answered.
Although the students usually answered lower-order thinking questions, in a few cases the teacher assigned inferential questions. For instance, the story about Mother Teresa’s biography had this question: Do you think Mother Teresa was a leader? Why do you think so? Here, the students had to put together different pieces of information scattered throughout the story, and they also had to draw on their background knowledge about what makes someone a leader. There was no explicitly stated answer in the book. Noma appeared to have been able to make an inference despite the fact that her answer was still somewhat vague. She said, “She [Mother Teresa] was a leader because she helped people.” By contrast, Muzi and Jabu appeared to have struggled. They both stated, “Mother Teresa walked about in the streets of Calcutta,” a sentence they extracted directly from the book.

It is possible that the students struggled with the inferential questions because of the predominance of lower-order thinking questions in class. In fact, I observed that the teacher avoided assigning the students challenging questions. For example, although there was a chance for the students to engage in an extended discussion when answering the different parts of one question in the story about Sandile’s train trip to Johannesburg, the teacher chose the simplest part. The first part of the question required the students to draw six train carriages and number them. In the next part—the part that the teacher omitted—they had to compare and contrast the pictures in the story with the pictures in the previous related story, a story about Sandile’s life at his rural home. Then, they had to write about differences and similarities between Sandile’s life at his rural home and in the city.

Although I am not sure why the teacher left out this part of the question, I think she possibly did so because the students would have had to refer back to the previous story. This would have been inconsistent with her teaching style. She rarely made references to the previous stories when teaching new stories despite the fact that some of the stories were
related. Not drawing the students’ attention to the connections between the stories may have limited the students in engaging with the stories in a meaningful way.

As the writing activities discussed above show, writing in this class tended to be controlled and structured. The students did not write extended texts; on only two occasions did I observe them writing such texts. This was towards the end of the year. One of these lessons was based on the story about Johannesburg. Instead of assigning the reading comprehension questions as the teacher usually did after every reading, she asked the students to write a short paragraph, describing Johannesburg: “Write a short paragraph about the city called eGoli (a Zulu name for Johannesburg). May be your paragraph must be five lines. It must be a paragraph, not sentences.”

As the instruction indicates, the teacher wanted the students to write a paragraph. This was despite the fact that I had never seen her teach the students how to write a paragraph, nor did she share with them explicitly a model of a paragraph. It was not surprising that as the students were writing the paragraph, some of them looked frustrated and blank. For example, five minutes into the writing of the paragraph, S’khona had not written a word. He was holding a pen in his hand, and with furrowed brows, he was staring at the blank page in front of him. However, most of the students were writing; presumably, they knew how to write a paragraph from the previous class. As the students continued writing, the teacher would walk around the class and from time to time would stop and look at the journals of the students. Sometime she would talk to them, but the voices were so soft that I hardly heard anything. But in one case when she was reading Muzi’s work, she turned to the whole class and made this comment: “. Kanti akusekhona eGoli has. Kusafuneka abantu baphinde bafunde u “has” no “have” (Is it not Johannesburg has . . . ? It means some of you need to go back and learn the difference between “has” and “have”).

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Evidently, the above remark shows that the teacher was more worried about the students’ grammar than the content. Despite this and the fact that she did not give the students the freedom to choose the length of the paragraph, by not specifying the exact points that the students had to incorporate in their paragraphs, she gave them some leeway. In other words, drawing on the story, they were free to shape their ideas and sentences however they wanted.

In another extended writing lesson, while the students were still restricted in terms of the length of the dialogue, they were free to write about any topic of their choice. The instruction was “You are going to write your own dialogue. The dialogue must not be more than ten lines and it must not be less than five lines.” Contrary to the paragraph writing activity, in this lesson the teacher had given the students models of a dialogue: three pieces she had generated herself and another piece from the textbook.

I observed that all the dialogues had few exchanges between the characters and tended to focus on a particular language structure. For example, the dialogue in the textbook followed the same structure: a question and answer structure with the first character asking a question and the second character providing an answer, with most of the answers starting with either a “yes” or “no”. Furthermore, although the dialogue was about the topics to which the students could relate, such as buying a favorite chocolate, preparing supper, and doing homework; the structures of the sentences were controlled. This seemed to have affected the natural flow of the dialogue and may have undermined the content. In fact, the fact that the teacher did not encourage the students to talk about the content of any of the model dialogues may have conveyed the message that content is not important, a view that may also have been unintentionally conveyed by the substantial amount of time the teacher spent teaching the dialogue structure, using the model dialogues.
In sum, the discussion on writing in this class shows that in large part writing was a controlled activity, which was intended to teach specific skills. Writing was not about exploring ideas, expressing cultural identities, and/or discussing knowledge about a particular topic (Calkins, 1994; Franklin, 1999; Hendricks, 2009). However, the emphasis on skills in writing was not limited to the 4th grade teacher. Some of the teachers in the foundation phase also stressed skills. For instance, when I visited the 1st grade class, in all the 3 lessons I observed the teacher spent half of the time in each lesson drilling the students on how to combine syllables with vowels to form words. This culminated into the spelling test illustrated below:

Teacher: [talking to one group] Ngicela abantu baka p-. (May I have a p-sound group). [A group of students went forward]. Ngizonibizela umsindo ka-p- esiwufunde izolo. (I am going to give you a spelling test about the sound p- we learned yesterday).

Teacher: [addressing the whole class] Ngibizela abantu baka p-; abanye bayabhala. (I am giving a spelling test to the p- group, the rest of you should be writing your work.)

Teacher: [talking to the p-sound group] Nangu umsindo ka- p- (Here is the p- sound). [writing the sound p- on the board and combining it with the vowels: pa, pe, pi, po, pu].

Teacher: Asibhaleni-ke. (Let us start writing).

Teacher: [giving the students the first word] Ipasi (a pass) [She repeated this word 4 times. As the other students were writing this word, one of the girls stood up, went to the board and looked closely at the syllables pa, pe, pi, po, pu. Seemingly, she was looking for the sound pa. As she was doing so, she was sounding out the syllable pa.]

Teacher: Okay. Number 2. Izipopolo. [She repeated this word 4 times as well. Again, as the other students were writing this word, two boys stood up, went to the board and
looked closely at the syllables *pa, pe, pi, po, pu*. One of them kept on sounding out the syllable *po*.]

In an interview I had with the teacher, she indicated: *Ingane kufanele iwazi amaletters; ikwazi ukubhala amasyllables nokuwahlanganisa ukwakha amagama. Ingane engakwazi lokho iba nenkinga yokukopisha ebhodini noma usuthi uyayisiza kuba nzinyana.* (Students should know the letters. They should know the syllables and how to combines them to form words. Students who do not know these things have a problem. They cannot copy work from the board, and sometimes it becomes difficult to help them copy from the board). The fact that the teacher believed in the development of sub-word and word skills was also evidenced by the writing exercises she assigned to the students. Right into the 8th month of the academic year, most of the students’ writing exercises were mainly syllables, words, and only a few exercises were sentences. There was no writing that was generated by the students regardless of how it looked like. In brief, the teacher was concerned about getting things right; there was no room for emergent writing or writing that allowed young children to use inventive spelling to show what they knew about sounds.

Like the other teachers, the principal seemed to understand writing as developing writing skills. In her response to the question about her views on what she considered important in teaching writing she replied:

*Mina I wish ukuthi izingane zikwazi ukubhala kahle, a good handwriting, neat kube clean. Izingane zikwazi ukubhala amaletters . . . Uthisha kwaseyena must have a good hand-writing. Angabhali anyhow so that izingane zingezukumislideka. Azicorrethe umntwana amaletters . . . Kungabi ukuthi ubhalisile, ubefuna ispelling leso. (I wish that students would learn to write properly—a good and a neat handwriting. Students should be able to write letters . . . The teacher must have a good handwriting and must not write anyhow so that she/he does not confuse*
students. She/he must correct students’ letters and must not simply focus on the content.

Although the 2nd grade teacher emphasized skills like the other teachers, she added that wherever possible students should be encouraged to write about the things they see every day. She said:

*Kubalulekile ukuthi abantu bakwazi ukuhlanganisa amasyllables namagama benze amasentenisi. Kodwa futhi bangabhala ngezinto ezilula abazibona zonke izinsuku.* (It is important that students know how to combine syllables to form words and how to combine words to form sentences. However, it is also significant that they write about things they see every day).

The teacher enacted this belief in one of the lessons I observed in her class. In this Zulu writing lesson, the teacher and the students started by reviewing some of the common ceremonies in the traditional Zulu culture, including a birthday party. Following this, she asked the students how people invite friends and relatives to a birthday party nowadays. This question led to an engaging discussion about how to write a birthday invitation card as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

*Teacher:* Umema abantu. Ubamema ngani? (You invite people. How do you invite them?)

*Student:* Ubhala incwadi uyifake emvilophini? (You write a letter and enclose it on an envelope).

*Student:* Ubhala ıkhadi. (You write a birthday card).

*Teacher:* Kambe yini ebalulekile kuyisimemo? Nihlale ningenzela. (By the way, what is important in an invitation? Some of you have sent me birthday invitation cards).

*Student:* Ubhala ıkhadi uthi uzoza nini. (You indicate the time of the birthday party).

Student: Yiziphuzo. (It’s cold drinks).

[Other students laughed.]

Teacher: Angikhumbuli ngithola ikhadi elithi woza uzophuza. (I don’t remember getting a card saying I must come for a cold drink).

Student: Usuku lwebirthday. (The date for a birthday party)

When the above conversation was over, the teacher showed the students a model birthday card that was designed by one of the students for her birthday and then asked them to design their own cards and provide the details. Throughout the remaining minutes, I observed that all the students were engaged, helping one another with designing the cards and sometimes with writing words. Evidently, contrary to the other teachers, this teacher viewed writing as a cognitive and a social process that takes into account students’ background knowledge and experiences.

Overall, despite the above mentioned example, the teachers considered writing as a tool to develop language and literacy skills. In this approach, writing is a cognitive process and students’ sociocultural knowledge and experiences have no role.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the findings on the instructional practices of the 4th grade teacher in the English language class and how the teacher’s beliefs influenced her instructional decisions. Evidently, the teacher seemed to believe that developing students’ oral language fluency and reading fluency should be the main components of teaching English. Through the recitation of the poems, repetition of grammatical structures, and repeated correction of the students’ oral reading when they read the texts aloud, the teacher supported the students’ oral language fluency and reading fluency. This skills-based
instructional approach extended to writing: the teacher used writing as a tool to reinforce the language and literacy knowledge the students had learned. The students did not engage in activities where they explored their ideas and identities nor did they write to discuss knowledge about a topic. In addition, the discussion showed that the teacher incorporated Zulu, the students’ L1, to make the input accessible and comprehensible to the students. Along with Zulu, the teacher also employed other strategies, including gestures, demonstrations, students’ background knowledge and experiences, albeit to varying degrees.

Furthermore, this discussion showed that the teacher’s instructional practices did not occur in a vacuum but occurred within a nested context of the larger sociocultural context of the school. In some cases, the teacher shared similar instructional practices and beliefs about language and literacy learning with the foundation phase teachers and the principal, and in other cases she did not do so. The consistencies and inconsistencies among the teachers demonstrate that participants across the school contexts interact with one another in dialectical and contradictory ways. In the next chapter, I turn to the students, still showing how contexts shape and influence language and literacy practices in complex and dynamic ways.
Chapter 5

Dynamics of Students’ Language and Literacy Practices

While the last chapter focused on the instructional practices and beliefs of the 4th grade teacher, and to a limited extent of the foundation phase teachers and the principal, in this chapter, I present findings on the focal students’ language and literacy practices in the classroom and in their homes. The first part deals with the students’ classroom language and literacy practices and the second part focuses on their home practices. Whereas language and literacy practices in the school and in the home are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Stein & Mamabolo, 2005; Street, 2001; Volk & de Acosta, 2003), teasing the two contexts apart helped me to learn more about the students’ strengths and challenges in each situation, and most importantly, how these two contexts can feed on one another in order to enhance the students’ learning. This understanding is important because the development of bilingualism and biliteracy tend to follow diverse and multiple paths, depending on the social and linguistic environments (Dworin, 2003; Gregory et al., 2004).

Formal Instruction and Language and Literacy Learning in the Classroom

This section deals with the language and literacy practices of the focal students in the classroom. The order in which I present the focal students is based on their participation levels in the different language and literacy events in the classroom, starting with the student who participated the most to the one who contributed the least. Furthermore, I paid attention to the students’ performance levels, based on my observations. The first two students were among the high-achieving students, the third student was somewhat below average performance, and the last one was among the most struggling students. For each student, I used a brief quote to introduce the theme that characterizes the student’s learning. Introducing the students this way allowed me to illuminate the students’ participation and interactions with the teacher and their peers in the different language and literacy events and activities.
“I am tired of this side. It’s always Noma, Zinhle, or Dudu”: Engaged and self-confident.

*Noma.* The teacher said these words as she was waiting for more students to raise their hands so that she could choose them to read a comprehension passage. As indicated before, reading in this class mainly involved the teacher and the students reading a text aloud several times. Sometimes the teacher and the students read a text chorally, and at other times the students took turns. For this segment of the lesson, it was the students’ turn to read the text aloud to their peers and the teacher. As the quote suggests, Noma was among a few students who always participated in this activity. Consistent with the norms of the class, after being selected by the teacher, she went forward and read the story. While she was reading the story, not only was she reading fluently and expressively, a reading behavior the teacher often encouraged, but she also seemed to be monitoring her reading very closely, paying attention to both grammatical and semantic cues. This is illustrated in the following transcript:

*Noma:* [reading fluently] Have you ever been to Johannesburg? Have you ever heard about this city? Millions of people live, work, and play in Johannesburg. It is the biggest city in Southern Africa. The city started in 1886 when people *found* [self-correcting] found

*Teacher:* [interrupting] found

*Noma:* [rereading the last part of the sentence with the word “found”] when people found gold there. Another name of this city is *Egoli.* It means a place of gold. Nearly half the world’s gold was found there [looking closely at the book and reading]. Nearly half of the world’s gold was found there.

[Noma went on, reading the next two paragraphs fluently and expressively until she stumbled on the word “museum”.]
Noma: You can learn all about mining at Gold Reef City. This is an old mine that is now museum [reading the long /u/ as a short /u/ in the syllable [mu]. She stopped and looked closely at the word]

Teacher: [offered the correct pronunciation] Museum.

Noma: Museum. You can put on a hard hat, like the one the miners wear. You can go underground and what is like in a mine [stopped and reread the last part]. And see what is like in a mine. Johannesburg has a big, beautiful zoo with many wild animals. You can go to the zoo at night to see night animals. You get into a wugon [self-correcting] wagon, pulled by a trailer. [She continued to read the next paragraph fluently without making any miscues.]

As this excerpt shows, in general, Noma read the story well and made a few miscues. She was also able to correct others without being prompted by the teacher as in the case of “found” she initially read as “fond” and “museum” she first read with a short /u/ in the syllable [mu]. In addition, she reread sentences when she had omitted a word, and the sentences did not seem to make much sense. Noma appeared to be recruiting grammatical and semantic cues in her reading to make sense of the text.

That Noma was engaged in her reading, closely monitoring it, is also illustrated in a lesson prior to the above one. It is interesting to note that in this lesson, which was taught half-way through the third term, she was not as fluent as she was in the above lesson. The story was about how the Red ants outwitted Snake. As was usually the case, the students were taking turns to read the story aloud in front of the class, and Noma had taken over from Zinhle.

Noma: Partridge flapped her wings and cried out loud, [reading with a flat tone] “No, no. Not you.”

Teacher: [interrupting] Are you crying? [shouting loud] “No, no! Not you!”
Noma: [shouting loud like the teacher] “No, no! Not you! If you step on Snakes you will break all my eggs. I need somebody sensible to chase Snake away.” All the animals came, one after the other, and said to Partridge, “We would like to help you.” But she told them to go away. “You are too big. You will break my eggs,” she said.

Teacher: Noma, remember to read with Partridge’s voice.

Noma: [reading with a small, frustrated voice] You are too big. You will break my eggs.

As the above excerpt indicates, when Noma was not reading fluently and expressively, the teacher modeled to her how to read appropriately. Evidently, this scaffolding helped to improve her reading. However, Noma went beyond merely decoding the words. When a word did not make sense, she stopped and fixed it, suggesting that she was engaged in and monitoring what she was reading. In fact, she was aware that she was rereading some of the words and sentences and could give reasons for doing so. For instance, during the break when I asked her jokingly what made her change the word from “chess” to “chase”, she explained:


(I remembered how to pronounce this word. Also, as my aunt always says one needs to make sense of what they are reading and words should be pronounced correctly. In addition, I remembered the game we played with words in the previous lesson).

The fact that Noma said she remembered the word game they played in the previous lesson seems to suggest that she was making connections across the lessons. The lesson she was talking about was on rhyming words. Clearly, “chess” and “chase” do not rhyme.
However, that Noma saw some connection shows that she understood that a word can activate other words with which it shares some features, including phonological features. This psycholinguistic processing demonstrates a certain level of engagement. Possibly, it was her active participation in the two rhyming lessons that encouraged her to make the connection in the first place.

After the teacher had introduced the concept of rhyming words in the first lesson, in the second lesson she gave the students three poems and asked them to read the poems in their respective groups, identifying rhyming words, after which they had to choose one group member to report back to the whole class. As the students were working in their groups, I was walking around, from one group to another. When I came to Noma’s group, I noticed that Noma seemed to be dominating the activity: she was the one reading the poems aloud and underlining the words, and most importantly, determining the correct words as illustrated below:

*Nqoba*: [identifying rhyming words] Rocks and pox

*Noma*: [looking at the words closely] You think these words rhyme?

*Nqoba*: Yea . . . [He looked at the words closely and opened his mouth as if he wanted to talk.] Look . . . [Before he could finish Noma jumped in.]

*Noma*: Buka (Look) [mentioning new words] pains and rains.

[They continued identifying other rhyming words in the poem and never talked about “rocks” and “pox”, which Nqoba had identified and Noma had not approved.]

When the time came for the group to report back, self-confidently, Noma took the list and went forward. When she read out the rhyming words, she did not mention all the rhyming words in the poem. I noticed a pattern among those she omitted. In each pair, the second word did not have the onset as in eye paired with dry, in paired with chin. However, Noma's group was not the only one that made this omission. It is not clear if the omissions that the
students made were related to the focus of the previous lessons. That is, all the examples had a clear onset and rime. Despite the omission, Noma’s active participation during the rhyming lessons seems to have supported her understanding that words may be related but have different meanings, the insight she demonstrated in her reading sometimes.

The fact that Noma made connections when learning is also evidenced by the following reading comprehension lesson in which they were reading about Mother Teresa. As was usually the case when the teacher was reading aloud to the students, she stopped and asked them the meaning of unfamiliar words. In this case, it was “community”.

*Teacher:* [reading] Every day Mother Teresa walked about the streets of Calcutta. She helped mothers to wash their babies. She looked after people who were dying. She helped many people. After a few years she started her own community. [She stopped.]

What is a community?

*Noma:* [loud and confidently, without being called on] People. [She paused.] Like a community of Nkosana.

*Teacher:* Yes, Noma. But what is a community? [The teacher waited for a few seconds] People living together. Yes, a community is a group of people who live and work together. As we live here at Senzeni, we are the community of Senzeni.

_Abahlala kwa-H bayi-community yakw-H._ (Those who live in H section form a community.) So Noma you are a member of Nkosana community. _Siyezwani yini?_ (Do you understand?) [The teacher continued reading the story until the end.]

As the excerpt demonstrates, the first part of the answer was general; Noma simply said people, but as soon as she realized that this information was not clear, she added a practical example, saying “community of Nkosana.” Nkosana is the name of the place where she lived. The fact that Noma could make this personal connection shows that, despite her limited definition of the word, she knew how it applied in real-life context. In other words,
she connected her formal knowledge of the word—albeit incomplete—to her everyday life knowledge by giving an example.

In another lesson she made a similar connection. In this lesson the students and the teacher had finished the first rounds of reading a comprehension passage about Sandile’s train trip to Johannesburg. As usual, the teacher asked the students to identify words they did not know for which she provided the explanations most of the time, except in a few instances where she allowed the students to offer their own explanations. This is how Noma made the connection:

Teacher: Another word you do not know?

Doli: Mist.

Teacher: Mist? We talked about it when we were doing NS (Natural Science). What is it? Noma: [without being nominated] Something not clear.

Teacher: Yes, Noma. Next word.

Contrary to the earlier example where Noma spontaneously drew upon her personal knowledge in making the connection, in this example the teacher provided the students with a clue, encouraging them to make the connection across the two subjects. Although this cross-curriculum connection was a rare occurrence in this class—one of the two examples in the whole study—Noma’s ability to link the two subjects shows that she could think beyond the text if encouraged to do so.

Not only could Noma make connections, but she could also draw inferences. This was particularly the case when the teacher asked higher-order thinking questions—a rare occurrence in this class. For instance, after the students had finished reading a comprehension passage about Sandile’s train trip to Johannesburg, the teacher asked the following question: “In what grade was Sandile? Why do you think so? Noma responded: “He is in grade two because when he reads he count (sic) the words.” Given that there was
no mention of Sandile’s grade in the story, Noma seemed to have inferred this answer from
the way Sandile read the word Johannesburg. In the book the sentence appears as follows:
“Sandile saw a large board and slowly sounded out the word: “Jo-han-nes-burg” (Harm,
Tsilik, & Commins, 2010, p. 66). Evidently, Noma was using her personal understanding of
how a second grader might read this word. In the same lesson when the teacher asked the
question: “Why was Sandile afraid on the train? Noma’s reply was “Sandile was afraid
because the train was full of strangers.” Again, this answer was not explicitly stated in the
book. The book simply said, “He heard people climbing on board. All strangers. His heart
was small and frightened.” (Harm et al., p. 66). These examples demonstrate Noma’s
potential to engage with the text beyond reproducing printed words.

Similar to the above discussed literacy events, Noma’s participation in the paragraph
and dialogue writing—the only two less structured writing activities I observed in this class,
illustrate that when the teacher created opportunities that encouraged the students to express
their ideas and experiences, some students were able to engage with the tasks in meaningful
ways. Before the students wrote their own dialogues, the teacher modeled several dialogues.
Using these dialogues, she taught the structure of a dialogue; she never talked about the ideas
in the dialogues. Following this, she broke the students into small groups and asked them to
choose three students who would read a designated dialogue, assuming the different roles.
Noma was among the students that were chosen in her group. After the students had practiced
reading the dialogue for five minutes, the teacher asked the representatives to come forward
and read the dialogue. As usual, Noma and her peers read fluently and expressively, using
voices, facial expressions and body movements to interpret the message.

Seemingly, participating in presenting the dialogue helped to shape Noma’s
subsequent writing of the dialogue. Not only did she follow the dialogue format, but she also
had more exchanges between the characters than any of the model dialogues. In addition, her
dialogue had a narrator, which none of the model dialogues had. The narrator introduced the story and the characters as follows: “Thandi asked her father to go to Durban. It was a holiday.” Moreover, although the sentences were still short, she did not focus on a particular language structure as it was the case with the model dialogues; she used the language to move the story forward. For example, her dialogue opened with Thandi asking for permission to visit Durban from her Dad. In response to the request the father tells Thandi that he needed to talk to her mother first. While waiting for her mother’s response, Thandi started preparing for the visit. Through the narrator readers learn that the mother approved the visit. So Thandi and her father went on with the preparations and they eventually left. Although the dialogue was short, it told a story that could be followed.

It would be misleading not to mention that in writing the dialogue Noma collaborated with two other students, Dudu and Zakhona. Nonetheless, she contributed more, Babhale isihloko. Ngase ngabhala-ke mina. (They [the friends] suggested the topic. I was the one who wrote all the words in the dialogue). Apparently, the teacher disapproved of this collaboration: No. I didn't say that [i.e., people should collaborate]. I said go home and write your own dialogue. Noma and her friends seemed to have ignored the teacher because when she asked individual students to go forward and read their dialogues, they also went forward and read the dialogue, each assuming a different character. Of all the dialogues read aloud, Noma and her peers presented the most interesting text, and read it fluently with expression.

Evidently, this example shows that by not encouraging the students to collaborate, the teacher missed an opportunity to engage them in interesting and creative ways of learning, which encouraged them to draw on their cultural knowledge and personal experiences. For example, in the case of Noma and friends, writing about a visit to Durban was not a random choice. During one of the interviews, in response to my question regarding what she would like to write about if she had a choice, she indicated: Ngingafisa ukuthi ngibhale ngezihloko
ezahlukene ezimayelana nabantu abavakashala ezindaweni. (I would like to write about topics that are related to people visiting different places). Dudu echoed a similar response, Ngingabhala about a trip to the sea (I can write about a trip to the sea.) When I asked Dudu to explain the reason for this choice, she said, Ingoba ngiyathanda ukudlala ebeach futhi sake saya. Ngingabhala ngalezi zinto esasenza ngesikhathi siyile (It is because I like going to the beach. We once went to the beach with my family. I would write about everything that we did at the beach).

Like Dudu, Noma indicated that she liked talking about what she knows. In response to my question about what she liked best about learning to write in this class, she said: Yingaleli langa ethi khona uMiss asibhale amaparagraphs (I liked the day when Miss Khanyile asked us to write paragraphs). When I probed her about what exactly she liked about this, she stated, Ngathanda ukuchazela umuntu into angayazi futhi ngathanda ukuthi ngizibhalele (I liked describing something to someone who did not know it and I liked writing things in my own words).

Reference to describing things seems to be linked to a paragraph that the students wrote in class in which the teacher had asked them to describe Johannesburg. This was after they had read a comprehension passage that described Johannesburg. Contrary to the dialogue that the teacher taught explicitly, she did not teach the students how to write a paragraph. All that she said was that a paragraph has a few sentences: Write a short paragraph about the city called eGoli. Maybe your paragraph must be five lines. It must be a paragraph not sentences. Unlike some of the students who seemed to struggle with this activity and did not write anything, Noma wrote:

\[ Egoli is a big city and it has long building. Millions of people live at EGoli. But there is no sea but you can find a pool. It has many stadium. At EGoli the is a zoo called Johannesburg Zoo. You can also see sand pumps in Johannesburg. You can find a \]
gold at EGoli. The first thing you see when you come close to EGoli is the Hillborw Tower. That tower is 270 meters high. It is the tallest building in Africa. It is the biggest city in Southern Africa.

Four out of the eleven ideas were not mentioned in the passage. The passage did not talk about the sea, the pool, and the stadiums, yet it is true that there is no sea in Johannesburg. It is also correct that there are pools, tall buildings, and many stadiums. As I mentioned in her profile, Noma lived in Johannesburg with her family for most of her life before she came to live with her aunt, so she knew Johannesburg very well. Evidently, she was drawing on her personal experience and cultural knowledge about the city. Most importantly, she integrated this knowledge with the text information, suggesting that if students are given an opportunity to express themselves freely, they can successfully do so.

Not all the strategies that Noma learned and used were always beneficial and supported her learning. This was particularly the case when she memorized some materials they were expected to learn. For example, one day the teacher asked me to look after the students during the English session because she was delayed. She asked me to tell them to read the names of baby animals from the handout she had given them the previous day. As I was walking around the classroom, I observed that most of the students were working in pairs, one holding a handout and quizzing the other one who did not have a handout but was expected to give answers. Noma and her friend, Nikiwe, were no exception. Sometimes they would close their eyes as they memorized the list. This behaviour resembled the strategy they had used the previous day. In this lesson the teacher had taught the same topic. She, together with the students, had taken turns to read the list, after which she asked them to close their eyes and then quizzed them on the names on the list. The fact that most students struggled to remember the names on the list suggests that out of context memorization like this one did
not seem to be productive; yet this is the strategy that Noma and her peers were using, a strategy that did not seem to engage Noma.

That memorization seemed to be ineffective for Noma’s learning is also supported by her inattention when they recited the poems in the morning as the usual practice, especially towards the end of the year. Instead of being enthusiastic, she seemed to have lost the oomph. For example, one day, instead of joining the other students in reciting the poems, she appeared to be reading one of the popular gloss magazines. In another example, she was wrestling with another student trying to get her birthday hat back. Upon noticing this, the teacher reprimanded her. Clearly, these examples indicate that she was not engaged.

In sum, the above discussion shows that Noma was an engaged student who used a variety of strategies to participate in the different language and literacy events. In addition, she infused her own understanding of what it meant to learn literacy by drawing from her sociocultural knowledge and experiences. However, Noma’s active engagement was, in part, facilitated by the greater latitude the teacher gave her to take leadership, to self-correct, and to practice her skills. This was also recognized and honoured by peers.

In most cases, the teacher allowed Noma to explore her learning in a less constrained manner; for example, she rarely scolded her when she spoke out of turn despite the fact that this was against the classroom norms and the teacher insisted on the students’ conforming to it. Similarly, her peers respected her contribution even in cases where they did not necessarily seem to agree with her. In short, Noma’s active engagement and self-confidence was not only supported by her knowledge of the content, but it was also facilitated by the encouraging scaffold she got from the teacher and her peers. Despite this, Noma could not escape the constraining classroom practices and this affected her learning in a negative way, a reminder that teachers should create classroom environments that encourage students to explore the
content in various ways, using a variety of strategies (Echavarria et al., 2004; 2008; Franken & August, 2011).

“Dudu and her group told me that they want to teach us a poem”: Assimilating and appropriating classroom practices

_Dudu_. These words were uttered by the teacher as she told the class that Dudu and her friends wanted to recite a poem they had taught themselves. The name of the poem was _An Old Woman_. It was about an old woman who had no place to live and had many children she struggled to feed. Dudu and her friends recited the poem from memory, and as they were doing so, they used gestures and body movements. For example, when they said the line: _There was an old woman_, they bent their knees similar to how old people bend their knees when they are struggling to walk. They also put their hands together when they came to the line: _She had ten children_. For the line: _She didn’t know what to do_, they shrugged their shoulders. The use of gestures and body movements happened throughout the recitation. In fact, after they had recited the poem three times, the teacher asked the other students to join them. The girls seemed to have learned the poem faster than the boys, most of the latter were mumbling the words. Following this, the teacher thanked the group and moved on to the lesson of the day.

This was not the first time Dudu’s group was reciting this poem. They had done so before, a few lessons after the beginning of the term. The two recitations were exactly the same. On both occasions, the teacher did not ask them to talk about the poem, including sharing the reasons for choosing it. She herself did not say anything about it. So the meaning of the poem was never explored. The teacher seemed happy that the students had taken the initiative to find a poem and recite it. It is interesting to note that Dudu’s group followed exactly the same strategies that were used to learn and recite poems in this class: they used gestures, body movements, and voices to express the meaning of the poem. Evidently,
Dudu’s group seems to have assimilated this learning style despite the fact that they had chosen their own poem, something for which the teacher credited Dudu, stressing that she was a good student.

Because I was curious to know what made Dudu choose this poem, during one of the informal conversations I asked her. She explained: *Ngangiwathanda amapoems esasiwafunda kwagrade 3. Lena kodwa asiyifundanga eklasini* (I liked the poems that we read in grade 3, but we did not read this one in class). The following day Dudu brought a book from which she had taken the poem. The book was a 3rd grade reader with short stories and short poems. Excitedly, she also told me that when she was in grade 3 she wrote a poem: *Kwagrade 3 kwathwa asiziqambele inkondlo yethu.* Ngathi “Kufa uynuku; kufa ngiyakwesaba. Ayi angisakhumbuli* (In grade 3 the teacher asked us to compose our own poems. I wrote: “Death you are untidy; Death I am afraid of you. I don’t remember everything). When I asked why she chose this topic, she stated: *OLungi angisho bake babhala kuthiwa ababhale inkondlo ngokufa. Mina ngavele ngacabanga eyakhe ngavele ngabhala yona. Ayengafani, kodwa ngafaka izinto zami* (Lungi [her older sister] once wrote a poem about death. So I thought of her poem and then I wrote about death, too. However, the two poems were not the same; I added other things).

When I asked to see a copy of the poem, she no longer had it. Nonetheless, the fact that she added other things that were not in her sister’s poem, her model, shows that she did not passively imitate her; rather, she appropriated her words. Furthermore, that Dudu could take a text and own it was also noted by the 2nd grade teacher who taught her. The teacher told me that Dudu was one of her best students: *Ngangimuthanda kakhulu uDudu. Uyazimisela. Into uzoyenza aze anezelele. Uyafunda* (I used to like Dudu very much. She is a diligent student. When you assign her a task, she will do it well and add a few things of her own. She also reads well). When I asked her if she could share with me a specific incident,
she indicated that she did not remember any specific example at that moment; nevertheless, she emphasized that Dudu was a good student and a good reader.

Evidently, the teachers were not the only ones who considered Dudu a competent student; other students did as well. In response to the question about whom they regarded a good reader in English and Zulu, Noma stated that Dudu was a good reader: *Ukuthi uma efunda ufunda into sengathi uyayikhuluma* (She reads like she is talking). S’khona noted: *Uyakwazi ufunda asheshise, asheshise alalele ongqi; eme uma sekukhona ongqi bese eyalihlukanisa igama* (She reads fast. She also observes periods. She knows how to separate words when reading). Dudu herself acknowledged that she was a good reader: *UNikiwe, yimi, uZinhle, uDoli, Noma, nabo abangingizi uma befunda amagama. Onke bayawazi ukuwafunda kodwa kakhona amanye esingawa understandi ukuthi athini kodwa siyakwazi khona ukuwafunda* (It is Nikiwe, Zinhle, Doli, Noma and me. We do not hesitate when we read. We know most of the words, but there are some whose meanings we do not know; nonetheless, we can read them).

As the above comments show, being a successful reader in this class meant being a fluent reader. The following excerpt in which Dudu read aloud in front of the class, a standard practice in this class, provides an example of this:

*Dudu:* [reading fluently] There were ten eggs in Partridge’s nest: beautiful, round, light green eggs. Snake slide [reading slid as slide, frowning and then self-correcting] slid up to the nest and chased Partridge from her nest. He said, [her voice expressing anger and frustration] “Go away. These eggs are mine!” . . . Partridge was very angry, so she called all the animals. She said, [her voice sounding desperate] “Come and help me, please. Come and help me! Come and help me!” The elephant heard her cry . . . [reading with a deep voice] “Don’t worry, Partridge, Elephant said. I will squ . . . [looking closely at the word]
Teacher: [offering Dudu the word before she could try it again] Squash.

[Dudu repeated the word and continued reading the paragraph before handing the reading over to another student to continue]

As this excerpt shows, Dudu could vary her voice accordingly as she assumed different roles and expressed different emotions. This was an example of fluent reading to which her classmates were referring and which the teacher emphasized when she taught reading. As the above transcript illustrates, Dudu went beyond parroting the reading strategies stressed in this class; she seemed to monitor her reading closely. For instance, when she read slid as slide, she recognized this and corrected herself. Because the teacher did not give her a chance to attempt the word “squash”, we do not know the strategy she would have used to resolve this problem. That Dudu could self-correct, a strategy I did not see the teacher teaching explicitly, suggests that although she was using most of the strategies taught in this class, she was able to inject her own strategies of self-monitoring as she read.

In addition, Dudu’s reading seems to have been supported by her friends as well. Whenever the teacher asked the students to come forward and read as different characters, Dudu was always in the same group of students, who also read well. This was usually the case when the teacher allowed the students to choose whom they would like to read with, a rare occurrence since most of the time the teacher selected students. The following excerpt illustrates how Dudu and her friends read the story about a mother and her daughter in a grocery store:

Dudu: We must go to the store today. We have finished ALL [stressing this word] the mealie meal and sugar.

Nikiwe: [with excitement in her voice] Oh, good! When are we going?

Zinhle: [the narrator]: Lile and her mother walked to the store, Mrs Magwaza stood behind the counter. She was weighing some potatoes. She was VERY [stressing this
word] old and wore thick glasses. Her BIG [stressing this word], black dog was lying in the middle of the floor.

_Noma:_ [with a polite voice and smiling]. Can I help you?

_Dudu:_ [smiling back and politely] Sawubona Mrs. Magwaza. Yes, please. Could I have two kilograms of mealie meal and one kilogram of sugar please?

_Zinhle:_ [the narrator] Lile looked at the sweets behind the glass. She LOVED [stressing this word] sweets. [The other students laughed at the stress of the word.]

As the above example shows, the students used their voices and facial expressions to interpret the story. This appeared to have drawn the attention of the other students. For instance, Themba, who had been off-task—fiddling with the cast on his hand when the story was being read by the whole group—looked up and seemed to be listening when it was read by Dudu and her friends. The fact that the teacher had read the story first, two times, might have helped Dudu and her friends with the expressive reading of the story. In this regard, the teacher provided the students with a model to emulate.

Similar to the reading activities, Dudu’s writing experiences in this class show that while in some cases she participated in the activities that required her to simply reproduce what she had learned, in others she was personally engaged in constructing meaning. The writing activities that required her to regurgitate what she had learned were mainly the spelling tests, the grammar lessons, and the reading comprehension lessons. As I indicated before, the teacher would drill the students on the words that she wanted them to learn how to spell. Not only did Dudu master these words as evidenced by her journal showing her getting all the points, but she also helped other students, following the teacher’s example. For example, when she assisted Vusi who was struggling with spelling out the word D.U.M.P., she used her lips to stress the place of articulation of the sounds, the same way the teacher sometimes did when helping struggling students. The following example shows this:
Teacher: [asking the students to read the next word on the board.] Another word?

Students: [in unison] Dump

Teacher: [selecting Vusi and pointing at the word] Vusi, spell the word.

Vusi: [spelling out the word] D.W. [stopped and looked frustrated]

Teacher: [expressing surprise] Hawu!


Dudu: [spelling out the word slowly and using her lips to show the place of articulation of the sounds] D. U. M. P.

Teacher: Vusi [asking Vusi to try again]

Vusi: [spelling out the word] D. U. M. P

As the above examples shows, Dudu did not have to do much language processing because the teacher drilled them on the words; all they had to do was to remember how to spell the words. Recalling what had been learned and reproducing it on a piece of paper seems to have made Dudu develop a somewhat limited understanding of writing. In one of the interviews when I asked her if she had any problems with writing, she replied: Ngithande ukubhala ngoba izinto engisuke ngizibhala ngisuke sengizazi. Usuke esesichazelile uMiss (I liked writing because I always know what I am writing. The teacher always explains things to us). She added: Uma ngibhala uMiss akajwayele ukuncorrecta esikhathini esiningi.

Ngizithola zonke izinto engisuke ngizibhala (I know how to write; the teacher rarely corrects me. I get all the points in everything that I write). When I probed further, asking for specific examples, she cited a comprehension passage they had learned that day saying: Kulula ukubhala ngoMother Teresa. Uvele ubheke izimpendulo encwadini (It is easy to write about Mother Teresa. You simply look for answers in the book).

Although most of the writing activities required the students to simply reproduce what they had learned and what was in the textbook as demonstrated by the above example, in a
few cases the teacher assigned the students activities that involved some active and creative thinking. Most of the time, Dudu was able to participate successfully in such activities. One such example comes from a cloze test about Sandile’s train trip. In this cloze test the students were supplied with a paraphrase of the entire story and were asked to fill out the missing words as shown below:

We were on the train for a long time. All I did was to . . . When I woke up I . . . Johannesburg. The buildings are so . . . you can’t see the sun! When the train stopped at the . . . we got off the train. We felt . . . and . . . We . . . not know anybody. We went to mamakhulu Lindiwe and babomkhulu Sipho’s house in a taxi. There I met a boy called . . .

Dudu rewrote the above passage as follows:

We were on the train for a long time. All I did was to sleep. When I woke up I saw Johannesburg. The buildings are so high you can’t see the sun! When the train stopped at the station we got off the train. We felt afraid and lose [for lost]. We did not know anybody. We went to Mamakhulu Lindiwe and Babomkhulu Sipho’s house in a taxi. There I met a boy called Themba.

As the above example shows, the students had to integrate factual, grammatical, and semantic information to give meaning to the excerpt. Clearly, this required some deeper level of language processing. The fact that Dudu successfully filled in the words without any one’s support since writing was almost exclusively an individual cognitive process in that class shows that she could engage in active learning.

Dudu continued to show that her learning went beyond simply imitating the teacher; she could appropriate the classroom activities. When she wrote a paragraph describing Johannesburg after the students had read a comprehension passage about Johannesburg, like
Noma she added her own details that reflected her personal experiences and cultural knowledge. Her paragraph reads as follows:

_Egoli is a big city with big buildings. It has many people who are walking. There is no sea. There are different cultures. In the road there are many cars which are waiting for the traffic light to be red. There are people who are selling fruits in the road._

_Other people call it: iJozi or Joburg and Gauteng._

In this paragraph only two ideas are from the story. In the story, there was no mention of the sea, the different cultures, cars waiting for the traffic light to turn red, or people calling Johannesburg Jozi, Joburg, or Gauteng, yet all these statements are true about Johannesburg. From the story Dudu was able to infer that if “Millions of people live, work, and play in Johannesburg” (Harm et al., 2010, p. 127), they probably have different cultures. Given that she sometimes visited Johannesburg because her mother was a registered nurse in one of the hospitals there, a point I learned during the home visits, it is possible that she was drawing on her cultural knowledge about this place. This suggests that if students are given an opportunity to express themselves freely, they can successfully do so. However, the fact that her ideas were not developed—they were a mixture of disjointed sentences put together—indicates that she needed to be explicitly taught how to write a paragraph.

As the year progressed, Dudu continued to show that she could infuse her own thinking when the teacher created opportunities that promoted such learning. She was willing to participate in activities that required the students to stretch their imagination. For example, when the teacher asked the students to dramatize a short play based on Sandile visiting Johannesburg, one of the reading comprehension texts they had read, not only did Dudu eagerly volunteer to be one of the three characters, but she also made some suggestions about the props they could use to enhance their dramatization. During the practice, I overhead her saying, _Where is the suitcase and a bag?_, and then the other group members started looking
around. They found a bookcase and a backpack, which they used as a suitcase and a bag respectively. The props made their dramatization interesting and stretched the imagination of the other students and the teacher. Furthermore, Dudu and her co-actors knew their respective lines well and integrated appropriate gestures and voices that had been modeled by the teacher during the reading aloud of the play. It was, therefore, no surprise that the teacher asked Dudu and her co-actors to repeat their dramatization of the play, modeling to other students how to dramatize the play.

Evidently, Dudu’s dramatization of the play shows that by going beyond the teacher’s modeling and expectations, she affirmed her identity as a good student as the teacher noted: *Into uyayenzisisa futhi uyakwazi ukukhombisa ukuthi uyicabangisisile* (She is thorough and she shows that she takes time to think things through). In short, for Dudu, learning meant being actively involved as much as imitating the teacher.

Overall, the above discussion shows that although Dudu imitated the classroom language and literacy practices, how she did this varied. In some cases she seemed to follow the classroom practices strictly and in others she appeared to adapt them in a creative manner, infusing her own understanding. For instance, while Dudu met the teacher’s expectations in reading by being a fluent reader, she also used other reading strategies that were not explicitly taught in this class, strategies such as rereading and self-correction. By using these strategies she demonstrated that she understood that meaning is as important as decoding. In addition, the fact that she suggested the use of the props without being prompted by the teacher when she and two other co-actors dramatized the short play indicates that she could engage in creative thinking, thus appropriate her learning.

It is important to note the role of Dudu’s peers in interactions; whether she was involved in reproductive practices as in the case of the recitation of the poems or in creative learning as in the case of the dramatization of the short play, in which she suggested the use
of the props demonstrating her comprehension of the content and integrating her cultural knowledge. The support that Dudu received from her peers allowed her to nurture her understanding of literacy learning. So literacy learning became a tool in which she actively represented her interests and identities. In brief, Dudu’s case demonstrates that while students are shaped by the classroom practices, which sometimes promote assimilative and imitative learning, they are simultaneously shaping their learning by infusing their own understandings and experiences, which can lead to meaningful and successful learning.

“I need to see your father about your work; you are no longer doing well”:

**Fluctuation—a matter of interest or a red flag?**

*Muzi.* All the students were quiet and had their journals opened in front of them, waiting for the teacher to dictate words. Like other spelling tests, this spelling test came after the students had finished a reading comprehension passage. Almost invariably, during the reading comprehension lessons, the teacher would ask the students to identify unfamiliar words, and she would explain these, sometimes inviting the students to provide explanations as well. It is these words that she used for the spelling tests, during which there was usually complete silence and attention. However, unlike the other students, Muzi was not paying attention: he was searching for a pen in his bag, so the teacher had to reprimand him as indicated in the above quote.

At the surface, there is nothing remarkably wrong about a student looking for a pen in a bag and not attending to what is going on in the classroom. However, a close analysis of Muzi’s behavior during the writing tasks shows that there was a problem—Muzi often avoided writing classwork. Most of the time, he had a reason why he could not sit down and write like other students. I noted that this was particularly the case when they were expected to write activities that involved some deeper level of language processing and production. For example, when the teacher asked the students to complete a dialogue that they had started at
home, Muzi was among the students who were not writing. When the teacher asked him about his dialogue, he explained that they had written the dialogue as a group. Upon probing further, it became evident that he did not contribute to the dialogue, not even a word.

Similarly, when they were writing a paragraph in which they had to describe Johannesburg as indicated in the other cases, Muzi seemed to avoid the task. In fact, the teacher had to scold him: *Muzi sit down and do your work. Why are you standing up?* After this reprimand, Muzi joined his desk mate and started writing the paragraph. He wrote the following sentence: *Egoli is a many gold it is many lokishi. Egoli is many stadium eSoweto, Orlando Stadium. Johannesburg is the many bully. Johannesburg is no place in Johannesburg. Egoli have many building. Egoli is a place in Springs, Soweto, Benoni. Egoli is a big town.*

Although the teacher had corrected the first sentence when she was talking to Muzi as she was walking around monitoring the students’ writing, Muzi did not appear to have understood the teacher. The teacher had made this comment: *Kukhona into abantu abangakazi kanti. Kukhona abasathi eGoli have. Kanti akusekhona eGoli has. Kusafuneka abantu baphinde bafunde u-“has” no “have” (Some of you still do not know that we say, “Johannesburg has . . .” It means we may have to go back and learn the difference between “has” and “have”). As the first sentence in Muzi’s writing shows, Muzi opted to use another structure “Egoli/Johannesburg is”, which he used throughout the paragraph, and was incorrect in all the sentences. Furthermore, the sentence “Johannesburg is no place in Johannesburg.” was not clear to the reader.

Interestingly, like Noma and Dudu, Muzi drew on his cultural knowledge about Johannesburg. He mentioned that there are many townships but used the word “lokishi”, a word that has become accepted as a Zulu lexical word. This word is derived from the English word *location*, which referred to a place that was reserved for black people by the apartheid
regime. Muzi also stated that there are many stadiums and bullies. He also mentioned places that surround Johannesburg such as Springs, Soweto, and Benoni. All these are facts about Johannesburg. Furthermore, as the Zulu word “lokishi” shows, when Muzi did not know the English word for “lokishi”, which is *township*, he used a lexical borrowing strategy. Similarly, instead of being stuck when he did not know the right preposition, he prefixed the Zulu locative prefix *e-* to Soweto and it became *eSoweto*. His use of these strategies confirms the assertion that there are multiple paths to biliteracy (Dworin, 2003; Soltero-Gonzalez, Escamilla, & Hopewell, 2012) and understanding these paths will better benefit students’ learning.

In general, despite this isolated example whereby Muzi incorporated his cultural and linguistic knowledge into his writing, he seemed to struggle with writing. His father admitted this when I asked him about his thoughts about Muzi’s performance in writing. He said, *Yena uyashoda kwispelling futhi nesandla sakhe asi sihle neze* (He is lacking in spelling and his handwriting is not good at all). This response indicates that the father viewed writing as spelling and handwriting. Like his father, Muzi had a limited view about writing. When I asked him if he had any problem with writing in English, he said, “*Ayi ayikho ngoba uMiss Khanyile uyasitshela ukuthi kwenziwa kanjani. Sibheka encwadini* (No. I don’t have any problem because Miss Khanyile [the teacher] tells us what to do. We copy things from the book). Although this statement might appear contradictory to the assertion that Muzi had challenges with writing, it is clear that the writing he was talking about was copying, either from the board or the textbook. In fact, he went on to explain that he liked writing about the past tense: *Ngithanda ukubhala ngamapast tense* (I like writing about the past tense). This seems to suggest that he probably found grammar writing activities easier because he did not have to do as much thinking. It was a question of knowing where to add inflections in the
sentences, which were usually presented out of context, an activity that required little language processing and production.

That Muzi was fascinated by grammar is also supported by his response to my question about what he liked best about learning English in this class. He stated, *Ngithanda amanouns, amapronouns, amapresent tense. Kulula lokhu* (I like learning about nouns, pronouns, and the present tense. These are easy). His interest in grammar explains his active participation in most grammar lessons. On several occasions, he was among the students who defined grammar concepts, gave examples, and even corrected other students. Some of this is illustrated in the following excerpt:

*Teacher*: Okay class. Who can tell me again, what is a noun? [She repeated this three times] Hands up! Muzi [calling on Muzi]

*Muzi*: A noun is a name of anything.

*Teacher*: [The teacher repeated what he had said]. It can be what? Give me examples.


*Teacher*: Ya (yea). Nonto.

*Nonto*: Paper.

[The teacher went on calling on several students to give examples of nouns]

*Teacher*: Okay class. There are nouns that we can count. Some things can be counted.
For example, can you count schools?

*Students*: [In unison] Yes.

*Teacher*: Can you count balls? Muzi.

*Muzi*: Yes. uJabulani

[About half of the class giggled. The teacher looked puzzled. Seemingly, Muzi was referring to the name that was given to the soccer ball that was used to mark the kick-off in the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup in South Africa. It is a standard practice that
during every FIFA Soccer World Cup, the hosting country gives a name to the soccer ball that is used to mark the beginning of the games. In South Africa that ball was called Jabulani; otherwise, Jabulani is a man’s name.]

*Teacher:* Yes, we can count balls. I don’t know about uJabulani. [The teacher seemed to have missed that Muzi was referring to the soccer ball.] I want you to give me all the nouns you can count. Can I count hair? Can I say one, two hair? Some nouns are not countable. Can you give me all the nouns you cannot count?

As the above example shows, Muzi was the one who provided the definition of a noun. In addition, he was among the students who gave examples of countable nouns. Interestingly, instead of simply using the word “ball” as an example of a countable noun, he used the word, “Jabulani”. As explained in the transcript, this is the name of the soccer ball that was used to mark the kick-off of the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup in South Africa. Muzi’s classmates got this, but the teacher did not and she did not ask for clarification. Had she done so, I suspect this would have opened an interesting conversation since almost all the students liked soccer as I observed in one of the lessons that inadvertently touched upon soccer. In this respect, this would have been a good opportunity to teach nouns in some context. In brief, this example shows that not only did Muzi enjoy the grammar, but he was also able to connect some of the grammatical concepts to his personal interests.

Furthermore, Muzi’s interest in grammar seemed to help him remember most grammatical rules and encouraged him to be attentive. The following example shows this:

*Teacher:* Okay class. Today we are going to look at the question form [The teacher wrote “Statement” on the first column and “Question Form” on the second column of the table, and then went on to write statement sentences under the first column.]
**Teacher:** [showing the students the first sentence on the board] Look at *I am going to do it now.* We are going to change this into the question form. Do you remember the helping verbs or auxiliary verbs we did in February this year?

**About half of the class:** No.

**Teacher:** What?

**Muzi:** [unprompted] Yes.

**Teacher:** Name them. Muzi.

**Muzi:** Is and Are

**Teacher:** Yes. Let’s clap for him. [The students clapped.]

[The teacher and the students went on mentioning a few others.]

**Teacher:** All these are helping verbs. If you want to change a statement into a question form, we start with a helping verb. Read the first sentence.

**Students:** [reading in unison] *I am going to do it now.*

**Teacher:** [repeating the sentence] Now I’m going to change this into a question form. You are going to start with a helping verb. Yes, Zinhle.

**Zinhle:** Am I going to do it?

**Teacher:** [turning to the board and writing the sentence on the second column as she was saying it aloud] *Am I going to do it?* Class, is this sentence right? [referring to the sentence she had just written on the board] [There was no response from the students]

**Teacher:** Something is wrong. Muzi.

**Muzi:** A question mark [suggesting that the sentence needed to have a question mark to be correct]

**Teacher:** Yes [writing the question mark at the end of the sentence] Now, say the sentence.

**Muzi:** [with a rising intonation at the end of the sentence] *Am I going to do it?*
Although Muzi appeared to be competent in grammar, he still struggled with earning the trust of his classmates. For instance, in one of the subsequent grammar lessons, which was a competition, in which the teacher asked the students to form groups and choose two representatives, Muzi’s group chose him as one of the representatives. Like all the other representatives, he went forward. Then the teacher explained that one of the representatives was going to be a scribe, writing the points for the group on the board below the group’s name, and the other one was going to identify a flashcard with a verb in the past tense corresponding to the present tense verb she would call out. All the flashcards with past tense verbs were spread on the table; the representatives had to pick up the relevant one, paste it on the board, and the group would earn a point.

Because there was only one flashcard for each corresponding verb, this meant that the representatives would have to be fast. In fact, before the beginning of the competition, the teacher warned the other members of the groups: Make sure that you are satisfied with these people [pointing at the representatives standing next to the table on which the flashcards were spread]. (Are you fine with these people? Are you sure these people are not going to fail you?) Upon hearing these words, Muzi’s group switched him with Noma, one of the competent students in class. He became a scribe, an activity that needed almost no thinking.

Although I did not ask the students why they substituted Muzi with Noma, I suspect that this was in part due to Muzi’s fluctuating participation and performance in class. In some cases he seemed to be actively involved and doing well, and in others he struggled and was passive and indifferent. This was particularly the case in the reading lessons. As mentioned before, reading in this class involved cases where, after being selected by the teacher, individual students would take turns to read in front of the class. In keeping with this practice, Muzi got his turn, and the following example shows how he performed reading:
Muzi: [reading softly] There were ten eggs in Partridge’s nest: beautiful, round, light green eggs. Snake slid up to the nest and [Muzi frowned as he looked at the next word, chased]

Teacher: [offering the word] Chased

Muzi: Chased Partridge for the nest.

Teacher: [correcting him] Chased from the nest and not for the nest.

Muzi: [reading with a flat and inexpressive voice] He said, “Go away. These eggs are mine.”

Teacher: [interrupting] If you chase something you don’t say “go away” [whispering softly just as Muzi had read the sentence] Go away! Go away! [shouting loud]

Continue.

Muzi: Go away! [shouting loud like the teacher and then continued to read in a flat intonation] These eggs are mine.” He [hesitating] co... col...

Teacher: [helping him] He coiled

Muzi: He coiled his body around and around the eggs. He lay there, [reading quite as quiet] quiet still.

Teacher: [correcting him] Quite

[Muzi continued to read the whole paragraph, reading word by word, with the teacher sometimes helping him.]

As this example shows, Muzi struggled with decodable words and some sight words. This made it difficult for him to read fluently and expressively. This was despite the fact that fluent and expressive reading was the defining characteristic of reading in this class.

Evidently, his challenges with these components of reading suggested deeper problems.

Interestingly, although Muzi seemed to struggle with reading and did not appear to like it, in one of the interviews he said: Mina ngithanda uma sifunda izincwadi ezibhalwe
ngamagama amakhulu njengalezi ekade sizifunda namuhla (I like it when we read books that are written in big words, like the ones we read today). The books he was talking about were big books like those used to teach shared reading in the earlier grades. The teacher had brought a couple of these to class to teach text features: the title, author, illustrator, and table of content. She asked the students to break into their respective groups and she gave each group a few copies of these books. I noticed that most students, including those that were often off-task during most reading sessions, were excited. As the following example illustrates, Muzi could not contain his excitement:

Teacher: You are going to see the books. [The teacher started passing out the books to the groups. As she was doing so, some of the students who had received the books, opened them.]

Teacher: [still passing out the books] You mustn’t open it. Do not open the book. [Those who had done so closed them, but Muzi did not. He continued flipping the pages of the book and looking at the pictures. While still paging through, he stopped, showed his group members the title, and went back to flipping the pages again, pointing at one of the pictures. Before his peers could response to what he was saying, which I did not hear, the teacher interrupted.]

Teacher: [turning to the students after finishing passing out the books] Abanye abezwa. Ngithe azivalwe izincwadi Muzi and your group! (Some of you do not listen. I said you should close the books.) [Looking disappointed, Muzi and a few other students who were paging through the books closed them.]

Teacher: Class. What is a title?

Students: [in unison] A title is the name of a book.

Teacher: What is a title?

Students: A title is the name of a book.
Teacher: Again.

Students: A title is the name of a book.

Teacher: [turning to the board and writing the definition while saying it aloud] A name of a book.

Teacher: [turning to the students] Okay. You have got different books in your group. You have got different titles. Who can tell me the name of a book or the title of that book? Ya.

Doli: Busy Bee.

Teacher: Busy?

Doli: Busy Bee.

[The students continued giving the teacher the names of the titles before she went on to ask for the authors, following the same pattern.]

In the above excerpt Muzi seemed to be interested in the books. He was paging through the books, looking at the pictures and appearing to be connecting the pictures to the written words as suggested by his pointing at the title of one of the books while looking at the pictures. Although I did not hear what exactly he was saying, I speculate that he was talking about robots because the title of the book was *Who is the robot?* and there were pictures of robots in the book. Because the content of the book as suggested by the title and the pictures was close to science-like fiction movies and cartoons such as the *Dragon BalZ*, which Muzi reported to like, I guess this is what sparked his interest in the book. In one of the interviews, he shared with me his love for action and science fiction-like movies. He stated: *Ngithanda ukubuka amamovie kaVandam namacartoons anje Dragon BalZ. Ngithanda u-action* (I like to watch Vandam’s (one of the famous stars in the action movies) movies and cartoons such as *Dragon BalZ*. I like action movies).
Evidently, instead of drilling the students on the titles and authors, I think if the teacher had allowed the students to explore the books by looking at the pictures and talking about what they saw, the students would have connected better to the books and this would have encouraged a meaningful discussion. This was a missed opportunity. In fact, after the teacher was done with teaching the students the text features, she collected the books and the students never saw the books again.

On the whole, Muzi’s participation in class appeared to fluctuate across the different language and literacy events. In some events such as the grammar, he was actively involved and seemed to be doing well, whereas in others such as reading and writing he appeared to be uninterested and struggling. As the above discussion shows, this fluctuation suggests bigger problems than a student who randomly varied his involvement across the different learning events and activities. In other words, it is a reminder that students’ fluctuation in the different learning activities needs to be looked into closely because it could be an indication that students need help.

“Come here! You are never serious.” Resisting or struggling?

S’khona. These words were uttered by the teacher when she reprimanded S’khona. The teacher had asked all the students to go forward because she wanted them to face the back wall of the classroom where she had pasted a poem she was going to teach them as she indicated: Okay class, today we are going to recite the last poem that we are going to do in grade 4. Instead of complying with the teacher’s order like his peers, S’khona decided to hide under his desk. His classmates drew this to the attention of the teacher who ordered him to join the other students.

On the surface, there is nothing strange about a student playing tricks on the teacher and peers. However, a closer look creates a different picture. S’khona dreaded standing in front of the class for any activity. In the exit interview, when I asked him what he did not like
about learning English in this grade, he said: Engingakuthandi ukuthi ngifundiswe into kuthiwe angiyoma phambi kweklasi into ngingayazi (I do not like to be asked to go in front of the class when I don’t know something). His mother expressed a similar feeling: Kungcono mhlawumbe ambizele noma ngasese ngoba uma elokhu embuza phambi kwezinye izingane kucina kungasamphathi kahle (It is better if the teacher calls him aside because if she keeps on talking to him in front of other children that makes him feel bad).

Evidently, public performance that was characteristic of this class was a problem to S’khona. On a number of occasions, I observed him avoiding activities that required him to perform in front of his classmates or along with them. During such tasks, he would seem to be indifferent and inattentive, and the teacher would have to call him to order. In fact, I noted that during the recitation of the poems at the beginning of most lessons, the standard practice in this class, S’khona was often off-task, doing other things or just standing there and mumbling the words. On several occasions, the teacher had to scold him as demonstrated in the following example: Some of you are not saying the poem. S’khona! What’s wrong? In this case, S’khona was fiddling with a vuvuzela, a horn-like object that was used to cheer players during the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup. In response to the teacher’s reprimand, S’khona put down the vuvuzela and joined the other students in reciting the poem, simply mumbling the words, looking through the window, and not gesturing like the other students. Although the boys often did not participate actively in the recitations, S’khona and his friends stood out among them. They rarely joined the other boys in dancing to the rhythm of the poems, something which most of the boys seemed to like about reciting the poems.

S’khona’s inattentive behavior was not restricted to the recitation of the poems; he was often off-task during other activities. For instance, during one of the grammar lessons on the formation of questions, instead of joining the other students in repeating sentences with this structure as ordered by the teacher, S’khona was fitting a birthday hat on his head and
talking to his desk mate, who like him was often off-task. By not joining the other students in practicing how to express questions properly, S’khona missed a chance to learn how to use this language structure in expressing himself.

However, in a few cases I observed S’khona joining the other students as they repeated the grammatical structures they were learning. In one such example, the students were learning about the formation of the past tense. Not only did S’khona repeat the sentences along with the other students, but he also tried to change one sentence from the present tense into the past tense.

*Teacher:* [pointing at the sentence on the board] Read the sentence.

*Students:* [reading chorally] I peep through the window.

*Teacher:* Again.

*Students:* [repeating the sentence] I peep through the window.

*Teacher:* Let’s change the sentence into the past tense. S’khona.

*S’khona:* [standing up and looking closely at the sentence on the board as if trying to figure something out] He peep [stopped]

*Teacher:* [without waiting for him to complete the sentence, the teacher made this comment.] *Hawu bakithi! Yini elukhuni?* (What’s wrong? What is difficult here?) Sakhile! [calling on another student, who like S’khona did not immediately give the answer]

*Teacher:* [selecting another student] Nomusa.

*Nomusa:* She peeped through the window.

As the above example shows, before S’khona could finish the sentence and before Sakhile could try the answer, the teacher had moved on to another student. She did not give them enough time to process their thoughts. It is likely that the teacher’s impatience with
S’khona and other students like him contributed to their reluctance to participate in the class activities.

In general, S’khona did not volunteer in any of the tasks; in fact, most of the time he joined groups that were also not enthusiastic about volunteering. For instance, in the dramatization lesson of a short play mentioned before in which the students had to choose three characters who would act out the play on behalf of the group, S’khona’s group did not volunteer. Actually, when the other students were practicing reading the play, S’khona and some of his group members were spinning coins of money on the desk. The teacher caught them and scolded them: *S’khona and your group! Wena awulaleli* (You do not listen).

The teacher’s frequent reprimands of S’khona in front of the other students seemed to have earned him a reputation of being stupid. The other students could not trust him with serious school work, especially when the stakes were high. For instance, in the grammar lesson mentioned earlier on in which the students had to compete for correct answers, although S’khona had been initially selected by his group as one of the representatives, once the teacher asked the students if they were happy with the representatives because they would determine their grades, S’khona’s group called him back and replaced him with Nikiwe, one of the competent students. Once S’khona was at his desk, along with some of his friends, he started to view a soccer magazine. Again, the teacher reprimanded him.

After the lesson, when we had an informal conversation with S’khona about the soccer magazine, he explained: *Ngithanda ukubuka izithombe, ikakhulukazi izithombe zabadlali bebhola ngoba ngithanda ibhola* (I like to watch pictures of soccer players because I like soccer very much). I then asked him if he ever reads about his favorite soccer players. He stated: *Ngithanda ukubuka izithombe. Angithandi ukufunda. Uma ngifunda kungcono ngifunde imigqa embalwa njengalendaba yezilwane esiyifunde ngokwedlule* (I like viewing pictures. I do not like reading; if I read, it should be a few lines like the story that we read last
time [referring to the previous term before I arrived]). He explained that the story he was
talking about was an animal story. They had read this story from one of the readers that the
teacher stopped using because she felt it was difficult for the students. Specifically, in the
story the lion fights with other big animals over who should be the king of the jungle.
Similarly, the smaller animals quarrel over trivial issues. So there is animosity and chaos.
However, this situation changes when the owl stumbles over a book, which he shares with all
the other animals. He gives each animal a page to read and then asks them to share their lines
with all animals in the next meeting. After all the animals have shared their parts, the animals
realize that all the fights are uncalled for; they need to live together harmoniously. So they
live happily ever after.

S’khona told me that he liked this story because he read as a monkey, which had
fewer lines than the other animals. He said: *Ngithanda ngoba iba nendaba ezincane* (I like
the fact that the monkey reads fewer lines). When I asked him why that was important, he
answered: *Ngangizofunda kancane. Futhi kwakulula ngoba uMiss wayesinike imigqa wathi
siyipractise* (I was going to read a fewer lines. It was also easy because the teacher had given
us our lines to practice). In general, these comments show that S’khona avoided reading. The
fact that he preferred reading the monkey’s lines because they are fewer demonstrates that he
wanted to get over and done with reading as soon as possible. Because I was not there to
observe how he read his lines, I would never know. However, when I observed him read
aloud in class, either along with the other students when they were reading chorally or
individually in front of the class—a rare occurrence for him—his literacy behavior was
troubling.

For example, when the students took turns, reading aloud one of the reading
comprehension passages, a story about Sandile being on the train to Johannesburg, S’khona
was not following the reading although he had the book in front of him. As I had observed
him in several cases where the students were reading the passages aloud, he was using a finger as a pointer and mumbling the words. Like in the other instances, the finger was all over the book, suggesting that he was not sure where they were reading. Further evidence that S’khona struggled with reading is shown in the following excerpt.

Teacher: [reprimanding S’khona who was pinching his desk mate] S’khona, you are playing. Why? Come here and read the story for us. [S’khona took the book and walked to the front.]

S’khona: [with a soft voice] This is Mr. Brown, the farmer. He lives [pronouncing this verb as an adjective]

Teacher: [offering the correct pronunciation] Lives. He lives . . . Uyabona-ke ukuthi ubungalele? (Do you see that you were not paying attention?)

S’khona: [grinning and reading word for word] He lives in Bloemfontein. We

Teacher: S’khona! Where are you? [walking toward him and then standing next to him] Teacher [asking S’khona] Where is we?

S’khona: [pointing to the word "he"]

Teacher: [pointing to the word as well] He. This is he.

S’khona: He is three children.

Teacher: [correcting him and still standing next to him and pointing at the words as he was reading] He has three children.

S’khona: [grinning] He has three children. His weef’s [reading wife as weef]

Teacher: His wife's

S’khona: His wife's name is Maria.

As this example shows, S’khona read with great difficulty; he struggled with almost every word. He had problems with identifying both high-frequency and decodable words. From his reading of the story, it is difficult to understand what the story is about. With the
teacher’s constant interruption to correct him in front of the other students, it is not surprising that at some point he grinned, something that might have been an indication of his frustration and embarrassment. As for the other students, they lost interest in the whole activity. Nikiwe was no longer following the reading. She was writing on her journal, probably some classwork for another class. Similarly, Zamani and Thulani were spinning some coins, smiling at each other and having fun with what they were doing. Clearly, neither S’khona nor his classmates benefitted from this reading.

Furthermore, the fact that the teacher asked S’khona to go forward to read after she had caught him off-task, confirmed the perception of him not only as a poor-performing student, but also a naughty student. In other words, reading aloud in front of the class was a form of punishment for him. Perhaps, it is experiences like this one that made him somewhat stubborn and resistant as his mother explained:

US’khona akakuthandi nje ngempela ukufunda. Ngisho ngingathi akafunde; hhawu uS’khona! Uvele angizibe impela . . . Yile nhlobo futhi enenkani mona umsiza nje. Athi akwenziwa kanje uMiss akashingo ukuthi kwenziwa kanje. Uthe kwenziwa la. Uyi leyonhlobo nje (S’khona does not like reading. He really does not like it. Even if I ask him to read, he does not want to do so. He simply ignores me . . . he is very stubborn. When you help him, he would tell you that the teacher did not say this is how it should be done).

Interestingly, S’khona was fully aware of his reading problems and was able to articulate them. When I asked him if he had any problems with reading, especially in English, he admitted that he struggled: Amagama amade, amagama abe maningi uthole ukuthi ott ababili no l. Yilokhu okuye kube kude . . . Ngigcina sengilahlekelwe umqondo wendaba (It is long words, words with many letters. For example, in a word you find letters such as tt following the letter l. It is long words . . . I end up losing the meaning of a story). Although
S’khona claimed to have problems with polysyllabic and morphologically complex words, the above example and others indicate that his problems were way beyond these words. His reading strategies did not seem to help either. In response to a question about what he did when he encountered words he did not know, he explained that most of the time he asked his family, the teacher, and friends. He also added that he sounded out words a lot. Clearly, for a 4th grader, these strategies did not prepare him to read effectively and independently.

Not only did S’khona have problems with reading words, but also with vocabulary, especially when words were in the context of reading comprehension passages. As a common practice in this class, after the teacher and the students had read a comprehension passage a few times, the teacher would ask the students to identify unfamiliar words. Not once did I see S’khona identify words, not a single word. In fact, the only time I ever saw S’khona participate in vocabulary activities was when the teacher was teaching vocabulary from the handouts. For example, after the teacher had taught the names of occupations, she ordered the students to put their handouts facing down, and then she asked them to name the different occupations found in the handouts. After being called on by the teacher, S’khona gave the correct answer. He mentioned that someone who works in another person’s house is a servant. Similarly, after they had learned a list of opposites from a handout, he was able to answer the teacher’s quiz correctly. Because the words were presented in a list form, S’khona appears to have used a memorization strategy. Although this strategy may have served him somewhat with out-of-context words, in longer texts, such as the reading comprehension passages, it did not seem to benefit him.

S’khona’s challenges also extended to writing. On a number of occasions, he did not write when the other students were writing classwork, except when they were copying grammatical notes and vocabulary from the board. When they were required to engage in some form of deeper language processing; he would sit there, stare at his journal, fiddle with
a pen, or talk to his desk mate. For example, in a lesson in which the teacher had asked the students to write a paragraph describing Johannesburg, a lesson mentioned before, S’khona was among the students who struggled with this activity. He simply stared at the blank page in front of him and never wrote a word until the end of the session. Although it is possible to argue that this was due to the fact that the teacher had not taught them how to write a paragraph as indicated before, given that he struggled with many other writing activities that the teacher had taught explicitly, this argument may not hold. For example, when the teacher asked the students to write a dialogue as homework after she had taught it and provided the students with models, S’khona still did not write it. When I asked him during an informal conversation about the dialogue lesson, he explained: *Angiyibhalanga idialogue kaMiss ngoba ngikhohliwe* (I forgot to write the dialogue).

I had observed that on a number of occasions S’khona did not write assigned homework. In a few lessons, the teacher would order him and a couple of other students who also did not do homework to stand in front of the class for almost the entire lessons. It is likely that this did not motivate S’khona. In fact, from one of the interviews with his mother, I learned that S’khona had no time for homework. His mother explained that when S’khona came back from school, he would eat fast, go play soccer with his friend until early evening, and then go to bed. She added that most of the time she was the one who reminded him. Sometimes it would be too late in the evening or in the morning when they would all be rushing to school or work. In such cases, the mother explained that she would do the homework herself and then ask S’khona to copy it. Clearly, this did not help S’khona to learn.

In addition, that at S’khona’s home there was no furniture might have contributed to S’khona’s reluctance to do homework. His mother indicated: *Ekhaya la sihlala khona, azikho izinto zokuhlala. Yilokho okwenza lokho. Ngisho ebhala, uvele alale phansi ngesisu. Usuwaze*
wajwayela nje ukulala phansi (There are no chairs or table at home. He lies with stomach on the floor when he is doing school work, even when he is writing. He is used to it now).

Although S’khona did not like to write, he enjoyed drawing. In fact, during our conversations with his mother, it came up over and over again that he preferred drawing: US’khona akakuthandi ukufunda. Nhlobo! Into ayithandayo yikho ukudweba (S’khona does not like reading, not at all! He likes to draw). Apparently, his classmates noticed this and turned it to their benefit. In a lesson on text features discussed earlier on, in which the teacher asked the students to work in groups to design a title page for their respective groups, S’khona’s group assigned him a role of drawing a picture that would go along with the title. He drew a picture of a big beautiful house since the title on the page was My House. As he drew the picture, he often erased the lines and carefully redrew them. Seemingly, he wanted to make sure that the picture came out well. In fact, his mother told me that S’khona once designed a beautiful birthday card for one of the Zulu lessons. However, when it came to the words that S’khona wrote on the card, she said: Angazi ukuthi wayetshelwa ngubani amagama (I wonder who helped him with the words).

Although drawing gave S’khona some social capital that earned him some respect among his peers, his over-reliance on drawing is worrisome. This is particularly disturbing because he definitely needed to learn to read and write if he is to be successful at school. In fact, his over-preference for drawing may probably be an escape from this task.

In sum, the preceding discussion shows that S’khona may have been resistant because he was struggling. He may have been often off-task because he was distracting himself from the tasks he found cognitively challenging and to some extent meaningless. S’khona’s case is a reminder to teachers that they should pay close attention to what might appear to be a “deviant behavior” when in fact it mask serious academic problems.
Home Language and Literacy Practices and Experiences

This part deals with the home language and literacy practices of the focal students. Similar to the themes on the students’ language and literacy learning in the classroom, the theme that characterizes each student’s home experiences is preceded by a brief quote. Again, introducing the themes this way helped me to highlight the students’ experiences. For the sake of consistency, in presenting the findings on the students’ home practices and experiences, I followed the same order as in the previous section.

“When actors are speaking Zulu, English words appear on the screen; sometimes it is Zulu words when they are speaking in English”: Using both languages as meaning-constructing and identity tools

Noma. The above comment was a response to my question about how Noma followed some of the bilingual and multilingual programs she reported to enjoy watching on television. She went on to explain how she used the subtitles: *Uma bebhalile kufana nedictionary, idictionary lena efana nalena yesiZulu nesiNgisi engijwayele ukuyisebenzisa uma ngibheka amagama* (Subtitles are like a dictionary, I mean like the Zulu-English dictionary that I usually use when I am looking for the meaning of unknown words). As this remark shows, Noma did not see her languages as separate; rather, she viewed them as interdependent sources from which she could simultaneously draw. This perspective seemed to be central to her use of the two languages, both at home and at school.

The family appeared to nurture this behavior. I learned that one of Noma’s cousins, with whom she was also living, always bought Zulu daily newspapers, *Isolezwe* and *Ilanga*, and an English Sunday newspaper, *The Sunday Times*, and of late the Zulu version of this newspaper. That Noma was reading these newspapers, especially the Zulu ones, was true. At school, on a number of occasions, I had seen her carrying these newspapers and reading them, particularly when there was no teacher in the classroom and I happened to be there.
When I asked her why she always had these newspapers, she said: *Ngithanda izindaba zakhona nokuthi kungisiza ukuthi ngifunde isiZulu* (I like the stories in these newspapers, and I also like the fact that they help me to learn Zulu).

As I mentioned in her profile, Noma was officially learning to read and write in Zulu in this grade for the first time. In the previous school she had attended in Johannesburg, which was a multiracial school, Zulu was not offered. Seemingly, Noma was aware that if she was going to make any meaningful progress in learning literacy in Zulu, she needed to do more: she needed to read outside the classroom, which she seemed to enjoy. For Noma, this meant that in addition to reading the newspapers, she had to read bilingual magazines such as *Bona* and *Drum*. She said: *Ngithanda ukufunda uBona. Ngesinye isikhathi ngiqala ngifunde uBona wesiNgisi futhi ngibuye ngifunde owesiZulu* (I like to read *Bona*. Sometimes I start by reading the Zulu *Bona* and then read the English one or vice versa). This behavior indicates that this student was cognizant of the benefits of reading in both languages to enhance her literacy learning in her weaker language.

In addition to drawing on her languages as resources for learning literacy outside the classroom, Noma also tapped into her personal interests and cultural knowledge. For example, when I asked her to share with me her favorite book or story, she mentioned *Off to the Sea*, a story about a family holiday next to the sea. She reported that she borrowed a copy of the text from the teacher to read at home and also explained how she came to choose the story: *Ngapheqa nje ngabona izithombe. Ngase ngibuka isihloko sakhona ngase ngifunde sona. Ngaphinda ngabuka izithombe; ngabona izingane zisolwandle ngase ngiyayithanda-ke* (I viewed the pictures and then looked at the title. I looked at the pictures again and saw children by the sea; then I liked the story). Although I did not ask Noma how she came to learn about this strategy, I suspect that her experience with reading multiple texts may have facilitated this strategy.
For Noma, reading also involved making personal connections. Her response to my question about why she liked this story demonstrates this. She said:

_Imnandi ngoba kukhona izingane ezidlala elwandle. Nathi ngesinye isikhathi siye sivakashele elwandle eThekwini kodwa uma singayanga eThekwini kakhona amaswimming pools eJohannesburg, sibhukuda khona_ (This story is interesting because there are children who play at the beach. Sometimes my family visits beaches in Durban. Sometimes when we cannot go to Durban, we go to the swimming pools in Johannesburg).

As these words show, the fact that the family in the story reminded Noma of her own family demonstrates that when she was reading the story she was “in and moving through” (Temple, Martinez, & Yokota, 2011, p. 394) the text. In short, recruiting her cultural background knowledge broadened her reading experience. In this regard, reading became a meaningful process. In part, this behavior was supported by her aunt, who always stressed the importance of meaning in reading. She explained:

_Kumele ukuthi ingane iyifunde indaba leyo eyifundayo. Ukuze kubonakale ukuthi iyayizwa ngampela ebese bebuzwa imibuzo ekuleyo ndaba; bachaze ngento akade beyifunda. Mhlawumpe lokho kungamsiza nge-understanding. Kungabi ukufunda nje bese kuyadlulwa_ (It is important that children understand what they are reading. To find out if they understand the text, they should be asked questions about what they have been reading, and they should talk about it. Perhaps, that could help with developing understanding. Children should not just go through the text for its own sake).

Evidently for Noma’s aunt meaning is important. It is not surprising that Noma displayed this understanding across the different literacy events and activities with which she engaged at the home. For example, when I asked her if she ever wrote anything at home
beside school work, she told me that she enjoyed designing and writing cards, especially birthday cards. She stated: *Ngijwayele ukwenza amakhadi. Ngesinye isikhathi ngisizwa uZama. Elinye ngalenzela uNikiwe; elinye ngalenzela uNtombi; elinye ngalenzela umama nobaba* (I usually design cards. I designed one for Nikiwe (a friend), another one Ntombi (a sibling), and others for Mom and Dad). She went on to explain that although she usually wrote cards in English, for her younger siblings, she used both English and Zulu: *Kodwa izingane lezi zasekhaya ezifunda ugrade 3 no grade 2, ngiye ngibhale nge-English bese ngibhala ngesiZulu eceleni* (But for my siblings in grades 3 and 2, I also write the message in Zulu next to the English message). This remark shows that for Noma, it was important that she communicated effectively with her interlocutors. She knew that the older people would have no problem in understanding the message in English, but the younger ones would struggle, so she had to have Zulu in parenthesis. In this respect, Noma viewed her languages as tools for authentic communication. It also shows her understanding of how the respective languages were defined and limited by the larger society.

Furthermore, the fact that she ensured that the addressees received the cards indicates that designing and writing the cards was not just a means of whiling away time, but a true communication tool. She said: *Ngiyabanika laba abaseduze. Laba abakude, uma obhuti behambile bayा eNewcastle, baye bangihambele nawo bese befike bemnika ubaba njalo* (I give the cards to those who live here, but for those who live in Newcastle, I give the cards to my cousins to pass them on when they go there). During one of the home visits, her aunt confirmed that Noma liked designing cards and ensuring that the addresses received the cards as she would sometimes ask for postal money. Evidently, for Noma, designing and the writing cards was an authentic activity in which she used both her languages in strategic ways.
In addition to using both Zulu and English in reading and writing activities, Noma also embraced these languages when she listened to some of her favorite programs from the radio. Her aunt told me that Noma and her cousins liked to listen to the radio from their cell phones. She explained that they did not listen to the family radio because they liked to listen to Igagasi FM, an English-Zulu bilingual private radio broadcaster. Her aunt explained: Cha ngizithandela lapha esiZulwini. IGagasi isiNgisi kakhulu (I like to listen to Zulu from uKhozi FM. Igagasi FM has too much English). When I asked Noma what she liked about listening to Igagasi FM, she said: Ngithanda kakhulu ikwaito neR&B nokuthi futhi babuye bakhulume isiNgisi. Lokho kungisiza ukuthi ngisijwayele (I like kwaito (a local hip-hop music) and R&B. I also like that they speak in English as well, which helps me to familiarize myself with English). Evidently, Noma saw the radio station more than a tool she could use to acquaint herself with the English language; she also viewed it as a means to reaffirm her bicultural/hybrid identities. Through listening to kwaito, she learned to embrace her South African identity, and through listening to R&B, she learned to appreciate popular Western culture. In short, both Zulu and English converged to develop not just her biliteracy and bilingualism but also her multiple identities.

The examples discussed above show that, in general, Noma was resourceful. Upon realizing that she had poor literacy skills in Zulu because she had not learned it in her previous school, she made a conscious decision to expose herself to literacy in both Zulu and English at home. Using multiple texts in both languages, Noma engaged in various language and literacy activities, something that may have facilitated the transfer of skills and knowledge across the languages in both directions. Not only did switching between the two languages enhance Noma’s biliteracy and bilingual development, but it also encouraged her to embrace her multiple identities as she learned to appreciate the Western popular culture and the African local culture. Most importantly, Noma’s family played an important role in
supporting her literacy in both languages, and thus underscored the effect of the family context in enhancing students’ learning.

“It is fun to listen to stories and to read about them in different places”:

Engaging language and literacy learning in diverse paths and texts

Dudu. The above words were in response to my question on what Dudu liked about reading in general. As these words suggest, Dudu found stories to be fun and exciting. For her, stories were important because she could imagine things: Ngithanda izitori kakhulu, zimnandi. Futhi ngesinye isikhathi zenza ukuthi into uyibone sengathi ubuka imovie (I like stories very much; they are fun. Some are so interesting; it feels like you are watching a movie). When I probed the kinds of stories she was talking about, she said: Noma nje izitori zivela kuphi, zimnandi. Kodwa angizithandi lezi zokuhlukunyezwa kwezingane namaginsa (I like stories from everywhere, but I don’t like those that talk about child abuse and people who steal cars).

Dudu’s interest in stories may have been supported by her grandmother, who showed high regard for traditional stories and lamented the fact that she was no longer telling traditional stories to her grandchildren. She indicated that the only time she told stories was when there was electricity blackout, which meant that the children had no access to television. This comment shows that television has replaced some of the engaging literacy practices among Zulu people. In her view, that the children were no longer exposed to traditional stories was unfortunate: Izingane azisakwazi ukulalela zilandele indaba. Yingakho nje ngesinye isikhathi uthi ukhulumu nengane ivele indwaze nje (Children cannot listen and follow stories anymore. They cannot listen. That is why sometimes they stare at you when you talk to them). Evidently, according to her, the slow death of traditional stories due to television was compromising children’s development of the listening skill. This comment implies that traditional stories played a significant role in children’s language development.
Although Dudu was not exposed to many traditional stories, when I asked her to share with me one story she liked the most, she did not hesitate. She opened the folktale with a conventional opening phrase: *Kwesukasukela* (Once upon a time). Furthermore, typical of Zulu folktales, she used a formulaic structure that was built into the story. Not only did this structure serve as a mnemonic device for Dudu, but it also helped me to follow the plot of the story. From the first character through the fifth character, the protagonist repeats the same words with minor variations. For instance, after receiving a bird from some boys in Cape Town, the protagonist gives it to his mother who eats it; not long after that, the protagonist turns around and demands it. Since his mother has eaten the bird, she gives him a bucket of water instead. The protagonist takes the bucket and gives it to someone he meets on the street. Again, he turns around and demands it—every time the protagonist meets someone; he gives them his things, turns around and demands them back. This pattern continues throughout the story. I noted that when Dudu told the part where the protagonist demands his things, she would sing this part, sometimes gesturing to express the feelings of the protagonist. The alliterative nature of Zulu helped to enhance the rhythmic movements, making this a beautiful combination of multiple modes: singing, movement, and oral performance.

As the above discussion shows, Dudu did not simply tell the story, but she also performed it, singing some words, and using gestures to express the feelings of the characters. In fact, when I asked her what she liked the most about this story she said it was the singing part: *Ngithanda uma umfana esecula esefuna izinto zakhe* (I like the part where the boy sings, demanding his things). In this respect, storytelling was more than reproducing words; it was an activity that engaged the student in interesting and fun ways. Dudu also indicated that the story reminded her of her grandmother: *Ugogo uye athi kubalulekile ukuthi umuntu angabi igovu. Kumele nikiwazi ukusizana* (Granny always says that it is important that
we share. We should always help one another). Evidently, using the folktale, Dudu’s granny
taught her grandchildren the value of sharing, one of the important norms in the traditional
Zulu culture, which, she complained was dying along with other values, including traditional
storytelling itself.

Dudu’s engagement with traditional texts went beyond participating in traditional
stories. She also reported that before she went to school, she used to enjoy chanting poems
with her siblings and mentioned *Amangebazane*, a poem about traditional cookies, as one of
her favorite poem. In this counting poem, there are five cookies in a jar, and children help
themselves with the cookies, taking one by one, until none is left. In addition to this Zulu
poem, Dudu mentioned an English one, *Five Gentlemen*, which she reported to have recited
with her siblings. This poem starts with five gentlemen standing on the road, bowing to a
beautiful queen and then leaving the scene, one by one, until they are all gone. Although the
poems were in Zulu and English respectively, the parallelism between them may have made
it easier for Dudu to learn both of them. In other words, the two languages may have
facilitated transfer of conceptual knowledge across the two languages.

In addition to participating in the chanting poems, Dudu reported that she also
enjoyed watching cartoons and comics on television. One children’s comic she indicated
liking in particular is *Takalani Sesame*. This comic is a South African version of the popular
Sesame Street, a children’s comic from the United Kingdom. In the South African version all
the eleven official languages are used and the voices of the puppets are those of the South
African people. This program does not only expose children to different South African
languages and different accents, but it also affirms their identities because they hear the
content to which they can connect. Dudu put it this way:

*Ngisemncane ngangithanda uTakalani kakhulu. Ngangithanda uma sebecula befaka
udoti emqonyeni becula futhi iculo lesigubhu. Ngesinye isikhathi uma bebhala*
amagama, ngangizama ukuwafunda kodwa babeshesha (When I was a child, I used to like Takalani very much. I particularly liked it when they sang Thathi’sgubhu (a popular local hip hop song), throwing the trash into the trashcans. Sometimes I would try to read the words on the screen, but they would flash them fast).

As the above comments show, like Noma, Dudu tried to use television to learn to read. Because what she was trying to read was about real-life issues, such as the importance of keeping the country clean, she was exposed to natural authentic language. Furthermore, the fact that the comic was televised in the different South African languages may have encouraged her to embrace her bilingual/hybrid identity. In one of the interviews she reported that she liked to listen to Ukhozi FM (a Zulu public radio broadcaster) and Igagasi FM (an English-Zulu bilingual private radio broadcaster, with English as a dominant language).

When I asked Dudu what she liked the most about Igagasi FM, she said: Ngithanda izando zakhona, nje nge-R&B noMaskandi. Ngithanda nokuthi ngithola ukulalela isiNgisi kanye nesiZulu kanye kanye (I like the music, especially R&B and Maskandi. I also like the fact that I get a chance to listen to English and Zulu all at the same time). This comment suggests that in addition to providing Dudu with opportunities to learn both her languages in an authentic way, the radio station enhanced the development of her hybrid identity. Through R&B, she learned to embrace popular Western culture and through Maskandi, she learned to appreciate her traditional roots.

Besides listening to the bilingual radio station, Dudu reported that she also read bilingual texts, especially Drum and Bona magazines, glossy magazines that are published in some of the African languages, including Zulu, and also in English and target black readership, especially women. She told me that she read these magazines, especially to find out about her favorite singers. She shared with me a story about Shakira, a Colombian singer, who took South Africa by storm with her song, Wakawaka, during the 2010 FIFA World
Cup. About the song, Dudu said: *UShakira wake washo wathi ingoma yakhe eyakudala.*

Yayisukela emaBhunwini kodwa yena kukhona asekufakile manje okwakungekho kuqala

(Shakira explained that her song is based on an old song that was once sung by Boers (Afrikaner farmers). However, she has added a few things of her own). When I asked Dudu if she was sure that the song was sung by Boers, she corrected herself and explained that she meant soldiers. This confusion may have been caused by the fact that before the independence, most of the soldiers in South Africa were white people, especially Boers. This extension of meaning is interesting; it suggests that she was imposing her cultural understanding to the song. In other words, she was appropriating the meaning of the words, connecting the song to her understanding of the world.

Like Noma, Dudu could make connections between the texts and other aspects of her life. In response to my question on why she liked the story *Off to the Sea*, which she reported to be her favorite story, she said, “*Ngithanda ngoba ikhuluma ngolwandle nebeach eThekwini. Uma kuvalwa izikole ngiya olwandle noma eGoli. Ngisuke ngihamba nobaba nomama nabatwana basekhaya* (I like the story because it talks about the ocean and the beach in Durban. When the schools are closed, I go to the beach or Johannesburg. I go with my father, mother, and siblings).

Like Dudu’s family, in this story a black family with two children of the same age as Dudu takes a holiday to a city with beaches during a school break. While at the beach, the two black children meet two white children; they all become friends and they play together. Dudu could also relate to the children playing because she said: *Ngithanda futhi ukuthi uma sisebhishi sidlala ibhola, sidlale nangesihlabathi* (When we are at the beach, I like that we play soccer on the sand and we also play with the sand).

Although Dudu could make personal connections, she could not extend the connection to the broader socio-political issues, such as racial integration, which seemed to
be one of the themes of the story. It is not clear why she failed to make this connection because in a Ben Carson’s (1990) book, a book she reported to like as well, she was able to make such a connection. In response to my question about what she liked about Ben’s story, Nonhle stated: "Ukuthi abantu bagcina sebemthanda. Wonke umuntu wagcina esemthanda nabelungu sebezincengela kuye ngoba esengodokotela" (I like that everyone ended up liking him [Ben Carson], even white people, because he became a doctor). In this comment, Dudu suggests that the success of Carson as a doctor helped him to cross racial boundaries. Although it is not clear what prompted her to make this comment, I suspect that the conversations about the book that she sometimes had with her uncle, who bought her the book when he was studying in one of the US universities in the Northeast, may have facilitated this kind of thinking. Dudu told me that sometimes they would talk about some of the issues in the book and during the conversations they would switch between English and Zulu.

Through the retelling of the book, which Dudu did in Zulu, she demonstrated that she knew some facts about the book. She mentioned that Ben Carson and his brother had a difficult childhood, so they had to dig food from trashcans. She added the fact that initially Ben had problems with school, and also stated that Ben attended a predominantly white school before he moved to a predominantly black school, which she called *isikole samaZulu* (a school for Zulus) and later on became a doctor. Although most of the points were accurate, it is not true that Ben Carson and his brother dug food from the trashcans. It is also not correct that the black school they attended was a school for Zulu people. What seems to have happened is that Dudu extended the meaning of the text by connecting it to her cultural knowledge, what Hill (2000) calls “reading creatively” (p. 98). She had probably seen poor people digging food from trashcans. Furthermore, the fact that in her school, everyone was black and Zulu may have made her to overgeneralize, stating that Carson’s school was for
Zulus. These connections demonstrate that Dudu was “in and moving through” (Temple et al., 2011, p. 394) the text.

Interestingly, when Dudu retold this story when we were at her home and not at school, not only did she include other points she did not mention earlier on, such as the fact that Carson’s mother restricted the number of programs Carson and his brother could watch on television, encouraged them to read books, and separated co-joined twins; she also explained what she learned from the book. Dudu said: Le ncwadi ifundisa ukuthi umuntu kufanele azimisele (This book teaches us to be devoted to our school work). This was after her grandmother had asked her what she learned from reading the book. The grandmother went on to stress that Kubalulekile ukuthi umuntu azi ukuthi incwadi isho ukuthini. Hhayi nje ukuthi umuntu ahhume (It is important to know the message of the book; you should not simply read a book for the sake of reading).

As the above comment suggests, Dudu’s grandmother was reminding Dudu about the importance of meaning in reading. Perhaps, it is comments such as these that encouraged Dudu and her siblings to engage in meaningful literacy activities at home. For example, when I asked Dudu if she ever wrote anything at home besides schoolwork, she told me that she sometimes exchanged notes with her older sister, especially when the family was watching television and they had been ordered to keep quiet. She said that they would write messages like: Asihambeni siydala onodoli ekamelweni kuyabhora lapha. Let’s go siydala iscrabble noma ichess (Let us go to the bedroom to play the dolls; it’s boring here. Let’s go play scrabble or chess). As the above words show, as Dudu and her sister exchanged messages, talking about issues of interests to their lives, they also switched between Zulu and English. The use of both languages in writing about matters of interests to them indicates that these children were developing biliteracy for authentic purposes.
However, when they switched to do school work at home, the authenticity in language use and learning changed. Dudu told me that sometimes when she was preparing for a test, she would ask her sister to quiz her from a book or a journal. For example, the sister would provide her with a list of incomplete sentences and ask her to fill out the missing words. Regarding her sister’s help when Dudu was reading school books, she said: *Uyangisiza ukuthi ngikwazi ukufunda kahle ngiqaphele amapunctuation marks futhi ngifunde ngingangengizi nginganensi. Uyake agcizelele athi amehlo ami kufanele abe fast, angahlali egameni kodwa futhi ubuye angisize nangamagama engingawazi* (She reminds me that I need to pay attention to punctuation marks and read fluently. She also stresses that I should move my eyes fast across the page, and sometimes she also helps me with unknown words). Evidently, in these examples, the focus is not on meaningful engagement with the texts but on the regurgitation of the learned materials and lower-level skills.

As the above discussion demonstrates, Dudu was exposed to a variety of texts that range from traditional stories to comics to magazines to short stories and to a novel. Furthermore, the topics that were addressed in these texts concern real life issues of personal interests, such as visiting the beach, playing games, and understanding the significance of education in the case of Carson’s book. In addition, her family members played a significant role in providing her with authentic materials—her uncle bought her a book and her mother bought magazines—which facilitated meaningful discussions of the texts. In brief, the question is: What can teachers learn from this context?

“I also help my mother follow the African Magic movies; she always struggles to understand stories in these movies”: Stories as a resource for language and literacy learning

*Muzi.* In this comment Muzi was talking about English Nigerian movies in the African Magic channel, the channel he reported to like best. These movies are set in Nigeria
and portray traditional and modern cultural values and lifestyles of Nigerian people. Because
they use Nigerian pidgin English, it is sometimes difficult to follow them. This is what
Muzi’s mother was struggling with. To address this problem, subtitles written in English are
provided. Muzi used the subtitles, along with the pictures, to follow the movies: *Khona
ngiyakwazi ukufunda escrinini kodwa ngesinye isikhathi ngisizwa uVelaphi ukufunda
amagama* (Although I can read some words on the screen, sometimes it is difficult; so
Velaphi (his oldest brother) also helps me to read the subtitles). Seemingly, not only did
watching the Nigerian movies expose Muzi to a different English variety and a different
African culture; with the help of his brother, it also helped him practice reading, and he did so
for authentic purposes—to share his understanding of the movies with his mother. In this
respect, watching the movies became a tool that mediated Muzi’s learning to read while it
also promotes literacy as a social process in which family members participate actively in
constructing meaning.

Just as Muzi liked Nigerian pidgin English movies, he also enjoyed bilingual and
multilingual programs in the local South African TV. He indicated: *Ngithanda ukubuka
amaprograms anjengoMuzi wezinsinswa kanye noBongo. UMuzi wezinsizwa mnandi.
Ngithanda uma oMkhize noMofoekeng sebexabana, bengezwani kahle; mina ngiyahleka* (I
like programs like *UMuzi wezinsizwa* and *Bongo* [sitcoms]. I like the misunderstanding
between Mkhize and Mofoekeng; it is funny). He added: *Futhi kumnandi ukulalela
oMofoekeng bekhuluma isiSuthu bese ngiyazi ukuthi ezinye izinto ngesiSuthu ngoba
bayabhala lapha uTV* (I enjoy listening to Mofoekeng because I get to learn some Sotho
words [from the subtitles]). Muzi also explained that, on a few occasions, when he wanted
to know more about some Sotho words he had heard from the program, he would ask Tsepho
(his bilingual Zulu-Sotho classmate). Seemingly, just as watching Nigerian pidgin English
movies mediated Muzi’s learning to read in English, listening to stories in multilingual programs encouraged him to learn other African languages.

In addition to enjoying stories in other languages, Muzi indicated that he liked Zulu traditional stories. This is despite the fact that traditional stories were not told in his family. The stories that he knew were from his friends: *Umboneni ohlala ngapha ngase*Manzini *wayengixo*oxela *izindaba uma sisesikoleni* (Mboneni, who lives at Manzini, used to tell me stories when we were at school). Despite his reported love for traditional stories, when I asked him to narrate one story that he liked, he was not as animated as the other students. He did not sing, gesture, or move his body although I knew he could have done so because I happen to know the story he told. The story is about the hare and an old woman who participate in a game they call “cooking each other.” They take turns to “cook each other,” but after several turns the hare refuses to let the woman out of the pot, so she ends up being cooked, and the hare serves her to her children. When the children are done eating, the hare sings, mocking the children for eating their mother. This is the part that Muzi was supposed to have sung, but he did not do so. It is not clear why he did not do so because that helps to make the story interesting.

In addition to showing interest in traditional stories, Muzi liked radio programs about traditional topics. The program he reported to like, *Kusadliwa Ngoludala*, is a talk show about topics related to traditional issues. Different experts in the traditional Zulu culture are invited and listeners are welcomed to call in and ask the experts questions. Muzi’s mother told me that Muzi did not miss the program and was particularly interested in matters related to the role of ancestors: *Ngifuna ukwazi ukuthi ngabe amadlozi abavikela ngempela yini abantu* (I want to know if ancestors really protect the living). She added that Muzi also seemed to enjoy the discussion about proverbs. She stated: *Kubantwana bami bonke uMuzi nguyenu nje ozihlupha kakhulu ngokubuza izinto eziphathelene nezaga ezimento*niwe
Of all my children, Muzi is the only one who bothers himself about the proverbs mentioned in the program).

Because I did not ask Muzi why he was also interested in traditional programs like the one mentioned above, I will never know. However, I suspect that, in part, this may have to do with the fact that the family belonged to the Church of the Nazarites, a church that mixes the Christian religion and traditional Zulu culture. Although most of its doctrines are based on the translated Zulu Bible, it localized some parts of the Bible in its hymn books, replacing foreign Bible names of people and places with the local names and also infusing the traditional Zulu dance, umgido, to its hymn book Muller (2003). In this respect, the church “create[d] a book of sacred song texts, which looked “European” on one hand, but sounded “African” on the other (p. 101).

Although Muzi used subtitles to read the stories in his favorite movies and programs, he did not seem eager to read stories from other sources. This was despite the fact that newspapers were available in both Zulu and English at his home as his mother indicated:

Sithenga amaphepha esiZulu nawesiNgisi. Mina ngiyafisa ukuthi izingane zilwazi ulimi lwazo. Zingagcini nje izingane sezilokhu zikhulumu i-English ngoba phela lapha esiZulwini ziningi izinto izingane okufuneka zizifunde zizazi eziyisiko. Ngiye ngithande ukuthi ingane isazi isiZulu (We buy newspapers written in Zulu and English. I want my children to know their native language. I don’t want them to end up speaking only English. Knowing Zulu is important because the language has a lot to teach children, especially the culture).

In fact, when I asked Muzi if he read newspapers and magazines, he did not mince his words about not liking these materials. He stated:

Cha. Angiwafundi amanewspapers namamagazines. Ngibuka izithombe kuphela.

Ngisikhwe ngibheke izithombe noma iziphi, ngedlule noma ngidlale amagames
asebhukwini. Ngidlala lokhu lapo ubuka khona amagama bese uyawagcwalisa noma ugcwalise igama. Sidlala noNhlanhla (No, I don’t read newspapers and magazines; I look at the pictures. I simply look at the pictures and then play games. I play the crossword puzzle. We play with Nhlanhla [his older brother]).

Muzi added that sometimes they would take out a TV guide magazine from a newspaper and read about their favorite programs and sometimes discuss some of the reviews. Just as Muzi did not like to read newspapers and magazines, he also did not enjoy reading books. When I asked him if he had a favorite book, he mentioned the Zulu textbook, *UVulindlela*, but indicated: *Ngithanda izithombe; ngizithanda ngoba ezinye ziyahlekisa* (I like the pictures; some of them are funny). When I probed further trying to find out if there was a particular story in the book that he liked, he said he did not remember the stories. Seemingly, reading stories from materials like books and newspapers did not interest Muzi.

While the reason for Muzi’s lack of interest in books and newspapers is not clear, it is possible that he found the dense language in these materials more challenging than the language in the subtitles and TV programs in TV guide magazines. Furthermore, subtitles and TV programs in TV guide magazines tend to be accompanied by visuals. This is not always the case with books and newspapers; in this respect, Muzi found these materials a bit difficult. In addition, the fact that at school Muzi did not seem to engage in collaborative construction of meaning, as suggested by the teacher’s instructional practices in the previous chapter, may have made reading books uninteresting to him. In short, Muzi may have found engaging actively in the various literacy and language activities with family members meaningful than taking part in these activities at school.

In sum, the above discussion illustrates that stories formed a significant part of Muzi’s home literacy practices. He sought them in the movies, TV programs, and traditional recounts. Furthermore, not only did he take an active role, for example, reading subtitles on
the screen and discussing them with family members, but he also seemed interested in learning other varieties and languages. In other words, the stories in the different communicative modes provided Muzi with an opportunity to engage in authentic literacy practices.

In addition, the fact that the stories portrayed different cultures afforded Muzi a chance to learn about other cultures. In this respect, his identities were converging in complex ways and along the continuum as he switched back and forth between his communicative practices (Hornberger, 2010; Pennycook, 2010). However, the fact that Muzi preferred texts with little discourse and more visuals such as subtitles and TV programs in a TV guide, and avoided texts with dense language and little visuals such as the textbook raises questions about what the teachers can do to build on what students bring to the classroom to support school-based literacy.

“I like the gestures and the movements. It’s really fun!” Literacy beyond the printed word

S’khona. These words were part of S’khona’s response to my question about what he liked about the traditional story that he had narrated to me. This story was about how the hare, a small animal, outwitted the lion, a big animal, which is often depicted as a king of animals in most traditional stories. With his singing, gesturing, and movements when he was telling the story, he took me into the imaginative world of the animals. I felt like I knew these animals and knew them very well. In fact, he explained that he liked traditional stories about animals. His mother confirmed this and shared with me one of the stories that S’khona liked best. However, she lamented the fact that of late they seldom told traditional stories; most of the time they watched television, something that was robbing him of his good story-telling skills: Yena umqondo wakhe uyashesha... Uma exoxa izinganekwane noma ekhuluma noma
Not only was S’khona interested in traditional stories, but he also enjoyed action movies and cartoons, especially animations. One of his favorite cartoons was the Dragon Balz. In this cartoon, the protagonist, Goku, together with his crew, fight against aliens who are trying to destroy the earth. S’khona explained that he found the magic powers of the protagonist and company impressive. He said he was particularly fascinated by the fights and the counter-fights: Ngithanda noma yini kodwa hhayi kulokhu kukhulunywa . . . Ngifuna ukuthi kuliwe; hhayi kulokhu kukhulunywa (I like everything but talking . . . I want them to fight; I don’t like it when they talk). Evidently, for him, the less dialogue the motion picture has, the more intriguing he found it.

That S’khona preferred less talk is also evidenced by one of the stories he reported to be his favorite. This story, which they read in class before I arrived on the scene, is about animals. At the beginning of the story the lion, together with a few big animals, fight over who should be the king of the jungle. Similarly, the smaller animals quarrel over trivial issues. So there is animosity and chaos. However, this situation changes when the owl comes upon a book, which he shares with all the other animals. He gives each animal a page to read and then come back and share what they have read. After all the animals have shared their parts, the animals realize that all the fights are uncalled for; they need to live harmoniously together. So they live happily after this realization. I noticed that as S’khona was narrating this story, he was animated: singing, moving his body, and gesturing. He also used his voice to portray the different characters. In fact, he added that he also liked this story because it had many pictures and he usually read as a monkey, which had fewer lines than the other animals.

Evidence that S’khona enjoyed reading books that had less discourse and more pictures also comes from his response to my question about books he would like to read.
explained: *Ngithanda ukufunda izcwadi ezincane . . . Ngiyazithanda izindaba ezinezithombe njengalena okade uyiphethe eklasini* (I like to read small books . . . I like books with pictures like the one I saw you reading in class). The book to which he was referring was a children’s book about the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup that had taken place in South Africa. S’khona stated that the book was particularly intriguing because, *Ngithanda izithombe zabafana abadlala ibhola nokuthi ibhalwe ngamagama amakhulu* (I like the pictures of the boys playing soccer. I also like it that it is written in big words). Seemingly, that the book had pictures of boys playing soccer, his favourite topic, also drew his attention.

S’khona’s mother explained that S’khona did not read anything at home, including the Zulu newspapers that were usually available. He simply cut pictures, especially those of his favourite players and pasted them on the wall in his bedroom. However, the fact that he did not read the newspapers is not surprising; the mother told me that the whole family seldom read the newspapers. In fact, I learned that these were old newspapers that S’khona’s aunt would bring home from work to be used as a toilet paper. Clearly, in this home the newspapers had a different function and significance.

Although S’khona did not write at home and wrote less at school, he indicated that if he were to write anything it would be about soccer and animals, his favourite topics. In fact, he was explicit about how he would go about writing about his favourite soccer players: *Ngingaqala ngibhale amagama abadlali, bese ngibhala ngamunye bese ngiyaxoxa-ke ukuthi ngithandani ngaye* (I can start by writing the names of the players and then tell a story about each one of them, describing what I like about them). This comment suggests that the lack of personal narrative writing in his class as indicated before deprived students of opportunities not only to express their personal interests but also to develop writing skills for purposeful ends instead of copying and generating out of context sentences.
As suggested in the above paragraph, interest in the materials plays an important role in motivating children. Unfortunately for S’khona, the family seemed to have relied almost exclusively on school materials, especially subject notes and homework. For example, every time S’khona’s mother talked about helping him, she would make reference to homework. She also indicated that when she did not know what the homework required, she would ask S’khona to seek help from the other family members. S’khona reported the same thing: *Uma umama engayazi into athi angiye kwaMkhonza, ekhaya eliphezulu* (If my mother does not know something, she asks me to go and talk to other family members). Evidently, despite the limited skills, Siyalo’s mother was interested in her son’s schooling and the other family members were prepared to offer him the support as well.

Further evidence that S’khona’s mother was concerned about his performance at school and was trying her best to help him also comes from our conversation about the educational blocks—kindergarteners’ educational blocks—she bought for S’khona. Excitedly, she explained that she wanted to keep S’khona’s mind busy over the December vacation. Given that S’khona was in the 4th grade, this may not have been the best option. However, his struggles with school work, in general, somewhat justifies this choice. S’khona’s mother was so concerned about her son’s performance that she asked me if I could make suggestions about how she might help him, especially with reading. Because this was at the end of the study, I felt free to share some thoughts since I did not think this would compromise my understanding of what typically took place at his home and in the school. I suggested that she should contact the public library since they had a good children’s literature selection in both Zulu and English, and I knew that they had a specialist in children’s literature. To my surprise, she was not aware that the public had free access to the library: *Ziyadayiswa yini? Ushiya imali ngesikhathi uyiboleka?* (Are they selling the books? Do I have to leave some money when I borrow the books?)
The above words show that not only do some families face materials constraints—there was no table and chairs in S’khona’s mother’s house—but knowledge constraints as well. As I pointed out in S’khona’s profile, the sharing of facilities in most rural Zulu families masks a lot of struggles among individual family members. For example, although S’khona and his siblings lived with their mother in a small three-room house that had little furniture, they had access to facilities such as a television, DVD player, and music system. All these were in the main house that belonged to S’khona’s uncle. Without the access to these facilities, S’khona would have been greatly affected by his situation. So knowing the circumstances under which he was doing school work at home provides us with a window to understanding some of the factors that may have contributed to his struggles with school work, specifically literacy.

In sum, S’khona’s language and literacy practices at home reveal a student with a complex set of practices. Through telling stories, watching cartoons, movies, and pictures, he was able to express his personal interests, especially interest in animal stories, fighting, and soccer. In other words, these multiple communicative “resources of spoken language, space, gesture, narrative and vocalization (Stein, 2008, p. 58) allowed him to express his personal and cultural identities. However, to some degree, the family’s limited resources constrained his potential to be successful in his learning of literacy, especially at school.

Chapter Summary

Overall, this discussion shows that despite the focal students being exposed to the same instruction in this 4th grade class, they varied in how they participated in the different English language and literacy events and activities. However, the running thread across all of them is the understanding that school reading in English is oral reading fluency and public performance. In large part, the teacher played a significant role in shaping this view. She repeatedly corrected the students when they were reading aloud and encouraged them to read
aloud in front of the class. The teacher’s emphasis on skills also extended to writing. She focused on the grammar and vocabulary exercises at the expense of creating opportunities where the students could write to explore personal and academic topics. To some extent, this may have been influenced by the fact that the students did not have enough English proficiency to write in English.

Although all the students conformed to the main classroom norms about learning the English language and literacy, their participation was complex. For example, in reading, while all the students paid attention to reading fluently, others—Noma and Dudu—also used strategies that were reinforced at home, which revealed the families were also concerned about meaning, something that was not stressed in class. Similarly, when these students, including Muzi, were given an opportunity to create their own piece of writing, however limited that was, they demonstrated that they could draw on their linguistic and cultural knowledge and experiences to write creatively instead of simply regurgitating what they had learned. As the discussion showed, the variations were, in part, shaped by the moral support the students got from their peers and the teachers. On one hand, those that were perceived as capable and competent were given opportunities to enhance their skills. On the other hand, the ones that were considered to be struggling got less to almost no chance to participate in meaningful ways.

Just as the school context influenced the students’ learning, so did their home contexts. In other words, the moral support and resources the individual families provided influenced how the students experienced and participated in the various language and literacy activities in the home, and by extension, at school. For instance, while all the families encouraged their children to learn by exposing them to various materials—albeit in varying degrees—how they helped the students to engage with the materials was influenced by the families’ general knowledge and infrastructure. For example, Noma and Dudu, whose
families seemed to have more resources, including general and school-based knowledge, created more opportunities for these students to engage in a variety of language and literacy activities in their homes, and to some extent, enhanced their learning at school. On the other hand, despite the efforts by S’khona’s family, especially his mother, to offer some help to S’khona, the lack of resources and skills constrained their efforts, and this affected S’khona’s learning, particularly at school. In short, inasmuch as the students’ participated in the different language and literacy practices in their homes, the families’ sociocultural contexts, and by extension, the community’s context, shaped how the students took hold of their learning.

Finally, although understanding students’ practices in various contexts is important as shown in this chapter, having an insight into how they perform when they are assessed is also significant. In the following chapter, I discuss the students’ performance assessments in both Zulu and English. Assessing bilingual and biliterate students in both languages sheds light on what these students can do or cannot do in their languages (Escamilla, 2006; Garcia, 2000; Soltero-Gonzalez et al., 2012).
Chapter 6

Students’ Performance Assessment

The last two chapters dealt with the dynamics of the teacher’s instructional practices and the students’ language and literacy practices in the classroom and in the homes. Although it is important to understand these aspects of learning, it is equally significant to have an insight into what students know and can do in their languages. In other words, assessment is a crucial part of understanding what students have learned. This chapter, therefore, presents findings on the students’ performance assessment in reading and writing in Zulu and English. The chapter begins with the students’ performance in Zulu, with the focus on oral reading, reading comprehension, writing, and a summary of the students’ performance across the tasks. Following this, the attention shifts to the students’ performance in English. Again, the emphasis is on oral reading, reading comprehension, writing, and then a summary of the students’ performance across the tasks. The last section summarizes the entire chapter.

Zulu Reading Tasks

As mentioned in chapter 3, the students read a narrative text, *Kudaladala* (trans. Sibiya, 2004), a translation of *Once Upon a Time* (Daly, 2003) and an expository text, *Changing Materials*: (Oxlade, 2008)—the first five chapters being Zulu translations and the last five chapters being in English. The narrative text is about a girl, Sarie, from a small rural town in South Africa who was struggling with reading aloud in class and, therefore, became a laughing stock to other children. Through the support of an old woman, Auntie Anna, every Sunday afternoon, Sarie practiced reading until she finally learned how to read. On the other hand, the expository text deals with change processes, including how liquid changes into a solid when it is frozen and how a solid becomes a liquid when it is heated. Before reading each of the texts, the students briefly talked about the texts using the title and the pictures in the texts. Following this, they read the text orally, stopping at designated areas to share their
think-alouds with me and answer the reading comprehension questions. Except for the think-alouds, I did not allow the students to use the texts when answering the comprehension questions.

**Oral reading in Zulu.** Table 2 displays the students’ performance in the oral reading of the narrative and expository texts. As the table indicates, with the exception of S’khona, the students’ oral reading ranged from instructional to independent levels (Gillet & Temple, 1990). At the independent reading level, a student reads 97% or more of the words accurately; at the instructional level, a student reads 90-96% of the words correctly; and at the frustration level, a student reads less than 90% of the words accurately. In the following section, I discuss the details, showing how similar and how different the students’ oral reading of the texts was.
Table 3

Types of Students’ Miscues in the Zulu Narrative and Expository Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miscues</th>
<th>Noma Nar/Expo</th>
<th>Dudu Nar/Expo</th>
<th>Muzi Nar/Expo</th>
<th>S’khona Nar/Expo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of insertions (meaning preserving)</td>
<td>7(18%)/2(8%)</td>
<td>2(29%)/0(0%)</td>
<td>4(14%)/ 2(22%)/6(7%)/3(5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of insertions (meaning changing)</td>
<td>2(5%)/3(12%)</td>
<td>0(0%)/0(0%)</td>
<td>2(7%)/1(11%)/14(16%)/7(12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of omissions (meaning preserving)</td>
<td>13(32%)/4(16%)/2(29%)/0(0%)</td>
<td>7(25%)/2(22%)/8(9%)/5(8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of omissions (meaning changing)</td>
<td>3(8%)/3(12%)</td>
<td>1(14%)/1(25%)/2(7%)/1(11%)/16(18%)/8(13 %)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of substitutions (meaning preserving)</td>
<td>13(32%)/6(24%)/1(14%)/3(75%)</td>
<td>9(33%)/3(34%)/12(13%)/ 10(17%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of substitutions (meaning changing)</td>
<td>2(5%)/7(28%)</td>
<td>1(14%)/0(0%)</td>
<td>4(14%)/0(0%)/33(37%)/27(45%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy rate</td>
<td>95%/ 95%</td>
<td>99%/ 99%</td>
<td>97%/98%</td>
<td>89%/87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of reading minutes</td>
<td>23/17</td>
<td>18/13</td>
<td>22/14</td>
<td>38/28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words in the narrative text: 839</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words in the expository text: 47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Noma: Making more meaning in the narrative than in the expository text.** While Noma’s accuracy rate in the narrative and expository text indicates that she is a good reader, reading 95% of the words accurately in both texts, in the expository text she made more meaning-changing miscues. For instance, whereas in the narrative text, she made, 18% meaning-changing miscues, in the expository text, she made 52% meaning-altering miscues.
In both texts, the miscues involved omission, insertion, and substitution of morpheme(s). For instance, in the narrative text, Noma inserted the derivational morpheme -is- to the original word babesebenza in Abomndeni wakhe babesebenza isikhathi eside (Her family used to work for a very long time), and thus changed this word into babesebenzisa (They implemented it). Likewise, she substituted the original word yaghuma in Yaghuma sengathi izovele ihlephuke (It [the book] cracked like it would be torn apart) with yaphuma (It [the book] came out) when she read a segment that describes what happened to the Cinderella book that Sarie found. In addition to substituting the original words with other words, in a few cases, Noma replaced words with nonsense words. For instance, in a segment that describes where Sarie found the book, she read emkhehlekhehleni (in an old car) as emkhuhlakhehleni, a nonsense word. The graphophonic affinity between these words indicates that sometimes Noma’s attention was on decoding rather than on meaning; possibly, in this case, because this is a low frequency word since it is rarely used nowadays.

As I mentioned above, while Noma made meaning changing miscues in both texts, it is in the expository text that she made more of these miscues. As in the narrative text, these miscues include omission, insertion, and substitution of morpheme(s). For instance, when Noma read a segment about how some materials take a new form when they are stretched, she replaced sinwebe (stretch) in Sizicindezele, sizinwebe noma sizisonte izinto (We press, stretch, or twist the materials) as sincwebe (pinch). Similarly, when she read a part about how pressing some materials can change them, she read singazicindezela (We can press them) as singazicindezeli (We should not press them). These substitutions suggest that she was not properly monitoring her reading. Furthermore, in some cases Noma read too fast and seemed to be rushing, which may have caused her to omit words. For instance, when she read about how solid changes into liquid, she omitted the word liyancibilika (it melts) in Iqhwa liyancibikala uma lithola ukushisa (Ice melts if it gets heat), an omission that affects the
meaning because melting describes a state of material change, which is what the text is about. Noma also omitted a word that describes another key material change. She left out intushana (water vapor) in *Intushana iphenduka amaconsana amanzi* (Water vapor turns into liquid). Despite the meaning-changing miscues discussed here and others, Noma’s performance in the reading comprehension, as I will show later, suggests that she was able to compensate for the miscues by using other strategies such as picture cues.

A closer look at Noma’s expository text miscues revealed that some of the miscues involved low frequency content words, it is possible that her lack of exposure to Zulu literacy in the earlier grades where some of these words may have been taught played a role. As mentioned before, Noma was receiving formal instruction in the Zulu literacy for the first time in the 4th grade. In this respect, her lack of exposure to the written Zulu language, especially, low frequency content words may have slowed her down and affected her word recognition.

Overall, most of Noma’s miscues involve substitutions, insertions, and omissions of morphemes; this suggests that she needs to pay close attention to the details of words. Furthermore, she needs to improve her reading fluency. While she read with expression, chunking the clauses, phrases, and words appropriately, especially at the beginning of both texts; she occasionally slipped into expressionless reading, particularly when she read polysyllabic words and towards the end of the texts. This affected the natural flow of the texts. However, with more practice and support, she would be a very good reader. Later on, I discuss her comprehension of the texts, also paying attention to how her oral reading influenced her comprehension.

*Dudu and Muzi: Demonstrating efficient oral reading across the Zulu texts.* Dudu and Muzi read the narrative and expository texts well, with Dudu decoding 99% words correctly in both texts, and Muzi reading 97% words correctly in the narrative text and 98%
words accurately in the expository text. Both students seemed to be reading for meaning in both texts. Evidence of this comes from the self-corrections they made, especially in the critical parts of the texts. For example, in the narrative text when Dudu read *uvalo* (fear) in *Ngesikhathi uvalo lungamshayi, waqala ukufunda kahle* (When her fear of reading disappeared, she started to read well) as *uvala* (she closes), she realized that this did not make sense and quickly corrected it. This correction was important because the fear of reading aloud in class was the main reason Sarie, the main character, was struggling with reading—the problem in the story. Similarly, in the expository text, after Muzi had read *liphenduka* (changes into) in *Iqhwa liphenduka amanzi uma ulifaka oketsezini* (Ice turns to water in drinks) as *kuphambuka* (it deviates), he immediately corrected this. Not doing so would have caused him not to understand one of the change processes—the theme in the text.

Further evidence that Dudu and Muzi were paying attention to meaning is also provided by the types of the miscues they made. In the narrative text, meaning-maintaining miscues made up 72% of Dudu’s miscues and in the expository text 75% miscues comprised such miscues. On the other hand, Muzi made 72% meaning-maintaining miscues in the narrative text and 78% meaning-preserving miscues in the expository text. Most of these miscues include substitutions, omissions, and insertions. For example, in the narrative text, Dudu’s insertion of the basic prefix *-si-* to the word *ngenkathi* (as) in *U-Anti wayivula incwadi ngenkathi ilanga liyishona* (Aunt opened the book as the sun was about to set down) does not change the meaning of this word because *ngesikhathi* also means *as*. Likewise, the substitution of *wawabona* (imagined) in *Wawabona namagama asencwadini ngeso le ngqondo* (She imagine the words) with the word *wawabheka* retains the original idea of the text because these are synonyms. That in both cases the spelling of the miscues is similar to the original words suggests that Dudu might have been misled by the graphophonetic similarity between these words. Unlike Dudu, Muzi’s substitutions appear to have been influenced by
context. In the narrative text, Muzi substituted esihlaweni (on the seat) in Usarie wagxumela esihlaweni esingaphambili (Sarie jumped into the front seat) with the synonym esitulweni, retaining the meaning of the original word. Similarly, in the expository text, when he omitted the word obasiwe (burning) in Ukhuni luyasha emlilweni obasiwe. (Wood burns in burning fire); this did not cause a change in the original meaning because fire burns anyway.

Only in a few cases did Dudu and Muzi make miscues that affected or slightly affected the meaning of the original words. For example, in the narrative text, Dudu read wahlala (She sat) in U-Anti wahlala ngemuva (Aunt sat at the back seat) as wahleka (she laughed), suggesting that the graphophonic similarity between these words may have misled her. Like Dudu, Muzi was sometimes confused by the graphophonic affinity between some words. For example in the narrative text, he read edlalisa (touched) in Kwakungathi usephusheni ngesikhathi edlalisa isandla sakhe (It felt like a dream when her hand touched something) as ehlalis (staying with). That Dudu and Muzi did not correct these miscues and did not seem to have been distracted by them suggest that somehow they were able to recover the meaning of the original words from other contextual clues in the texts, supporting the argument that readers do not have to get every word correct when reading and they use multiple cues.

Overall, given that some of Dudu’s and Muzi’s miscues involved words that are graphophonically similar, they need to pay close attention to the details of the words. This is particularly important because in some cases these miscues altered the meaning of the original words. Finally, the question remains: Does Dudu’s and Muzi’s proficient oral reading of the texts translate into effective comprehension, I address this question later on.

**S’khona: Struggling to read the narrative and the expository texts.** Unlike the other students, S’khona struggled to read the narrative and expository texts. He read at a frustration level in both texts, decoding 89% and 87% of the words correctly in the narrative and
expository texts respectively. For the most part, S’khona read both texts word for word and hesitantly, and sometimes sounding out initial letters or syllables. His monotonous intonation and expressionless reading made it difficult to follow the texts. After reading a few sentences at the beginning of the sessions in both texts, S’khona asked if he could use a finger to point at the words. He explained that he found it difficult to read if he was not pointing at the words. This seemed to have slowed him down more; he took twice as much time to read the texts compared to the other students.

Also, almost halfway through the narrative, S’khona seemed to be getting more and more frustrated. This frustration may have been due to the length of the narrative text: it was twice as long as the expository text. In addition, when S’khona read the narrative text, he would say the name of the punctuation marks instead of simply observing them. For instance, at the end of a sentence, he would say “full stop”, or “period” in American English. When I asked him why he was doing that, he had no answer. However, his answer in the final interview to the question about what makes a good reader explains this behavior. He stated, *Uyakwazi ukunaka ongqi noma okhoma asheshise futhi.* (A good reader observes periods and commas. He also reads fast). Evidently, S’khona views reading as observing punctuation marks and reading fluently.

S’khona’s struggle with reading the texts is also demonstrated by the fact that most of his miscues were meaning-changing. In the narrative text he made 71% meaning-changing miscues and in the expository text such miscues made up 70%. For the most part, he substituted original words in the texts. For example, when he read the narrative text, he replaced *lungasabambeki* (not stumbling over) in *Waqala wafunda kahle ulimi lungasabambeki* (Sarie started to read well and no longer stumbled over the words) with *lungasabheki* (Sarie could no longer see anything). This miscue suggests that S’khona was
not following the story. In the story, the fact that Sarie was beginning to read well is important to note because it marks the beginning of the resolution of the problem.

S’khona displayed similar problems in reading the expository text. He substituted some of the key words, and thus drastically changed the original meaning of the text. For instance, he read *uketshezi* (liquid) in *Iqhwa liyinto eqinile kanti amanzi wona awuketshezi* (Ice is a solid and water is a liquid) as *ukukleza* (to drink milk directly from the cow). Because the part he was reading was talking about how liquid changes into solid when placed in a freezing place, this miscue indicates that he was not aware of the main idea: how materials change from one state into another. Furthermore, that S’khona made a couple of nonsense miscues, such as *lukula*, which he substituted for *kulula* (it is easy), also shows that he was not monitoring his reading. Even more problematic was his failure to read some of the words that would be considered basic high frequency words, such as *thina* (we), which he read as *ethi* (he/she says), and *futhi* (again), which he read as *ifu* (a cloud). Given that the above-mentioned miscues and many others bear graphophonic affinity to the original words, this suggests that he was attending to the surface features of the words at the expense of monitoring meaning.

Although the above discussion portrays a picture of a student who was struggling, on a few occasions S’khona showed that he had some understanding of the texts. For example, in the narrative text, after substituting *eyayimkhathaza* (That which bothered Sarie) in *Yisikole into eyayimkhathaza* (It was school that was bothering Sarie) as *eyayimkhuthuza* (that which was mugging Sarie), he corrected himself, demonstrating that he realized the word did not make sense in the story. This correction is important because the original word introduces the problem; that is, Sarie was bothered by the fact that she could not read. Because S’khona failed to connect this idea to the subsequent words since he struggled to read them, this self-correction was a futile exercise. Similarly, in the expository text the fact
that S’khona corrected himself after reading sheshisa (hurry up) instead of shisisa (warm up) in *Uma ushishisa amanzi ebhodweni, aya ngokuya eshisa bese kusuka intushwana yomoya phansi ebhodweni* (When water is heated in a pot, the water gets hotter, and some gas rise from the bottom) shows that sometimes S’khona was aware of the importance of monitoring his reading, but was inconsistent in his ability to do so.

In conclusion, this discussion demonstrates that S’khona is in need of several skills and strategies related to his reading. He needs to improve his basic decoding and word recognition skills so that his fluency can improve. He also needs instruction that shows him how to monitor his reading. Reading in general has to be redefined for him; he needs to understand that reading is not simply “getting through the text.” Later on, I discuss how S’khona comprehended the texts—by implication, how his oral reading of the text influenced his comprehension.

**Reading comprehension in Zulu.** Overall, all the students, with an exception of S’khona, showed a better comprehension of the narrative text than the expository text. To a large extent, this captured what they said during the think alouds of the narrative text reading. For the most part, their paraphrases while reading reflected the ideas of the text. As Table 3 shows, while they paraphrased during the reading of the narrative text, the students struggled to make sense of the expository text by relying on their general knowledge of the world to help them. Unfortunately, their connections were not always relevant. The latter was especially true in regard to S’khona’s and Muzi’s cases, and to a lesser extent to Noma’s case. With respect to specific strategies, all the students relied more on pictorial cues in the expository text than in the narrative text. Muzi and S’khona did this to an even greater degree than the other two students. In the following section, I discuss these issues in detail.
Table 4

*Students’ Think-Aloud Strategies in the Zulu Narrative and Expository Texts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Noma Nar/Expo</th>
<th>Dudu Nar/Expo</th>
<th>Muzi Nar/Expo</th>
<th>S’khona Nar/Exo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background knowledge</td>
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<td>6/9</td>
<td>8/11</td>
<td>12/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code-mixing</td>
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<td>0/3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferencing</td>
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<td>6/9</td>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrasing</td>
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<td>22/15</td>
<td>17/11</td>
<td>9/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictorial cues</td>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>6/9</td>
<td>7/17</td>
<td>13/18</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0/0</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of comments</td>
<td>25/30</td>
<td>35/27</td>
<td>33/31</td>
<td>31/29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Some of the strategies overlap; for example, a statement could involve use of pictorial cues based on background knowledge

*Noma: Demonstrating better reading comprehension in the narrative text.* Like her oral reading, Noma’s reading comprehension performance in the narrative text was better than in the expository text. At the beginning she showed that she could use the titles and the pictures to connect the texts to her background knowledge. For example, after Noma had read the title of the narrative text, *Kudaladala*, which translates as “In the olden days”, she stated that she thought the book might be about the olden days when people used to wear traditional skin clothes and ate traditional food. However, after the picture walk, she revised these predictions, explaining, *Ikhuluma ngogogo ofundisa ingane yakhe ukufunda bese nayo ifundisa abanye esikoleni.* (It’s about a grandmother who teaches her grandchild how to read and the child goes to school to teach her friends). Although the last statement is not accurate,
the fact that Noma could revise her predictions upon being confronted with new information shows that she was engaged in trying to comprehend the text.

Similarly, after looking at the title of the expository text, *Changing Materials*, Noma stated that she thought the book might be about things that change their shapes. Describing the picture on the book cover, she explained that change can occur when someone pours an egg into a glass, and thus cause the egg to change its shape. Although this is not a correct description of the process in the picture—the picture is about a man heating a glass in order to soften it—this statement shows that Noma had activated her schema about change. However, in order to benefit from this activation, she still needed to retrieve the relevant aspects of the schema; this was not always the case as the discussion of the think alouds and comprehension questions show.

In fact, analysis of Noma’s think-aloud statements in the expository text shows that some of her background knowledge did not help her to comprehend the text. To a large extent, this was due to the fact that she over-relied on her background knowledge. Over and over again, she repeated the same concept of an egg or liquid changing its shape and taking the shape of an object to which it is poured she mentioned when the she talked about the title at the beginning. For example, after Noma had read a segment about why soft clay turns hard after being exposed to the heat, in her think-aloud comments she simply stated that this happens when the clay is poured into a container, and as it dries it follows the shape of the container. Similarly, when she commented about why chocolate snaps and does not bend easily, she stated that this happens when someone breaking the chocolate does not follow the shape of the mold to which the chocolate was poured. In both instances, the explanations do not make sense. In the former case, the heat is responsible for turning the soft clay hard, and in the latter case, it is because some materials do not break easily.

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Although the concept of materials changing their shapes is mentioned in the text; for example, when water is poured into a container it takes the shape of that container, Noma seemed to have overextended this concept to all other situations. When I asked her where she first heard about this change, she said that she learned about it from the English teacher when she was teaching degrees of comparisons. She explained that the teacher brought containers of different sizes and used them to teach degrees of comparisons and in the process demonstrated how water changes its shape. It seems as if Noma was fascinated by this concept; however, overusing this background knowledge compromised her understanding of the text.

By contrast, in the narrative text when Noma used her background knowledge, it was relevant most of the time. For example, after reading a segment about Sarie walking a long distance to school, she said, *Ngicabanga ukuthi izingane ezihamba ibanga elide zifika esikoleni sezikhathele.* (I think children who walk long distances to school are tired by the time they arrive at school). Likewise, after reading a part where Sarie finally learns to read, Noma explained, *Abantu abangafundile bayahlupheka; uSarie kwafuneka afunde ukufunda.* (Uneducated people suffer, so Sarie had to learn to read). On both occasions, Noma’s background knowledge was relevant and helped her to understand why Aunt wanted to help Sarie learn to read.

Similar to the think-alouds in the expository text, Noma’s answers in the expository text shows some gaps. For instance, to an inferential question that required that she explain to her mother what causes boiling mud pools in some parts of Europe, she simply talked about boiling water turning into water vapor in a pot when heated; she made no reference to boiling mud pools. She did not indicate that although heated water in a pot and boiling water underground cause water to turn into steam, in boiling mud pools the steam filters through the mud, causing what looks like smoke. This suggests that she did not fully understand this
process. Likewise, to a question that required Noma to ask a friend a question to check a friend’s comprehension, referring to the picture of the molten lava in the book, she indicated that she would ask why the fire changes into an animal shape. Seemingly, Noma confused the picture of the cooling molten lava for an animal, showing that she did not understand the whole concept of the volcano. In large part, Noma’s misunderstanding of the boiling mud pools and the volcano may be due to the fact that these phenomena do not occur in South Africa, so she had no background knowledge. In brief, this discussion demonstrates that background knowledge affects comprehension.

While Noma seemed to struggle with most questions in the expository text, she appeared to be consistently doing well in the narrative text; and her retelling of the story provides a good example. In her retelling Noma gave a logical sequence of the plot episodes. She mentioned the problem of the main character—Sarie could not read; the actions to solving the problem—the support Sarie received from her teacher, and how she practiced reading with the help of Aunt after she found an old book; and the resolution of the problem—when Sarie could finally read. In addition, Noma provided the details of most story elements although she omitted the setting and did not mention that the book Sarie found was about Cinderella. Despite these omissions, Noma’s retelling indicates that she comprehended the story.

In part, Noma’s comprehension of the story may have to do with the fact that the story fitted a plausible plot that she could probably relate to on some level. For example, she could imagine a student walking a long distance to school since some of the students at the school had to walk long distances to school. Furthermore, she could picture Sarie getting the help from Aunt just like her: Noma was living with her aunt and her aunt took great interest in her school work. This makes one wonders how she would have performed in the expository text
had all the topics in the text been about familiar topics; notwithstanding, the fact that some of
the topics were not context specific, for example, referring to shapes and forms.

In summary, Noma’s case illustrates that genre and background knowledge may affect
comprehension. Noma performed well in the narrative text but struggled in the expository
text. To a certain extent, this was due to the fact that she did not have the necessary
background knowledge for some of the topics, and even in the few cases where she had some
background knowledge, she used it inappropriately. For students like her, this challenges
teachers to ensure that they help students to activate background knowledge that is
appropriate for the situation and provide appropriate background knowledge to students so
that they come to task with the necessary knowledge.

**Dudu: Comprehending the narrative and the expository texts well.** That Dudu was
reading for comprehension is supported by her effective comprehension in both texts. In the
narrative text, when I asked her to look at the title and predict what the story might be about,
drawing from her background knowledge, Dudu stated that she thought it was about things
that happened in the olden days—people walking long distances on foot, fetching water from
the river, and wearing skin clothes. While these predictions are consistent with the title, they
do not apply to this story. Upon this realization, after the picture walk, Dudu revised her
predictions, explaining that the book is about a girl who liked to read and sometimes read for
her granny. Unlike in the narrative text, in the expository text, Dudu was able to use both the
title and the illustrations to activate appropriate background knowledge about the content of
the expository text. After reading the title and looking at the picture on the book cover, she
said, *Cishe le newadi ikhuluma ngezinto eziguqukayo. Lapha sibona lo muntu elungisa ugesi
ukuze kube khona ukukhanya besekwenzeka uguquko.* (I think this book talks about changing
things. For example, in this picture we see this person fixing electrical wires so that there is
light, darkness can change into light). Although Dudu confused the picture of someone
Like Noma, in the think-alouds in both texts, Dudu paraphrased most of her comments, indicating that she had understood what she had read. For example, in the narrative text, after reading a segment that introduced the protagonist’s problem, Dudu simply restated it, mentioning that the protagonist’s problem was school. Likewise, she paraphrased the part about Sarie finding an old book in an old car and then added, *Uma ufunda njalo ugcina usukwazi futhi usukuthanda* (When you read all the time, you improve and end up liking it). At this point, she shared with me Ben Carson’s story, which she reported to like very much. Not only did Dudu paraphrase the important segments of the story, but she also related the content to her life, which shows that she was engaged.

Likewise, in the expository text, in addition to paraphrasing most of her think-aloud comments, Dudu also connected the text to her life and her understanding of the world. For example, after paraphrasing the segment about how snow changes into water, Dudu explained, *Ngiyazi ukuthi phesheya bajwayele ukuba neghwa kodwa thina asinalo* (I know that overseas they usually have snow, but we don’t have it here). Dudu also demonstrated how her background knowledge helped her comprehend the concept of chocolate being a brittle material. She said, *Uma uchocolate kade usefrijini bese uzama ukuwuhlephula ungakathambi, uphuka kabi.* (When chocolate has been in a refrigerator, and you try to divide it into small pieces before it is soft, it breaks). This comment suggests that in addition to understanding that unlike the other materials, chocolate is not bendable but breakable as discussed in the text, she was able to relate this content to her background knowledge. However, when she tried to draw on her background knowledge when she commented about the part on the volcano, she distorted the information: *Kuyivolcano kusuke kungamatshe*
(A volcano happens when small stones that have been heated by the sun cause eruption). In the text, it is the heat from underground that causes a volcano and not small stones that had been heated by the sun. When I asked her where she got this information, she explained that she had seen a volcano erupting from a movie. Evidently, in this case Dudu’s background knowledge did not serve her well. The fact that South Africa hardly experiences volcanos may have also contributed to Dudu’s poorly developed schema regarding this phenomenon.

Similar to the think alouds, Dudu’s answers to the reading comprehension questions in both texts indicate that she comprehended the texts well and could respond correctly to the different types of questions. For instance, in the narrative text, in response to the “Think and Search” question about why Aunt in the story did not want to read the Cinderella book to Sarie but wanted them to read it together, Dudu explained that it was because Sarie had told Aunt that she could not read, so Aunt wanted to help her. Given that this answer is not explicitly stated in the book, Dudu seemed to have made an inference based on the text. In addition, her answer to the question on whether or not she agreed with Aunt that it is good to learn to read demonstrated that she could relate the text to her understanding of the world. She responded, *Ngiyavumelana no-Anti. Kuhle ukufunda; kukufundisa izinto* (I agree with Aunt, knowing how to read is good because it teaches you many things).

Likewise, Dudu’s answers in the expository text show that she comprehended the text and could answer a variety of questions. For example, in her response to the question where she had to ask a friend a question to check if the friend understood the text, Dudu asked this question: *Why is it difficult to remold dry mud cows?* The text only mentions that it is easy to make new shapes with soft clay; there is no mention of mud cows. This question demonstrates that not only could Dudu make an inference from the text, but she could also
draw from her background knowledge since she indicated that she had seen boys in her area make clay cows. However, it was her answer about the main message of the text that was more impressive. Dudu explained, *Umbhali ufuna sazi ukuthi izinto ziguquka kanjani, mhlawumbe senze nama-experiement nathi* (The author wants us to know how things change, and perhaps make our own experiments). As this statement indicates, Dudu viewed reading as gaining knowledge, which could be applied beyond the context of the text.

In sum, Dudu’s reading performance in both texts shows that her ability to connect the texts to her background knowledge and personal experiences enhanced her understanding of the texts. Furthermore, the fact that there was distortion of information in a few cases where there was discrepancy between the content and her background knowledge as was the case with the volcano topic indicates that such inconsistencies can adversely affect comprehension.

**Muzi: Used pictorial cues to scaffold comprehension in the expository text.**

Although Muzi used a range of strategies to comprehend the narrative and the expository texts, in the expository text he seemed to use pictures more. Despite this, at the beginning, when I asked him to read the title of the narrative text and share with me what he thought the story might be about, Muzi focused on the picture on the book cover, ignoring the title. Using the picture, he stated that the book might be about a girl and her grandmother dancing on the street, predictions that were relevant to some parts of the story. On the other hand, his comments about the picture on the cover of the expository text indicate that he used little information from the illustration. He simply said, *Ikhuluma ngomlilo.* (It talks about fire). However, once we started the picture walk, Muzi began to talk, showing that he could use the pictures to figure out the content.

That Muzi seemed to depend on the pictures in the expository text is further evidenced by his think-aloud statements. Seventeen out of 31 think-alouds were based on the
illustrations. In fact, I noted that after reading a segment, before he could share his think-
aloud comments with me; he would keep quiet for a few seconds and look closely at the
pictures, and sometimes refer specifically to a picture. For instance, after reading a segment
about how materials change from one state to another, he said, *Uma i-ayisi uwubeka elangeni, uyancibilika ube amanzi* (When you expose ice to the sun, it becomes water). When
I asked him if he had more to say, pointing at the picture, he added, *Njengalapha emanzini nanti ilanga no-iayisi uyancibilika emanzini nasematsheni*. (Like in this picture, you can see
that the ice in the water and on the stones is melting). He went on to explain that he knew this
because he saw it every day when they add ice to a drink at home.

Likewise, Muzi used the pictures when he talked about melting and solidifying
materials. In fact, before he read the segment about a volcano, he looked at the volcano
picture and commented that the picture looked like a volcano. After he had finished reading
the segment, he only talked about the volcano despite the fact that the segment also addressed
other materials that cool after either freezing or erupting. As he was talking about the
volcano, he showed me the rocks in the picture, saying, *Miss, njengala matshe aseqinile manje*. (Teacher [researcher], like these rocks, they are hard now). He went on to explain,
*Ngike ngiyibone. Kuyavezwa kuyiTV, kuyiDish u-150 noma u-153* (I have seen volcanos.
They show them on TV, in channel 150 or 153). This example shows that the pictures and the
fact that he had seen documentaries helped to enhance Muzi’s comprehension of the text.

Unlike in the expository text, in the think-alouds in the narrative text, Muzi seemed to
prefer paraphrasing which allowed him to build on his background knowledge. Seventeen of
his think-alouds were paraphrased version of the text and 11 were based on his personal
background knowledge. Like Dudu, he only used his background knowledge after I had
probed. For instance, it was after he had read and restated the part that introduces Sarie’s
reading problem that he connected Sarie’s fear of reading aloud to his knowledge about the
experiences that struggling students undergo. He explained, *Uma ubukwa iklasi lonke uma ubheda zikuhleke izingane bese umuntu ezizwa esaba* (When someone is reading aloud and misread some words, and other students laugh at him or her, he or she gets scared). Similarly, Muzi restated the segment about Sarie’s family working hard in a farm and only connected it to his general knowledge about what tired people do after I had probed. He stated, *Uma lishisa ilanga futhi abantu bekhathele, baphumula ngaphansi kwesihlahla njengoba senza ekhaya* (People rest under the shadow of the sun after working hard like we do at home).

Likewise, when Muzi retold the narrative text, he did not flip the pages; he simply recalled the story from his memory. Like Noma and Dudu, he mentioned all the key plot episodes: the problem—Sarie could not read; the actions to solve the problem—Sarie practiced reading with Aunt; the failed attempt at resolving the problem—Sarie unsuccessfully tried to read in class after several reading sessions with Aunt; the solution to the problem—Sarie finally learned to read; and the ending—Aunt’s joy at the fact that Sarie could read. Although Muzi mentioned some of the details, he omitted the setting and the names of the students who used to tease Sarie when she struggled to read. Like the other students, he did not mention that the book that Sarie found was about a Cinderella story. It was only after I had asked him if he had more to say that he remarked, *Le ndaba kaCinderella; indaba yamantombazane leyo kodwa* (Oh! the Cinderella story, this is a girl’s story)—an interesting comment showing how reading can be gendered.

Just as he did with the think-alouds in the expository text, Muzi also used pictures as scaffolds when he answered the comprehension questions. For instance, to a question that required him to explain to his mother why some countries in Europe have boiling mud pools, he pointed at the picture before answering, *Isitimu siyaqhuma bese kuphuma amanzi awudaka* (The steam bubbles through the soil and then we end up with mud pools). Likewise, to a question where he had to ask a friend a question to find out if the friend had understood
the text, Muzi indicated that he would ask this question: *Amanzi aguquka kanjani isimo sawo uma uwafaka enkomishini* (How does water change its shape if you pour it into a cup?) When I asked him why this was a good question, pointing at the glass in the picture, he said, *Njengala eglasini, uzobona naye ukuthi amanzi azofana nesimo seglasi* (Like water in this glass, he will see that the water takes the shape of the glass). Similarly, when he explained the main message of the author, he kept on flipping the pages, citing the processes illustrated in the pictures as the messages that the author wanted him to know. In brief, these examples provide evidence that the pictures played a significant role in Muzi’s comprehension of the expository text. He did not rely on a mixture of his own world knowledge and that of the text. Perhaps this is because some of the concepts he was learning were new to him and he did not see the connection to the world around him.

To sum up, the fact that Muzi seemed to use pictures as the main scaffold in the expository text and paraphrasing in the narrative text to facilitate his comprehension of the texts shows that students may use different strategies, depending on the genres. In Muzi’s case, it could be that he found the concepts in the expository text easier to follow if he used pictures; on the other hand, paraphrasing helped him to stay close to the meaning and message in the narrative text.

*S’khona: Poor reading comprehension in the narrative and expository texts.* Similar to his oral reading of the narrative and expository texts, S’khona’s reading comprehension of these texts was poor. In general, his engagement with the different tasks shows that he did not comprehend most parts of the texts. In fact, he appeared to compensate for this by relying on the pictures and random use of his background knowledge. Because he failed to connect these strategies to the printed words in the texts, these strategies did not help him much. For instance, his predictions about the content of the narrative text based on the title and the picture walk became futile when he failed to read and understand the text as demonstrated by
some of his think-aloud statements. For example, although S’khona had predicted that an old book that Sarie found in an old car might be about two children playing a wedding: *Angazi, Miss, mhlawumbe lapha laba badlala umshado* (I’m not sure teacher, but I think these children here are playing a wedding), after he had read a part about this information, he explained that the book reminded him of the 2010 Soccer World Cup when South Africa had many visitors. There is nothing in the story that alludes to this. Likewise, after reading a segment that talks about the solution of the problem—when Sarie finally learned to read, S’khona made reference to people having trouble with water. Seemingly, upon seeing the picture of a windmill in the book, he thought that Aunt and Sarie had a problem with water as well. Although this might be due to the fact that in his area windmills were once used to help people with water problem before the water taps were installed, it has nothing to do with the story. Evidently, his use of the picture and his background knowledge was not relevant.

However, on a few occasions, S’khona used his background knowledge appropriately. For example, after reading a part that introduces Sarie’s reading problem, he immediately connected Sarie’s struggle to his own reading problems, explaining that like Sarie, *Ngesaba ukungingiza phambi kothisha nezinye izingane* (I am afraid to read hesitantly in front of the teacher and other students). Although this statement shows that he understood this part of the story; that he failed to understand the subsequent parts of the text undermined this effort. For instance, he did not understand the part where the teacher encouraged Sarie to try again when she tried to read aloud in class but failed. In his think-aloud, S’khona said, *Mhlawumbe uthisha uthethisa le ngane ufuna ifunde kakhulu.* (Perhaps the teacher is scolding Sarie. He wants her to read aloud audibly). Evidently, S’khona seemed to have relied on his personal experience because his own teacher would scold students when they read softly. In this situation he related to what he was reading about at a personal level.
Just as S’khona struggled to connect the pictures and his background knowledge to the printed words in the narrative text, the struggle was even harder with the expository text. In fact, compared to the narrative text, S’khona seemed to rely more on the pictures and his background knowledge. For instance, although in his think aloud statements S’khona pointed out that the melting in the picture reminded him of one afternoon when there was hail and the hail stones turned into water once they got heated by the sun, after he had read a part that describes how ice and snow change into water when they heat up, he failed to connect his comment to the text. He continued to talk about the hail stones, explaining how dangerous they are and made no reference to the melting. He said, *Isichotho sibi sibulala amafasitela ezimoto nokudla emasimini* (Hail stones are bad; they destroy car windows and crops in the fields). S’khona never addressed the question of melting that was important since this part was about this change.

Similar to his think-alouds in the expository text, S’khona’s answers to the reading comprehension questions show that his comprehension had gaps that could not be compensated by the pictures and background knowledge. For example, in response to the question where he had to explain to his friend the meaning of the word “solution”, after a long pause, he simply said, *Angazi*. (I don’t know). Given that he struggled with the explicit text-based question like this one, it was no surprise that he failed to answer most inferential questions. For instance, in response to the question where he had to explain to his mother why some countries in Europe have boiling mud pools, he said, *Amanzi aba maningi bese ayaqhuma njengalapho kuna khona izulu*. (There is too much water on the ground; as a result, the water bubbles through the soil, like when there has been too much rain). This answer shows that S’khona did not understand the concept of water vapor in the ground; that is, as a result of the heat underground, water can change into water vapor and force its way through the mud, causing boiling mud pools.
In summary, the fact that S’khona seemed to have comprehended very little in both texts is not surprising given that he struggled remarkably with decoding the texts as demonstrated by the miscue analysis. In other words, his access to the printed word limited his ability to access meaning. He also seemed to have very limited repair skills; that is, when he gets in trouble, unlike a good reader, he does not know how to repair the problem. As a result, most of the time, not even the pictures and background knowledge could help him. However, the fact that sometimes he could use these two strategies successfully shows that they were a good scaffold, but not sufficient. Overall, S’khona needed to learn to decode words and monitor his reading in order to be able to access meaning.

Zulu Writing Tasks

As mentioned in chapter 3, I assessed the students only on narrative writing. Similar to the reading assessments, I started by modeling to the students what I wanted them to do. Using pictures with hidden words, I told a story. I then asked the students to tell me how the pictures helped them to understand the story. I probed to make sure that they understood the story. In cases where some students were confused, I clarified the confusion. The use of the pictures and the oral telling of the story served as a means for organizing the author’s thoughts and served as a scaffold. Following this, I asked the students to do the same. They looked at the pictures I showed them and then told a story based on the pictures. The pictures were about the FIFA World Cup 2010 closing ceremony in Soccer City in Johannesburg. In cases where I was confused about their story, I asked the students questions for clarification. After this, I asked them to write down the story, giving as much details as possible. In assessing the students’ writing, I used the features discussed in chapter 3.

Overall, table 4 demonstrates that only Dudu performed at grade level. Noma’s performance showed that she was approaching grade-level. On the other hand, Muzi and S’khona performed well below grade level. In addition, all the students’ writing showed the
influence of English on Zulu. Although most of this occurred at a lexical level through code-mixing and lexical borrowings, on some occasions, it also involved transfer of English phonological and morphological features into Zulu words. In the follow section I discuss the students’ writing in detail.

Table 5

*Ratings of Zulu Writing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grammar/</th>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Ideas</th>
<th>Linguistic Transfer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noma</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dudu</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muzi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S'khona</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 4 – grade level; 3 – Approaching grade level; 2 – Developing competence; 1 – Below grade level

Noma: *Provided limited details in writing than in oral telling.* Unlike in the oral telling of the story where Noma provided details about most of the pictures, in writing she omitted many of the details. (See table 6). For example, in her oral telling, right from the beginning, she gave a good lead in the introduction: *I*South Africa yayingakaze ibuzwe ubumnandi obungaka. Izivakashi eziningi kangaka kanye namastadiums amahle kanjena kwenza sijabule kakhulu futhi siziqhenye ngezwe lethu (South Africa had never experienced
so much joy. Many visitors and new stadiums made us proud of our country). This is in contrast to her written introduction where there is only one sentence.

Similar to the introductory paragraph in the written text, the middle paragraphs had scanty information despite the elaborate ideas in the oral retelling. For instance, while in the oral telling Noma added many facts about Ladysmith Black Mambazo, one of the groups that sang during the World Cup closing ceremony; in her writing she simply mentioned the kind of dance they did (See 6b. in table 6). Because Noma tended to omit details in her writing, most of her paragraphs were short; they ranged between a sentence and 3 sentences (See table 6). Surprisingly, the last paragraph about the last picture was long (See 6e in table 6.). However, instead of writing about the topic depicted on the picture—the display of the fireworks that took place at the end of the closing game, Noma talked about the opening ceremony, explained how South Africa won the opening game against Mexico. In addition, she provided details, mentioning the name of the goal scorer, the score, the different stadiums where people watched the games, and how people felt. Evidently, the fact that Noma could provide details as shown in this paragraph demonstrates that sometimes she was able to hold the organization that she had in the oral retelling in her writing.

Although the paragraph in 6e table 6 has longer sentences that helped Noma to express complex ideas, most of them are not properly punctuated. For example, between the sentence *I World cup yadlalelwa ezindaweni eziningi and Yadlalelwa ezindaweni eziningi yadlalelwa e-Orlando, Mabhida, naseSoccer City* (The World Cup was played in many stadiums and It was played in the Orlando, Mabhida, and Soccer City stadiums) there should have been a period or a semi-colon. The prevalence of sentences such as this one suggests that Noma was still in the process of learning about sentence structures.

In addition, sometimes Noma wrote words as individual morphemes, detaching morphemes from the roots and verb stems. Unlike in English where most morphemes can
stand as independent words, in Zulu, an agglutinative language, most morphemes are attached to roots or stems. In violation of this principle, Noma wrote sentences like this one: Abantu base South Africa bajabula kabi ngokufika kuka Shakira e suka e South America eza e South Africa. (South African people were happy that Sharika from South America visited South Africa). In this sentence base (of) should be attached to the noun South Africa, hence baseSouth Africa, kuka (of) to Shakira, therefore, kukaShakira, e (from) to suka (come), and thus esuka (coming from), and e (in) to South Africa, and hence eSouth Africa (in South Africa). All these examples show a consistent pattern: Noma did not attach the preposition to the stem. In other words, she treated Zulu prepositions as if they were English prepositions. Evidently, her transfer of the English knowledge into Zulu did not serve her well in this case.

In sum, Noma’s performance in writing suggests that while she knows how to present details in oral language, she should improve on doing this in her writing. She also needs to learn to follow the conventional way of writing words in Zulu. To overcome these challenges, she needs instruction that encourages extended writing where she can practice these skills instead of instruction that focuses on short guided and structured practice exercises, as it was often the case in this class.
### Table 6

**Table 6**

*Table 6: Noma’s Oral and Written Texts in Zulu*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral text</th>
<th>Written text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6a.</strong> <em>ISouth Africa yayingakaze ibuzwe ubumnandi obungaka. Izivakashi ezingi kangaka kanye namastadiums amahle kanjena kwenza sijabule kakhulu futhi siziqhenye ngezwe lethu. Futhi nezwe lethu laduma umhlaba wonke. (South Africa had never experienced so much joy. Many visitors and new stadiums made us proud of our country and our country became known throughout the world).</em></td>
<td><strong>6a.</strong> <em>Ngenkathi kuvulwa I world cup e South Africa kwakukhona abaculi abehlukene njengo 1 Shakira 2 Bug Nuz (Tira) R R.</em> (During the opening ceremony of the World Cup there were different singers such as 1 Shakira 2 Bug Nuz (Tira) R R.)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6b.</strong> <em>ILadsymith Black Mambazo iqembu elidume kakhulu. Licula naphesheya futhi nomholi wabo uShabalala. Badume ngengoma ethi Homeless kodwa ngeWorld Cup bacula lena ethi Beautiful Rain (Ladysmith Black Mambazo is a famous group. They also sing abroad with their leader Mr. Shabalala. They are famous for the song Homeless, but during the World Cup they sang Beautiful Rain).</em></td>
<td><strong>6b.</strong> <em>Kukhona abanye abantu abenza ukuthi abantu bajabule, basina (They were other groups that made people happy they did traditional dance).</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6c.</strong> <em>Kwakumnadi nge-World Cup. Kwakukhona abantu abaningi ezweni lethu. Nabaculi bekwaito bacula kahle oMampintsha, Bacula amaculo abo adumile. Kwaba mnandi impela. (We really had a good time during the World Cup. Many kwaito singers sang their famous songs. The songs entertained people who did not know kwaito. We really had fun.)</em></td>
<td><strong>6c.</strong> <em>UTira no Mampintsha bona a baculi abadumile endaweni yase South Africa. Abacula amaculo ekwaito nabo futhi benza abantu abasivakashele bajabule. (Tira and Mampintsha are famous kwaito singers. They sang kwaito songs and everyone was happy.)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(There were many singers who performed traditional dance; some were wearing traditional men’s skirts, beads, and other traditional ornaments. They entertained our guests. The groups represented different South African ethnic groups).

6e. No oral rendition of the text.

6e. I World Cup yadlalelwa ezindaweni eziningi Yadlalelwa e-Orlando, Mabhida, nase Soccer City. Amaqembu aqala ukudlala kwakuyi South Africa ne Mexico. Ngalelo langa I South Africa yawina Sawina ngo 2-1. UShabalala wakora Abantu sabezwa beshaya a ma vuvuzela Abanye bejabule (The World Cup was played in many stadiums It was played in the Orlando, Mabhida, and Soccer City stadiums. Groups that played first were South Africa and Mexico We won by 2-1. Shabalala scored the goal. People blew vuvuzelas (horns) They were happy).

**Dudu: Used oral telling as an effective scaffold.** Unlike Noma, who, in her writing of the story, omitted many of the details she mentioned in her oral telling, Dudu included most of the facts she mentioned during the oral telling in her writing (See table 7). For example, in her oral telling and written text, Dudu mentioned that Shakira is a famous singer who perfomed during the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup that was held in South Africa. She also
gave details about the song. Similarly, when Dudu talked about BigNuz, another group, she provided details about the group in both oral and written rendition of the story. For example, in addition to mentioning the song that the group sang during the ceremony, she indicated that the song was one of the songs that was played during the New Year’s celebrations.

Table 7

*Dudu’s Oral and Written Texts in Zulu*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral text</th>
<th>Written text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>7a.</strong> UShakira umculi waphesheya odumile futhi usuka eSouth America. Yena neqembu lakhe bacula noZolani ingoma ethi Wakawaka. Lengoma yakhe wayithathela emasotsheni. Bacula kahle kakhulu bawina. Sonke sajabula (Shakira is a famous singer from abroad in South America. She sang with Zolani and the name of the song was WAKAWAKA. She adapted this song from a song once sung by soldiers. Shakira and her group sang very well. We were all happy).**</td>
<td><strong>7a.</strong> UShakira noZolani nabanye ababecula nabo becula emva kwecWWorld Cup ngoba babenza ubumnandi. Babeyiqembu becula iculo elithi WAKA WAKA. UShakira yena wayasuka phesheya ezocula emzansi khona iculo lakhe lizophuma kuyi-World Cup (Shakira and Zolani and others sang during the closing ceremony of the World Cup. They entertained us. Shakira's group sang the song WAKA WAKA. Shakira came from abroad and wanted to make her song famous by singing in the World Cup).**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**7b. Omapintsha noMashesha bacula iculo labo abadume ngalo elithi Umlilo. Leli cula lahlukenisa unyaka ngabo bonke abantu babelithanda kakhulu (Mampintsha and Mashesha sang the song Umlilo. This song [Umlilo] was sung during the New Year's celebrations because many people liked it.** | **7b. Kwaphinda kwangena elinye iqembu elibizwa ngokuthi iBigNuz. Bona bacula iculo elithi uMlilo. Leli cula lahlukenisa unyaka okusho ukuthi ilona elaba unamba 1 kuwo wonke amaculo ekwai aseMzansi/South Africa. (Another group known as BigNuz came to the stage. They sang the song known as Umlilo. This song was sung during the New Year’s celebrations, which means that it was a number one song of all kwaito songs in South Africa).** |

Table 7 (continued)
Dudu’s paragraphs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7 (continued)</th>
<th>Dudu’s paragraphs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For paragraphs 1 and 2 see 7a and 7b above. Paragraphs 3, 4, and 5 continue below.</td>
<td>For paragraphs 1 and 2 see 7a and 7b above. Paragraphs 3, 4, and 5 continue below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7c. Kwaphinda kwacula abanye bona babezocula isicathamiya. Iqembu labo kuthiwa iBlack Mambazo. Bawina iAward futhi banamanye amaawards amaningi. Umholi wabo uJoseph Shabalala yena waziwa phesheya ngomculo wakhe. NgeWorld Cup bacula iBeautiful rain.</td>
<td>(Another group took the stage; they sang isicathamiya. The group’s name is Ladysmith Black Mambazo. They have won many awards. Their leader is Joseph Shabalala. He is also known abroad for his music. During the World Cup, they sang Beautiful rain).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7d. Kwangena nabanye ababezokwenza umgido. Babegida ngendlela efanayo benza ngamacultures. Bethi uma beqeda ukugida kungene abanye khona umcimbi uzobamnandi. Nabo babecula eSoccer City</td>
<td>(Other groups that danced traditional dance took the stage. They displayed dances from their cultures. The groups took turns in show casing their dance, and this made watching the dance interesting).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7e. Kwathi bonke abaculi oShakira noZolani oBlack Mambazo oBig Nuz abagidayo sebeqede ukucula kwaqhuma amacricat kwaba kuhle kakhulu. Phela ngalelo langa kwakudlala iSpain neNetherlands bona babekwi final. ISpain sawina sibhaxabula iNetherlands ngo1 nil. Kwathi sebephakamisa indebe kwaqhuma amacricat. ISpain sawina indebe yeFIFA World Cup kwaphela kanjalo.</td>
<td>(When all the singers had performed: Shakira and Zolani, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, BigNuz and traditional dancers; it was time for the fireworks. On that day, the final match was between Spain and Netherlands. Spain won by 1-0, whipping Netherlands. When the players lifted the Cup, the fireworks were all over the stadium. Spain won the Cup and that was the end of the FIFA World Cup).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not only did Dudu share the details in her writing compared to the other students, but she also organized her writing systematically. (See table 7c). Each paragraph concentrated on a single idea and started with a topic sentence that was followed by the details. For instance, the first paragraph focused on Shakira’s group, the second one dealt with the BigNuz group, the third one was on Ladysmith Black Mambazo, the next one was on the traditional music group, and the final one was about the display of the fireworks, marking the end of the closing ceremony and the story. (See table 7). Surprisingly, the only paragraph she did not
have was the introduction. Given the fact that in her oral telling she had introduced the story by providing the summary of the ceremony, it is not clear why in her writing she said nothing to introduce the story. Nonetheless, this omission does not take away Dudu’s ability to present the story systematically, a fact that is further evidenced by the transitional words she used at the beginning of every paragraph. For example, in two of the paragraphs as shown in table 7, she started with the word *Kwaphinde*, which translates as *another*. Dudu’s ability to present the story systematically made the story easy to follow and engaging.

Although Dudu wrote a longer story and used a variety of sentence structures, including compound and complex sentences, sometimes the sentences were poorly punctuated. Some were like a chain of sentences as illustrated by this sentence: *Kwangena nabanye ababezokwenza umgido abanye babeshaya izandla abanye beshaya amadrums.* (Another group that was performing a traditional dance came to the stage some of the group members were clapping hands others were playing drums). The different independent clauses in this sentence should have been marked, for example, by semi-colons. Dudu’s failure to do so suggests that she may not be aware of this.

Overall, Dudu’s performance shows that oral language could be used as a tool to encourage students to explore ideas, activate prior knowledge, and engage with the text in a way that supports their writing. Furthermore, that she performed better than the other students may not be a coincidence. In one of the interviews, she reported that she and her sister sometimes wrote notes to one another. This playful literacy practice may have given her additional practice at home, which, in turn, gave her an edge over the other students.

**Muzi and S’khona: Demonstrated poorly developed ideas and organization.** While Noma and Dudu were able to build on their oral telling of the story in their writing—albeit to varying degrees, Muzi and S’khona failed to do so despite the fact that they talked as much as Noma and Dudu, incorporating their general knowledge into the content displayed on the
pictures. For example, when Muzi talked about the BigNuz, one of the music groups shown on the pictures, not only did he mention the song that the group sang during the ceremony, but he also shared some details about the group, explaining the kind of music they sang and the awards they had won. In his written text, this information was lost. (See 8a in table 8).

Table 8

Muzi’s Oral and Written Texts in Zulu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral text</th>
<th>Written text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8a. <em>IBigNuz iqembu likaTira nabangane bakhe. Bacula ikwaito futhi bayiqembu elidumile lasethekwini. Futhi bawine iMTN award kulo nyaka</em> (BigNuz is Tira’s and his friends group. They sing kwaino music, and they are from Durban. This year, they won an MTN award).</td>
<td>8a. <em>Lapha kwenzeka lokhu iBignuz icula ngeworld cup amagama abo omampintsha nabanye</em> (Here is what is happening here Bignuz sang during the world cup).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Muzi’s paragraph

8b. *Lana kwenzeka lokhu UChakira ucula noZolani bacula ngeWorld cup. Lapha kwenzeka lokhu Abaculi abashaya i-ogeni nophethe imacrophone nophethe isigingci. Lapha kwenzeka lokhu abafana abashaya ingoma abagqoke amabheshu nokunye okunungi. Lapha ngibona amacricet eghuma stadium eSoccer City.* (Here is what is happening here Chakira and Zolani are singing they are singing during the World Cup. Here is what is happening here the singers are playing an organ one is holding a microphone another one is playing a guitar. Here I see boys dancing traditional dance also wearing traditional men’s skirts and other things. Here I see cricet [fireworks] all over the Soccer City stadium.

Like Muzi, S’khona failed to capture the details he knew about the topics on the pictures in his writing although he was able to do so in his oral telling. For instance, in the
written text, he simply mentioned that Ladysmith Black Mambazo sang during the World
Cup but did not provide the details he mentioned in his oral telling. (See 9a in table 9).

Table 9

*S’khona’s Oral and Written Texts in Zulu*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral text</th>
<th>Written text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9a. IBhecamambazo yacula nayo ngomcimbi.</td>
<td>9a. <em>lapha ibhecamambazo yacula</em> (Here another singer was bhecamambazo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ngithanda iculo labo lapho bethi Homeless.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ngithanda ibhesi kakhulu.</em> (Ladysmith Black Mambazo also sang during the ceremony. I like their song Homeless. I particularly like the bass part).*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S’khona’s paragraph

9b. *Kungikhumbuza lapho kungumcimbi esocasithi lapha kucula abaculi igama lalona wokuqala ukushacil wayecula. ingoma iwakawaka omunye uDJ thila ingoma yakhe ibhiginazi. Lapha omonye umculi owacula lapha ibhecamambazo yacula namanye anaqembu. Kwadlalwa ibhola kwawina isipein ngo1-0 lapha sebewinile banikwa amamedali nabadiwe nabo futhi bathola Kwakumnandi ngo2010.* (This [the picture] is about the ceremony at the soccer city when different singers sang there the name of the first one is shacil she was singing. her song wakawaka the other singer is DJ thila his song is biginazi. Here another singer was bhecamambazo here we see other singers. Soccer players played soccer spein [for Spain] won by 1-0 here they have won and are receiving medals those who did not win also got medals. 2010 was good). In fact, not only did Muzi’s and S’khona’s written texts have scanty information, both of them wrote one or two sentences as captions for each picture, comparable to what would be generated in their classroom. As a result, sometimes there was no clear connection
between the ideas in the story as shown on the tables. Furthermore, their sentences were poorly punctuated. There are no commas, semi-colons, and colons where these markers are required. In addition, Muzi used indexical language to introduce each idea in the pictures as illustrated by this phrase: *Lapha kwenze ka lokhu* (Here is what is happening here). He did not seem to have knowledge of transitional or connecting words. In brief, these examples show that Muzi struggled with expressing his ideas in writing and lack some of the basic mechanical writing skills.

Like Muzi, when Skhona introduced his story, he wrote, *Kungikhumbuzo . . .* (This [the picture . . .). In addition, his sentences are poorly punctuated—there are no commas, semi-colons, and colons where these markers are required. Furthermore, S’khona did not use capital letters for the names of people and songs. In fact, instead of retaining some of the proper names in English, he adapted them to the Zulu phonology, morphology, and syllabic structure. For example, he wrote *BigNuz* as *ibhiginazi* and *Soccer City* as *esocasithi*. In the first word, not only did he add the prefix *i-* to the noun *BigNuz*, but he also suffixed the vowel -i, hence *BigNuz* became *ibhiginazi*. The prefix and the suffix used in this noun are consistent with the morphological and syllabic structure of Zulu words—most Zulu words attach prefixes and suffixes to the stem and end with a vowel. This example shows that S’khona transferred his knowledge of Zulu into English when writing some of the words, illustrating that bilinguals’ language are in constant interaction with one another. In addition, that he wanted to keep everything in Zulu suggests that he did not seem to understand the idea of lexical borrowing, such as in the names of people or places. At the very least, he appeared to think of it as not permissible.

Overall, the fact that Muzi and S’khona did as well as Dudu and Noma in their oral telling of the story but struggled with writing indicates that the problem has to do with poorly developed writing skills. It is not that the students lacked ideas and had poor background
knowledge to enhance their writing. Evidently, the performance of these students underscores the significance of teaching writing in contexts that promote use of extended language.

**Summary of students’ performance in Zulu reading and writing tasks.** Overall, the students’ performance in the oral reading of the Zulu narrative and expository texts shows that, in general, they read fluently and decoded the texts well, with an exception of S’khona who struggled with these skills. Of significance is the fact that they seemed to be monitoring their reading and reading for meaning, as evidenced by the high number of meaning-preserving miscues they made, some in critical areas—areas that significantly affect the structure and the meaning of the texts.

However, unlike Dudu and Muzi who maintained reading for meaning across the genres, Noma’s oral reading in the expository texts was somewhat weaker than in the narrative text: she was not as fluent and tended to make more meaning-changing miscues. As mentioned earlier, this may have been due to the fact that she was encountering most of the low frequency content words and concepts in the written Zulu language for the first time since she was receiving formal literacy instruction in Zulu for the first time in the 4th grade. In other words, her lack of exposure to the written Zulu language, especially low frequency words, may have affected her word recognition. This raises an interesting question: If exposure to the written language facilitates oral reading as shown by Dudu’s and Muzi’s cases, one wonders what to make of S’khona’s case. S’khona, who had been exposed to literacy in Zulu since grade R, read both genres with great difficulty and made more meaning-changing miscues. Evidently, while Noma’s case points to the role of exposure to written language; S’khona’s case underscores the significance of instruction that better meets his literacy needs in phonics, other word recognition strategies, and opportunities to practice reading in a low affective filter environment.
To some degree, the students’ performance in the reading comprehension tasks in the two genres corresponded with their oral reading in these genres. Dudu, who read the texts well, performed well in almost all the comprehension tasks. Similarly, Noma, who made more meaning-changing miscues in the oral reading of the expository text, also struggled with performing some of the reading comprehension tasks in the expository text. In large part, this was due to her tendency to use irrelevant background knowledge, especially the overdependence on her background knowledge. Noma kept on mentioning that she knew that when water is poured into a container, the water takes the shape of the container to which it was poured, and applied this knowledge to other change processes to which it did not fit. Possibly, this was a compensatory strategy: She was trying to make up for the fact that she did not understand some concepts in the text.

S’khona, who had a great difficulty in decoding and reading fluently both texts, also battled with performing the different comprehension tasks. In what appears to be a compensatory strategy, he resorted to over relying on the pictures and his background knowledge. While in some cases these strategies helped him to engage with the texts, in many occasions, they failed him. Most of the time, he could not tie his background knowledge to the text nor could he relate the pictures to the content, most probably because he did not decode most parts of the texts correctly in the first place. Interestingly, Muzi, who decoded and read both genres fluently seemed to rely on the pictures just like S’khona, but only in the expository text. Most of his answers in the expository text showed that he had not understood the details of the change processes discussed in the text, most probably because some of the concepts were unfamiliar. Overall, with the exception of Dudu, the students’ performance in the reading comprehension tasks suggests that they could benefit from instruction focused on how to monitor their reading.
Just like in the reading tasks, the students’ performance in the writing tasks varied. In general, Noma and Dudu performed at the grade-level—although to varying degrees. On the other hand, Muzi and S’khona performed below the grade-level. To a large extent, Noma’s and Dudu’s ability to build on their oral telling when writing—although to varying degrees, with Noma providing less details than Dudu—contributed to their essays being better. On the other hand, although Muzi and S’khona talked as much as Noma and Dudu during their oral telling of the story, they failed to integrate the information they had share orally into their writing. As a result, their essays were short and had almost no details. In fact, they used sentences as captions for the pictures; they did not narrate a story. In addition, they failed to show the connection between the sentences: the sentences read like a list of unrelated sentences. Consequently, their stories were incoherent. Moreover, their use of indexical language such as this as *In this picture or that as in* *That group* did not help. They needed to transform these indexical features into appropriate lexical items, which are not dependent on the interactional context.

Despite the differences among the students’ writing, they all seemed to have a problem with punctuation, especially punctuating independent clauses when they occurred next to each other. As a result, some of the sentences ended up being run-on sentences. In some cases, the students, with the exception of Dudu, also used capital letters randomly, suggesting that they may not be sure how and where to use capital letters. Furthermore, although there was little evidence of the influence of English on Zulu during the oral telling and writing, on a few occasions, I observed that the students would use code-mixing and lexical borrowings, especially when they talked about the fireworks and some music instruments. For example, some of them mentioned *ukuqhuma kukacricket* (the cracking of the crickets) and *umculi odlala i-organ* (a singer who plays an organ). This may be due to the fact that these things are not part of their culture. While most of the transfer occurred at a
lexical level, only Noma and S’khona showed transfer at a phonological and morphological level. For example, instead of attaching morphemes to the stems, especially the prepositions, Noma wrote them as independent words, the same way one would do in English. Zulu, being an agglutinative language, requires that most of the morphemes be prefixed or suffixed to the stems. In this respect, the fact that the students failed to keep their languages discretely separate, even in writing, illustrates that bilinguals’ languages are in constant interaction with one another.

**English Reading Tasks**

The students read a narrative text, *At The Crossroads* (Isadora, 1991) and an expository text, *Changing Materials* (Oxlade, 2008). The narrative text is about children in a South African village who patiently and excitedly wait at the crossroads for the return of their fathers who have been away working in the mines for 10 months. After a long wait—the whole day and the whole night; at dawn, the fathers finally arrive, bringing gifts and joy to their children and families. On the other hand, the expository text focuses on change processes, such as how some materials dissolve when added into liquid, and how others change forever when heated.

Similar to Zulu, before reading each of the texts, the students briefly talked about the texts using the title and the pictures in the texts. After this, they read the texts orally, stopping at designated areas to share their think-alouds with me and answer the reading comprehension questions. Except for the think-alouds, I did not allow the students to use the texts when answering the comprehension questions.

**Oral reading in English.** Table 5 shows the students’ performance in the oral reading of the narrative and the expository texts. Like in Zulu, the students’ oral reading ranged from instructional to independent levels (Gillet & Temple, 1990), with an exception of S’khona
who read at the frustration level. The following discussion shows how similar and how
different were the students’ oral reading of the texts.
Table 10

Types of Students’ Miscues in the English Narrative and Expository Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miscues</th>
<th>Noma Nar/Expo</th>
<th>Dudu Nar/Expo</th>
<th>Muzi Nar/Expo</th>
<th>S’khona Nar/Expo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of insertions (meaning preserving)</td>
<td>1(9%)/1(10%)</td>
<td>0%/0%</td>
<td>0(0%)/0(0%)</td>
<td>9(10%)/0/0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of insertions (meaning changing)</td>
<td>0(0%)/0(0%)</td>
<td>0%/0%</td>
<td>1(7%)/1(4%)</td>
<td>0(0%)/4(5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of omissions (meaning preserving)</td>
<td>5(46%)/4(40%)</td>
<td>2(40%)/4(50%)</td>
<td>4(27%)/5(19%)</td>
<td>9(10%)/11(13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of omissions (meaning changing)</td>
<td>0(0%)/0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)/0%</td>
<td>2(13%)/4(15%)</td>
<td>13(15%)/12(14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of substitutions (meaning preserving)</td>
<td>2(18%)/1(10%)</td>
<td>1(20%)/2(25%)</td>
<td>2(13%)/2(8%)</td>
<td>6(7%)/4(5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of substitutions (meaning changing)</td>
<td>3(27%)/4(40%)</td>
<td>2(40%)/2(25%)</td>
<td>6(40%)/14(54%)</td>
<td>52(58%)/54(63%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy rate</td>
<td>97%/98%</td>
<td>99%/99%</td>
<td>96%/95%</td>
<td>79%/: 85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of reading minutes</td>
<td>10/12</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>12/15</td>
<td>23/26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of words in the narrative text: 427
Total number of words in the expository text: 584

Noma and Dudu: Decoding words efficiently in the narrative and expository texts.

Noma’s and Dudu’s oral reading of the narrative and expository texts shows that they are efficient readers. While Dudu decoded 99% words accurately in both texts, Noma read 97% and 98% words correctly in the narrative text and expository text respectively. However, both students were not as fluent and expressive in both texts. On a few occasions, they read hesitantly and reread words, especially when they came across difficult words, suggesting that they were monitoring their reading. For example, in the narrative text, although Dudu
first read *rooster* as *roster* in *A rooster crows*, she quickly corrected this miscue, showing that she realized that the miscue was interfering with her comprehension. Likewise, in the expository text, when she corrected *salutation*, which she had read instead of *solution* in *The mixture of the salt and sugar is called “solution”*, she demonstrated that she was paying attention to the meaning of the text. This correction was important because “solution” is one of the key words in understanding the dissolving process discussed in the text.

Similarly, Noma’s self-correction demonstrated that she was monitoring her reading and focusing on meaning. In fact, I noted that in some cases she would read a word incorrectly when she first met it, but in subsequent encounters, she would get it right—it was as if the word had been recycled in her mind. For instance, when she first encountered *heated* in *When some materials are heated, they get softer and softer before turning into liquid*, she read it as *hate*; however, in the following parts of the text, she read the word correctly. The same thing applies to *mold*, which she first read as *meld* in *A chocolate bar is made by pouring hot, runny chocolate into a mold*, but in subsequent encounters read it correctly. Encountering a word several times seems to have improved her recognition of words.

Further evidence that Noma and Dudu were monitoring their reading comes from the fact that most of the miscues they made were meaning-maintaining. Whereas Noma made 73% and 60% meaning-preserving miscues in the narrative text and expository text respectively, Dudu made 60% and 75% meaning-preserving miscues in the narrative text and expository text respectively. With both students most of these miscues involved the omission of the third person singular marker -s in the verb. For instance, in the narrative text, Dudu read *shakes* in *Nomsa shakes her can in rhythm as shake*. Similarly, Noma read *plays* in *Thandeka plays the school drum as play* in the narrative text. In fact, despite the fact that Noma and Dudu encountered the verb *changes* several times in the expository text, each time they read this word, they omitted the -s in the verb. For instance, Dudu omitted the –s in
When a candle burns, the wax in the candle changes forever; this was despite the fact that she had met this word in the previous parts of the text. Their consistent omission of the marker -s in the singular verbs may be due to the fact that in Zulu the subject verb agreement is prefixed to the verb stem and not suffixed like in English, so they did not feel disoriented by this miscue. I also noted that both of them made this omission in their oral language, suggesting that their reading may have been influenced by their oral language proficiency.

In addition to the morphologically-related miscues, Noma and Dudu made miscues that show transfer of some Zulu phonological rules. Unlike the morphologically-based miscues that did not change the semantic meaning of the original words, these miscues altered the meaning of the original words. For example, in the narrative text, Dudu read *dawn* in *It is almost dawn* as *down*, replacing the English phoneme /o:/ in *dawn* with the Zulu phoneme /a/, and thus making the word sound like *down*. Likewise, when Noma read *rooster* in *A rooster crows*, she pronounced it as *roster*, omitting one of the vowels of this diagraph, the same way one would do in Zulu since in Zulu vowels do not occur in juxtaposition; some phonological rule has to take place, including omitting one of the vowels. However, in some cases, I noted that these students confused the English sounds, replacing one English sound with another sound. For instance, when Dudu read the narrative text, she substituted the short phoneme /i/ in “winds as in Warm night winds blow with the long phoneme /ai/ in *winds* as in the verb. Because both students did not make many meaning-changing miscues, these miscues do not seem to have compromised the meaning of the text.

In sum, this discussion shows that although Noma and Dudu are proficient readers who understand that meaning is at the core of reading, somehow their English reading was influenced by their knowledge of Zulu, but this did not interfere with their overall understanding. Teachers with students like Noma and Dudu should engage them in metalinguistic awareness through comparison and contrast of the two languages as to
facilitate their learning of the English language systems (Franken & August, 2011), especially
elements of the two languages that differ from one another.

**Muzi: Needs to pay attention to making sense of the words in both English texts.**

Although Muzi decoded most of the words correctly in the narrative and expository texts as suggested by the accuracy rate of 96% in the narrative text and 95% in the expository text, his oral reading was not fluent and showed little expression. Most of the time, he read word for word and failed to observe the punctuation marks, which made his reading sound like a stream of sounds strung together with no clear beginning or ending. Of significance about his oral reading is the high number of meaning-changing miscues he made in both texts. In the narrative text, 60% miscues were meaning-altering and in the expository text he made 73% meaning-changing miscues.

In both texts, most of these miscues involved the substitution of the vowel in the original word. For example, in the narrative text, Muzi read _shout_ in _Our fathers are coming today!_, _we shout_ as _shut_, substituting the English phoneme /ɔ:/ with the Zulu phoneme /a/, and thus making the word sound like _shut_. Similarly, he mispronounced the phoneme /ei/ in _He shakes his head_ as _shakes_, and read it as a Zulu vowel /a/, causing this word to sound like _shucks_. Likewise, in the expository text, he substituted the phoneme /au/ in _clouds_ in _Clouds are made of tiny droplets of water_ with the Zulu phoneme /o/, thus changing the word to _clods_. To a large extent, these miscues are due to the fact that Zulu does not have diphthongs and long vowels. In other words, Muzi’s transfer of the Zulu phonological rules did not serve him well.

Although in most cases the substitution of the vowel sounds changed the meaning of the original words as shown above, in other cases it led to the formation of nonsense words that distorted the meaning of the original words. For instance, in the narrative text, Muzi read _fallen_ in _Zolani is little and has fallen asleep_ as _fullen_ and _wait_ in _But we wait_ as _wite._
Similarly, in the expository text, he mispronounced “squashing” in Changes such as squashing and melting can be reversed as squesting and gradually in If we leave a dish of solution in a warm place, the water gradually evaporates as gradually. The fact that some of the nonsense words are central to the comprehension of the texts suggests that his comprehension was compromised. For example, the repetition of waiting in the narrative text is significant; it highlights the suspense in the plot—the children engaging in numerous activities while waiting for their fathers from the mines to arrive. So by not getting this word right, Muzi may have compromised his comprehension. Furthermore, the fact that Muzi rarely self-corrected shows that he did very little to monitor his reading. In brief, the meaning-changing miscues, the nonsense words, and the few self-corrections he made suggest that Muzi may not have understood some parts of the texts.

To sum up, although Muzi appears to be a good decoder as suggested by his accuracy rates, he needs to improve on monitoring skills and fix-up strategies. Furthermore, he should pay attention to the English vowels, especially because his failure to read the vowels correctly led to many meaning-changing miscues that distracted from the meaning of the original words. In other words, he needs instruction that helps him to see and hear the differences in vowel sounds across the two languages. He also needs to learn how changes to vowel sounds change the meaning intended in English. In short, this suggests that teachers should focus on phonics, highlighting how differences in pronunciation affect the meaning of words, and, by extension, overall comprehension.

S’khona: Poor oral reading in the narrative and expository text. Like in the Zulu texts, S’khona battled with the oral reading of the English narrative and the expository texts. In the narrative text, he decoded 79% words accurately, and in the expository text, he read 85% words correctly, placing him at the frustration level. Throughout both texts, S’khona read with frequent hesitations, sounding out initial letters and syllables to a point where it
became difficult to figure out the original words. His monotonous intonation and expressionless reading did not help. Sometimes when he failed to read a word, he would ask for the word and I would provide it in order for the reading to continue. As he did when he read the Zulu texts, he also used a finger as a pointer to follow the words in the texts. Seemingly, this did not help; he still omitted some words and lines, and did not appear to be distracted by the omissions.

Similarly, in both texts when S’khona replaced the original words with nonsense words, he did not appear to be troubled by this. For example, in the narrative text, after reading mines in *For ten months they have been working in the mines as mineks* and waiting in *Our mother is waiting with the others at the water tap as witing*, he continued to read the text, showing no sign of disorientation. Likewise, in the expository text, he did not seem troubled when he replaced some of the key words with nonsense words. For instance, reading heat in *Materials that turn soft when they are heated easy to make into shape* as where should have raised a red flag since this is the key word to understanding the process of change discussed in the softening of materials in the text. That S’khona was not concerned about meaning is also evidenced by the limited number of self-corrections he made. In the narrative text he self-corrected only twice and in the expository text only 3 times. In brief, S’khona does not seem to have monitored his reading.

That S’khona was not paying attention to the meaning of the words in the texts is also supported by the fact that in the narrative text, he made 73% meaning-changing miscues and in the expository text he made 82% meaning-changing miscues. Of significance, some of these miscues include basic sight words, such as the, which he often substituted with to and of, which he replaced with for. Although to and for are prepositions, and thus belong to the same syntactic category, in the texts, replacing one with the other does not make sense; however, S’khona did not appear to be aware of this. In addition to having problems with
basic sight words, S’khona appeared to confuse actual words in the text with other words that share similar graphophonic features. For example, in the narrative text, Siyalo read *line* in *We line up in front of the school and sing hymns as lane*, guitar in Zola wants to play his guitar as *gutter*. Likewise, in the expository text, he substituted *ground* in *After it rains, the ground is wet, and puddles form with round and hard in When the chocolate cools, it turns hard, making a solid bar with had*. That these miscues are similar to those that are made by beginning monolingual students suggests that some of the strategies that monolingual and bilingual students use are somehow similar.

Similar to the other students, in a few cases, S’khona’s substitutions seem to have been influenced by the Zulu phonological rules. For example, in the narrative text, he replaced the long phoneme /ei/ in “shakes” in *Nomsa shakes her can in rhythm* with the phoneme /a:/ as in “shark”, which corresponds to the Zulu phoneme /a/. Similarly, he substituted the phoneme /au/ in *now* in *There are only six of us now* with the Zulu phoneme /o/, thus making this word to sound like *know*.

In addition to the graphophonic and phonemic challenges, S’khona, like Noma and Dudu, tended to omit the third person singular marker -s in the verbs. For instance, in the narrative text, he read *brings* in *When she brings water home, we take turns as bring* and *sings* in *Everyone sings and dances to our band as sing*. Likewise, in the expository text, he omitted this marker in the verb *change* as in *As it [candle] changes, it makes heat and light that come from the flame* despite encountering this verb several times. Although S’khona’s miscues regarding the inflectional formatives did not affect the meaning of the original words, he should pay attention to this aspect of the English language.

In conclusion, S’khona showed very little knowledge of decoding skills, including knowledge of basic sight words. He used little graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic information. He did not seem concerned about meaning; he appeared to be merely going through the process.
Evidently, S’khona needs intensive instruction on decoding skills, including instruction in basic sight words. Most importantly, he also needs to understand that reading is about making sense of the text. Later on, I discuss S’khona’s reading comprehension, by implication, how his oral reading influenced his comprehension of the English texts.

**Reading comprehension in English.** Similar to Zulu, all the students performed better in the narrative text than in the expository text. To a large extent, this was due to the fact that they did not seem to have understood some of the key concepts in the expository text. As the summary of the think-alouds strategies presented in Table 7 demonstrates, to compensate for this, they relied on the pictures, especially Muzi and S’khona. In addition, Muzi and S’khona resorted to using Zulu almost exclusively, with Muzi using code-switching in a few instances. Because they had not properly understood most parts of the texts when they were reading, using Zulu did not appear to have helped them much. They would use Zulu to talk about irrelevant things. In fact, the question of relevance became an issue in the students’ background knowledge. Simply drawing on their background knowledge was not enough; they had to show the connection between that knowledge and the texts. As demonstrated by the students’ answers to the reading comprehension questions, in some cases the students’ think-alouds seem to have influenced their general comprehension of the texts, especially the expository text. I discuss these issues in the following section.
Table 11

*Students’ Think-Aloud Strategies in the English Narrative and Expository Texts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Noma Nar/Expo</th>
<th>Dudu Nar/Expo</th>
<th>Muzi Nar/Expo</th>
<th>S’khona Nar/Expo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background knowledge</td>
<td>9/8</td>
<td>8/10</td>
<td>7/9</td>
<td>10/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code-mixing</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>5/3</td>
<td>1/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code-switching</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>8/5</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferencing</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of L1</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>12/15</td>
<td>24/27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrasing</td>
<td>9/6</td>
<td>10/9</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictorial cues</td>
<td>8/13</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>9/15</td>
<td>22/23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rereading</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of think-alouds</td>
<td>27/23</td>
<td>25/21</td>
<td>17/20</td>
<td>27/30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Some of the strategies overlap; for example, a statement could involve use of pictorial cues based on background knowledge in which the L1 was used

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**Noma: Performed poorly in the inferential questions in the expository text.**

Although Noma performed nearly equal in the oral reading of the narrative and the expository texts, her reading comprehension performance in the two texts differed, especially when it comes to the inferential questions. In fact, whereas she answered all the inferential questions well in the narrative text except one, in the expository text she battled with many inferential questions. For example, in the narrative text, in response to the question about why she thought mothers in the story had to get water from the tap on the street, she said, *Because they have no taps in their shacks.* Given the fact that there is nowhere in the story where this statement is made, it is clear that Noma used her knowledge of the world. She knows that people are more likely to fetch water from outside their homes if there is no tap in the house or on the yard.
Furthermore, in the narrative text, Noma could use words and expressions to infer meaning. For instance, when she was asked to explain what she thought the expression *It’s a long way from the mines* means, she stated, *It means that the children were going to wait for a long time because their father are not coming now. They were coming late because they will go a long way.* She also added, *Mr. Sisulu [the old man who said these words] want the children not to give up.* The last statement suggests that Noma could infer that Mr. Sisulu’s words were words of encouragement, something not explicitly stated in the text. Similarly, when Noma answered vocabulary questions whose meaning she did not know, she was able to infer the meaning of the words. For example, when I asked her what she thought the expression *The lights flicker on in distant windows* means, she kept quiet for a second, looked at the book, and then replied, *I think the word flicker means it was starting to get dark and the light was burning like it is blowing by the air.* Interestingly, Noma also connected some of the inferences to her own life. For instance, when she explained the word *rush*, she said, *They [the children] were doing things fast,* and then added, *like me when the bus have come.*

Sometimes when Noma made inferences, she was aided by the pictures. In fact, I noted that before she inferred the meaning of the word *flicker* in the expression mentioned-above, she looked at the pictures of the shacks with dimmed lights, and then explained the word and the expression as indicated above. In short, using different cues—words, her own personal experiences, and the pictures—helped Noma to make appropriate inferences.

Unlike in the narrative text, Noma was not as successful in making inferences in the expository text. The main reason is that she lacked the vocabulary and concept knowledge necessary to understand some of the key concepts related to the change processes discussed in the book. For instance, Noma’s answer to the question about why water disappears in a container of solution that has been tightly sealed and placed in a warm place shows that she did not fully understand the concept of evaporation; hence, she could not make the inference.
She answered, *Water disappears because there is no air into the container*. The answer is the opposite: the water disappears because it mixes with the air and then turns into a gas. That Noma did not understand the evaporation concept is also illustrated by her think-aloud comments. After reading a segment about how crystals of salt are formed when a solution of salt and water on a plate dries up, she made no reference to this; instead, pointing at the picture, she said, *I think this is the ice and it is on top of a plate*. She added, *This person wants to make this ice to be water*. Clearly, Noma was thinking about melting and not evaporation, demonstrating that she did not understand evaporation.

Likewise, Noma’s inference to why the lid of a pot gets covered by droplets of water when the water is boiling in the pot shows that she did not fully understand the condensation process. In response to this question and after being silent for a couple of seconds, she said, *I don’t know*. I encouraged her to try, and then she said, *Boiling water makes the droplet in the lid*. While it is true that it is the boiling water that initiates the condensation process, it is important to mention that boiling water turns into water vapor, which, in turn, changes into droplets of water once it cools when it hits the lid. Similarly, when Noma answered the question about what she thought would happen if she were to add oil to a bowl of water and leave the mixture for a day, she demonstrated that she did not fully understand that some materials dissolve and others do not dissolve. She stated, *It [the solution] becomes hot*. I rephrased the question and asked her to try again. Not even this could work; she did not respond and then admitted that she did not know. Apparently, Noma could not infer from the text that some materials have particles that do not break up into small pieces in a liquid; as a result, they do not dissolve; they float.

Similarly, Noma’s answer to the question about the big idea of the text shows that she had a problem with inferring the main idea. Rather than generating one big idea, she gave several answers, all of which were based on different topics in the text. For example, she said,
I learn that when the water cools, some of the water vapor turn back into liquid. What is interesting about this answer is that she failed to mention it when she was asked why the lid of a pot is covered by droplets of water when the water is boiling, suggesting that she may not have been able to infer the condensation process when it is applied to a real life context. With respect to the main idea, the fact that Noma mentioned specific topics and could not come up with one big idea shows that she could not put together the different pieces of information from which she could infer a main comprehensive idea. As these examples show, Noma struggled to see how the different parts of the text relate to one another and how she could relate them to the real-life contexts.

Overall, the fact that Noma struggled with the inferential questions in the expository text, the text in which she seemed to have missed several key concepts suggests that in order for her to have made appropriate inferences she needed to have had a good conceptual understanding of the content. In other words, students need to have a good grasp of the content so that they can infer meaning appropriately. Furthermore, that Noma could use pictures and personal experiences to make inferences indicates that students should be encouraged to draw on as many sources as possible when they are making inferences.

**Dudu: Comprehended the narrative text better than the expository text.** Although Dudu performed nearly equal in the Zulu narrative and expository texts, she did better in the English narrative text than in the expository text. In part, this was due to the fact that some of the background knowledge she used in the expository text did not tie well with the content, and more importantly, she could not revise it in the face of new information. For instance, in the think-aloud statements after Dudu had read a segment about how clouds are formed, she remarked, *When there is going to be a thunderstorm; the sky become heavy clouds* [meaning it forms dark clouds] *and the sun disappear from the sky.* While it is correct that clouds are formed in the sky before it rains; the fact that Dudu did not explain how this happens; that is,
when the air cools, some of the water vapor in the air turns into droplets of water, and hence form clouds, shows that she missed this part. That she failed to recover this information even after I had probed shows that she did not understand the process. Further evidence that Dudu did not understand how water vapor turns into small drops of water also comes from her answer to the reading comprehension question on how she would explain to her friend what happens to the air around a can of coca cola from a refrigerator if she puts it in a hot place. Dudu’s reply was *The cold will not be there. It [the can] will start to be hot.* When I asked her to give more explanation, she simply said, *I don’t know.*

Just as Dudu failed to build on her background knowledge when she commented about the formation of clouds, she had a similar challenge with the explanation of the dissolving materials. In her think-aloud statements after reading a segment on what happens to a mixture of salt and water, Dudu commented, *I notice that sometimes water is not clear, it become whitish, like when you cook uphuthu [hard porridge].* What is missing in this answer, which is stated in the text, is that salt dissolves in water and the particles of salt break down. Seemingly, overlooking this part compromised Dudu’s comprehension. This is further suggested by her answer to the inferential question where she had to explain what she thought would happen if she were to add oil to a bowl full of water. She answered, *I think water will change. It will be like oil.* As this answer shows, Dudu did not mention that the oil will float on the water, let alone pointing out that this would be due to the fact that the oil does not dissolve in water. Dudu’s misunderstanding of this question and the above-mentioned one suggests that she had not understood the part of the text on these questions.

Unlike in the expository text where Dudu seemed to struggle with connecting her background knowledge to the information in the text and revising it accordingly where necessary, in the narrative text, she appeared to use her background knowledge appropriately.
For example, after reading and restating the segment that introduces the problem—children waiting for their fathers who are working in the mines, in her think-aloud comments, Dudu explained that she thought that the children’s fathers probably worked in Johannesburg because Johannesburg has many gold mines. Similarly, after reading and restating the segment that highlights the suspense as the children continued to wait for their fathers right into the evening, Dudu focused on the word *flicker* and explained, *Cishe lezi zingane zihlala emkhukhwini* (Perhaps these kids leave in a shack). They do not have electricity. When I asked her about the connection between the word *flicker* and her statement, she stated, *Electricity is bright*, but *amakhandlela ayamfimfa* (Candles are somewhat dim). The fact that in some of her think-alouds, Dudu offered information that was not stated in the book but relevant for better understanding the text shows that she had a good insight of the text.

That Dudu performed better in the narrative text is also demonstrated by the fact that she got all the inferential questions right except one. Not only did she infer the answers from the text, but she also drew from her knowledge of the world. For example, in response to the question that required her to explain why she thought the mothers in the story had to get water from the tap, she replied, *I think they are poor; they don’t have taps in their homes.* What is interesting here is that although she could have extracted the answer from the text because it is right there, she constructed her own that demonstrated her understanding of the world. It is true that most poor people in South Africa do not have taps in their homes. She used the same strategy in another inferential question where she had to explain why it is a good thing to help a friend. She answered, *Because if I need help, she will help me, too.*

Surprisingly, when Dudu answered the question about what she thought is the main idea in the story, her inferential skill was somewhat poor. She said, *I must first make sure that our fathers they are coming in which time. If they are not coming, I need to phone them early and ask them when they are coming home because we are waiting for them for a long time.*
As this answer shows, she seemed to have focused on the particulars of the story and not on the broader message. She did a similar thing to the same question in the expository text. Instead of inferring one big idea, she came up with several answers, all of which were addressing specific topics. For instance, she stated, *I think he or she [author] want us to know that when you mix water with something what the water would be like. Like when you mix water with salt, it will be salty. When you mix it sugar, it will be sweet.* This answer focuses on how materials dissolve in water—one of the many topics discussed in the book. Evidently, Dudu struggled in this context with how to generate one big idea.

Overall, Dudu’s use of background knowledge in the expository text shows that she needs to learn how to tie her background knowledge to the content of the text in order to benefit from this knowledge. Furthermore, that Dudu’s think-alouds seem to influence her answers to the reading comprehension questions—she failed to answer the questions related to the think alouds where she showed some gaps—suggests that teachers who use think alouds need to make sure that students’ think alouds help them to understand the text.

*Muzi and S’khona: Over-relied on Zulu and pictures.* Whereas Noma and Dudu used English almost exclusively in the different English reading comprehension tasks, Muzi and S’khona relied on Zulu. In addition, Muzi also incorporated code-switching and code-mixing—albeit to a limited extent. In fact, right from the beginning, in the narrative text, after Muzi had read the title *At The Crossroads*, he code-mixed in his prediction: *Ngicabanga ukuthi le ncwadi ikhuluma ngezimoto ezishayisanayo ngoba enye ingazange inake amaroad signs* (I think this book talks about colliding cars because one of the drivers did not observe the road signs). Muzi continued with this strategy in his think-aloud statements. For example, when he paraphrased the segment about the women who are fetching water from a tap in the street, he said, *Lapha lo bhuti helping mothers* (Here, a man is helping mothers). In this statement, the code-mixed part does not have the helping verb *is*; instead it is *helping*
mothers. This may be due to the fact that in Zulu a helping verb does not stand on its own; it is always prefixed to the verb stem since Zulu is an agglutinative language. In this respect, Muzi’s code-mixing shows the influence of the Zulu morphological system.

In addition to code-mixing, Muzi also used code-switching. For instance, in response to the question about why he thought the women in the narrative text had to get water from a tap in the street, he answered, *Yingoba babezowaphuza, They were going to clean* (Because they [the women] were going to drink the water. They were going to clean [with the water]). Similarly, in his answer to the question about why he thought it is a good thing to help a friend, he said, *Uma kuwukuthi uyahluleka ukwenza into. He cannot . . . do something . . . he . . . (If he struggles to do something. He cannot . . . do . . . do something . . . he . . .).* As the code-switched part shows, it is incomplete. When I asked Muzi to finish the sentence, instead of continuing in English, he switched back to Zulu, stating, *Uma engakwazi ukwenza into, ngingamsiza ngoba naye uzongisiza* (If he cannot do something, I can help him because he would do the same). This indicates that he prefers to use all his resources when he is not able to complete an entire text in one language.

S’khona, like Muzi, seemed to have had trouble with expressing himself in English. In a few cases where he used English, he used single words or short phrases to express ideas. For example, in the narrative text, during the picture walk, when S’khona talked about one of the pictures, he simply said, *People wash*, meaning that people are washing. Similarly, when he described a picture of dancing people, he stated, *Happy*, implying that the people in the picture are happy. He continued with this strategy even when he answered the reading comprehension questions. For instance, in the narrative text, after S’khona had read a segment on the children singing in front of the school, he stated, *They reading*. When I probed him, he simply kept quiet; it was after I had indicated to him that he could use Zulu that he said, *Bayafunda kanye kanye. Ngibona ngoba bonke bavule imilomo* (They [the
children] are reading aloud; I know this because they are all opening their mouths). Likewise, in the expository text, in response to the question where S’khona had to explain to a friend what happens to the air around a can of coca cola from a refrigerator if he puts it in a hot place, he said, Uyaphela (It [the air] disappears), and quickly added, Angazi (I don’t know), admitting that he was not sure.

Evidently, the use of Zulu by S’khona nd Muzi helps us to see what these students knew about the content. It shows that although they had understood some parts of the texts, they had some gaps and some of the gaps could not be addressed by their over-reliance on the pictures because pictures do not capture everything, especially details. For instance, S’khona could not explain the meaning of the word solution despite the fact that this was an explicit text-based question. He simply said, Isolution uma uthatha ubisi uluthela etiyeni bese itiye liba mhlophe (Solution is when you add milk to a cup of tea and the tea changes and becomes whitish). This answer seems to be based on the picture in the text; S’khona focused on the picture of someone adding what looks like milk to a cup of tea. He did not understand the definition of a solution, which is clearly stated in the text. Similarly, when S’khona had to infer the big idea of the text, he based his explanation on the pictures. He stated, Ukuthi uma wenza amaqanda ungawafaka kanyekanye epanini futhi uma ugcoba irama ungayixikeli (If you are frying eggs do not add them all at the same time and do not spread too much butter on your bread). The first answer is based on the picture of the eggs in a pan in the text—it has nothing to do with the fact that once an egg has been broken, it changes forever, which is the change mentioned in the book. Likewise, the pictures show how butter turns soft when it is placed in a warm place. Evidently, S’khona had a limited understanding of the general idea discussed in the text.

Like S’khona, Muzi also seemed to rely on the pictures. For example, in the expository text, in response to the question about what he thought would happen if he were to
add oil to a bowl of water and leave the mixture for a day, he stated, *Kuzovutha.* (It will burn). When I asked him why he thought so, he said, *Njengasencwadini bacima umlilo ngoba mhlawumbe kuchitheke u-oyela* (Like in the book, they are putting out the fire perhaps because of the oil that spilled). Likewise, to the question about why paint dries when it is left open, he said, *U-pende uyoma ngoba kusuke kungena umoya kumacontainer* (Paint dries because air gets into the containers). While it is correct that air may cause paint that has been left uncovered to dry, that Muzi did not mention that paint also dries when the water in the paint evaporates, a point mentioned in the text, suggests that he may have relied on the picture in the book where the paint is left uncovered and the air gets into the containers. That Muzi’s over-reliance on the pictures compromised his comprehension is also evidenced by his failure to answer simple explicit text-based questions. For example, when I asked him to explain to a friend the meaning of the word *solution,* he kept quiet for a few seconds, and then simply said, *Angazi* (I don’t know).

Although S’khona and Muzi battled with the questions that required them to refer to the texts, they did not seem to have problems with the questions where they had to draw on their background knowledge. For example, in the expository text, in response to the implicit text-based question about what S’khona thought would happen to chocolate if he were to leave it in a bag for a day, he said, *Uzobe usuthambile ngenxa yokushisa* (It will be soft because of the heat). Although this answer could be inferred from the text; in his case, he seemed to have used his background knowledge, a point supported by this comment, *Ngiyazi ngoba uma umama ebeke uchocolate ngaphandle, uyathamba bese ewuhlephula kahle* (I know this because when Mother wants to divide chocolate properly, she puts it outside the refrigerator for it to be soft). Similarly, in the narrative text, to the question that required S’khona to express his opinion about what he thought might happen in South Africa if we had many people who do not work, he connected his answer to economic issues: *Abantu*
In summary, although the use of Zulu seems to have helped Muzi and S’khona to engage with the texts, that they over-relied on it suggests that they had limited English productive competence. However, unlike Muzi who could answer most of the questions without them being translated into Zulu, S’khona needed the questions to be translated into Zulu. He would admit that he did not understand the questions in English. Evidently, whereas Muzi’s challenge was productive competence, S’khona’s problem also involved receptive competence.

Furthermore, just as Muzi’s and S’khona’s over-use of Zulu may be a problem in that it limited their opportunity to learn to express themselves in English, so is their over-dependence on the pictures. Pictures do not always capture everything. In fact, that Muzi and S’khona seem not to have grasped the content in the texts as suggested by their performance in the different tasks despite their over-reliance on the pictures rendered the use of Zulu somewhat ineffective. In other words, for these students to benefit from using their L1 and the pictures, they also needed to have read and made sense of the texts. Actually, in S’khona’s case, his over-reliance on the pictures may be a strategy to compensate for his poor decoding skills as demonstrated by his oral reading. By contrast, Muzi, who decoded both English texts well but did not do well in the reading comprehension tasks, provides evidence that decoding does not necessarily translate into comprehension. Overall, these cases highlight the significance of instruction in decoding and reading comprehension skills to ensure students’ success in reading.

**English Writing Tasks**

Similar to the writing assessment in Zulu, in assessing the students’ writing in English, I started by modeling to the students what I wanted them to do. I told a story using
pictures with hidden words. I then asked them to tell me how the pictures helped them to understand the story. I probed to make sure that they understood the story. Where I thought the students did not understand, I clarified the confusion. After this, I asked the students to do as I had done. They looked at the pictures I showed them and then told a story based on the pictures. The pictures were about a soccer match between two main soccer teams in South Africa. I asked the students questions for clarification. Following this, I asked them to write the story and give as much details as possible. Specifically, in assessing the students’ writing, I followed the features discussed in chapter 3.

Overall, table 8 demonstrates that, in general, the students’ performance in English was lower than their performance in Zulu, and S’khona struggled the most. In fact, with an exception of Dudu who reached grade level in some aspects, the students did not reach grade-level in any of the writing aspects. In addition, they all transferred skills across the languages, specifically from Zulu into English. I discuss these points and others in detail in the following section.

Table 12

*Ratings of English Writing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Features</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grammar/ Punctuation</td>
<td>Sentence Complexity</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>Linguistic Transfer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Noma</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Dudu</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muzi</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S’khona</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 4 – grade level; 3 – Approaching grade level; 2 – Developing competence; 1 – Below grade level
**Noma: Used poorly developed sentences.** Although Noma was able to capture the main ideas presented on the pictures fairly well, sometimes providing details that help the reader visualize the match; the string of sentences that are poorly punctuated and capitalized undermined her writing. (See table 13 below)

Table 13

*Noma’s Oral and Written Texts in English*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral text</th>
<th>Written text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13a. The stadium have many followers of Pirates and Chiefs. Before the match, the players were putting their hands on their chests. They were singing a national anthem. Pirates players were wearing black and white uniform and Chiefs players were wearing their uniform, too.</td>
<td>13a. At the Stuidam I saw the parate players and they singing and putting their hands on their chests they were wearing the parete uniform and the colour of their uniform was black and white and the back and white shoes and black and white socks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13b. Chiefs and Pirates players were playing and followers were happy. They were shouting and some playing with Vuvuzelas. There was noise in the stadium. The player of Pirate took a ball and dribble the player of Chiefs. Followers of Pirates screamed and shout the names of the players.</td>
<td>13b. In picture 2 I saw the player of chief and the player of parate and they will dribble a ball. The followers we scriming, shouting and others were quite because they didn’t nkow the wich team will won the match/the game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13c. The player of Pirate score the goal in the net because the goalkeeper was not in the net. There was noise in the stadium. Followers of Pirates played with vuvuzelas and show posters with many writing. One writing was CHIEF ARE BEEFS WE EAT THEM. I was not happy because I like Chiefs, but my cousin Mandla like Pirates. My aunt is not follower of soccer team.</td>
<td>13c. In picture 3 the parate score the goal and the followers of parate felt happy. the goalkeeper of chiefs was not in the net then the parate score a goal. The followers of parate we having posters on their hands and the posters were written in big letters they were written like this: CHIEF ARE BEEFS WE EAT THEM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the paragraphs in table 13 show, because the sentences are poorly punctuated, it is difficult to tell where one starts and ends in relation to the others, and thus her writing becomes difficult to follow.

Furthermore, the fact that Noma failed to present the story as one coherent piece, as she did with the Zulu writing, also made her work difficult to read. For instance, after the first paragraph in the story, Noma introduced all the subsequent paragraphs with this phrase: In picture [then the picture number, for instance, 2, or 3 or 4] . . . ” (See 13b and 13c in table 13). Introducing the paragraphs in this way made the story sound like a list of unrelated events. There was no coherence and cohesion in the story, making it difficult to understand how the events in the story are related to one another.

Although Noma’s sentences were poorly punctuated and thus interfering with the message, some of the words she used to describe the events in the story created a clear picture. For instance, when she described the noise that the Pirates fans were making as they were cheering the players, she said, The followers were scriming, shouting, and others were quite [for quiet] because they didn’t know wich team will won the match/game. The words scriming for screaming and shouting help the reader to visualize the excitement of the fans. Similarly, when she used dribble to describe how the players were tackling one another, she created an image of skilful players because dribbling requires more than kicking the ball; it is a tactful way of taking the ball from an opponent. These examples demonstrate that word choice can enhance the story.

However, as the above examples show, Noma seemed to have issues with spelling. Some of her spelling errors involved homophones. For example, she used quite for quiet. Furthermore, some of the errors in her spelling indicate that she incorporated Zulu phonetic representation of the words. For example, she wrote screaming as scriming, replacing the sound /ea/ with the Zulu /i/. Likewise, in smiling, which Noma wrote as smalling, she
replaced the phoneme /ai/ with the Zulu phoneme /a/. These examples suggest that somehow Noma was transferring her phonemic and phonetic Zulu knowledge into English, underscoring the interaction between her languages.

In sum, although Noma was able to demonstrate that she understood the main ideas in the pictures and could write about them, poor sentence punctuation, capitalization, and other mechanical features undermined how she parceled the ideas clearly. Furthermore, weak spelling compromised her writing. This suggests that Noma should work on these issues.

**Dudu: Wrote less in English than in Zulu.** Although Dudu wrote more in Zulu—provided many details about the topic, wrote long sentences, and more paragraphs—in English, she wrote less. She had only four short paragraphs and did not give many details although she sometimes did in her oral telling. (See table 14).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral text</th>
<th>Written text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14a. The game was a game of Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs, two big soccer teams in South Africa. Teams have many supporters in all provinces of South Africa that is why the stadium is full. Before a game, players were singing the national anthem <em>Nkosi sikelel’iAfrika</em>. The song has many languages: English, Afrikaans, Sotho, and Zulu. The Zulu part was write by Enoch Sontonga.</td>
<td>14a. It was a match of Orlando Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs. When the game began to start they first sang a National Anthem of <em>NKOSI SIKELEL’IAFRICA</em>. They were all playing for a Cup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14b. The stadium was full. The fans were happy and did many things. Before the game start, others were moving up and down to drink water; others were sitting down and talking with friends; others were showing their vuvuzelas and blow them. There was noise in the stadium. Players of Cheifs and Pirates were playing with a leather ball, Jabulani. This ball is black and white.</td>
<td>14b. They start a game. Their fans were up and down, others were sitting others were standing they blow their vuvuzelas very loud. Knowledge a players of Kaizer Chiefs dribble a players of Pirates. They want to pass a ball to other players. They were playing with a leaderball its name is JABULANI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14c. Pirates players were happy and were showing posters. The posters were write in big letters and were in their chests. Others players were not wearing their shirts and were wearing big fun sunglasses with colors of Pirates. Chief’s players were sad. They were looking Pirates’s players.</td>
<td>14c. JABULANI was made for a FIFA WORLD CUP of 2010. That ball is black and whites. They play the game when Pirates scored a goal. Then the fans of Pirates were very happy they blow vuvuzelas louder than the last time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The sentences in table 14 demonstrate that Dudu was able to use a variety of sentence structures with different sentence beginnings. For example, in 14a the first sentence is a simple sentence that starts with the expletive *It*; the second sentence is a complex sentence that begins with an independent clause, and the last sentence is also a simple sentence but starts with a pronoun. In addition, in some cases Dudu’s word choice painted a clear picture of the events in the story. For example, like Noma, when she talked about how the players tricked one another as they were kicking the ball, she used the word *dribble*. Similarly, when she described the noise that the fans were making from the *vuvuzelas* [horns] as they cheered their teams, she used the word “blow”. She stated, *Their fans were up and down others were sitting others were standing they blow their vuvuzelas [the horns] very loud. Knowledge a player of Kaizer Chiefs dribble a player of Pirates.*

As the above sentences show, although Dudu was able to convey the ideas reasonably well, she had issues, mainly with the tenses and punctuation. For example, although she started with the past tense in the above sentences, somewhere towards the end, she switched to the present tense, confusing the tenses and somewhat distorting the message. Likewise, her failure to punctuate the sentences accordingly interfered with the way she was chunking her ideas and also made the relationship between the sentences unclear. Since writing depends on abstract language, with few extra-linguistic features, the way conventional features of writing is used to present ideas is essential.

Overall, although Dudu was able to capture the main ideas of the story, the omission of the details weakened her writing. Furthermore, the tendency to mix tenses and not to punctuate her writing appropriately also compromised her writing. This suggests that she needs to improve on these issues.

*Muzi. Demonstrated limited writing skills.* Like Muzi did in the Zulu essay, he did not build on the oral telling in the English essay. However, unlike in the Zulu oral telling, in
his narration of the story during the English assessment, Muzi would sometimes use short sentences and short phrases. This was despite the fact that most of his oral telling was in Zulu. As shown in table 15 below, after Muzi had indicated that the first picture talks about Orlando Pirates players singing the national anthem, I asked him what made him think that the Pirates players were singing the national anthem. He replied, *Ngibona ngoba bonke babeke izandla zabo ezifubeni* (I know because they all have hands on their chests). I continued: *What do you know about the national anthem?* He answered: *Liculwa ngesiZulu nangesiNgisi nangesiBhunu* (It is sung in Zulu, English, and Afrikaans). As these examples show, although the questions were in English, Muzi answered in Zulu, giving appropriate answers, suggesting that he understood the questions.
Table 15

Muzi’s Oral and Written Texts in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral text</th>
<th>Written text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 Muzi: Le ndaba ikhulumu ngomdla phakathi kweChiefs nePirates. I Pirates icula iculo lezizwe (This story talks about a match between Pirates and Chiefs. Pirates players are singing the national anthem). [a long pause]</td>
<td>15 Orlando Pirates will singing to play or play to MTN 8, And Orland opirates Legwadi dribble Mosua and pass a ball. Ayanda Dlamini will run a ball and follow a ball. Orlando Pirates will score a goal on the net and Kazia Chiefs will sad pirates will happy. Abalandeli bePirates bathi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher: Why do you think they are singing the national anthem?</td>
<td>Abalandeli bePirates bathi (Pirates’ fans say) “Chiefs are beefs, we eat them. Pirates will happy and champaiions pirates. Champions play Orlando Pirates and Swallows. Orando pirates will singing to play to final Pirates and Chiefs. Pirates is my teame. Orlando Pirates is happy happiest and Kazia chief will bayatetema njengengane (are crying like babies). Jali will score on the net and Shabalala will sad all teame Kazia will defend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muzi: Ngibona ngoba bonke babeke izandla zabo ezifubeni. (I know because they all have hands on their chests). [Another long pause]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher: What do you know about the national anthem?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Muzi: Liculwa ngesiZulu nangesiNgisi nangesiBhunu (It is sung in Zulu, English, and Afrikaans). Muzi: [continued] Lapha abadlali beChiefs nePirates bayajikana. Abantu bona bayabuka. Kuthe kungazelele muntu uLegwadi wePirates walishaya phakathi. Mina ngajabula. Ngithanda iPirates. (Here Pirates’ and Chief’s players are dribbling one another. Unexpectedly, Legwadi scored a goal. I was happy. I like Pirates). | In addition, Muzi would sometimes code-switch as shown in the examples where he talks about the followers of both teams. He wrote: Orlando Pirates will score a goal on the net and Kazia Chiefs will sad pirates will happy. Abalandeli bePirates bathi (Pirates’ fans say) “Chiefs are beefs, we eat them . . . Orlando Pirates is happy happiest and Kazia chief
will bayatetema njengengane (are crying like babies). He added, Orlando Pirates is happy happyiest and Kaiza chief will bayayetema njengengane (Orlando Pirates fans are the happiest fans, and Kaizer Chiefs fans are crying like babies).

Not only did Muzi code-switch during the assessment, he also code-switched during most of the classroom activities, including writing, as I showed in chapter 5. That Muzi could code-switch in both oral and written language is consisted with findings from other studies (Gort, 2002; Perez, 2004). Evidently, for Muzi, the most important thing was to resolve the communication problem regardless of the mode.

Just as Muzi code-switched in oral language and written language, sometimes his writing mirrored exactly what he had said during the oral telling. For example, when he described the picture where the Orlando Pirates players were lifting a trophy after winning the finals, he said, Pirates is happy and is champion Pirates. Muzi repeated this sentence in writing. He remarked, Pirates will happy and is champions pirates. In both sentences, the part: is champion Pirates is consistent with the flexible word order in Zulu. While the basic word order is Subject, Verb, and Object (SVO) like in English, Zulu has more flexibility. As in Muzi’s sentence, it could be Verb, Object, and Subject (VOS). In this regard, Muzi seems to have transferred his knowledge of Zulu word order into English, a less flexible language.

Although Muzi was somewhat able to express his ideas in his writing, the fact that he did not elaborate on the ideas—most of the sentences served as caption sentences—undermined his writing. Furthermore, the repeated use of the same sentence structure—most of the sentences were simple sentences and started with the subject—made his work to read like a list. In other words, not using appropriate connectives, transitional words, and other cohesive words compromised the ideas in the story.

In summary, Muzi’s case shows that when students explore all their linguistic resources, they can overcome some of the frustrations of not being able to express
themselves. Therefore, teachers with students like Muzi may do well to encourage this behavior and build on students’ resources rather than dismiss them.

**S’khona: Struggling to write.** S’khona showed very limited knowledge about writing in English. This is despite the fact that his oral telling demonstrated that he knew about the topic shown on the pictures. Similar to Muzi, he discussed most of the ideas in Zulu, and on a few occasions used short English phrases. (See table 16). For example, when I asked S’khona to talk about one of the pictures, he simply said, *Play soccer*, and only continued to talk about the picture after I had indicated that he could use any his languages, in which case he used Zulu. I noted that he showed the same over-reliance on Zulu in the reading tasks as well.

That S’khona’s challenges went beyond productive competence in English is evidenced by his frequent request for me to repeat the questions. After I had asked him a question in English, he would say, *Angizwa*, which translates as *I don’t hear or I don’t understand*. In his case, it was the latter because after I translated the question into Zulu; he would answer it and do so well, sometimes drawing from relevant background knowledge. For example, when I asked S’khona a simple question about one of the pictures: *What do you know about this song?* he said, *Angizwa* (I don’t understand), and only answered the question after I had translated it into Zulu. He stated, *Leli culo laqanjwa ngu-Enoch Sontanga.*

*Laculwa kakhulu ngesikhathi somzabalazo ngaphambi kokuba libe iculo lesizwe* (This song was composed by Enoch Sontonga. It was sung a lot during the liberation struggle before it became the national anthem). Not only is this statement correct, but it also shows that he knew more about the national anthem. However, his severe limited writing skills prevented him from expressing this fact and many other brilliant ideas.

Unlike in the Zulu essay where S’khona wrote a paragraph as was shown in table 9, in the English essay he had only 5 short sentences, as shown in table 16. The sentences were like captions for the pictures, just as he had done in the Zulu essay. However, unlike in the
Zulu essay where the ideas between the sentences were clear, in the English essay, it was difficult to discern how the sentences were related. In fact, some of the ideas had nothing to do with the pictures he was supposed to write about. For example, after mentioning that Chiefs scored a goal, a fact that he distorted deliberately because he explained that as a supporter of Chiefs he wanted Chiefs to win, he wrote AmaZulu run followers. Given that AmaZulu is the name of another soccer team, the connection between Chiefs and AmaZulu is not clear because Chiefs was playing against Orlando Pirates. In another sentence, he said, Orlades paceteo [ineligible word] ball slow motion. Again, there was no connection between this sentence and the story; there was nothing suggesting a slow motion on the pictures. It was as if S’khona simply threw in any idea that came to his mind. As these sentence shows, S’khona could not write Orlando Pirates correctly despite the fact that he may have encountered this word several times since Orlando Pirates is one of the big soccer teams, and he is a staunch follower of soccer, as he and his mother indicated in the interviews. In addition, none of his sentences was correct. For instance, in the first sentences he omitted a verb: Orlades pacetes national anthem. Similarly, in the last sentence, he stated, Orlades pacetes world cup and follower. Furthermore, he left the period in all the sentences.

Given all the challenges mentioned above, it is clear that writing a meaningful story was almost impossible for S’khona, a fact he admitted before he started writing the story. He said, Miss, ngizohluleka ukubhala indaba (Teacher, I won’t be able to write the story). That S’khona battled with writing is also supported by his failure to write any of the classroom activities, including the two essays they wrote during the time I observed their class. I noted that unless they had to copy something from the board or book, S’khona would not write. In fact, his mother told me that he had lost all the school journals twice in that year. She said, Angazi noma kwenza ngoba uyehluleka yini uS’khona (I am not sure whether this is because S’khona is struggling).
In brief, S’khona’s case shows that his proficiency in English was almost non-existent. He could neither talk nor write in English although he knew about the topic as indicated by his oral telling of the story in Zulu. That S’khona also battled to write in Zulu seems to suggest that oral language proficiency was not enough; he needed to acquire literacy skills in both Zulu and English.
Table 16

*S’khona’s Oral and Written Texts in English*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral text</th>
<th>Written text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balungiselela ukudlala ibhola. Bacula iculo lesizwe uNkosi Sikelel IAfrika. (Here we see soccer players. They are preparing to play soccer. They are singing the national anthem, Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrika).</td>
<td>Orlades pacetes is Chiefs leotur ball slow motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers: What do you know about this song?</td>
<td>Chiefs shoag for the goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S’khona: Angizwa? (I beg your pardon).</td>
<td>AmaZulu run followers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers: Tell me what you know about the song.</td>
<td>Orlades pacetes world cup and follower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S’khona: Angizwa? (I beg your pardon).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers: Ngabe yini oyaziyo ngalicelo? (What do you know about this song?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S’khona: Leli culo laqanjwa ngu-Enoch Sontanga. Laculwa kakhulu ngesikhathi somzabalazo ngaphambi kokuba libe iculo lesizwe (The players are singing Nkosi sikelel’i-Afrika. This song was composed by Enoch Sontonga. It was sung a lot during the liberation struggle before it became the national anthem).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers: Continue.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S’khona: Play soccer. [There was a long pause].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers: Ungaqhubeka nganoma ngaluphi ulimi. (You can use any language).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S’khona: Abadlali beChiefs nePirates bayajikana. OwePirates useyakora; ibhola lingena phakathi enethini. (Pirates and Chiefs players were tacking one another trying to win the ball. A Pirates player scored the goal; the goal was inside the net.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of students’ performance in English reading and writing tasks. Similar to the Zulu texts, all the students, with the exception of S’khona, decoded the English narrative and expository texts well although their oral reading was not as fluent and expressive. Likewise, the students seemed to be monitoring their reading as evidenced by their rereading of some words, especially Noma and Dudu. However, this was compromised by their tendency to confuse the English vowel sounds with the Zulu sounds, and thus made miscues that affected the meaning of the original words. As I explained before, this may be due to the fact that the students transferred Zulu phonological rules to English. For example, in Zulu, vowels do not occur in juxtaposition; some phonological rule has to take place, including omitting one of the vowels; so, when Noma read “rooster” as “roster”, she seemed to have applied this rule.

Just like the students transferred their Zulu phonological knowledge, they also transferred their Zulu morphological knowledge to English. In almost all cases, this involved the omission of inflectional formatives, especially the third person singular marker -s. For instance, although Noma and Dudu encountered the verb *changes* several times throughout the expository text, each time they read it, they omitted the -s in the verb. As I pointed out before, the students’ consistent omission of the third person singular marker -s in the verbs may be due to the fact that in Zulu, the subject verb agreement marker is prefixed to the verb stem and not suffixed like in English, so the students did not feel distracted by this miscue. Of significance is the fact that the students also made this omission in their oral language, suggesting that their reading may have been influenced by their oral language proficiency, and thus raising the question of the interaction between reading and oral language proficiency.

While the other students’ cases point to the challenges of transferring Zulu linguistic skills into English, S’khona’s case highlights a problem of a student who lacked basic reading
skills. Like in the Zulu texts, in the English texts, S’khona read hesitantly, with no expressions, and used a finger as a pointer. Most disturbingly, he could not read most basic sight words, such as the, which he often confused with to. In addition, he seemed to rely on graphophonic features of the words, a point supported by many graphophonic miscues that share the length and shape of the original words. Even more troubling, S’khona did not appear to have any idea that reading is supposed to make sense. Evidently, not only does S’khona’s case underscore the importance of phonics and other word recognition skills, but it also points to the importance of stressing to students that people read to make sense of the text.

In general, compared to the Zulu reading comprehension tasks, the students’ performance in the English reading comprehension tasks was low, suggesting that Zulu was their stronger language. This was particularly the case with Muzi and S’khona. In all the reading comprehension tasks, they used mainly Zulu although Muzi would occasionally code-switch and code-mix. Unlike Muzi, S’khona did not code-switch or code-mix; instead, on a very few occasions, he would use single English words or short phrases that were meant to capture main ideas. Like S’khona, he would get stuck and switch back to Zulu. Evidently, to a large degree, Muzi and S’khona had low English productive competence.

Although, in general, the students’ performance in the English reading comprehension tasks was low, they seemed to struggle the most with the expository text than with the narrative text. For instance, although Dudu answered all the explicit text-based questions and most of the referential questions correctly, sometimes she appeared to have problems with connecting her background knowledge to some parts of the text. This was especially the case with the questions that corresponded to the parts of the think-alouds in which she had failed to activate appropriate background knowledge. In this respect, Dudu’s think-alouds seem to
have influenced her subsequent interaction with the text, suggesting that it is important that students activate appropriate background knowledge.

Noma’s case demonstrates that not only do students need to activate appropriate background knowledge, but they also need to grasp the details of the key words and concepts. Noma struggled with the inferential questions in the expository text. The analysis showed that this was due to the fact that she missed several key concepts. In other words, for her to have made appropriate inferences, she needed to have had a good conceptual grasp of the content. S’khona’s case shows that although an understanding of the text can be supported through various strategies, if students hardly decoded what they read, the strategies can have a very limited effect. S’khona, who struggled with decoding most of the English words in both genres, over-relied on the pictures. Because he had no idea of what the texts were about, this strategy was self-defeating; he could not connect the pictures to the content of the text to enhance his comprehension. Clearly, this suggests that to ensure students’ success in reading teachers need to attend to both decoding and reading comprehension skills.

With respect to writing, the students’ performance in English writing was lower than their performance in Zulu writing, with the students writing less in English. For the most part, their English essays lacked details. This was despite the fact that during the oral telling of the story, they were able to provide details, especially when I prompted them to do so. Because Muzi and S’khona seemed to struggle to tell the story orally in English, I allowed them to use Zulu. However, using Zulu, and some code-switching for Muzi, does not appear to have helped these students to build on their oral telling when they wrote their stories. In their essay, they mentioned very little of what they had shared orally. In large part, this seems to be a productive problem, specifically a vocabulary problem—they could not express themselves in English. In S’khona’s case, there was also a receptive competence issue: He did not
understand most of the English tasks; I had to translate the tasks and questions into Zulu. In fact, most parts of the session ended up being conducted in Zulu.

Besides battling with adding details in their writing, in general, the students struggled to connect the ideas in the different paragraphs or sentences. Muzi had one big paragraph and S’khona had a list of 5 sentences. As I argued before, in large part, this was due to the fact that they used indexical language such as *this* in “this picture” and *that* in “that singer.” Their failure to transition from contextualized language to decontextualized language, using appropriate lexical items affected the flow of the ideas in their stories. Sometimes this was made worse by poorly punctuated sentences. In addition, shifting between the present and the past tense made the stories somewhat difficult to follow.

Overall, the above-mentioned issues suggest that inasmuch as ideas are important in writing, they cannot be properly conveyed if appropriate writing conventions are not followed. In other words, students need to learn that writing, like speaking expresses meaning; however, in writing it is important to use suitable decontextualized language and writing conventions to channel ideas correctly and accessibly.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter reported on the students’ performance in reading and writing in Zulu and English. One of the main findings was that while the students’ performance in the reading tasks was generally low, especially in the expository text, their performance in writing was much lower, particularly in English. Another key finding was that, in general, with the exception of S’khona, the students did better in oral reading across the genres than in the reading comprehension tasks. Furthermore, the students seemed to have battled with the inferential questions, especially in the expository texts. To a certain extent, this was due to their lack of comprehension of some key concepts, particularly in the English text. Finally, some of the students, specifically, Muzi and S’khona seemed to over-rely on Zulu for their
lack of oral English productive competence and sometimes receptive competence, raising a question about how students’ L1 can be used to develop these competencies. In the following chapter, I discuss what the findings I reported in chapters 4 through 6 mean for instruction and learning in this context and other similar contexts.
Chapter 7

Summary, Discussion, and Implications

Summary

The aim of this qualitative case study was to gain insights into language and literacy practices in English as L2 in a South African 4th grade classroom, and to a lesser extent in the foundation phase grades (grades R-3), where literacy was in the students’ home language, Zulu. For the 4th grade students, I was also interested in finding out how well the four focal students performed in reading and writing assessments in Zulu and in English, and what we can learn from their performances. In addition, I sought to understand the home language and literacy practices of the focal students, and also establish if there were any tensions between these practices and the school language and literacy practices, and most importantly, the meanings of the tensions for the students’ language and literacy learning at school. Throughout the study, I tried to show how the socio-political and cultural factors shaped the students’ learning of language and literacy in this class.

I was guided by sociocultural and cognitive-linguistic theories of language and literacy learning. Using data collected from the participants at the school and the families, I found that while the school context limited the development of students’ bilingualism and biliteracy, the home context offered a better context for the students to enhance their bilingual and biliteracy skills. At the school, the students were exposed to limited texts and limited opportunities to engage with the texts and use their languages in meaningful ways. On the other hand, the students’ homes seemed to provide the students with diverse texts that encouraged them to use their languages in flexible ways as they made sense of their literacy learning. These findings raise questions about what teachers and researchers can do in order to ensure that bilingual and biliterate students in South Africa and in similar contexts receive
literacy instruction that addresses their needs and sustains bi/multilingualism in these contexts.

In presenting the discussion of the findings, I used three broad themes that emerged across the entire study namely, language and literacy learning as narrowly defined processes, variation in students’ performance assessments as a window to students’ complex literacy behaviors, and home language and literacy practices as dynamic and fluid practices.

**Discussion of the Findings**

**Language and literacy learning as narrowly defined processes.** Through classroom observations and interviews, I sought to understand the language and literacy practices in English in the 4th grade class, and to a certain extent in the foundation phase (grades R-3), where it was offered in Zulu. A common thread that ran throughout these classes was that language and literacy learning was narrowly defined. The focus in these classes was on performance and display of knowledge and skills. For example, in the 4th grade the teacher and the students spent a significant amount of time reading texts aloud, reciting poems and acting them out, repeating grammatical structures, and writing practice exercises. While the public display of knowledge was not a problem for Noma and Dudu, Muzi and S’khona were intimidated; in fact; this seemed to have heightened the affective filter for them (Krashen, 1985), which had a negative impact on their learning.

The limiting language and literacy instruction in the 4th grade and in the foundation phase grades in this study should be understood within the broader socio-political context of teacher preparation in South Africa. During the apartheid era, as part of the oppressive policies, black teachers were poorly prepared, and some of these teachers are still teaching, as it was the case with the teachers in this study. The fact that the National Department of Education in the post-independence era did not speed up transformation in teacher education delayed improvement in this sector, and thus continued the production of poorly prepared
teachers, especially in black rural and township schools (Hemson, 2009; Kruss, 2009). In other words, poor language and literacy instructional practices in most black rural and township schools are part of the wider socio-political context (Macdonald, 2002; Matjila & Pretorius, 2004; Pretorius & Currin, 2010).

Evidently, that the 4th grade teacher used ineffective instructional practices, including instructional strategies and materials is, therefore, not surprising. The teacher herself is the product of poor language and literacy instruction. To add to the problem, her professional training was not in language and literacy pedagogy, let alone L2 and L2 literacy pedagogy. Clearly, she had insufficient professional and academic knowledge about effective instructional strategies and texts she could use to support students’ literacy learning in English. However, the teacher’s overdependence on the textbook seems to have been beyond her control. There were a few instructional materials in the school in general, so the textbook was the main source information. For the students, the problem of access to the textbooks was exacerbated by the fact that they were not allowed to take the books home because of the fear that this scarce resource could be lost or damaged, a finding reported in other studies (Van Staden & Howie, 2010). As Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) put it, expecting students to learn to read without providing them with books is like expecting football players to play football without a ball.

One can extend the above metaphor to writing instruction: How can we expect students to learn to write meaningfully when they spend a significant amount of time copying from the textbook or generating unrelated sentences, as was often the case in this study? Several studies have reported that South African primary students do very little or almost no meaningful writing, such as expressive, creative, and factual writing (Gains & Graham, 2011; Puddemann et al., 2000). In part, this is due to the teachers’ lack of knowledge and skills in writing pedagogy, including personal experience since most of the teachers did not engage in
meaningful writing in the primary grades as students themselves (Gains, 2010). Clearly, this lack of training and personal experience about writing instruction suggests that there is a need for teachers to be equipped with skills and knowledge that promote effective writing.

Despite limiting literacy activities reported in this study, there is some evidence that when the teacher created opportunities that allowed the students to engage in meaningful literacy learning, although this was very rare, some of the students were able to participate in such learning. The students showed they could draw on their background knowledge and experiences to engage with the texts they were reading and writing. For example, when Noma paraphrased a paragraph in which she described Johannesburg, she went beyond providing facts mentioned in the text; she added facts that were correct about Johannesburg, yet were not mentioned in the book, showing her personal knowledge about the city. Similarly, Muzi used code-mixing and code-switching to express his ideas when he did not know the English words. Evidently, these examples show that restrictive practices limit students’ opportunities to draw on their maleta (suitcases) that are full of their languages, beautiful cultures and many others valuables—to paraphrase Gutierrez and Larson (1994).

In other words, although most rural and township schools tend to focus on lower-order skills, when these students are encouraged to draw on their “funds of knowledge” (Moll & Gonzalez; 1994), they are capable of being engaged in their learning. They learn to read texts creatively (Hill, 2000) and to move “in and moving through” (Temple et al., 2011, p. 394) the text, as was evidenced by Dudu in her retelling of Ben Carson’s book that she read independently. Stein (2008) found similar results in a story-telling study by primary students in some black township schools in South Africa. When the students were allowed to use their L1s as a resource in telling their stories, not only did they become actively involved, but they also demonstrated a deeper understanding of gender issues. This points to the significance of
using students’ L1 in ways that promote engaging and effective learning, that is, beyond simply explaining unknown L2 vocabulary in an L1, as it was often the case in this study.

The use of students’ L1 in restrictive ways is, in part, due to the teachers’ lack of specialized knowledge about language teaching, not only in English but also in African languages (Gains, 2010; Macdonald, 2002, Van Staden, 2011). In this study, the teacher explained that although incorporating the students’ L1 in her teaching of English helped the students to follow the lessons, sometimes she was not sure how to avoid a situation where the students over-relied on the L1, a situation that was observed with two of the focal students in the performance assessments. This problem was confounded by the tension between the teacher’s belief in the importance of using students’ L1 as a scaffold and the expectations of the School Management Team (SMT). While the teacher believed that the students’ L1 is crucial for the students’ learning, the SMT discouraged her from using the students’ L1 in her teaching.

In part, these tensions may be due to the fact that the Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) Act (1996) that promotes bi/multilingualism in the classroom is not a mandate and is open to multiple interpretations. Unfortunately, the neglect of students’ L1 in their learning of L2 and L2 literacy is not beneficial to students as evidenced by several studies all over the world, including some studies from African countries (Gains, 2010; Lekgogo & Winskel, 2008; Williams, 1996). There is a need for professional development programs, both in pre-service and in in-service teachers that should address the question of L1 use in students’ learning of L2 and L2 literacy.

In sum, the issues raised in this discussion show that for South African primary students, especially those from rural and township schools, to benefit from language and literacy instruction, the instructions need to go beyond lower-order thinking skills; teachers need to incorporate a range of skills and knowledge, including higher-order skills and
students’ sociocultural and personal knowledge. As already indicated, this calls for well researched and informed professional development programs, and such programs should take into account what students know and can do in their languages, a point I discuss in the following theme.

Variation in students’ performance assessments as a window to students’ complex literacy behaviors. In general, the students’ performance in the oral reading of the Zulu narrative and expository texts demonstrates that overall they were proficient readers who read fluently and decoded the texts well, with an exception of S’khona who struggled with these skills. For Dudu and Muzi, their good oral reading skills in Zulu should be understood within the context of the instruction that focuses on decoding and word recognition skills in African languages in the Foundation Phase (Gains, 2010; Prinsloo & Stein, 2004). On the other hand, for Noma, who was receiving formal instruction in the Zulu literacy for the first time in the 4th grade, her good oral reading performance in Zulu may have been due to the fact that, unlike English—a language that has an opague orthography where letter-sound inconsistencies are prevalent and the language she first learned to read in—Zulu has a transparent orthography; that is, there is a high degree of letter-sound correspondence. In other words, Zulu’s transparency may have enhanced Noma’s ability to transfer what she knew about reading in English to reading in Zulu; thus supporting evidence that orthographical properties play a role in students’ literacy learning (Patel, Snowling, de Jong, 2004; Perez Canado, 2005).

Furthermore, the fact that all the students, with the exception of S’khona, also read the English texts well, decoding and recognizing words correctly most of the time as evidenced by the miscue analyses, suggests that they were transferring their knowledge and skills about word reading in Zulu into reading in English; thus supporting research that shows that learning to read in an L1 facilitates learning to read in an L2 (Chow et al., 2005; Lipka &
Siegel, 2007). On the other hand, Noma’s case, who first learned to read in English in the earlier grades but also read well in Zulu, the language she was formally learning to read in for the first time, suggests that she may have transferred word reading skills across her languages in either direction, demonstrating bidirectional transfer of skills, a finding reported in other studies (Dworin, 2003; Toloa et al., 2009).

In general, the evidence about the transfer of oral reading skills demonstrated by the students in this study challenges teachers in South African primary grades and in similar contexts to revisit how they use students’ L1 and L2 to enhance learning to read in both of the students’ languages. In other words, this calls for “a flexible bilingual pedagogy” (Franken & August, 2011, p 224), where students’ languages are not viewed as discrete entities but as resources that exist along each other in mutually interdependent ways (Hornberger, 2002, 2010). In this respect, teachers can draw on linguistic features of one language to highlight linguistic features of the other language, what Franken and August call “metalinguistic comparison and contrast” (p. 225). Currently, this does not seem to be the case in most schools that teach literacy in more than one language in South Africa (Gains, 2010; Prinsloo & Stein, 2004). In part, this is due to the approach to teaching that tends to favor independent disciplines or subjects over collaboration between and across disciplines or subjects (Hemson, 2009). Clearly, to benefit students this needs to change.

Just as the students’ performance in the oral reading varied across the languages and genres, so did their performance in the reading comprehension tasks. However, in general, the students did better in the narrative texts than in the expository texts in both languages. As the findings show, in part, this was due to the fact that the students sometimes failed to connect their background knowledge to the texts. In addition, unfamiliarity with some of the concepts in these texts may have played a role. For example, intabamlilo (volcano) and amadamu abililayo (pooling mud) do not occur in South Africa, yet these were some of the
concepts in the Zulu expository text. In the English expository text the situation was more challenging; not only were the students trying to understand specialized vocabulary, but they were also grappling with syntactic structures and textual features that are somewhat different from those of spoken English, which they were at the early stages of acquiring since they were emerging bilinguals. For instance, when Dudu, who had shown to be a good comprehender, answered a question that required her to use specialized language mentioned in the text such as water vapour and condensation; she avoided these concepts and also distorted these processes. Similarly, Noma confused evaporation and melting in her think-alouds. Clearly, specialized language may make accessing concepts somewhat challenging for students, especially bilingual students (Buchorn-Stoll, 2002; Ntuli & Pretorius, 2005).

The above discussion indicates that in addition to everyday English, L2 students should be exposed to content-based English—a point mentioned in other studies on L2 students (Echavarria et al., 2004; Harper & de Jong, 2004). For L1 African language students, Smyth (2002) suggests that instead of teachers focusing on teaching grammar and other structural properties in African languages, they should collaborate with content teachers and design materials and strategies in which content concepts are taught in African languages in order to facilitate transfer of scientific concepts and knowledge across African languages and English, and thus support comprehension.

Just as L1 can enhance comprehension during instruction, it can also aid students during assessment (Escamilla, 2006; Soltero-Gonzalez et al., 2012). In this study, the use of Zulu, especially by Muzi and Siyalo, seemed to have helped these students to engage with the texts. For example, when Muzi shared his think-alouds and answered the comprehension questions, and was not sure how to continue in English; he switched to Zulu, which helped him to express himself clearly. In other words, tapping into all his linguistic resources assisted him to carry out the tasks. Garcia (1991), in a study on the factors that influence the
English reading test performance of Spanish-English bilingual 5th and 6th graders, found that when the students were allowed to express themselves in Spanish, they demonstrated more comprehension than they did in English. This suggests that incorporating the native language of bilingual students can reveal more about comprehension strategies these students use.

However, the fact that Muzi and S’khona, unlike Noma and Dudu who used less Zulu, over-relied on Zulu and on the pictures in most of the English reading comprehension tasks and across the genres seems to suggest that they lacked oral proficiency in English. In fact, for S’khona, I had to repeat every instruction and question, translating these into Zulu. Evidently, unlike Muzi who lacked productive competence, S’khona lacked both productive and receptive competence in English. Given the kind of instruction that the students received in this class, the fact that these students had challenges with these English competences is not surprising. There was little creative use of spoken and written language in this class. For the most part, the students talked when responding to the teacher’s questions, which in most cases required them to give one-word or one-sentence answers, a practice that is also reported in other studies in similar contexts (Bunyi, 2005; Kasule & McDonald, 2006). Clearly, there is a need for teachers to create classroom contexts that promote extended use of spoken and written language. However, teachers may not be able to do this without the support of professional development programs and workshops. In other words, language and literacy challenges should be addressed beyond the school level.

Just as reading in both Zulu and English showed us what the students could and could not do, allowing the students to write in both languages revealed their strengths and challenges. The finding that all the students demonstrated factual knowledge about the pictures, most of which was detailed and accurate, when I allowed them to use any of their languages during the oral telling of the stories, points to the significance of engaging students in oral activities in any of their languages before they write about a topic. Currently, this does
not seem to be the case in most South African primary schools. As I indicated before, most writing tends to focus on the mechanics and conventional aspects of writing, especially in rural and township schools. The focus on these features limits students’ abilities to learn expressive, creative, and factual writing (Gains, 2010; Puddemann, et al., 2000). Studies of L2 and bilingual students in other parts of the world show that L2 and bilingual students can engage in these kinds of writing, but teachers have to create opportunities for such writing (Escamilla, 2006; Franklin, 1999; Soltero-Gonzalez et al., 2012).

In addition, as the written texts of the students in this study show, South African primary teachers should help students to develop decontextualized language, the language needed for an abstract cognitive process such as writing. In this study, some of the students tended to rely on indexical language and used phrases such as “this picture or “that picture” and showed no connection between the pictures, suggesting poorly developed decontextualized language. There is evidence that exposing students to activities that support the development of academic language enhances their learning of this kind of language (Buchorn-Stoll, 2002; Cruz de Quiros, Lara-Alecio, & Tong, 2012). Ntuli and Pretorius (2005), in a storybook intervention study on Zulu-speaking students in grades R and 1, found that students who participated in storybook activities learned to use decontextualized language compared to those who did not participate in the study. Evidently, students’ development of academic language cannot be left to chance.

Furthermore, the fact the students in this study demonstrated transfer of skills and knowledge across both Zulu and English in their writing, similar to the reading tasks, shows that allowing students to write in both of their languages can help teachers to know how students’ languages interact with one another, and most importantly, how they can build on this knowledge. For example, Noma who sometimes wrote Zulu words as individual morphemes, detaching morphemes from roots and stems, something that is not allowed in
agglutinative languages like Zulu, could be supported to understand that although this is permitted in English—the language she first learned to write in—in Zulu most morphemes are attached to roots and stems. In other words, the teacher could build on Noma’s knowledge of writing in English to facilitate her writing development in Zulu. In the case of Muzi, who sometimes code-mixed or code-switched in his writing when he did not know English words, the teacher could provide him with appropriate English words; and thus help him to build on what he already knows. The same argument could be extended to S’khona who demonstrated little knowledge about writing in both languages. The teacher could use the nativized English words in S’khona’s Zulu written text to help him learn to compare and contrast letters across the two languages.

Several studies show that students who use their bilingual and biliteracy strategies enhance their language and literacy learning and performance (Franken & August, 2011; Soltero-Gonzalez et al., 2012). For example, Jimenez et al., (1996) found that successful Spanish-English bilingual 4th and 5th graders differed from their less successful counterparts because they were able to use bilingual strategies in learning English. This suggests that it is important for teachers to be aware of bilingual strategies in order to support students’ bilingual and biliteracy development.

In sum, this discussion highlights the significance of assessing bilingual and biliterate students in both of their languages in order to learn about their strengths and challenges, information that can be used to inform instruction.

**Home language and literacy practices as dynamic and fluid practices.** In general, although the focal students were from a similar social environment—they were all from one of the rural parts of the country—the dynamics in their families made them to experience language and literacy practices in varied ways. In some cases, their experiences seem to bear resemblances, and in others they appear to differ in noticeable ways, reminding us that
students should never be viewed as a homogenous group no matter how similar they might appear to be because within a sociocultural view “Home background is no longer static, a set of demographics, but is a context of social relations and social actors variously in crisis and variously resilient . . . ‘home background’ . . . references a matrix of social relations, social conditions, and potentials for social actions”(Welle, personal communication cited in Stein & Mamabolo, 2005, p. 41).

In this study, despite the dynamics in the students’ home language and literacy practices, the common thread that runs throughout the students’ home practices is their exposure to stories. The stories ranged from traditional stories to stories in movies and cartoons to stories in short written texts. This variation in the students’ stories shows that the written word is not the only legitimate resource; resources are interdependent and interrelated (Hornberger, 1989; 2010). Through the stories as means of meaning-making, the students were able to integrate multiple modes of representation in engaging ways. For example, as Dudu and S’khona narrated the traditional stories they liked, they performed them—they sang, danced, and gestured to express meaning. Evidently, these performances allowed the students to tap into multiple communicative resources, including gestures and body movements; so the spoken word was not the only legitimate means of representing meaning as the students stepped and moved through the stories (Temple et al., 2011, p. 394).

In general, the use of multiple channels of communicative practices and texts, including performative, spoken, and visual texts represented in different languages (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Janks, 2010; Kress, 2003; Stein, 2008) seemed important to the students in their attempts to make sense of their learning of literacy. For instance, Noma, whose literacy skills in Zulu were weaker than in English, made a conscious effort to improve her literacy in Zulu by reading Zulu newspapers in addition to reading English materials. She also watched bilingual and multilingual TV programs. Similarly, Dudu read magazines and newspapers in
both Zulu and English and also took interest in bilingual movies and dramas on the TV and the radio. Muzi’s interest in reading subtitles in Nigerian pidgin English movies shows that not only did the students participate in different kinds of texts and languages, but they also learned to embrace their multiple identities, a behavior that was also fostered by their interest in Western popular music and local hip hop music. In this respect, the students’ linguistic and cultural identities converged in complex ways along the continuum as they switched back and forth between their literacy and communicative practices (Hornberger, 2002, 2010; Pennycook, 2010), thus challenging the perception that the language and literacy practices of nonmainstream or disadvantaged families and communities, such as rural communities and families in the case of this study, are poor.

As some studies show, the above mentioned claim only takes into account school-based literacy practices and ignores community and family literacy practices, especially those that differ from school literacy practices, including support networks (Heath, 1983; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Stein & Slonimsky, 2006). For example, Dudu’s discussion of Carson’s book with her uncle shows that not only did the family provide her with this text, but they also engaged her with it. So reading was a shared sociocultural process, unlike reading in her class that ignored this aspect of reading and social support. Similarly, in Noma’s case, the moral and financial support she received from her family to nurture her interest in designing birthday cards and sending them out to respective family members and friends shows that her literacy learning was enhanced by her social network, the family. The same argument can be extended to Muzi and S’khona, albeit in varying degrees. In these families ‘literacy learning is mediated by language and is accomplished in a context in which social actors position, and are positioned by, each other in verbal, nonverbal and textual interaction’ (Hall, Larson & Marsh, 2003, p. xix).
The findings about the students’ home language and literacy practices in this study challenge teachers to rethink language and literacy practices they enact in their classrooms. This is especially important in the context of primary school teachers in South Africa, because classroom language and literacy instruction tends to limit students’ opportunities to participate actively in their learning, as this study and others show (Prinsloo & Stein, 2004; Puddemann et al., 2000). In part, this is due to instruction that is mostly teacher-centered and textbook dominated. With regard to the use of the textbook, Howie et al. (2007) reported that 57% of the 4th grade teachers who participated in PIRLS 2006 used the textbook every day or almost every day compared to 12% that used a variety of children’s literature every day or almost every day. Given the positive effect of using multiple texts on students’ active language and literacy learning (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Long & Gove, 2003), the fact that most South African students depend on textbooks, some of which are of questionable standards, suggests that these students will continue to struggle with literacy.

Moreover, the fact that diverse, multiple texts validate cultural backgrounds and personal experiences of all students (Bloome et al. 2005; Reyes, 2001, students who are restricted to the textbook may not get a chance to use their lived experiences to enhance their learning. For example, in this study, given that S’khona was exposed to traditional story-telling and he enjoyed it, if story-telling was part of the classroom literacy activities, this might have encouraged him to participate actively instead of being a passive bystander, which he was for the most part. In fact, some studies show that oral stories can be incorporated into classroom literacy activities to facilitate students’ learning (Stein, 2008; Stein & Mamabolo, 2005). As Solesken et al, 2000) found, using stories can support struggling students; they learn to integrate this knowledge into their literacy learning. Furthermore, not only does using multiple and diverse texts enhance students’ development of literacy and identities, but it also encourages them to question social issues (Moll et al.,
In other words, it helps them to learn to “read the word and the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987), which in the South African context is consistent with the envisaged student, that is, a student who has “the ability to participate in society as a critical and an active citizen” (Department of Education, 2002, p. 8).

In sum, the above discussion highlights the fact that home language and literacy practices of students from all backgrounds are valid. Teachers and researchers need to be aware of the practices in order to incorporate them in their classroom language and literacy practices to benefit students in their learning.

Lessons Learned

Overall, the analysis of the classroom data shows that students should not be treated as a homogenous group. When teachers use a one-size-fits-all approach, this benefits a small group of students. In this study, it was mainly girls, especially those that participated actively; the rest of the class was left behind. To promote effective learning in which bilingual and L2 students assume an active role in constructing knowledge with the teacher and their peers, teachers should use a variety of grouping configurations such as pairing students and dividing them into small groups (Echavarria, et al., 2004, 2008). This allows students to negotiate meaning collaboratively, and thus optimize their level of participation as they learn from one another in a less threatening way. Teachers also get an opportunity to observe and assess students’ understanding, and this information can help them to plan subsequent lessons accordingly, addressing students’ needs.

Another lesson learned is that students’ learning to be bilingual and biliterate should not be restricted to simple mundane activities such as vocabulary explanation, as it was often the case in this study. This limits their bilingual and biliteracy development. In this study, the fact that the students were exposed to bilingual and multilingual contexts through TV and radio programs, music, movies, and reading materials makes one speculate that had they been
given space to use Zulu and English in meaningful ways by being engaged in extended and authentic activities and texts, this would have increased their level of participation and learning. Stein and Mamabolo (2005) and Newfield (2011) found that when students from some South African township schools were provided with opportunities to use multiple texts in different meaningful classroom activities, such as in oral telling of personal stories in their L1s and in translating the stories into English in the written texts, not only did they become actively involved, but they also learned to represent their identities.

This study also showed that assessing bilingual and biliterate students in both their languages can reveal their skills and knowledge in each language, and most importantly, how these transfer across their languages. Although evidence about cross-linguistic transfer is widely reported in developed countries (Lindsey et al., 2003; Jongejan et al., 2007), it is under-explored in the African context (Asfaha et al., 2009; Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007). Understanding transfer of skills and knowledge across students’ languages in South Africa and other African countries is particularly significant because bi/multilingualism is a norm rather than an exception in these countries. Teachers and researchers need to know what skills and knowledge transfer, and what factors support or do not support the transfer, including literacy programs.

In this study, the fact that during the performance assessments, Dudu, who performed well in the Zulu literacy tasks, her initial literacy language, also did well in the English tasks, the language she first learned as a subject in grade 2 and as a medium of instruction in grade 4, provides evidence that initial literacy in an L1 facilitates literacy learning in an L2. On the other hand, that Noma performed well in both Zulu and English tasks despite the fact that she was getting formal literacy instruction in Zulu for the first time in the 4th grade—she received formal initial literacy in English as indicated before—shows that students can transfer literacy skills and knowledge in any direction, a finding that has been reported in other studies.
(Dworin, 2003; Toloa et al., 2009). In brief, these two cases challenge researchers and teachers, especially in Africa and other similar contexts, to adopt instructional and learning practices that promote transfer of skills and knowledge in flexible ways.

**Implications for Education and Research**

**Educational implications.** The findings of this study reveal that oral reading, which took up a significant amount of time in this class, was marked by constant interruptions by the teacher correcting students’ pronunciation of words. Because this “look and say” method (William, 1996) did not seem to be productive in this study and in other similar studies (Opoku-Amankwa, 2009; William, 2007), teachers need to teach word recognition and decoding skills systematically and explicitly to emerging bilinguals. Since bilingual students may already know how to read and write in another language, teachers can scaffold students’ learning of literacy in the new language by highlighting similarities and differences in the language systems of both languages (Bauer & Mkhize, 2011; Franken & August, 2011).

However, given the fact that knowing how to read words does not necessarily translate into comprehension as it was demonstrated in this study and also pointed out in other studies (Pikulski & Chard, 2005), teachers should explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies. But, for students to benefit optimally from being exposed to reading comprehension strategies, strategy instruction should be a school-wide program. As Raphael and Au (2005) noted, such programs result in coordinated efforts that increase students’ learning of strategies across the school as teachers continually interact with one another to lay a foundation on strategy use or to build on strategies already taught. Because strategies are not learned in a vacuum, for these programs to be effective, teachers need to use a wide range of texts in order to cater to students’ interests, abilities, and cultural and language backgrounds (García & Bauer, 2004).
A similar argument can be extended to writing. Instead of focusing on practice exercises, as it was often the case in this study, teachers should create writing opportunities and contexts where students interact with texts in meaningful ways. When bilingual students write about topics that interests them and are allowed to incorporate their native languages, not only do they improve their skills, but they also learn to represent their bilingual and bicultural identities (McCarthey et al., 2004; Stein, 2008).

Because reading and writing in an L2 requires some level of L2 oral language proficiency (Asfaha et al., 2009; Garcia, 2000), teachers should create opportunities for students to engage in extended oral activities in an L2—something that rarely occurred in this study. Such activities can involve students having an exploratory talk about a topic they are about to read or write about (Setati et al., 2002). During such talks, students may use any of their languages to express their ideas and understandings of the topics. Evidently, this points to the significance of extended texts about a range of topics, some of which relate directly to students’ cultural and linguistic experiences as suggested before.

In addition, because teachers of bilingual and biliterate students are concerned with language development and content knowledge, teachers of these students should have clearly stated language and content objectives. As Echavarria et al. (2004, 2008) recommend, objectives should be written in simple language that students can understand. Writing objectives on the board and sharing them with students helps the teacher and students to know if they are achieving what they set out to do in a session.

Finally, as the classroom observations, assessments, and home visits showed, the students did not always keep English and Zulu discretely separate. On some occasions, they would draw on both languages in complex and dynamic ways. This shows that the students viewed their languages as resources from which they could benefit as they tried to make sense of their literacies. Although the 4th grade teacher and the foundation phase teachers
were aware of this as the interviews indicated, they did not seem to have knowledge about how to help the students transfer their knowledge and skills across the two languages. They mostly used translation and code-switching as bilingual strategies. Given this situation, it is clear that professional development and teacher preparation programs need to expose teachers to programs which promote biliteracy pedagogy. These programs should educate teachers about cross-linguistic theories, and how to use these theories to better understand issues students grapple with in their learning of literacy in two languages.

**Research implications.** In this study the focus was on the learning of English as L2 in a 4th grade class, and to a limited extent on the Zulu literacy in the foundation phase; it would be interesting if future studies would examine students’ learning of literacy in African languages alongside English in the same grade. This will help us to better understand how the teaching of African languages shapes acquisition of oral proficiency and literacy in English, and how these languages mutually influence one another.

Furthermore, since this study did not examine instruction and learning of the English literacy in the 3rd grade for the reasons mentioned in the study, studying how English teachers in the 3rd grade prepare students to transition to learning in English in all their academics in the 4th grade would shed some light on students’ strengths and challenges in the 4th grade. This is particularly important because language and literacy instructional strategies and techniques that teachers use to help students transition from the 3rd grade play an important role in supporting students as they transition to the 4th grade (Franken & August, 2011).

Another research idea would be to conduct an intervention study where teachers work with researchers to better build on students’ assets. It is not enough to simply expect teachers to learn on their own how to shelter instruction, and make learning more meaningful without any support. Researchers need to better understand what will work in the South African context if students’ performances are ever to improve.
In addition, because in this study the students’ home language and literacy practices were reported and not observed, it would help if researchers in future studies would actually observe students participating in different language and literacy practices in their homes. Such studies would enhance teachers’ and researchers’ insights into how students navigate learning language and literacy across the school and home contexts, and most importantly, what can be learned from the two contexts in order to facilitate students’ learning of language and literacy, especially at school.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study shed some light on how Zulu-English emerging bilingual and biliterate students learn literacy in the English 4th grade class in the South African context, and how they engage in language and literacy practices in their homes, it has some limitations. First, a small group of students participated in the study; therefore, the results are not generalizable to a broader student population in South Africa.

Second, the fact that I did not examine the students’ learning of literacy in Zulu, their L1, provided an incomplete picture about their development of literacy in this language. This is particularly the case because what students can do in each of their languages is qualitatively different: Bilinguals and biliterates use their languages and literacies in complex and dynamic ways, depending on the contexts, interests, abilities, and experiences (Escamilla, 2006; Grosjean, 1989; Soltero-Gonzalez et al., 2012). Nonetheless, assessing the students in both Zulu and English helped to reveal some of their strengths and weaknesses across their languages.

Third, because I could not find an expository text with a South African background due to the lack of expository texts for children, the expository text I used for assessing the students, a selection from the US children’s literature, may have adversely affected the students’ comprehension since some of the concepts were unfamiliar to the students.
Moreover, that I had to divide the text into two parts—the first five chapters being Zulu translation and the last five chapters being in English—may have caused the students to recycle some of the concepts and content across the languages. In other words, the transfer of concepts and knowledge may make it difficult to know exactly how the students performed in each of their languages.

Although I gained some insight into the students’ home language and literacy practices through the interviews with the students and their parents/guardians, because I did not observe the reported practices, I did not get a comprehensive picture about the students’ home practices. Observing reported practices may enhance teachers’ and researchers’ understanding about how students engage in various literacy events and practices in their homes, and most importantly, how they can build on this knowledge to better address the needs of bilingual and biliterate students.

A final limitation of the study is that I did not assess the students within the home context. Given the wider range of literacy skills that the students displayed at home, it is not clear if they would have performed better in that context.
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Appendix A

Focal Students’ Interview Questions

Initial Interview

Language and literacy practices before formal schooling

Today we are going to talk about you before you started school. I am going to ask you questions. I want you to tell me what you remember. There are no right or wrong answers. If you did not hear or understand a question, I want you to ask me to repeat the question. Do you have any question before we continue? (If the student says “yes”, clarify the confusion, but if the student says “no”, continue). Let us start.

1 (a) Before you started school, did you listen to stories? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b), (c), (d), and (e). If the student says “no”, go to number 2).

(b) Who told the stories? Where were the stories told? Were you told lots of stories or was it something that happened once in a while?

(c) Please share with me one story that you liked a lot.

(d) What did you like about this story? Why?

(e) Is there any particular story you did not like? What was it that you did not like about this story? Why?

2. (a) Did you like to tell stories? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b) and (c). If the student says “no”, go to number 3).

(b) What story did you like to tell? Tell me the story.

(c) Why is that one of your favorites?

3. (a) Did you play any language game(s) (e.g., Bantwana bantwana buyan’ekhaya)? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions (b) and (c). If the student says “no”, move on to number 4.

(b) Tell me about the language game(s) you liked. Why?

(c) Which languages games you did not like? Why?
4. (a) Did you watch any children’s TV program (e.g., *Dados*—a popular term for South African children’s TV programs)? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b) and (c). If the student says “no”, go to number 5).

(b) Tell me more about the one(s) you liked a lot? Why?

(c) Tell me more about the one(s) you did not like. Why?

5. (a) Did you read books, magazines, TV guides or anything else with adults or older siblings before you started school? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b), (c), and (d). If the student says “no”, go to number 6).

(b) Who helped you?

(c) Tell me which story you liked a lot. What did you like about it? Why?

(d) Tell me the story you did not like. Why?

6. (a) Do you remember writing before you started school? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b), (c), and (d). If the student says “no”, go to number 7)

(b) What did you write?

(c) What did you like about writing? Why?

(d) What did you not like about writing? Why?

7. (a) Do you remember drawing/copying anything before you started school? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b), (c), and (d). If the student says “no”, go to the next section)

(b) What did you draw or copy? Why?

(c) What did you like about drawing or copying? Why?

(d) What did you not like about drawing or copying? Why?

*Language and literacy practices in grades R-3*

Now, we are going to talk about you in grades R through 3. Again, I am going to ask you questions. I want you to tell me what you remember. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. If you did not hear or understand a question, I want you to ask me to repeat the
question. (If the student says “yes”, clarify the confusion, but if the student says “no”
continue). Let us start.

8. (a) Did you listen to stories in these grades? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b),
(c), and (d). If the student says “no”, go to number 9).

(b) What do you remember about these stories? Were the stories fun?
(c) What did you like about these stories? Why?
(d) What did you not like about the stories from school? Why?

9. (a) Did you have a favorite book that you liked reading? (If the student says “yes”, ask
questions: (b) and (c). If the student says “no”, go to number 10).

(b) What was it about this book that you liked? Why?
(c) Was there a part in the book you did not like? Why?

10. (a) What did you write in these grades?
(b) What did you like about writing? Why?
(c) What did you not like about writing? Why?

Final Interview

Language and literacy practices in grade 4

Today we are going to talk about you in the 4th grade. I am going to ask you questions. I want
you to tell me what you remember. There are no right or wrong answers. If you did not hear
or understand a question, I want you to ask me to repeat the question. Do you have any
question before we continue? (If the student says “yes”, clarify the confusion; if the student
says “no”, continue). Let us start.

1. (a) You have been reading in English in this grade. What did you like about reading in this
class? Why?
(b) What did you not like about reading in this class? Why?
2. On a scale of 1-3, 1 being hard, 2 being okay, and 3 being easy; how would you describe what reading in English is like for you?

3. (a) Do you have a favorite book? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b), (c) and (d). If the student says “no”, go to number 4).

(b) Tell me about this book.

(c) Why is it a favorite?

(d) How did you come to know about this book?

4. What other things would you like to read in this class (e.g., magazines, newspapers, comics, etc.)? Why?

5. (a) When you are reading in English, do you use Zulu to help you? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b) and (c). If the student says “no”, go to number 6).

(b) When do you use Zulu? Is it before you read, during reading, or/and after reading?

(c) How does using Zulu help you to read?

6. (a) When the teacher taught English sometimes she used Zulu to explain things. Did that help you to learn English? (If the student says “yes”, ask question (b). If the student says “no”, go to number (c)

(b) How did that help you? Give me examples.

(c) Why do you think it did not help you?

7. (a) Where do you do reading in English? Is it only at school or do you do it at home, too? (If the student says at home as well, ask questions (b) and (c). If the student says “no”, go to 8).

(b) Where does the reading material come from?

(c) Tell me more about what you read.

8. (a) Do you see yourself as a very good, okay or bad reader in English? Why?
(b) How do you see yourself as a reader in Zulu: very good reader, okay reader, or a bad reader? What makes you think that?

(c) Who in your class would you say is a good reader in Zulu? What makes him/her a good reader?

(d) Who in your class would you say is a bad reader in Zulu? What makes him/her a bad reader?

(e) Who in your class would you say is a good reader in English? What makes him/her a good reader?

(f) Who in your class would you say is a bad reader in English? What makes him/her a bad reader?

9. (a) Tell me about your writing in this class. What do you like to write about? Why?

(b) What do you not like to write about? Why?

10. Do you use Zulu when you are writing in English? If so, how?

11. How would you describe yourself? Do you see yourself as a good, okay, or bad writer? Why? Do you feel the same in both Zulu and English? Explain.

12. What problems do you have when you are reading and writing in English in this class?

13. (a) What would you like your teacher to do to help you to be a better reader?

(b) What would you like your teacher to do to help you to be a better writer?

14. What would you like your family to do to help you with reading and writing in English?

Current out-of-school language and literacy practices

Now, let us talk about what you do outside school. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. I want you to tell me what you remember. If you did not hear or understand a question, ask me to repeat the question. Do you have any question before we continue? (If the student says “yes”, clarify the confusion, but if the student says “no” continue). Let us start.
15. (a) At home, do you listen to any stories? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b),
(c), and (d). If the student says “no”, go to number 16).

(b) Who tells them?

(c) Please tell me the one that you like a lot. Why?

(d) Tell me the one you do not like. Why?

16. (a) Do you watch TV at home? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b), (c), and (d).
If the student says “no”, go to number 17).

(b) Which TV programs do you watch?

(c) Tell me more about the one(s) you like a lot. Why?

(d) Tell me more about the one(s) you do not like. Why?

17. (a) Do you listen to the radio? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b), (c), (d). (e) If
the student says “no”, go to number 18).

(b) What is your favorite station?

(c) Tell me more about the program(s) you like. Why?

(d) Tell me more about the one(s) you do not like. Why?

(e) What kind of music do they play? Do you sing along to the music when it is playing?

18. (a) Do you have a favorite singer? (If the student mentions the singer, ask questions: (b),
(c), (d), and (e). If the student says he/she does not have a favorite singer, go to number 19).

(b) Who is your favorite singer?

(c) What do you like about his/her songs?

(d) Tell me about a song that he/she sings that you like. Why?

(e) Do you read about this singer and where do you read about him/her?

19. (a) What do you read at home (e.g., books, newspapers, magazines)?

(b) Does someone help you to choose what to read? If so, how?

(c) In what language is what you read written?
(d) What do you like about what you read? Why?

20. (a) What language do you like to read in? (If the student says, he/she likes reading in one language and not in the other, ask questions: (b) and (c). If the student says, he/she likes reading in both languages, go to (d) and (e).

(b) What is it about reading in one language and not in the other that you like? Why?

(c) What is it about reading in both languages that do not like? Why?

(d) What is it about reading in both languages that you like? Why?

(e) What is it about reading in one language and not in the other that you do not like? Why?

21. (a) Do you do any writing at home? (If the student says “yes”, ask questions: (b), (c), and (d). If the student says “no”, go to (e).

(b) What do you like to write about? Why?

(c) Does someone help you with writing at home? How?

(d) What language do you like to write in at home?

(e) Why do you not write at home?

22. Besides reading and/or writing at home and at school, is there any other place where you read and/or write? Tell me about this place? How did you learn about this place? Does someone help you to read and/or write in this place? Tell me more about your reading and/or writing experiences in this place.
Appendix B

Fourth Grade Teacher Interview Questions

Initial Interview

Today I would like to discuss with you your experiences and views on teaching English to your students. I want to stress from the onset that I am interested in learning what real teachers experience and their concerns. Therefore, there are no right or wrong answers. What you share with me are your views and that alone makes them of value to me. As I ask you a few questions, if at any time you do not understand a question, please let me know so that I can clarify the question. Let us start with some general questions about your teaching background.

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you taught this grade?
3. Have you taught at any other grade levels?
4. Have all your teaching been at this school? (If the answer is ‘no’) Where did you teach before coming here? What grades did you teach?
5. You have been teaching and will continue to teach literacy in English to your students. Please share with me your goals for your students at this level? What do you specifically want them to learn before they end the academic year?
6. What elements of these goals are the easiest to reach? Please explain.
7. What elements of these goals are the hardest to accomplish? Please explain.
8. What role, if any, does Zulu play in your students’ learning of English? Please explain.
9. Can you think of specific examples where you found using Zulu to teach reading and writing in English beneficial or not beneficial? Please explain.
10. In teaching literacy in this grade, what strategies and/or skills have you found to be most beneficial to your students? What has not helped the students as much as you might have hoped? Please explain?

11. Imagine someone has come to visit your classroom and they are observing one of your English lessons. Share with me what that person would observe. Explain why?

12. Please explain why you approach literacy instruction in English the way you do. What drives your decision making?

13. What are your thoughts regarding the teaching/learning materials used in literacy in this grade?

14. How effective and/or ineffective are these materials in enhancing students’ learning of literacy in this grade?

15. What improvements would you like to see regarding the selection of the teaching-learning materials in this class?

16. What things would you like the principal to do to support your teaching of the English language and literacy in this grade? Please explain.

17. As you continue teaching literacy in English in this grade in the remaining few months, what are some of the things you would like to improve on? Why? Please be as specific as possible.

**Final Interview**

Thank you very much for the opportunity you gave me to learn from you and the students. You created a welcoming environment for me and the students to learn. Without this conducive environment, conducting this study would have been extremely difficult. Now, I would like you to share with me your experiences and thoughts regarding the language and literacy practices in this class. As I said earlier on, there are no right or wrong answers; only your thoughts and experiences. So feel free to tell me what you think and have experienced.
Throughout the interview, if you do not understand a question, please let me know so that I can clarify the question.

1. At the beginning of the year you set some goals for teaching reading and writing in English to your students. What were these goals and which of the goals were you able to accomplish? Why? Which ones were you not able to reach? Why? Please explain.

2. Why were some goals easier to reach and others more difficult?

3. I noticed that when you were teaching reading and writing in English sometimes you would switch to Zulu. What were you thinking at that moment that made you switch the languages? Had you planned to switch the languages prior to teaching the lesson?

4. What happened after you switched with the students? How did it help them? How do you know?

5. In general, what did you find to be most effective in helping the students learn to read and write in English?

6. What did you find to be less effective as you might have hoped? Please explain.

7. Share with me your experiences and thoughts about the materials you used in teaching reading and writing in this class.

8. How did these materials enhance your teaching of reading and writing in English?

9. Can you tell me some of the challenges you encountered when you used these materials?

10. Please share with me the support that the parents gave their children in their learning of the English language and literacy.

11. What would you suggest the parents do to enhance their children’s learning to read and write in general and in English in particular?

12. Earlier on you shared with me some of the things that the principal do to support your teaching of the English language and literacy. Having taught the English language and
literacy in the 4th grade this year, how else would you like her to support you in your
teaching?

13. I understand that you have been attending workshops on teaching literacy in the English
language. Given the content of the workshops, what did you find most beneficial for you and
your classroom? Please explain.

14. If the coordinator for next year’s workshop came to you and asked you for your input on
what they should cover, what would you suggest? Why?

15. If you were to teach reading and writing in this class again, what would you do differently
and why?

16. In general, what would you say is the best part of your job as a teacher? Why?

17. What would you change if you could? Please explain.
Appendix C

Interview Questions for Grades R-2 Teachers

Today I would like to discuss with you your experiences and views on teaching literacy to your students. I want to stress from the onset that I am interested in learning what real teachers experience and their concerns. Therefore, there are no right or wrong answers. What you share with me are your views and that alone makes them of value to me. As I ask you a few questions, if at any time you do not understand a question, please let me know so that I can clarify the question. Let us start with some general questions about your teaching background.

1. How long have you been teaching?

2. How long have you taught this grade?

3. Have you taught at any other grade levels?

4. Have all your teaching been at this school? (If no) Where did you teach before coming here? What grades did you teach?

5. You have been teaching and will continue to teach reading and writing to your students. Please share with me your goals for your students at this level. What do you specifically want them to learn before the end of the academic year?

6. What elements of these goals are the easiest to reach? Please explain.

7. What elements of these goals are the hardest to accomplish? Please explain.

8. In this grade English was introduced this year with the focus on oral English and to a limited extent on reading and writing in English, before then the students were learning literacy in Zulu. Based on your teaching of the English language and literacy this year, what role does the children’s Zulu oral language and literacy skills play in their learning of the English language and English literacy? Please explain. (This question is specifically for the 2nd grade teacher)
9. Based on your knowledge of the students’ performance in reading and writing in Zulu, do you think most students are at grade level in reading and writing in the Zulu language? If so, what do you think contributes to this? If not, what are some of the factors do you think contribute to this situation?

10. In teaching literacy in this grade, what strategies and/or skills have you found to be most beneficial to your students? What has not helped the students as much as you might have hoped? Please explain?

11. Imagine someone has come to visit your classroom and they are observing one of your literacy lessons. Share with me what that person would observe.

12. Please explain why you would approach the lesson the way you would. What would drive your decision making?

13. What are your thoughts regarding the teaching/learning materials used in literacy in this grade?

14. How effective and/or ineffective are these materials in enhancing students’ learning of literacy in this grade?

15. What improvements would you like to see regarding the selection of the teaching-learning materials in this class?

16. What support would you like to get from the principal concerning the teaching of literacy in this grade?

17. Considering the curricular documents (e.g., the RNCS and work schedules), are there places where you find these curricular documents to be a hindrance? Are there others that are helpful to you? Do you find there are times you need to deviate from the curricular directives? Explain why.

18. Overall, can you share with me your thoughts regarding what you think you need to do to become stronger in your teaching of literacy in this class?
19. In general, what would you say is the best part about your job? Why?

20. What would you change if you could? Why?
Appendix D

Principal Interview Questions

Thank you very much for all the support I got from you and the staff. Without the kind of support I received here, doing this study would have been extremely difficult. Now, I would like you to share with me some of your experiences and thoughts regarding the language and literacy practices at the school. I am aware that you may not be directly involved in the teaching of reading and literacy in all the grades; nevertheless, I would like to hear your views. As I ask you a few questions, if at any time you do not understand a question, please let me know so that I can clarify the question. Let us start.

1. How long have you been a principal in this school?
2. Have you worked as a principal before this school? (If yes) Where and for how long?
3. Before you became the principal, what subjects and grades did you teach and for how long?
4. Has all your teaching been in this school? (If no) Where did you teach and what grades did you teach?
5. As a principal of the school, with respect to literacy, what are your goals for the students at this school?
6. What elements of these goals are the easiest to reach? Please explain.
7. What elements of these goals are the hardest to reach? Please explain.
8. Imagine that you are going to visit the 4th grade class and you will observe one of the English lessons. Please share with me what aspects of the lessons you would focus on and what would drive your choice?
9. What are your views about the use of Zulu in the teaching and learning of reading and writing in English?
10. What opportunities do you create to improve students’ skills in reading and writing in both Zulu and English at the school? Please explain.

11. What support do you give teachers to enhance their teaching of reading and writing in both Zulu and English? Please explain.

12. I am aware that in this school Zulu is used as a medium of instruction from grade R through grade 3. How did this policy come about? Did the school governing body have any input or say in this policy?

13. What are some of the successes and/or challenges of this language policy, especially with regard to the teaching and learning of reading and writing at the school in the foundation and intermediate phases?

14. How do you think the challenges can be addressed?

15. The school has been declared a no fee school. Please explain this concept to me.

16. How is this policy going to affect the teaching and learning at the school, including the teaching and learning of reading and writing?

17. Overall, share with me your thoughts regarding what you think needs to be done to enhance the successes and improve on the weaknesses in the teaching of reading and writing in general and in English, in particular.
Appendix E

Samples of the Texts


Kudaladala

Inxeko ezithombe ibhalwe

nga Niki Daly
Appendix F

Assessment Protocol for the Zulu Narrative Text

Kudaladala ngu-Niki Daly

1. Ngifuna ukuthi ufunde isihloko sale ncwadi [khombisa umfundli isihloko bese umnika
ithuba lokufunda isihloko sencwadi]. Uma ubuka isihloko sale ncwadi yini efika emqondweni
wakho? Khululeka ungitshele noma yini esemqondweni wakho. Ungesabili ukuthi
узонгитшела okuyiqiniso noma okungelona. Angibhekile ukuthi ungitshele lokho. Ngifuna
ukuzwa okusengqondweni yakho.

2. Manje sengizokukhombisa izithombe bese ngicela ukuthi ungitshele ukuthi ucaabanga
ukuthi indaba ingaba mayelana nani. Ngiyaphinda futhi ngicela ukuthi ukhululeke ungitshele
nomayini esemqondweni wakho. Ungesabili ukuthi uzongitshela okuyiqiniso noma
okungelona. Angibhekile ukuthi ungitshele lokho. Ngifuna ukuzwa okusengqondweni yakho.
Asikayifundi le ndaba, ngakho-ke asazi kahle hle ukuthi ikhuluma ngani. [Cela umfundli
ukuthi abheke izithombe bese esho lokho akucabangayo].

Umyalelo:
Ngaphambi kokuba ngikukhombis le ncwadi, uzokhumbula ukuthi ngiye ngafunda enye
incwadi. Ngesikhathi ngifunda, bengibuye ngime kwezinye izingxenye bese ngikhuluma
ngalokho engikade ngikucabanga ngesikhathi ngifunda lezo zingxenye. Manje sekungawe.
Ngizocela ukuthi ufunde le ncwadi. Uma ufika lapho kуненомболо khona, ngizocela ukuthi
ume bese ungitshele ukuthi yini okade uyicabanga ngesikhathi ufunda. Ungesabi
ukungitshela lokho okusengqwodweni yakho. Ayikho impendulo okuyiyonayona noma
okungeyona. Ngifuna ukuzwa ngemicabanga yakho. Uma usuqedile, ngizokubuza umbuzo
ukuze ngazi ukuthi uzweni ngendaba. Uma usungiphendulile, ngiyobe sengikucela ukuthi
uqhubeka ufunde kuze kube futhi uhlangana nenamba. Uyophinde futhi ungitshele ukuthi

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yini okade uyicabanga ngesikhathi ufunda. Ngiyophinde futhi ngikubuze umbuzo.

Sizokuphindaphinda lokhu kuze kuphele izinamba endabeni. Asiqale.

3. Ekuqaleni kwendaba umxoxi wendaba uthi ibanga elide lalingamkhathazi uSarie. Kusho ukuthini ukukhathazeka? Yini eyayikhathaza uSarie?


8. [Imicabango yomfundi bese kuba umbuzo] Ngasekupheleni kwendaba umxoxi wendaba uthi ulimi lukaSarie lwalungasambeki uma efunda: “Amagama get the quote). Ucabanga ukuthi lokhu kusho ukuthini?

kulula kuwe ukulinda ngesineke? Kunini lapho ulinda ngesineke? Ngabe ukhona uthisha omaziyo onesineke? Kungani usho njalo?

10. [Imicabango yomfundi bese kuba umbuzo] Nikeza igama eliphikisa elithi “emandulo”.
Ake ucbange isibonelo sento ekhombisa ukuthi into akusiyona yasemandulo. Usho ngani?
Sekela impendulo yakho.

_Umyalelo:_


12. Uma ufuna ukwazi ukuthi umngane wakho uyizwe kahle le ndaba, yimuphi umbuzoohlakaniphile ongambuza wona?

13. Uma ungaxoxela umngane wakho le ndaba, ungayixoxa kanjani? Qala ekuqaleni, udlulela maphakathi nendaba bese ugcina ngesiphetho sendaba.

14. Ngokubona kwakho, yini into ebalelekele umbhali afuna uyifunde kule ndaba?

Assessment Protocol for the Zulu Narrative Text (Translation)

*Once Upon a Time* by Niki Daly

1. I want you to read the title of the book [show the student the title of the book and allow the student to read the title]. When you look at the title of this book, what comes to your mind? Feel free to tell me whatever is on your mind. Do not be afraid that you might be wrong. I am not looking for right or wrong answers but your thoughts.

2. Now, I am going to show you the pictures in the book and then ask you to tell me what you think the story might be about. Again, feel free to tell me whatever is on your mind. Do not be afraid that you might be wrong. I am not looking for right or wrong answers but your thoughts. We have not read the story yet, so we do not know exactly what this book says. [Show the student the pictures and asked the student to share his/her thoughts about the pictures].

*Instructions*:

Before I showed you this book, you will remember that I read aloud another book. As I was reading, I would stop at some parts of the story and talk about what I was thinking as I was reading those parts. Now, it is your turn to do so. I will ask you to read aloud to me. When you come to a number, I would like you to stop and tell me what you were thinking as you were reading. Do not be afraid to talk about what is on your mind. There are no right or wrong answers; I want to hear your thoughts. After you have told me your thoughts, I will ask you a question about the part of the story you will have read to check what you understood about the story. After you have answered me, I will ask you to continue to read the story until you come to a number. Again, you will stop and talk about what you were thinking as you were reading that part. Once you have finished, I will ask you a question. We will repeat this until there are no more numbers in the story. Let us start.
3. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] At the beginning of the story the narrator tells us that the long distance did not bother Sarie. What does the word “bother” mean here? What bothered Sarie?

4. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] When you read aloud with other students, how do you feel? Do you feel at ease or do you feel not at ease? Why? Support your answer.

5. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] What is another word the author could have used to mean “to tease”? Do you think it was a good thing that Sindi and Mdu teased Sarie? Why? Support your answer.

6. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] In this story auntie Anna tells Sarie not to give up reading because “It’s so good to be able to read well and enjoy books.” Do you agree with that advice? Why? Is there any book you enjoy reading? Or is there anything else that you enjoy reading? Why? Support your answer.

7. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Auntie Anna refused to read to Sarie the book they had found in the old car. She said they were going to read it together. Why do you think she wants to do it that way? Is there someone who helps you to read a book or anything else you might be reading? Who is this person? How does she/he help you?

8. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Towards the end of the story, the narrator says, when Sarie was reading “the words pour out as clear as spring water”. What do you think this means?

9. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] The story says, Adonis, Sarie’s teacher “waited with patience” when it was Sarie’s turn to read. What does this mean? Is it hard or easy for you to be patient? When did you have to be patient? Do you know of a teacher who is patient? Why do you think so?
10. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] What word is the opposite of the word “emandulo” (in the olden days)? Can you think of something that shows that something does not belong to the olden day? Why? Support your answer.

Instructions

Now that you have finished reading the whole story, you are not going to do think-alouds anymore, but I am still going to ask you some questions. Again, when you answer a question, try to be as detailed as possible. Do not be afraid to tell me what you think. Although some of the answers will be in the book, others will not be in the book. You will have to think about them. Let us start.

11. In the story auntie Anna says Sarie should “ukubona into ngeso lengqondo” (lit. meaning: “see something by the eye of the mind” which means “to imagine or visualize something”). What was auntie Anna trying to say when she said that? As you were reading this book, were you able to see some of the things that are happening in the story? Which part was most visible to you?

12. If you want to know if your friend has understood the story, what good question can you ask him/her?

13. If you were to tell this story to a friend, how would you tell it? Start with the beginning, the middle, and then the end.

14. In your opinion, what do you think the author wants you to learn from this story?

15. In your opinion, what do you think might happen in our country if we could have many people who cannot read? Why? Support your answer.
Appendix G
Assessment Protocol for the Zulu Expository Text

(See the translation below)

*Working with Materials: Changing Materials* by C. Oxlade


2. Yini ofuna ukuyifunda noma ukuyazi ngalesi sihloko?

_Umyalelo_


Sizokuphindaphinda lokhu kuze kuphele izinamba endabeni. Asiqale.


4. [Imicabango yomfundi bese kuba umbuzo] Chaza ukuthi kwenzekani uma ubeka ubumba olumanzi elangeni. Kungani?
5. [Imicabango yomfundi bese kuba umbuzo] Encwadini kuthiwa singakwazi ukuguqula isimo sezinto eziqinile. Yизiphi esingenza ngazo lokhu?

6. [Imicabango yomfundi bese kuba umbuzo] Chazela umngane wakho ukuthi amanzi asishintsha kanjani isimo sawo.

7. [Imicabango yomfundi bese kuba umbuzo] Uma wena nomngane wakho nidlala nge-elastiki, niyinweba futhi niyisonta, suguqka kanjani isimo sayo? Chaza.

8. [Imicabango yomfundi bese kuba umbuzo] Ucabanga ukuthi kungani ushokoledi uphuka uma sizama ukuwephula ube amaqhezwana amancane uma uqinile?

9. [Imicabango yomfundi bese kuba umbuzo] Encwadini kuthiwa, “Iqhwa liyinto eqinile kanti amanzi wona awuketshezi.” Ngabe iliphi elinye igama olaziyo elisho uu-wuayisi?


Imiyalelo


11. Ngokufunda le ncwadi, ufundeni lokhu okade ungakwazi ngaphambili?

12. Yimuphi umbuzo ongawubuza umngane wakho ukuze uthole ukuthi uyizwe kahle into ebeshiwo kule ncwadi? Kungani ucabanga ukuthi lona kungaba umbuzo omuhle?

13. Ucabanga ukuthi yini umbhali afuna uyifunde ngokufunda le ncwadi?
Assessment Protocol for the Zulu Expository Text

(Translation)

Working with Materials: Changing Materials by C. Oxlade

1. I am going to show you the title of this book and ask you to tell me what you know about the title. Feel free to tell me whatever is on your mind. Do not be afraid that you might be wrong. We have not read the book yet, so we do not know exactly what this book says. [Show the student the title.] What do you already know about this topic?

2. What do you want to know/learn about this topic?

Instructions

Before I showed you this book, you will remember that I read aloud another book. As I was reading, I would stop at some parts of the story and talk about what I was thinking as I was reading those parts. Now, it is your turn to do so. I will ask you to read aloud to me. When you come to a number, I would like you to stop and tell me what you were thinking as you were reading. Do not be afraid to talk about what is on your mind. There are no right or wrong answers; I want to hear your thoughts. After you have told me your thoughts, I will ask you a question about the part of the story you will have read to check what you understood about the story. After you have answered me, I will ask you to continue to read the story until you come to a number. Again, you will stop and talk about what you were thinking as you were reading that part. Once you have finished, I will ask you a question. We will repeat this until there are no more numbers in the story. Let us start.

3. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Your friend does not understand how snow and ice change to water. How would you explain this to your friend?

4. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Explain what happens when you leave soft clay in the sun. Why?
5. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] In the book, it says, “We can change the shape of the solid materials”. What are some of the ways we can do this?

6. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Explain to your friend how water changes its shape.

7. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] When you play with your friend with an elastic band, stretching and twisting it, how does it change its shape? Explain.

8. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Why do you think chocolate breaks when we try to break it into small parts when it is hard?

9. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] The book says, "Ice is a solid material, and water is a liquid." What is another word for "u-ayisi" (ice) in Zulu?

10. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Your mother was listening to the news in SABC1 and heard that in one of the countries in Eastern Europe, there are boiling mud pools. Explain to her how this happens.

Instructions

Now that you have finished reading the whole story, you are not going to do think-alouds anymore, but I am still going to ask you questions. Again, when you answer a question, try to be as detailed as possible. Do not be afraid to tell me what you think. Although some of the answers will be in the book, others will not be in the book. You will have to think about them. Let us start.

11. What did you learn from reading this book that you did not know before?

12. What question would you ask your friend about this book to see if your friend has understood the information in the book? Why do you think this would be a good question?

13. What do you think the author wants you to learn from reading the book?
Appendix H

Assessment Protocol for the English Narrative Text

*At the Crossroads* by R. Isadora

1. I want you to read the title of the book [show the student the title of the book and allow the student to read the title]. When you look at the title of this book, what comes to your mind? Feel free to tell me whatever is on your mind. Do not be afraid that you might be wrong. I am not looking for right or wrong answers but your thoughts.

2. Now, I am going to show you the pictures in the book and then ask you to tell me what you think the story might be about. Again, feel free to tell me whatever is on your mind. Do not be afraid that you might be wrong. I am not looking for right or wrong answers but your thoughts. We have not read the story yet, so we do not know exactly what this book says. [Show the student the pictures and asked the student to share his/her thoughts about the pictures].

*Instructions*

Before I showed you this book, you will remember that I read aloud another book. As I was reading, I would stop at some parts of the story and talk about what I was thinking as I was reading those parts. Now, it is your turn to do so. I will ask you to read aloud to me. When you come to a number, I would like you to stop and tell me what you were thinking as you were reading. Do not be afraid to talk about what is on your mind. There are no right or wrong answers; I want to hear your thoughts. After you have told me your thoughts, I will ask you a question about the part of the story you will have read to check what you understood about the story. After you have answered me, I will ask you to continue to read the story until you come to a number. Again, you will stop and talk about what you were thinking as you were reading that part. Once you have finished, I will ask you a question. We will repeat this until there are no more numbers in the story. Let us start.
3. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] The narrator in the book tells us that the fathers of the children in the book are coming back from the mines after being away/absent from their families for 10 months. Do you have a family member who works away from home?

(a) If the answer is YES, ask: Who is this person? Where does she/he work? After how long does she/he come back home? When she/he is away, how do you feel?

(b) If the answer is NO, ask: Do you know of any person in the community who works away from their family? Who is this person? Where does she/he work? After how long does she/he come back home? How do you think the children feel when this person is not at home?

4. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] In the story the narrator says their mothers have to fetch water from the water tap outside their home. Why do you think the mothers have to get water from the tap? In your home, where do you get water? Is it easy or difficult to get water in your home? Why?

5. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] After school the children rushed outside to wait for their fathers. What does the word “rush” mean in this story? Do you sometime rush after school? Why?

6. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Zola’s and Sipho’s friends agreed that they were going to help Zola and Sipho find a piece of wire for the guitar and a stick for the drum so that they could play these things while waiting for their fathers. Why is it a good thing to help friends? If you were to help a friend, what would you do? Why would you choose to do that?

7. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] The narrator tells us that they waited for their fathers until “The lights flicker on in distant windows”. What do you think this might mean? What does it tell us about the time of the day?
8. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] The children in the story tell stories to keep themselves awake as they were waiting for their fathers. Do you ever tell stories?
   (a) If the answer is YES, ask: When? What is your favorite story? Briefly tell me this story?
   (b) If the answer is NO, ask: can you share with me a story that was told to you by someone?
10. [The think-aloud task first and then the question] When Mr Sisulu talked to the children, he said, “It’s a long way from the mines”. What did he mean by this statement?
9. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] At last the fathers of the children in the story arrived after the children’s long wait. Have you ever waited for someone or something for a long time? Who was that person or what was that thing? When the person or the thing eventually arrived, how did you feel? Why? If you were to wait for one thing in your life, what would that be and why?

Instructions
Now that you have finished reading the whole story, you are not going to do think-alouds anymore, but I am still going to ask you questions. Again, when you answer a question, try to be as detailed as possible. Do not be afraid to tell me what you think. Although some of the answers will be in the book, others will not be in the book. You will have to think about them. Let us start.

10. If you want to know if your friend has understood the story, what good question can you ask him/her?
11. If you were to tell this story to a friend, how would you tell it? Start with the beginning, the middle, and then the end.
12. In your opinion, what do you think might happen in our country if we could have many people who do not work? Why? Support your answer.
Appendix I

Assessment Protocol for the English Expository Text

*Working with Materials: Changing Materials* by C. Oxlade

1. I am going to show you these topics and ask you to tell me what you know about these topics. [Because this was the same text that the students used for Zulu, I chose a topic from one of the chapters in the book they did not read about during the Zulu assessment]. Feel free to tell me whatever is on your mind. Do not be afraid that you might be wrong. We have not read about these topics yet, so we do not know exactly what they are about. [Show the student the topic] What do you already know about this topic?

2. What do you want to know/learn about this topic?

*Instructions*

Before I showed you this book, you will remember that I read aloud another book. As I was reading, I would stop at some parts of the story and talk about what I was thinking as I was reading those parts. Now, it is your turn to do so. I will ask you to read aloud to me. When you come to a number, I would like you to stop and tell me what you were thinking as you were reading. Do not be afraid to talk about what is on your mind. There are no right or wrong answers; I want to hear your thoughts. After you have told me your thoughts, I will ask you a question about the part of the story you will have read to check what you understood about the story. After you have answered me, I will ask you to continue to read the story until you come to a number. Again, you will stop and talk about what you were thinking as you were reading that part. Once you have finished, I will ask you a question. We will repeat this until there are no more numbers in the story. Let us start.

3. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Your friend does not understand how paint dries up. How would you explain this to your friend?
4. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Explain what happens when air around a can of coca cola from a refrigerator or a cold place cools on a hot day.

5. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Imagine that yesterday you forgot to take out a bar of chocolate from your school bag, when you woke up this morning it was very soft you could spread it on your slice of bread. Explain why it turned soft.

6. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Why is it easy to make or turn some materials into different shapes?

7. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Your friend did not understand the meaning of the word “solution”. How would you explain this word to her/him?

8. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] What do you think would happen if you were to add oil to a bowl of water and leave the mixture for a day? Why?

9. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] A boiled egg can change to its original shape. True or false. Why?

10. [The think-aloud task first followed by the question] Why is sometimes burning important to people?

Instructions

Now that you have finished reading the entire story, you are not going to do think-alouds anymore, but I am still going to ask you questions. Again, when you answer a question, try to be as detailed as possible. Do not be afraid to tell me what you think. Although some of the answers will be in the book, others will not be in the book. You will have to think about them. Let us start.

11. What question would you ask your friend about this book to see if your friend has understood the information in the book? Why do you think this would be a good question?

12. What big idea do you think the writer wants you to learn from reading this book?
13. Do you think the title "Working with materials: Changing materials" is a good choice for this book? Why or why not?
Appendix J

Pictures for the Zulu Writing Task: 2010 FIFA World CUP Closing Ceremony
Appendix K

Pictures for the English Writing Task: A Match between Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates
Appendix L

Writing Rubric for Zulu and English Writing

Grammar/Punctuation

Score of 5 – Advanced
The student uses language conventions such as capitalization and punctuation appropriately. The student uses more than basic punctuation including commas, semicolons, colons, question marks and exclamation marks. The student capitalizes proper nouns as well as the first word in a sentence consistently. The student’s writing exhibits subject-verb agreement.

Score of 4 – Grade-level
The student uses language conventions such as punctuation appropriately. The student’s writing exhibits subject-verb agreement.

Score of 3 – Approaching grade-level
The student uses basic language conventions appropriately and exhibits correct use of subject-verb agreement most of the time. Errors do not interfere with the reader’s comprehension of the text.

Score of 2 – Developing competence
The student uses capitalization and punctuation inconsistently. Lack of subject agreement may interfere with reader’s comprehension of the text.

Score of 1 – Below grade-level
The student does not use capitalization and punctuation. Lack of subject –verb agreement interferes with reader’s comprehension of the text.

Sentence Complexity

Score of 5 – Advanced
Student uses a variety of types of sentences including simple, compound, and complex (one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses) sentences
Score of 4 – Grade-level
Student frequently uses sentences of varying lengths and structure that may include simple, compound, and/or complex (one independent and one or more dependent clauses) sentences.

Score of 3 – Approaching grade-level
Student uses simple sentences correctly. There is some attempt at varying length and structure.

Score of 2 – Developing competence
The student uses run-on sentences or sentence fragments that may interfere with the reader’s comprehension.

Score of 1 – Below grade-level
The student’s lack of sentence structure interferes with the reader’s comprehension.

Organization
Score of 5 – Advanced
The student demonstrates clear organization including beginning, middle, and ending with an effective introduction and conclusion. Major points or events are appropriately paragraphed. There is a clear flow (coherence) and logic to the order of events (narrative) or points given (expository).

Score of 4 – Grade-level
The student has clear organization with an effective introduction and conclusion. Major points or events are appropriately paragraphed. There is adequate flow and logic to the student’s writing.

Score of 3 – Approaching grade-level
The student has attempted organization with a beginning, middle with an ending with an introduction and conclusion. Most points or events are appropriately paragraphed. There may not be a perfect flow or logic to the text, but the reader is still able to understand the student’s meaning.
Score of 2 – Developing competence
There is general lack of focus. There are some difficulties with flow that interfere with the reader’s ability to understand the text.

Score of 1 – Below grade-level
There is no organization or focus.

Content/Ideas
Score of 5 – Advanced
The student develops the ideas or main events in the paper thoroughly with relevant support and elaboration. This may include details, personal reactions, anecdotes, and/or quotes/dialogue. The writer also includes second order ideas, giving an explanation of the importance/value of the examples/evidence given.

Score of 4 – Grade-level
The student includes adequate support and elaboration of ideas, but there is not a rich use of different types of details.

Score of 3 – Approaching grade-level
The student includes basic information and some support and elaboration for ideas or events.

Score of 2 – Developing competence
The student includes basic information with little or no support and elaboration of ideas.

Score of 1 – Below grade-level
There is no elaboration of ideas.
Appendix M

Assessment Protocol for the Zulu Writing Task

Umyalelo wokuqala: [Emva kokukhombisa umfundi ukuthi indaba angayixoxa kanjani esebenzisa izithombe.] Sengikuxoxele indaba ngisebenzisa lezi zithombe. Ungangitshela ukuthi izithombe zikusize kanjani ukuthi uyizwe kahle le ndaba ekade ngiyixoxa? [Ngase ngimbuzisisa umfundi ukuze ngazi ukuthi uyizwe kahle yini indaba. Kwathi uma umfundi engayizwanga kahle, ngase ngiyayiphinda; ngicacisa lezo zindawo ezibe yinkinga.]

Umyalelo II: Manje sekungawe. Ngizokukhombisa lezi zithombe bese ngikucela ukuthi ungixoxele indaba usebenzisa zona. Ngicela ungithathe njengomuntu ongazibonanga lezi zithombe manje ungixoxela indaba ngazo. Zama ukwenaba ngawo onke amandla akho. [Emva kwale miyalelo, ngase ngihombisa umfundi izithombe futhi ngamvumela ukuthi azibuke ngokwenele ngaphambi kokuba angixoxele indaba acabanga ukuthi yabe ixoxwa yizithombe.]


Note: The translation is the same as the English writing assessment instructions below
Appendix N

Assessment Protocol for the English Writing Task

Instruction I: [After modeling telling a story based on the pictures.] I have told my story using the pictures. Can you tell me how the pictures helped you to understand the story I was telling you? [I probed to make sure that student understood the story. If the student did not understand the story, I repeated telling the story, clarifying any possible confusion the student might have had.]

Instruction II: Now, it is your turn to do the same. I am going to ask you to look at these pictures and then tell me a story. Imagine that I did not see the pictures and you are telling me the story. Be as detailed as possible.

[Following the above instructions, I showed the student the pictures and allowed the student to look at the pictures before she/he could tell me the story they thought was being told by the pictures.]

Instruction III: Now that you have told me the story, I want you to write down the story for me. Imagine that a friend of yours could not be here to hear the story, so you are writing it down for her/him so she/he will not miss out. Be as detailed as possible.

[Following the above instructions, I allowed the student to write down the story. This took at least 25 minutes. I then asked him/her to revise and edit the story, for at least, five minutes. Finally, I collected the story for analysis.]
Appendix O

Imibuzo yabazali (Parents Interview Questions)

(see the translation below)

Imibuzo yokuqala


1. (a) Kuleli khaya niyazoxoxa izindaba? (Uma impendulo ithi ‘yebo’, qhubekela kumbuzo (b) kuya ku- (e); uma impendulo ithi ‘cha’, qhubekela kumbuzo (e).

(b) Ngubani oxoxa izindaba? Ngabe nizixoxela kuphi futhi ngabe nejwayele ukuzixoxa?

(c) Iyiphi indaba ocabanga ukuthi abantwana bayithanda kakhulu? Kungani?

(d) Ngabe ikhona indaba ocabanga ukuthi abantwana abayithandi? Yini ocabanga ukuthi yenza ukuthi bangayithandi?

(e) Kungani zingaxoxwa izindaba kuleli khaya? Ngicela ungichazele.

2. (a) Kuleli khaya ngabe niyayidlala imidlalo efana nezilandelo (Isib. Bantuwa bantuwa buyani ekhaya). Uma impendulo ithi ‘yebo’, qhubekela kumbuzo (b) kuya ku-(e); uma impendulo ithi ‘cha’, qhubekela kumbuzo (f).

(b) Ngobani ababamba iqhaza? Lokhu kwejwayele ukwenzeka?
(c) Ngabe isiphi isilandelo ocabanga ukuthi izingane zisithanda kakhulu? Ngiqela ungisholo sona.

(d) Ucabanga ukuthi yini abayithandayo ngalesi silandelo? Kungani?

(e) Ngabe sikhona isilandelo ocabanga ukuthi izingane azisithandi? Yini abangayithandi ngalesi silandelo?

(f) Kungani zingashiwo izilandelo kuleli khaya? Ngiqela ungichazele.

3. (a) Ngabe wena nabantwana niyizibuka izinhlelo zeTV? Uma impendulo ithi ‘yebo’, qhubekela kumbuzo (a) kuya ku-(g); uma impendulo ithi ‘cha’, qhubekela kumbuzo (h)

(b) Yiziphi izinhlelo zeTV enizibuka ndawone njengomndeni?

(c) Ake uthi qaphuqaphu ngalezo ezithandwa cishe ngumndeni wonke. Kungani?

(d) Ake uthi qaphuqaphu ngalezo ezingathandwa cishe ngumndeni wonke. Kungani?

(e) Ngabe umntwana wakho (lowo engimkhethile) ubuka iTV ngasiphi isikhathi sosuku? Yiziphi izinhlelo zеTV azibukayo?

(f) Ake uthi qaphuqaphu ngalezo azithandayo. Kungani?

(g) Ake uthi qaphuqaphu ngalezo angazithandi. Kungani?

(h) Kungani ningayibuki iTV kuleli khaya? Ngiqela ungichazele.

4. (a) Kuleli khaya ngabe umndeni uyawulalela umsakazo? Uma impendulo ithi ‘yebo’, qhubekela kumbuzo (b) kuya ku-(h); uma impendulo ithi ‘cha’, qhubekela kumbuzo (i).

(b) Yisiphi isisteshi somsakazo enisilalelayo nonke njengomndeni? Kungani?

(c) Yisiphi isisteshi somsakazo eningasilaleli njengomndeni wonke? Kungani?

(d) Ake uthi qaphuqaphu ngalezo zinhlelo zomsakazo ezithandwa ngumndeni wonke. Kungani?

(e) Ake uthi qaphuqaphu ngalezo zinhlelo zomsakazo ezingathandwa ngumndeni wonke. Kungani?
(f) Ngabe uyazazi izinhlelo ezithandwa ngumntwana wakho (lowo engimkhethile) kakhulu? Kungani?

(g) Ngabe uyazazi lezo angazithandi? Kungani?

(h) Luhlobo luni lomculo ingane yakho awudlalayo? Ngabe kuyenzeka acule iculo ngesikhathi lidlalwa? Yimaphi amaculo awathandayo? Ngobani abaculi ebathandayo njengamanje?

(i) Kungani ningawudlali umsakazo kuleli khaya? Ngicela ungichazele.

5. (a) Yiziphi izinto enizifundayo lapha ekhaya (Isib., izincwadi, amaphephandaba, amaphephabhuku?)

(b) Nizithola kuphi izinto enizifundayo? Ngabe kulula noma kunzima ukuthola lezi zinto?

c) Ngabe nifunda izinto ezibhalwe ngesiZulu kanye nesiNgisi? (Uma umzali ethi bazifunda zombili izilimi, qhubekela kumbuzo (d); uma ethi bafunda ulimi olulodwa, qhubekela kumbuzo (e).)

d) Kungani nthanda ukufunda ngazo zombili lezi zilimi? Yini ningafundi ngolimi olulodwa?

e) Kungani nthanda ukufunda ngolimi olulodwa? Yini ningafundi ngazo zombili izilimi?

(f) Ake uthi qaphuqaphu ngezinto ezithandwa ukufundwa ngumntwana wakho (Isib: izincwadi, amaphephandaba, amaphephabhuku) (lowo engimkhethile) Ucabanga ukuthi kungani ethando ukufunda lokhu?

(g) Ngabe uyamsiza umntwana uma efunda. Uma kunjalo, ukwenza kanjani lokho?

(h) Ngokombono wakho yini ongayenza ukusiza umntwana ukuthi akwazi ukufunda uma esekhaya?

6. (a) Ngabe wena nomndeni wakho niyabhala nomnda we okuthile? Uma impendulo ithi 'yebo', qhubekela kumbuzo (b) kuya ku-(f) ; uma impendulo ithi cha, qhubekela kumbuzo 7).
(b) Nizithola kuphi izinto enizibhalayo nomadwebayo? Ngabe kulula noma kunzima ukuthola lezi zinto?

(c) Yini ethandwa ukubhalwa noma ukudwetshwa ngumntwana wakho? Kungani?

(d) Yini angathandi ukuyibhala noma ukuyidweba? Kungani?

(e) Kwenzakalani kulokho asuke ekubhalile noma ekudwebele?

(f) Ngokombono wakho yini ongayenza ukusiza umntwana ukuthi akwazi ukubhala noma ukudweba kungcono?


7. (a) Kungabe umntwana wayezilalela izindaba esikoleni? Uma impendulo ithi ‘yebo’, qhubekela kumbuzo (b) kuya ku-(e); uma impendulo ithi ‘cha’, qhubekela kumbuzo 8.

(b) Yini oyikhumbulayo ngalezi zindaba?

(c) Ngabe lezi zindaba zazehluke kanjani kulezo ezixoxwa ekhaya, uma zazikhona?

(d) Yini umntwana ayeithinda ngalezi zindaba? Kungani?

(e) Yini umntwana ayengayithandi ngalezi zindaba? Kungani?

8. Ngabe ikhona inewadi eyayithandwa ngumntwana wakho kakhulu? Uma impendulo ithi ‘yebo’, qhubekela kumbuzo (b) no-(c); uma impendulo ithi ‘cha’, qhubekela kumbuzo 9).

(a) Yini ayeithinda ngale newadi? Kungani?

(b) Yini ayengayithandi ngale newadi? Kungani?

9. (a) Yini eyayibhalwa ngumntwana esikoleni?
(b) Yini ayethanda ukuyibhala? Kungani?
(c) Yini ayengathandi ukuyibhala? Kungani?

**Imibuzo yokugcina**


2. (a) Ngabe ikhona incwadi ethandwa ngumntwana wakho kakhulu? (Uma impendo ithi “yebo”, qhubekela kumbuzo (b) no-(d); uma impendo ithi “cha”, qhubekela kumbuzo 3).
(b) Iyiphi leyo ncwadi?
(c) Yini ayithandayo ngale ncwadi?
(d) Wazi kanjani ngale ncwadi? Ngicela ungutshele kabanzi ngale ncwadi.

3. (a) Ngabe umntwana wakho uyazifunda izinto ezifana namaphephandaba namaphephabhuku? (Uma impendo ithi “yebo”, qhubekela kumbuzo (b) no-(d); uma impendo ithi “cha”, qhubekela kumbuzo 4).
(b) Ngabe kulula noma kunzima ukuthi athole lezi zinto?
(c) Ngabe zibhalwe ngaluphi ulimi noma izilimi?
(d) Yini ocabanga ukuthi uyayithanda ngalezi zinto?

4. Njenomzali/umbhekeli yiziphi izinto ezifundwayo ongazoncoma kuthisha wengane yakho?

5. Ngiye ngaqaphela ukuthi ngesikhathi uthisha efundisa abantwana ukubhala nokufunda ngesiNgisi uwebuye asebenzise isiZulu. Ngabe yini imibono yakho mayelana nokusetshenziswa kwesiZulu uma kufundiswa ukufunda nokubahla eklasini lesiNgisi?

6. (a) Ngabe ucabanga ukuthi umntwana wakho ukuliphi izinga ekufundeni isiZulu: usezingeni eliphezulu, usezingeni eliphakathi nendawo, usezingeni eliphezulu? Yini eyenza ukuthi ucabange lokho?

(b) Ngabe ucabanga ukuthi umntwana wakho ukuliphi izinga ekufundeni isiNgisi: usezingeni eliphezulu, usezingeni eliphakathi nendawo, usezingeni eliphezulu? Yini eyenza ukuthi ucabange lokho?


8. Yini imibono yakho mayelana nokusetshenziswa kwesiZulu uma kufundiswa ukubahla eklasini lesiNgisi?

9. Ngokubona kwakho ngabe iziphi izinkinga umntwana wakho anazo mayelana nokufunda ukufunda (reading) nokubahla (writing) eklasini lesiNgisi?

10. Yini ongafisa ukuthi uthisha ayenze ukusiza umntwana wakho akwazi ukufunda (read) nokubahla kangcono?

11. Yini ocabanga ukuthi umndeni ungayenza ukusiza umntwana ukuthi afunde ukufunda (reading) kanye nokubahla kangcono ngesiNgisi? Kungani?
Transcribed Questions for Parents Interview Questions

Initial Interview

Thank you for sharing with me your experiences and thoughts about the communicative and literacy practices of this family in the previous conversations. The discussions have really been helpful. Today I am going to audio tape our conversation as I indicated earlier on. Please feel free to tell me what you remember. There are no right or wrong answers. If you did not hear or understand a question, please ask me to repeat the question, I will gladly do so. Do you have any questions before we continue? (If the answer is “yes”, I will clarify the confusion; if it is “no”, I will continue.) Let us start.

1. (a) In this family do you tell stories? (If the answer is “yes”, continue with questions (b) through (e); if it is “no”, go to question (e).

   (b) Who tells the stories? Where are the stories told? How often are they told?
   (c) Which story do you think the children like the most? Please share this story with me.
   (d) Is there a particular story the children do not like? What is it about this story that they do not like?
   (e) Why do you not tell stories in this family? Please explain.

2. (a) In this family do you play language games (e.g., Bantwana bantwana buyan’ekhaya)? (If the answer is “yes”, continue with questions (b) through (e); if it is “no”, go to question (f).

   (b) Who participates in these games? How often do you play these games?
   (c) Which game do you think is the children’s favorite? Please share with me this game.
   (d) What do you think the children like about this game? Why?
   (e) Is there a particular game the children do not like? What is it about this game that they do not like? Why?
   (f) Why do you not play language games in this family? Please explain.
3. (a) Do you and the children watch any TV programs? (If the answer is “yes”, continue with questions (a) through (g); if it is ‘no’, go to question (h).

(b) Which TV programs do you watch together as a family?

(c) Tell me about the ones that most family members like. Why?

(d) Tell me about the ones that most family members do not like. Why?

(e) During which times of the day does your child (the focal student) watch TV? Which TV programs does she/he watch?

(f) Can you share with me the ones she/he likes the most? Why?

(g) Can you tell me about the ones she/he does not like? Why?

(h) Why do you not watch TV in this family? Please explain.

4. (a) In this family, do you listen to the radio? (If the answer is “yes”, continue with questions (b) through (h); if it is “no”, go to question (i).

(b) Which radio station(s) does the family listen? Why?

(c) Which radio station(s) does the family not listen? Why?

(d) Tell me about the program(s) that most family members like. Why?

(e) Tell me about the one(s) that most family members do not like. Why?

(f) Are you aware of the program(s) that your child (the focal student) likes the most? Why?

(g) Do you know the ones that she/he does not like? Why?

(h) What kind of music does your child play? Does she/he sing along to the music when it is playing? What are her/his favorite songs? Who are her/his favorite singers right now?

(i) Why do you not listen to the radio in this family? Please explain.

5. (a) What reading materials do you and the children read in this family (e.g., books, newspapers, and magazines)?

(b) Where do you get the reading materials? How easy or difficult is it to get the materials?
(c) Do you read in both Zulu and English? (If the parent says they read in both languages, go to (d); if the parent says they read in one language and not in the other, move on to (e).

(d) What is it about reading in both languages that you like? Why do you not read in the other language?

(e) What is it about reading in one language and not in the other that you like? Why do you not read in both languages?

(f) Tell me about the reading materials (e.g., books, newspapers, and magazines) that your child (the focal student) likes to read. Why do think you she/he prefers these materials?

(g) Do you help her/him when she/he is reading? If so, how do you do this?

(h) In your view, what can you do to encourage her/him to read at home?

6. (a) Do you and the children write or draw anything? (If the answer is “yes”, go to (b) through (f); if it is “no”, go to question 7).

(b) Where do you get the writing and/or drawing materials? Is it easy or difficult to get these materials?

(c) What does the child like to write about or draw? Why?

(d) What does she/he not like to write about or draw? Why.

(e) What happens to what the child writes or draws?

(f) In your view, what can you do to encourage her/him to write and/or draw at home?

Now, we are going to talk about your child in grades R-3. I am going to ask you questions. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. Please tell me what you remember. If you did not hear or understand a question, let me know so that I can repeat or clarify the question. Do you have any questions before we continue? (If the answer is “yes”, I will clarify the confusion; if it is “no”, I will continue.) Let us start.

7. (a) Did your child listen to stories at school? (If the answer is “yes”, continue with questions (a) through (e); if it is ‘no’, go to question 8).
(b) What do you remember about these stories?
(c) How were the stories told at school similar or different from those told at home (If the child was exposed to stories at home)?
(d) What did the child like about the stories from school? Why?
(e) What did the child not like about the stories from school? Why?
8. (a) Did the child have a favorite book that she/he liked reading? (If the answer is “yes”, move on to (b) and (c); if it is “no”, go to question 9).
(b) What was it about this book that she/he liked? Why?
(c) Was there a part in the book she/he did not like? Why?
9. (a) What did your child write about at school?
(c) What did she/he like to write about? Why?
(d) What did she/he not like to write about? Why?

Final Interview

Once more, thank you very much for allowing me to talk to you about how your family, especially the child (the focal student), uses language(s) and reading and writing in their every-day life. In this interview we are going to focus on your child in the fourth grade. As I have said before, there are no right or wrong answers, only your experiences and thoughts. If you did not hear or understand a question, let me know so that I can repeat or clarify the question. Do you have any questions before we continue? (If the answer is “yes”, I will clarify the confusion; if it is “no”, I will continue.) Let us start.

1. Your child has been reading in English in this grade. Do you think she/he liked to read in English? Why? If she/he did not like reading in this class, what do you think contributed to this situation.
2. (a) Does the child have a favorite book? (If the answer is “yes”, move on to (b) through (d); if the answer is “no”, go to question 3).
(b) What is her/his favorite book?
(c) Why is it a favorite?
(d) How did the child come to know about this book? Tell me more about this book.

3. (a) Does your child read materials such as newspapers, magazines? (If the answer is “yes”, move on to (b) through (d); if the answer is “no”, go to question 4).
(b) How easy or difficult is it for him/her to get these materials?
(c) In what language(s) are they written?
(d) What do you think the child likes about these materials?

4. As a parent/guardian, what kind of reading materials would you suggest to the teacher?

5. I noticed that when the teacher was teaching reading and writing in English, she sometimes used Zulu. What are your views about the use of Zulu when students are learning to read and write in read in English?

6. (a) How do you see your child as a reader in Zulu: a very good reader, an okay reader, or a bad reader? What makes you think that?
(b) How do you see your child as a reader in English: a very good reader, an okay reader, or a bad reader? What makes you think that?

7. Tell me about your child’s writing in this class. What do you think she/he likes to write about? Why? What does she/he not like to write about? Why?

8. What are your views about the teacher using Zulu to teach writing in English?

9. What problems do you think the child has when she/he is reading and writing in English in this class?

10. What would you like the teacher to do to help your child to be better reader and a better writer?

11. What do you think the family should do to help the child with English reading and writing? Why?