

## **A Narrative Enrichment Programme in literacy development of Afrikaans-speaking Grade 3 learners in monolingual rural schools**

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### **Abstract**

This study is motivated by existing information on the discontinuity between home literacy practices and school literacy expectations of learners who typically speak a local variety of their mother tongue which differs in various ways from the standardised language of learning and teaching (LoLT). In this particular case, the study refers to Afrikaans as a home language and language in education. These learners typically perform below par on standardised South African literacy tests such as the Annual National Assessment (ANA) and the Systemic Evaluation Test. They show delayed achievement of literacy milestones, higher school drop-out rates and less achievement of access to higher learning opportunities (Lahire 1995; Siegel 2007). In the present study, a two-part Narrative Enrichment Programme was introduced. The first part provided learners with an enriched reading, listening and writing environment in which they could engage with novel stories and work towards producing their own little books. The second part of the programme consisted of supporting exercises that addressed narrative structure issues that arose in the course of the first part. Specifically, exercises of picture sequencing, picture-sentence matching and an exercise called “Beginning, Middle and End” were used to assess how learners recount the various narrative components and the chronology.

**Keywords:** children, meaning-making, drawings, early writings, multimodal pedagogies

### **1. Background**

This study investigated a number of salient aspects of language awareness and literacy in a largely monolingual Afrikaans community of young learners who typically achieve less than the national median in standardised literacy tests. Language is the medium through which societies communicate their value systems, history, beliefs and identity (Le Cordeur 2010:79) and navigate education and social mobility. In fulfilling these functions, not only spoken varieties but also their written forms are used. Therefore, literacy and literacy development are important aspects of learning which any early schooling curriculum should attend to. UNESCO (2006:21) defines “literacy” as “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts”. The development of literacy, according to this definition, entails the development of a person’s whole being, thus factors which may influence literacy development are also likely

to influence other facets of a person's life, be they academic, social or economic. This study specifically focuses on how a selected group of Grade 3 learners exhibits and uses their literacy skills in varying contexts. Because considerable numbers of young learners have been identified as having literacy skills below the expected level in the national literacy tests (one particular formal context), this study is interested in shedding more light on what skills they have in other contexts.

Concerns regarding literacy development are already reflected in the initiative of the South African Department of Education (DoE), in that it has developed a system to assess the literacy levels of all learners. (Department of Basic Education (c) 2011) Two tests were developed for the purpose of assessment. The first test, the Annual National Assessment (ANA), is compiled externally by the National DoE, but the teachers of each school administer and mark the tests of their learners themselves. The Home Language results of the 2012 and 2013 ANA tests showed that learners in Grade 1 improved from 58% to 60% and Grade 2 learners improved from 55% to 57%. There was a national drop in Home Language achievement of 1% across the nation for Grade 3, from 52% to 51%. These differences between 2012 and 2013 results nationally are, given the numbers of participants, not significant. Despite the improvement in results, they are still a cause for concern.

In order to get a more meaningful view of the results, schools are also provided with a tailor-made report which compares their results to the national average as well as the district averages and circuit averages.

Two schools, which will be referred to as "School A" and "School B", respectively, participated in this study. In 2013, the Grade 3 results achieved in the tests for Afrikaans Home Language in School A delivered a pass rate of 58.24%. The circuit average in the same tests of the same year was 53.63%. Thus the Grade 3s of School A scored slightly higher than other schools in the circuit; they also performed 10% better than the Western Cape overall, where the average was 48.75%.

The Systemic Evaluation Tests (SET)<sup>1</sup> are provincial diagnostic tests (Western Cape Education Department (c) 2014) compiled by the Western Cape Education Department for the Western Cape schools. Departmental officials from outside the school administer the tests and no teacher is allowed to even see them. They test language abilities as well as mathematical abilities. A summary of the results is mailed to the school by the Department.

Table 1 below gives a summary of the Grade 3 pass rate percentages in the SET for Schools A and B, as well as the Grade 3 average percentage achieved in each school. It also gives the circuit pass rate and national pass rate for 2011–2013. Because these tests are only written in the Western Cape, there are no national results against which to read the local outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> SET is not an official acronym for Systemic Evaluation Test, but will be used in this section for ease of reference.

**Table 1:** Summary of Grade 3 Systemic Evaluation in School A and School B 2013

	School A			School B		
	2011	2012	2013	2011	2012	2013
<b>Pass rate percentage of school</b>	17.5	31.9	29.2	22.2	60.0	77.5
<b>Average percentage of school</b>	31.2	37.0	38.1	30.7	56.8	58.4
<b>Circuit pass rate</b>	28.2	37.7	37.0	28.2	37.7	38.1
<b>Circuit average</b>	37.8	42.7	43.1	37.8	42.7	43.1
<b>Provincial pass rate</b>	30.4	38.9	37	30.4	38.9	37

In 2012 and 2013, School B achieved an SET pass rate well above the pass rate of School A and the circuit. The statistics in Table 1 also show a considerable rise in literacy and language achievement from 2011 to 2012 and 2013. School A's record shows more fluctuation, with a low 17.5% pass rate in 2011 compared to the circuit pass rate of 28.2% in the same year. In 2012 and 2013, in spite of the overall improvement, they still performed below the pass rate of the circuit.

Relating this to the definition of 'literacy' given by UNESCO (2006), it is clear that currently the ability of a large proportion of young learners to function optimally is lower than can reasonably be expected of them. This does not bode well for young learners individually, nor for a national economy that is dependent on the educational success of its youth for future prosperity.

This study is an attempt at understanding the literacy practices of learners at grass-roots level. An attempt is made to cast some perspective on the learners' capabilities, rather than on that of which they are not capable. Furthermore, this study will hopefully improve learners' enthusiasm and participation in a wider variety of literacy practices, which may help them to adapt in the academic environment without losing their home varieties as legitimate mediums of communication.

## 2. Research aims and objectives

This study then intends not only to investigate the discontinuity between home literacy practices and school literacy expectations, but also to assess what it is that these learners are capable of in real life, away from the standardised tests and curriculum documents, with the aim to eventually incorporate what they have in order to facilitate the learning of what they need to learn.

The main research question is then as follows:

“How does the Narrative Enrichment Programme developed for this study shed light on learners’ awareness of language, their recognition and appreciation of prevailing varieties, registers and communicative practices of classrooms where their mother tongue is the LoLT, and on their achievement of basic literacy goals?”

The first two aims of this study are (i) to develop a Narrative Enrichment Programme and (ii) to implement it in a setting where literacy levels are below par for the given age groups. Further aims are (iii) to check, in using the Narrative Enrichment Programme, what the features of these learners’ spoken and written skills are in an activity that is not part of the standard curriculum. In the process, questions will be raised as to learners’ awareness of language, their appreciation of multiple varieties of their mother tongue, and their achievement of basic literacy goals. Observations on the present level and possible development of ‘linguistic literacy’ during the implementation of the Narrative Enrichment Programme will also be recorded.

The main instrument to be used in this project is a Narrative Enrichment Programme, aimed at investigating the following:

- Does use of the Narrative Enrichment Programme developed for this study show significant signs of the current state of learners’ knowledge of their first language (L1), achievement of expected literacy goals, language awareness, and awareness of appropriate language forms (registers, genres etc.) for different contexts of language use? What does the programme disclose regarding learners’ appreciation of the value of their L1 as a social and communicative instrument?
- In the use of their L1 as evidenced in the data from the Narrative Enrichment Programme, do learners show awareness of language variety/register/genre/literacy? Alternatively, what kind of awareness regarding language variety/register/genre/literacy do the learners project?
- Does the Narrative Enrichment Programme disclose significant information on learners’ appreciation of spoken and written narratives as forms of art and expression? If so, how and in which form is such appreciation indicated? Is there evidence that the programme has improved/fostered such appreciation?
- Is there a difference between the home language of the learners and the language required in their schoolwork? Do the data give signs of school expectations regarding language use that is not a continuation of the home repertoires?
- Are there indications in the data that learners appreciate the value of written narrative? What are the features of the written work learners produced that signal narrative proficiency of a more or less advanced level (also in relation to expectations for their age group)?
- Are there any indications that learners’ participation in activities that present language for enjoyment, such as language games and language for laughter (also as in reading stories and creative writing, i.e. activities included in the enrichment programme), had an effect on their engagement in reading and writing activities in school work?

### **3. Theoretical framework**

South Africa is a multilingual country with 11 official languages. Not only is the country multilingual in terms of official languages, but also on the grounds of varieties of each of these

languages. In recent years, mother tongue education has been argued for on many levels as the most beneficial form of education for all learners (Alexander and Busch 2007). However, very little research has been done on the academic achievement of learners who speak a non-standard variety of the language used as the instructional medium in their schools. For learners to become truly bidialectal, they need to have a well-developed sense of linguistic literacy. Linguistic literacy here refers to the ability of learners to “preserve their own dialectal or sociolectal identity, while also learning to participate in school-based activities in the standard language” (Ravid and Tolchinsky 2002:422).

### **3.1 Literacy as construct**

Street (2003) describes two models of literacy that typify how teachers view literacy. One model he calls the “autonomous model”, and the other the “ideological model” (Street 2003:77). The autonomous model revolves around the view that literacy is a set of skills that can be taught, as in the case of reading and writing. The ideological model situates literacy within the cultural context in which it is used. During the 1970s, the view of literacy began to shift from the autonomous model towards the ideological model. “[T]he ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being” (Street 2003:78); therefore, the skills involved can never be separated from the social function they must fulfil and require acute language awareness. The current study draws from the ideological model in its exploration of home literacy practices versus school literacy expectations.

“Language awareness refers to the development in learners of an enhanced consciousness of and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language” (Carter 2003:64). James and Garrett (1992) divide language awareness into five domains, namely ones that attend to affective aspects, to social aspects, to aspects of power, to cognitive aspects and to aspects of performance (see Svalberg 2007). Their work emphasises the premise of the ideological model of literacy. To achieve acceptable literacy aims, learners need to develop their awareness of formal aspects of language such as grammar, spelling and semantics, as well as the uses of these skills in everyday, practical situations.

### **3.2 In- and out-of-school language abilities**

Because the current study is conducted in a rural, predominantly monolingual community, the question of poor learners’ linguistic ability is raised. Gee posits that contrary to many traditionalist viewpoints, poor children do not have less-developed language abilities than learners from affluent communities. Linguists know that “all children – including poor children – have impressive language ability. The vast majority of children enter school with vocabularies fully fit for everyday life” (Gee 2008:16).

The apparently well-developed language ability of children at school entry raises another question: How is it that despite their adequate oral language ability some learners are less successful in learning to read, write and perform related tasks in the classroom? Patton Terry (2006:907) supplies part of the answer when she says,

Writing is not speech written down. Correspondences between spoken and orthographic representations of phonology, grammar, and vocabulary are not always direct, because print conventions do not always map to speech sounds, because speaking and writing are different language registers, and because social and regional language variations often are not reflected in standard written language systems.

Patton Terry (2006) made the above statement in the context of her research on the relation between African American English (AAE) and Standard American English in learning literacy, but it may be applied to other situations in which the norms of a spoken variety differ considerably from the norms of the written (standard) variety taught in schools. She elaborates on this statement by stating that this dissimilarity between the spoken variety and the written variety may be the cause of poor academic achievement. Therefore, learners from poor backgrounds may not be at such a disadvantage as is sometimes claimed; the divide between oral literacy and written literacy should be approached differently.

It is clear from these sources that learners who are speakers of a non-standard variety need to have a multi-dialectal ability in order to function optimally in all situations, not only in academic situations. Even though multilingualism has been in the foreground in the educational and political domains, the practical situations in schools still show favouritism of a standard variety, leaving minority varieties unacknowledged. Ioannidou (2009:263) declares that despite the attention to multilingualism in education, some are still concerned about “the battle between the languages legitimated by schools and the language varieties used by students at home”.

### **3.3 Linguistic literacy**

Ravid and Tolchinsky’s view of ‘linguistic literacy’ gives support to Ioannidou’s concern. Linguistic literacy refers to the ability “to recognize and apply precise, context-appropriate linguistic features in speech” (Ravid & Tolchinsky 2002:423). Another feature of linguistic literacy as described by Ravid and Tolchinsky (2002:421) is the awareness of one’s own “linguistic identity” and the recognition of other linguistic identities. This linguistic versatility provides learners with multiple linguistic identities and enables them to use both vernacular varieties and specialist academic varieties appropriately according to differing contexts.

## **4. Methodology**

The primary focus of the study is on establishing, though not formally testing, the level of literacy and language awareness amongst learners who typically show low literacy levels in the ANA tests. Hiebert and Raphael (1998:15) make the point that “low income cannot and should not be equated with low expectations or low levels of knowledge. There is hardly a home where literacy experiences do not occur”. It is in this regard that first the little books and later picture sequences were used with a view to illuminating some aspects of learners’ home literacy practices. The enrichment programme was offered to gain a better understanding of why, on average, these learners’ achievements of literacy and language awareness goals for their age and school level showed unsatisfactory outcomes. The development of Grade 3 learners’ literacy and associated language awareness at home and at school is in focus.

The following sub-questions were formulated from the main research questions (section 2) as focal points for data collection and analysis:

1. What are the language repertoires<sup>2</sup> of the communities to which participating teachers and learners belong?
2. What is the level of language awareness<sup>3</sup> among participating teachers and learners?
3. What kind of literacy and literacy-related experiences are typical of the everyday lives of the participating teachers and learners?
4. What level of reading and writing proficiency do learners show when writing their own narratives?
5. What level of reading and writing proficiency have the various participating groups achieved according to earlier ANA test results?

#### **4.1 Research design**

The research is designed around the above-mentioned set of questions and with former projects where “little books” have been used in literacy development in mind (Schreger 2010; Busch 2010; Busch 2011; Pitkänen-Huhta and Pietikäinen 2014). The regular literacy development programmes of the two schools selected to inform the current project were supplemented with a specially-developed Narrative Enrichment Programme with the “little books” writing project and a set of related narrative exercises at its core.

The programme was implemented during a two-month action research period, where four weeks were spent at each of the two schools. During that time, the learners were exposed to stories not otherwise introduced at school, which the researcher read to them. After each reading session some informal questions were asked to informally assess whether any of the research objectives had been met. It was a conscious decision not to test learners’ knowledge and listening skills on a formal level, in order to observe any spontaneous change in enthusiasm and motivation towards reading and listening without the interference and possible inhibiting effects of a test situation. They were given carte blanche as to the topic of their stories. The necessary materials, such as paper and drawing pencils, were provided. Based on observation of their written stories, a follow-up was done in which some learners were asked to give oral renderings of stories represented in a set of pictures.

#### **4.2 Research group**

The intention was to do the writing project in a rural community with a largely Afrikaans monolingual profile. At the start of the research period, the Grade 3 teachers at each school were given an official consent form to sign. Each of the learners also received a simplified consent form in which they agreed to their own participation. The necessary consent forms were signed by all parties concerned. Both of the participating schools were assured of anonymity, in that their location and other identifying details would not be disclosed. This was particularly

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<sup>2</sup> Repertoire refers to “a set of resources that a speaker actually commands” (Snell, 2013: 115) and the competence with which one uses these resources in communicating a message in any given context. Repertoire is thus grounded in practical life and not abstract theory.

<sup>3</sup> This term refers to knowledge about language, how language works and how it is used creatively and in situated contexts such as the classroom or in the community.

offered to accommodate possible sensitivity regarding some of the statistical data from the ANA and Systemic Evaluation Test scores.

#### **4.2.1 Schools**

Two schools were selected from a number of candidates on the basis of (i) proximity to the university where the research is located; (ii) the likelihood that the learners will have been exposed mostly to a spoken, non-standard variety of Afrikaans and minimally to English in their everyday lives; (iii) limited literacy and pre-literacy experiences of the learners, in that they belong to relatively under-resourced communities; and (iv) willingness of teachers and the school principal to participate in a longer-term Narrative Enrichment Programme. The schools were chosen on the basis of their socioeconomic status as well. The participating schools are both state-funded Afrikaans-medium schools, which ensures similarity between their curricula.

#### **4.2.2 Participating learners**

All participants are from predominantly Afrikaans-speaking ‘coloured’<sup>4</sup> farm-labouring communities within the Western Cape, South Africa. The target group for this study were 90 Grade 3 learners ranging in age between 8 and 10 years. The reason for choosing Grade 3 learners is two-fold: 1) they are at the end of the Foundation Phase and should thus already be familiar with the principles of reading and writing in their mother tongue and 2) the national literacy benchmark tests, i.e. the ANA tests mentioned in section 1, are administered to all learners at Grade 3 level. The data available from earlier ANA tests are used to ascertain whether these learners are more or less on par with their peers across the region and according to nationally-set benchmarks.

### **4.3 Data collection**

#### **4.3.1 Background to the method**

This study developed an enrichment programme following work done in two other contexts where learners with comparable linguistic and literacy challenges are accommodated. Specifically, it was modelled on projects undertaken in two primary schools, one in inner-city Vienna and another in a rural Sami-speaking community in Finland (cf. Pitkänen-Huhta & Pietikäinen 2014). In these programmes, learners who are first-language (L1) speakers of languages other than the dominant LoLT were introduced to (i) literacy exercises, which included writing little books, as a means to developing knowledge while still learning the LoLT, as in the case of the Ortnergasse school in Vienna<sup>5</sup> (Pernes 2013; Busch 2011); and (ii) a Narrative Enrichment Programme in which their L1s were used to cultivate awareness of their own and other languages, as was done with Sami-speaking children in Finland (Pitkänen-Huhta & Pietikäinen 2014; Pietikäinen & Pitkänen-Huhta 2013). Learners were thus stimulated to

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<sup>4</sup> It is well understood that the word ‘coloured’ is a controversial term that harks back to the apartheid era. It however has been deemed necessary to use this term in the context of the study in order to distinguish the particular community in which the research was conducted from other previously disadvantaged groups. The term is also still used in everyday conversation for reasons of specificity rather than derogation.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on research done on the little books in Vienna see:  
[http://ortnergasse.webonaut.com/m2/projekte/pdf/slon\\_en.pdf](http://ortnergasse.webonaut.com/m2/projekte/pdf/slon_en.pdf)

become aware of the phenomenon of bilingualism and multilingualism as a valued resource rather than a handicap in learning (Busch 2011).

The first project of this kind was designed and is used by a teacher, Mr Christian Schreger in the Ortnergasse School, Vienna<sup>6</sup>, and has been investigated by Prof Brigitta Busch. Mr Schreger, who was in charge of a class of learners from recently migrated families, introduced a narrative and creative writing project into his curriculum activities that entailed the learners' production of little books. These stories are grounded in the daily lives and defining experiences of learners. No topics are excluded.

The book has an A6 size, consisting of 8 to 12 pages and a cardboard cover on which the title of the book and the name of the author appear; the back cover has a photo of the author, publisher's details and even a copyright statement. The layout is that of a normal picture book, in which pictures and text support each other to tell the story. This "Kleine Bücher" project in Austria is run in a multigrade class with a wide range of learner L1s, such as Kurdish, Punjabi, Hindi, Turkish and even Afrikaans.

### **4.3.2 Narrative Enrichment Programme**

#### **4.3.2.1 Little Books**

During the second term the researcher spent four weeks at each school, starting at School A. It was decided to spend only Monday through to Thursday at the school, so that the two groups in School A would spend equal time on activities related to the research project. Learners were exposed to several new stories during reading time. After the first story was read to them, they were asked to write their own. Because the study was not intended as a therapeutic study, but rather aimed to highlight the developing skills of the learners, the researcher did not give learners a pre-test. It was deemed more important to introduce the program to the learners in an unthreatening class environment where more spontaneity was allowed than in other school exercises. Furthermore, the intervention was planned so as to cause minimal upset to the schedule and rhythm of the learners' normal school day.

The first two weeks were spent reading stories and working on their first little book. Group 1 in School A only did the first little book. The first assignment that was given to them was to write a story about themselves. It was originally decided not to give themes for writing, as part of the research was to test for creativity and language awareness. However, after explaining to the learners how the little books would be written and printed, it was found that their experience of printed work and the processes of creative writing was limited. Thus, a single theme was given for the first book. It also served as a basis on which to assess the learners' writing abilities and language skills in a way that facilitated categorisation of learners according to their demonstrated written literacy levels.

See Figure 1 below for an example from a page in one of the little books:

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<sup>6</sup> Information on the original class project and its variations can be seen here:  
<http://ortnergasse.webonaut.com/m2/projekte/index.html>



**Figure 1:** Little Book

The Narrative Enrichment Programme was not developed to have a day-to-day schedule, but was rather moulded according to each class's specific needs. Even though the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS)<sup>7</sup> prescribe a certain number of hours per week for each of the Learning Areas, schools are free to fit them in however they think most appropriate. Because of prescribed assessment tasks that had to be done and the teachers' own daily plan, the researcher had to be flexible about when and how much she would work with the learners. Some of the teachers were more willing to make adjustments than others.

#### 4.3.2.2 Small-group language exercises

After reviewing and categorising the booklets made in the second term, the researcher realized that there were three distinct problem areas in writing which needed more specific attention. Learners from both schools had difficulties with the following activities while writing the stories.

- Picture sequencing
- Matching pictures and sentences
- Narrative timeline sequencing

It was decided to select smaller groups from each school and to do some activities with them that addressed these issues. Learners' little books produced in the second term were categorised using a scale of 1 to 5; with 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest grading. The criteria for categorisation included features of the storybook genre; thus attention went to whether the authors had given their books a title page and a suitable title, whether they wrote from left to right, and whether their stories were told in a manner that made chronological progression clear, etc.

The picture sets used for the Picture Sequencing (PS) and the Picture-Sentence Matching (PSM) activities in the third term were largely obtained from a board game called "Next Up"<sup>8</sup> developed by Smile Educational Toys, privately-owned speech therapy material, and also material from ongoing research on the *Receptive and Expressive Activities for Language*

<sup>7</sup> Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) contains the national curriculum for Grades 1 to 12 in public schools in South Africa (Western Cape Education Department(c) 2014).

<sup>8</sup> A new version of the game can be seen at this link: [http://www.toys4you.co.za/product.php?id\\_product=696](http://www.toys4you.co.za/product.php?id_product=696)

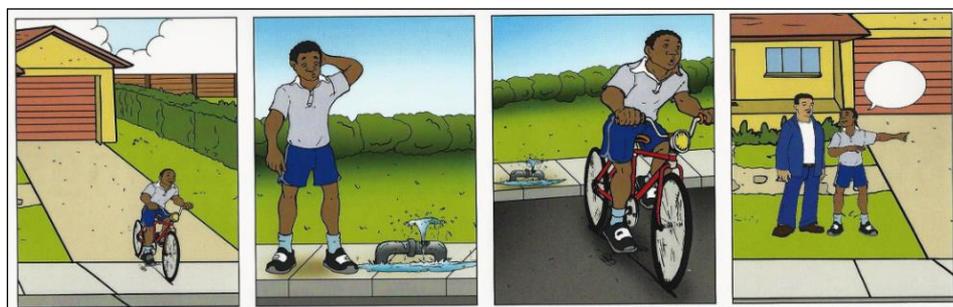
*Therapy (REALt)*. The *REALt*, as developed by Southwood and Van Dulm (2012), aims to provide “evidence-based and linguistically, culturally and visually suitable language therapy material for use with child speakers of Afrikaans and English” (Nel 2015:79).

Figures 2 to 4 show examples from each of these activities.



**Figure 2:** Picture sequencing

Figure 2 shows an example of a picture sequence used in the PS activity exercises of the third term. For this activity, learners were given several sets of picture cards which they were asked to order in the sequence that meaningfully represented a narrative. Learners were allocated 20–30 minutes to order as many sequences as possible. This time constraint was due to the fact that, as agreed, only the language period was made available for these activities. The researcher used her discretion in deciding when to move to the next level, based on how long the learners took with each set.



**Figure 3:** Matching pictures and sentences

John het besluit om met sy fiets te gaan ry. (*John decided to go for a ride on his bicycle.*)  
 Langs die pad sien hy ’n gebarste pyp. (*On his way he saw a burst pipe.*)  
 Hy het toe dadelik terug gery om iemand te vertel. (*He immediately rode back to tell someone about it.*)  
 Hy sien Meneer Martin in sy tuin en sê, “Kom gou, Oom. Daar het ’n pyp gebars.”  
 (*He sees Mister Martin in his garden and says, “Come quick, Sir. There is a burst pipe.”*)

Figure 3 depicts a picture set used in the PSM activity. For this activity, learners were given different sets of pictures and a set of sentences to match up with the corresponding pictures. Again, there were different levels of difficulty; with sets ranging in size from three to five pictures.



**Figure 4:** Narrative timeline activities

Figure 4 depicts one learner's product for the activity in which they had to draw one event from the beginning, middle and end of a new story. For this activity, the researcher read a new story to the whole class: '*Maar hy't dan meer as ek!*' ('But he's got more than me!') (Roehle 2012). After the reading, the participating learners were asked to draw three pictures each, depicting an event from the beginning, middle and end of the story. This activity was given to test their ability to remember the sequence of events, and thus to show their understanding of the concepts of 'beginning', 'middle' and 'end'.

## 5. Main findings

The main findings of the study can be categorised according to the broader themes of 'Awareness', 'Appreciation', 'Home varieties' and 'Relevance'.

### 5.1 Appreciation

Both groups of participants, i.e. the learners in both schools where the study was done, showed great appreciation for telling and listening to stories. Learners showed greater ease and comfort in the oral medium than in the written form. However, after they had written and illustrated their own work and received their first little books in publication form, their enthusiasm for writing increased markedly.

Although the learners showed greater appreciation for spoken narratives, this is nevertheless an area that could be developed. The fact that only one school's learners brought stories from home and the other school did not support this statement. Story-telling is a central form of social expression which needs to be encouraged and developed.

Participants showed a particular appreciation for the fairy tale genre, in that many of the little books were retellings and adaptations of existing fairy tales, such as *The Three Little Pigs*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Tortoise and the Hare*, to name but a few.

Many of the learners simply rewrote parts of the stories that they read (or that had been read to them) in class as part of the curriculum. Rewriting stories rather than writing your own not only shows limited knowledge of the written genre, but also a level of under-appreciating what the

learner him-/herself has to offer as a creative author writing a story. Despite the fact that some learners showed little confidence in writing in their own words, or about their own stories, most of them show a keen artistic appreciation for the illustrations that accompany their written texts.

The most salient finding in this category then was the high level of appreciation that learners showed for the spoken form of narrative. Their love of the oral tradition may serve as a definite entry point when motivating learners to write. The occurrence and use of regional expressions may be used to further foster their love and appreciation for their regional variety, and in this way convince them that the knowledge and skills that they already have are not only suitable, but are in fact unique as instruments in creative writing.

## 5.2 Awareness

Linked to the theme of appreciation is that of awareness. Learners' great appreciation for the fairy tale and storybook genre led to an awareness of certain punctuation marks, such as inverted commas; dialogues; and certain key phrases, such as *Een dag* ('Long ago') and *Fluit-fluit my storie is uit* ('Snip, snap, snout, the tale's told out') that are used to begin and end these kinds of stories.

A more general awareness of spelling can be seen in the way in which they corrected their texts. Some learners also had innovative ways of spelling words based on how they perceive the spoken counterpart of that word. An example of phonological awareness is the word *kar* ('car') being written as *kag*.

The levels of awareness, just like the levels of appreciation, were different from learner to learner. The general finding is that learners do have knowledge of different genres and genre-specific features, and that they do have knowledge of spelling. The presence of both awareness and appreciation to some degree answers the questions that were set as research objectives, but the research on this question needs to be expanded.

## 5.3 Finding relevance

Sperber and Wilson (2002) find that Grice's Maxim of Relevance is the most important of the maxims he identified because it underlies all the others, but what they add is that readers and listeners interpret meanings on the grounds of greater and lesser relevance based on what *they* know and not necessarily what the speaker or writer intended to be relevant. Thus, and this can be seen in one of the findings in this study, with different things manifest to different speakers, some degree of discontinuity can occur in communication. In the school context this needs to be considered, as what is salient and also manifest for learners in their home environment may be less so in the school context, and vice versa.

One of the most telling examples of how learners apply the relevance principle is in the story of *Die Kaasman* ('The Cheeseman'). One learner interpreted a character meant to represent a sea sponge as a cheese because he did not know the world of sea creatures and how sponges form part of that realm.

This example of finding relevance gives an understanding of choices that researchers and educators could find odd. It shows how easily discontinuity in communication can occur

between people, also in educational environments. In order to appreciate the choices learners make, as well as to develop their ability to make as many relevant interpretations in as many situations as possible, they need broader exposure to literature and other reading material.

## 6. Conclusion

The data that have been collected during both phases of the study show that learners have more linguistic resources at their disposal than what is commonly believed. Resources of regional language, appreciation and life experiences should be investigated in more depth in order to incorporate them with more success into the formal educational environment. Most important is the fact that learners have to gain a sense of respect and purpose in using their own varieties before and while teachers teach them the standard varieties. If the appreciation for their L1 and the sense of its usefulness is strongly developed, learners have a much firmer base on which to build any future literacy endeavours.

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