



BALID
British Association for
Literacy in Development

Conference Report

Common Goals, Shared Purpose

Strengthening Reading, Family Learning and the UPE Targets

24-25 January 2011, Cape Town, South Africa

A collaboration between

The British Council, South Africa,

The British Association for Literacy in Development,

Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa



Conference Partners

British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID)

BALID aims to:

- promote literacy and numeracy for adults as an integral part of human development
- increase awareness of the relationship between literacy, numeracy, economic development and social change, in partnership with other appropriate organisations
- inform and advise governments, non-governmental agencies and the private sector on adult literacy and numeracy within the context of development
- contribute to programmes for adult literacy and numeracy
- facilitate interactions and exchanges between those working in adult literacy and numeracy
- exchange experiences and research findings in order to inform future practice.



The British Council, South Africa

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Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA)

PRAESA is an independent research and development unit attached to the Faculty of Education at the University of Cape Town. Established in 1992, PRAESA emerged from the struggle against apartheid education.



PRAESA focuses on language policy in education in order to further the democratisation of South African society. Focal areas of work include language planning and policy formulation at national and provincial government levels, in-service teacher education, developmental research into multilingual classrooms, early literacy and biliteracy, dual-medium primary schooling, language surveys, as well as generating publications and learning support materials.

PRAESA strives to:

- further an additive approach to bilingualism and biliteracy in education
- raise the status of the (official) African languages, particularly isiXhosa in the Western Cape
- assist teachers in coping with the challenges of working in multilingual classrooms
- contribute towards a database of research relating to language policy, planning and practice
- initiate the development of materials for use with children in multilingual situations
- initiate and support community involvement in the development of reading habits and cultural practices through community literacy clubs.

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A full copy of this report may be downloaded from the BALID website: www.balid.org.uk

Reflections on the Conference

Brian Street, President of BALID

For BALID, this conference was a follow up to a Family Learning conference, *Education for All: Strengthening UPE through Family Learning*, held in Sierra Leone in February 2010, a report of which has been circulated. The aims of BALID include promoting human development through literacy, in part by means of two-way learning between the global north and global south. The Cape Town conference amply fulfilled these aims, with participation by many colleagues from South Africa as well as by members of the BALID Executive Committee—Juliet McCaffery, Ian Cheffy and myself. We are grateful to all the speakers and participants for generously contributing their time and energy, making the conference a rich occasion for sharing and learning.

Our colleagues in PRAESA provided excellent examples of local community work, especially with children. In our visit to the Vulindlela Reading Club set up by PRAESA in the township of Langa, we were very impressed by the commitment of the organisers and by the activities taking place—games, storytelling,

writing and drawing. These, along with other modes of engagement, such as dance and song, are approaches that fit well with the social practice approach that takes literacy learning beyond the narrow confines of decoding, grammar and vocabulary. Discussion of these issues took place both in the scheduled sessions and in more informal meetings before and after the conference and they laid the ground for fruitful collaboration in the future.

In this and the conference in Sierra Leone, the British Council has played a key supportive role in providing facilities, excellent food and vital liaison with local groups in the field. BALID and PRAESA are very grateful to the British Council for this assistance. BALID will be circulating copies of this report to British Council offices with a view to planning such events in the future.

From the BALID perspective, the success of these two Family Learning conferences gives us the incentive and confidence to continue the series with further conferences of this kind in other countries in Africa.

Jean September, Deputy Director British Council, South Africa (Cape Town)

My colleagues and I from the British Council, South Africa directorate, were delighted to partner with two leading international literacy and change agencies, the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) based at the University of Cape Town (SA) and the British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID), on *The Common Goals, Shared Purpose Community Literacy Conference* in January 2011.

The conference provided an important space for community literacy practitioners and academics to be engaged with some of the practical approaches to developing literature and cultivating a culture of reading for enjoyment. In doing so, they looked at some of the strategies used for literacy in development. At the conference, participants were given an opportunity to explore best practices, share experiences, and look at improving some of the challenges they face in facilitating reading rather than teaching reading in the conventional way.

The conference was an opportunity for the British Council to engage with some of the work

of these organisations and to have a better understanding of the work done by volunteers through the many reading clubs run on the weekends. For us, the interaction between community literacy workers, academics and officials from the education department was one that is necessary and that needs to be further supported. The act of working together and pooling the experiences, resources and energy from all the participating organisations will only strengthen the resolve to promote reading and learning in new and innovative ways. As Ntombizanele Mahobe, a facilitator, translator and storyteller from PRAESA said, “Organisations need to be more proactive in sharing ideas, volunteers and resources when working in the same communities”.

Furthermore, this was an opportunity to build on the partnership established with the work that BALID conducted with our British Council colleagues in Sierra Leone on *Strengthening Universal Primary Education through Family Learning in February 2010*.

1 Executive Summary

Family Learning initiatives, which bring together parents and children to enhance learning in both generations simultaneously, can make a significant contribution to the achievement of international targets for education, as set out in the Education for All goals established in Dakar in 2000, and in the Millennium Development Goals agreed by the United Nations in the same year.

The international community urgently needs to address the educational needs of the most disadvantaged people. Over 758 million adults in the world are not literate. Of these, over 99% live in developing countries, the majority in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central, East and West Asia. More than 68 million children in developing countries are out of school, and 17% of children in these countries fail to complete primary education. Many who complete primary school fail to enter secondary school (UNESCO 2010).

It is therefore essential that all those with an interest in education and especially in the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE) should consider what they can do to improve the educational experience of the children and young people of the world. This conference, entitled *Common Goals, Shared Purpose: Reading, Family Learning and the UPE Targets*, provided one such opportunity for reflection leading to stimulus for action.

Family Learning (also known as Family Literacy) builds on the strong foundation provided by the close relationship between parents and children and the desire of parents to promote their children's development in every respect. These initiatives offer a means for parents whose educational experience may be limited or non-existent to give their children a better chance in life, and to promote their own educational achievement at the same time. While the form of Family Learning varies according to local contexts and needs, projects share many positive outcomes through enabling parents to be actively involved in the education of their children. Research indicates that the impact on children's education achievement brought about by the involvement of parents in their children's education is greater than that brought about by the quality of their children's school (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003).

Conference background

The conference was jointly hosted by the British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID), the British Council, and the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa

(PRAESA). The complementarity between BALID, the British Council and PRAESA brought a special richness to the conference as each organisation approached the theme of conference from their particular perspective.

For BALID, Family Learning brings a double benefit in the contribution it makes to both the achievement of UPE and the realisation of greater literacy among adults, especially in developing countries. For PRAESA, the involvement of community members, including parents in the education of their children, and the encouragement and stimulus which they can give to their children through shared interaction in reading and writing, are essential if children are to acquire an enthusiasm for reading and achieve their educational potential. For the British Council in South Africa, the conference made a significant contribution to its goals of facilitating intercultural exchange between the UK and South Africa and the professional development of South African educators. Just as the impact of Family Learning arises from the interaction between adults and children, so the success of this conference was due to the dynamic interaction between the three collaborating organisations.

Over 80 people attended the conference, including academics and practitioners, teachers, educators and NGO staff. While many were working in South Africa, this was an international conference which attracted participants from Europe as well as from North and South America.

The conference was a further expression of BALID's commitment to promote literacy in development and to contribute to the Education for All goals through highlighting the contribution of Family Learning and Literacy. It was the third in a series of conferences on this theme, following others in London in 2007 and in Sierra Leone in 2010.

Conference presentations

The conference programme was structured over two days around a series of plenary and parallel sessions, some of a theoretical nature while others were firmly practical.

Family Learning, underpinned by an awareness of literacy practices within the community of the parents and their children, can be particularly effective in promoting literacy and education. This approach to literacy, which was explained by Brian Street, was new to many of the participants, who found that it offered them

useful insights which they could apply in their work. His explanation of the ethnographic approaches to literacy sensitised them to the complexity of local literacy practices and offered avenues for incorporating them into Family Learning initiatives.

Maria Lucia Castanheira's presentation on her research in Brazil provided an example of the ethnographic approach being used to identify local literacies. Her longitudinal study of a working class district of Belo Horizonte showed how literacy was integral to life in the community, even if the educational achievement level of the residents was low. Nevertheless, the opportunities to make use of reading and writing have increased in the last 20 years. This serves to remind family learning practitioners to be continually responsive to changing local practices and uses of literacy.

Ian Cheffy's presentation pointed to ways in which Family Learning could address the educational challenges faced by developing countries. In Cameroon, in spite of considerable improvements in recent years, many children fail to complete primary school and a substantial proportion of adults are not literate. These challenges are exacerbated by the linguistic complexity of the country which results in many children being taught in French or English even though they have limited grasp of those languages. Ian's example of a Family Learning project in one community demonstrated how this approach can be particularly effective when it is built on existing strong relationships within the family and on an established culture in which parents expect to take responsibility for their children's religious education and their training in life skills. Family Learning in the language spoken at home by parents and their children brings significant benefits.

Neville Alexander, the director of PRAESA, provided an inspirational example of Family Learning in practice as he described the work of PRAESA and in particular the Vulindlela Reading Clubs which have had a very significant impact on children and parent's engagement with books in the poorest communities of South Africa. Some of the conference participants had greatly enjoyed visiting one of the Reading Clubs before the conference began.

The first reading club, as Carole Bloch, the Coordinator of the PRAESA Early Literacy Unit, explained, was established in 2006. Since then others have been established in Cape Town and further afield in South Africa. Relying on trained volunteers and parents, the clubs attract several hundred children who meet regularly each week because of their love of reading. They provide children with the opportunities to read for pleasure which are often unavailable in school because of the lack of awareness of the deep significance of free reading for education, the

pressures of the school curricula and the emphasis placed on learning the skills of reading and writing. The children range in age from pre-school to early teenage. Club meetings include games, storytelling, free reading, and writing. Both isiXhosa and English are used throughout the club meetings, thus promoting biliteracy, an essential accomplishment in multilingual South Africa.

Another powerful example of a well-developed Family Learning project making a significant difference in the community was provided by Lynn Stefano, director of The Family Literacy Project in KwaZulu Natal. Building on the Reflect approach in adult literacy, the project introduces the theme of family literacy as one of the topics explored by the adults involved. Family Learning is then supported in practice by the mothers reading with their children, borrowing books from a local library and writing letters to one another. Social interaction between the mothers encourages them to further activity with their children and further involvement in learning. The project amply illustrates how reading books together can stimulate the joy of reading in both children and their parents.

Stories occupy a prominent place in Family Learning, whether told orally or read in a book. When well written and told in a lively manner, they are a source of great pleasure which stimulates readers and hearers to explore further the rich world of literature. The vivid demonstrations of effective storytelling by PRAESA staff will linger long in the memories of the participants.

The workshop led by Ntombizanele Mahobe of PRAESA focused on how to share stories with children, whether orally or when reading, in such a way as to excite their interest. At all times storytelling and reading must be seen to be enjoyable and fun.

Ntombizanele was joined by her colleague Xolisa Guzula in a second workshop which showed how telling stories, reading and writing are all intertwined. Telling stories with children leads into making books with and for children. Adults can help children to write down their own experiences.

Brian Street's session took the theme of literature further and introduced an international comparative perspective by giving participants the opportunity to discuss the merits of examples of literature from Sierra Leone and Uganda and to compare them with those found in South Africa. This was one of the most animated sessions of the conference, especially as it gave the participants an opportunity to express their own enthusiasm for literature and for passing this on to others.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

This was a most successful conference, as evidenced by the comments made in the evaluation exercise when many participants indicated that they had not only enjoyed the conference but had also found it useful and relevant to their situations and concerns. Several commented that they would have liked the conference and the individual sessions, especially the practical workshops, to have been longer. The benefit of the conference, and the desire for further learning opportunities of this kind, is very evident.

The participants enjoyed the mixture of practice and theory and felt that all the sessions were relevant to them. A number expressed their appreciation for the introductory session on literacy as a social practice and for the opportunity to learn from the experiences of others. They enjoyed the storytellings from other countries, and were glad to put their own experience in the wider perspective offered by learning of contexts of South Africa. Some participants from outside the Western Cape appeared to know little of PRAESA's initiatives in running the Vulindlela Clubs; the idea of the community Reading Clubs was new to many and some were motivated to start similar clubs in their own communities.

Comments received also indicated that the conference provided a valued opportunity for professional interaction. A common complaint was that everyone was so busy with their own projects that they barely had time to take account of those of others, even those in or near their own locality. Conferences such as this serve an important role in enabling people to interact with one another.

Several suggestions were made for additional items for inclusion on another similar occasion. These included:

- the mechanics and processes of starting and supporting a reading club
- inviting the government to attend such conferences and exploring ways to work together
- information on ways to sustain voluntary organisations
- a practical book-making workshop, and
- more time to network and learn about each others' projects and experiences.

Again, a clear message here for future conferences seems to be that people want more time. Conference organisers should not underestimate the amount of time which people will give to what they see as of clear benefit to them.

The organisation of a future similar event could be improved by giving more attention to facilitating interaction between participants through circulating a list of participants and their organisations, giving time to self-introductions and giving more attention to welcoming people who were coming to such an event for the first time.

Other comments of a practical nature reinforced the need to ensure that the meeting rooms were conducive to promoted group interaction, that presenters could be easily heard, and that water should be available for participants at all times.

The high number of positive comments, the appreciation of the inputs, the desire for more time and for more information show that the conference met an important previously unmet need for information and exchange of ideas and that it opened up future possibilities for a number of participants.

The BALID members present were reinforced in their commitment to hold more such conferences on this theme in other parts of Africa.

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2 Conference Presentations

2.1

Literacy as Social Practice: Using Ethnographic Perspectives in Programme Development

Brian Street
President, BALID

Brian's presentation at the opening of the conference indicated the kinds of approaches to literacy learning—notably the recognition of literacy as social practice—which are evident in the work of BALID and of other organisations working in literacy and development, such as PRAESA, Uppingham Seminars, and Education for Development. After summarising the aims and vision of BALID, he illustrated the social practice approach by describing some programmes based in the Letter Project for helping literacy tutors to take local practices into account in their teaching. This understanding of literacy can inform Family Learning projects in a powerful way.

The session generated a considerable amount of discussion. Many of the attendees were very interested in the issues which Brian raised, and in particular the relationship between a social practice approach to literacy and the work in which they were involved locally, through the rich variety of organisations which had come together for the conference.

BALID Aims, Vision and Approaches

Aim:

Promoting human development through literacy

Vision:

That all adults have access to high quality opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy to meet their aspirations

Approaches:

- Increase awareness of the relationship between literacy, numeracy, economic development and social change, in partnership with appropriate organisations.
- Promote two way learning between the global north and global south in relation to literacy and numeracy.

The Letter Project (Learning Empowerment Through Training in Ethnographic Research) addresses these aims by working with four levels of participants: literacy and numeracy learners in their context, teachers, trainers of the teachers and, lastly, tutors training the trainers. In addition, those involved, notably Alan Rogers, Brian Street and Dave Baker from the UK, Malini Ghose from Nirantar in India, Alema Gebre in Ethiopia, and George Openjuru in Uganda, have produced publications and conducted research on the project (see references below). Letter workshops have been held in India, Ethiopia and Uganda and it is hoped to hold further workshops in Tanzania, Mexico, Brazil and South Africa.

Considering literacy as social practice assumes that we are dealing with what Brian terms 'local literacies' in the plural rather than a single uniform thing called literacy. Whilst the dominant perspective tends to focus on what he would term 'schooled literacy', it is important for teachers and facilitators to also recognise the significance for learners of their own local literacies, their uses of, for example, commercial or religious literacy practices.

The approach to literacy as social practice builds on a distinction between an 'autonomous' model and an 'ideological' model of literacy (Street 1984). The 'autonomous' model of literacy works from the assumption that literacy in itself—autonomously—will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. This model, he argues, disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it which can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal. Research in the social practice approach challenges this view and suggests that in practice dominant approaches based on the autonomous model are simply imposing western (or urban etc.) conceptions of literacy onto other cultures (Street 2001).

The alternative, ideological, model of literacy offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another. This model starts from different premises than the autonomous model. It posits instead that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill, and that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. The ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge,

identity and being. Literacy, in this sense, is always contested, both its meanings and its practices, hence particular versions of it are always 'ideological', they are always rooted in a particular world-view and a desire for that view of literacy to dominate and to marginalise others.

The argument about social literacies (Street 1995) suggests that engaging with literacy is always a social act even from the outset, rather than assuming that literacy can be learned 'autonomously', as it were, and then taken out into society afterwards. The ways in which teachers or facilitators and their students interact is already a social practice that affects the nature of the literacy being learned and the ideas about literacy held by the participants, especially the new learners and their position in relations of power. It is not valid to suggest that 'literacy' can be 'given' neutrally and then its 'social' effects only experienced or 'added on' afterwards. For these reasons, as well as because of the failure of many traditional literacy programmes (Abadzi 1996; Street 1999), academics, researchers and practitioners working in literacy in different parts of the world are beginning to come to the conclusion that the autonomous model of literacy on which much of the practice and programmes have been based is not an appropriate intellectual tool, either for understanding the diversity of reading and writing around the world or for designing the practical programmes this required which may be better suited to an ideological model (Aikman 1999; Heath 1983; Doronilla 1996; Hornberger 1997, 2002; Kalman 1999; King 1994; Robinson-Pant 1997; Wagner 1993).

The question this approach raises for policy makers and programme designers is not simply that of the 'impact' of literacy—to be measured in terms of a neutral developmental index—but rather of how local people 'take hold' of the new communicative practices being introduced to them, as Kulick & Stroud's (1993) ethnographic description of missionaries bringing literacy to New Guinea villagers makes clear. Literacy, in this sense, is already part of a power relationship and how people 'take hold' of it is contingent on social and cultural practices and not just on pedagogic and cognitive factors. This raises questions that need to be addressed in any literacy programme: What is the power relation between the participants? What are the resources? Where are people going if they take on one literacy rather than another literacy? How do recipients challenge the dominant conceptions of literacy?

In order to begin to find out about these local meanings, facilitators and trainers in the Letter Project expose the learners to ethnographic perspectives. This is well captured by recounting the Buddhist story of the Turtle and the Fish, which illustrates the error of ethnocentrism.

There was once a turtle who lived in a lake with a group of fish. One day the turtle went for a walk on dry land. He was away from the lake for a few weeks. When he returned he met some of the fish. The fish asked him,

"Mister Turtle, hello! How are you? We have not seen you for a few weeks. Where have you been?"

The turtle said, "I was up on the land, I have been spending some time on dry land."

The fish were a little puzzled and they said, "Up on dry land? What are you talking about? What is this dry land? Is it wet?"

The turtle said, "No, it is not."

"Is it cool and refreshing?"

"No, it is not."

"Does it have waves and ripples?"

"No, it does not have waves and ripples."

"Can you swim in it?"

"No, you can't."

So the fish said, "It is not wet, it is not cool, there are no waves, you can't swim in it. So this dry land of yours must be completely non-existent, just an imaginary thing, nothing real at all."

The turtle said, "Well, that may be so." And he left the fish and went for another walk on dry land.

Another version of the story ends in this way:

The fish said, "Don't tell us what it isn't. Tell us what it is."

"I can't," said the turtle. "I don't have any language to describe it."

The story shows how ethnographic perspectives can help the fish, who, like us, might think that everyone is swimming in the same sea, to recognise the different ways of being, the different meanings that learners engage in. With regard to literacy this may mean that the reading and writing practices which teachers are familiar with, that they commonly swim in, may not be the same as those of their learners who may, as it were, be on dry land engaging in different uses of reading and writing. The uses of literacy for local commercial practices, writing notes and records, keeping notes of the weight and numbers of objects being sold, may be quite different from the formal text book kind of literacy familiar in schools.

A further conceptual issue is what is currently termed 'multimodality'—the recognition that meaning comes in many modes, visual, sound, movement etc, and not just writing. Indeed, for many of the participants, a first move in helping learners acquire literacy is often to dance and sing and to provide visual displays, such as in the Saturday morning Vulindlela Reading Club held at Langa, a local township in Cape Town.

As is suggested by the accompanying photographs (see page 10) of examples of writing on local walls, of the use of bowls for measurement, of different scripts and languages, teachers should not simply assume that their local environment is 'illiterate', as many national and international policy documents tend to imply. These photographs point to a number of features of local literacy practices which teachers should be alert to, and which they might build upon in a family learning programme:

- surfaces / materials / resources—ephemeral / permanent; permitted / transgressed
- asking which languages / which scripts are used for which purposes
- orthography—varying responses to prescriptive rules, punctuation, spelling etc; scripts / typewriter
- modality; e.g. written vs. visual, spoken, gesture
- genres e.g. notices, books, messages, instructions
- notices / signs—for information / instruction / literary / interaction OR no notices—for exclusion / privacy
- books e.g. religious, 'heritage'.

Teachers can learn from the Turtle and Fish story which underlines the need to listen to others, and to understand variety and difference. A useful way of doing this could be through the use of ethnographic perspectives.

The following guidance is helpful to family learning practitioners applying a social practice perspective which differs from the dominant models of literacy that they are likely to have encountered:

Avoid:

- an imposed outside view, e.g. international or national policies, typified by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report and the World Bank
- concepts such as 'they do not have' / 'illiteracy'
- wrong metaphors: 'filling empty vessels'; 'banking'.

Work with local meanings and uses:

- start from where learners / local people are
- use ethnographic perspectives with teachers and trainers
- recognise multiple, diverse, 'mobile' language and literacy uses
- develop appropriate metaphors for working with the local, e.g. building, bridging, scaffolding.

Resources on Literacy as a Social Practice

Letter Project

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Illustrations of the social practice approach



Fig. 1 Dalit women and local measure of quantity (D. Baker)



Fig. 2 Multiple scripts in Ethiopia (B. Street)



Fig. 3 Panchang (religious calendar, India) Purnima



Fig. 4 Writing on the wall of a house in Ethiopia (Negussie Hailu)

(Trans: "I became lonely in order to make my life easier [because] today's friend is tomorrow's enemy".)

2.2

Writing in a Brazilian Working Class Neighbourhood

María Lucia Castanheira

Federal University of Minas
Gerais, Brazil

María Lucia's presentation discussed her longitudinal research project which has demonstrated how changes in the local environment impact the literacy practices of the people. Family literacy practitioners need to be sensitive and responsive to the changing practices of people in their context.

Although her presentation examined literacy practices in Brazil, the conclusions which she drew are applicable all around the world.

Introduction

In this text I present data from ethnographic research of writing involving working class families who live in Trombetas, a district on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte, Brazil. These families participated in a case study that examined the ways in which children from their neighbourhood had access to writing *in* and *out* of school. Data collection for the study occurred in 1988 and 1989. Two decades later, in 2009, I returned to Trombetas, to re-encounter the children and their families that participated in this previous research and to initiate a second case study with them. Since then, I have had the opportunity to visit and interview members of three of these families about the role of literacy in their lives and those of their children.

This project enables a comparison of living conditions across three generations of these families: children interviewed before are now adults, have children of their own and, in some cases, live with or close to their parents. These aspects raised the following questions: What changes have occurred in the larger context that might have influenced changes in the conditions in which these families live? How have these changes affected their uses of writing / literacy? To address these questions, I examine my data archives guided by the following question: What changes can be identified by contrasting pictures, field notes, interview transcripts from 1988–1989 and those produced in 2009–2010? The comparative analysis between the two data archives showed that significant changes occurred in three areas: economic, religious, and home/school literacy. In this paper, I will develop a brief discussion in relation to the first area and some of its implication for literacy.

Living and writing in Trombetas in late 1980s

The first members of these families arrived in the city of Belo Horizonte in the 1970s coming from rural areas. At that time, internal migration was intensifying as a result of structural changes in the Brazilian economy that was moving from an agrarian to an industrialized model. In the late 60s, new laws redefining rural working contracts and crop sharing made working conditions even more difficult for workers in the rural areas. In contrast, the new industrial economic model promoted the development of industrial areas in major Brazilian cities and attracted families searching for new job opportunities. The majority of migrants went to live in *favelas* or shanty towns on the outskirts of big cities, where the infrastructure for transport, electricity, water and sewer was minimal or non-existent. As an unqualified workforce with no schooling, or only few years of schooling at best, they were contracted for very low payment, receiving a minimal wage or not even that. A picture of Trombetas from 1988 (Fig. 1), when the first study was conducted, shows the characteristics of this neighbourhood 18 years after the first arrivals in the area. At that time, Brazil was going through economic recession. Trombetas continued to be without basic infrastructure and many people lost their jobs.

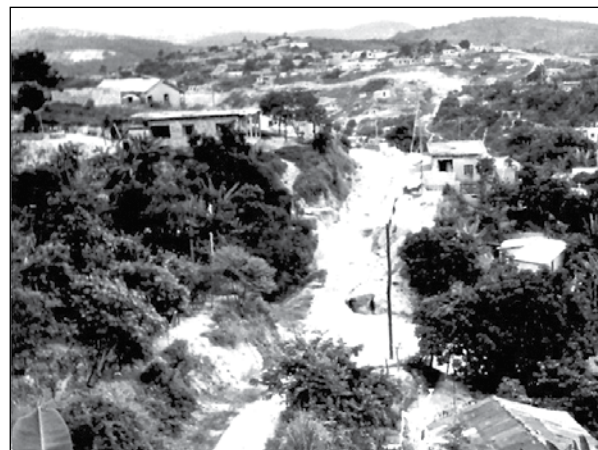


Fig. 1 Trombetas in 1988

Writing was not yet very visible in the public spaces of Trombetas. For example, signs indicating the names of streets or the number of the houses were scarcely present. Besides that, the only library in the area was the school library that was not in use even for the students. However, visiting the houses and interviewing children and adults, it was possible to unravel

some of the ways in which writing was part of their daily lives. For adults, reading was necessary, for example, to read bills, to take notes of debt in the market, to receive and send personal letters, and to identify which buses to take. As many of them had only a few years of schooling or had not even had the chance to go to school, they found work as cleaners, masons, or street sellers with no formal contract, jobs which, according to the adults interviewed, did not require writing. Some parents expressed their worries about not having money to give a better life to their children, such as by buying books or sending them to better schools. Some mothers mentioned that they brought used textbooks, donated from the houses where they worked as cleaners or maids. Most of all, it was clear that adults made efforts to prepare their kids to enter elementary school, hoping that schooling would give them a better chance in life.

The study also showed that children engaged with writing in many ways as they participated in activities developed by adults or played with friends. They also demonstrated their knowledge of uses and functions of literacy in various situations. Sometimes, they were the ones to read a letter or to write the answer to it. A younger one, aged four, read and commented about the soft drink brand label written on the bag I carried with my research paraphernalia. Her older sister explained that she had learned by helping their father in the bar. A child playing on the street pointed out to me the number of a house hanging from a TV antenna, while others compared my research notebook with their parents' notebook to register money owed. In many houses, notebooks like the one shown in Fig. 2 were used collectively by family members. Notebooks from school were used and re-used many times to teach those preparing to go to school the a-e-i-o-u, syllables and numbers. The influences of the schooling approach were easily identified in such practices, given that parents or older siblings would use their own lived experience in school to develop these activities.

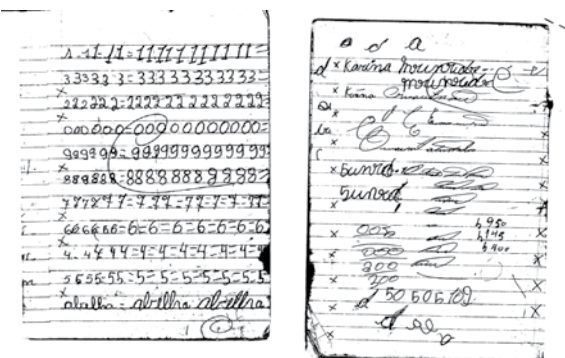


Fig. 2. Notebooks

Living and writing in Trombetas in 2009 and 2010

The two pictures presented below help to show changes that have taken place in Trombetas over

the last two decades, compared with what is shown in Figure 1.



Fig. 3 Trombetas in 2010



Fig. 4 Street in Trombetas 2010

From the early 1990s, the Brazilian economy gradually became more stable. Inflation somehow came under control and the industrial area of the city where Trombetas is situated has, since then, increased the number of industries and services. In 2009 and 2010, changes in landscape of the area reflect the investment of the state and municipality in this area with improvement of urban infrastructure, which has made life better for its residents (see Figs. 3 and 4). Over the years, families have improved their houses or built a new unit on the same piece of land for relatives who have established a new family. The people interviewed manifested their satisfaction in experiencing some degree of working stability, and many of them are no longer in the informal job market. Second generation men and women of these families continue to work as masons, cleaners or maids, although some are working as teachers or secretaries. When interviewed, some of the second generation affirmed that their job does not involve much writing and that after a long journey to and from work they do not have the energy for reading.

Analysis of schooling across the three generations of families interviewed shows that the second generation stayed longer in schools than the previous one, at least completing elementary school before starting work, and a few of them finished high school in the normal expected time. Teenagers, the third generation of these families, have not yet been pressed to leave school in order to work, as happened with their parents. The visibility of writing on the streets of Trombetas indicates how much the area became integrated into the urban life of Belo Horizonte (see Fig. 4). The neighbourhood now has one newsstand and internet café. In some houses, children have access to TV, and to CD or DVD players. They can be seen teaching adults how to use these resources. They also have access to newspapers, magazines and the Bible. A government education programme is providing free textbooks in different disciplines for all of them.

Conclusion

Some conclusions are possible based on this initial analysis. Writing is more visibly present in the lives of the people of Trombetas than it was before. However, economic changes and the consolidation of a new job market have not required special qualifications or higher level of schooling from workers. Rhetoric about literacy

as necessary for work therefore seems to be different from reality. Years of schooling are increasing across generations of these families. However, to understand the effect of that in relation to literacy practices outside school or upward mobility in the job market needs to be further investigated. New technologies are also present in the houses, although the residents still have very limited access to computer and internet, compared to the upper social classes. Further research and analysis are needed for a better understanding of how the changes that took place impact the uses and meanings of writing in this context, and how these changes in Brazil relate to those identified in other countries.

2.3

Family Learning in Cameroon: Problems and Possibilities

Ian Cheffy

*International Literacy
and Education Consultant,
SIL International*

Family learning approaches can make a significant contribution to the learning of younger and older people, but their potential has not been fully realised. Ian's presentation discussed the many challenges faced by formal schooling in Cameroon, not least because of the highly complex linguistic profile of the country. He highlighted one particular family learning project which, although in its infancy, is showing indications of making an impact on the educational achievement of children and adults in the marginalised Fulani community.

The session proved very stimulating both for Ian and the audience who gained insights into their work through comparing the South African context with that of Cameroon.

The challenges for formal education in Cameroon

In recent years, Cameroon has made considerable progress in increasing the numbers of children who attend formal school, but the country continues to face serious difficulties. In some areas, large class numbers and a limited availability of trained teachers, combined with poor facilities for both teaching and learning, conspire to hinder children from achieving their full potential in school.

Recent statistics indicate that, although most Cameroonian children complete six years of primary school, only 32% of them continue their education at secondary level. The relatively high costs of school fees, equipment, and the boarding accommodation which is often necessary in view of the inaccessibility of secondary schools in some areas make secondary education unaffordable for many parents. This has an impact on literacy among adults; only 77% of men and 60% of women are estimated to be literate (UNESCO 2010).

These aggregated statistics conceal considerable disparities. Achievement levels for education and literacy tend to be lower in rural areas than in the urban centres, and are lower among older people than among younger adults who have had the opportunity to attend formal schooling. This is

particularly evident in the northern part of the country where the establishment of primary and secondary schools has lagged behind that of the southern part.

A further challenge facing educational provision is the complex linguistic profile of the country. Cameroon is highly multilingual in that over 270 languages are in daily use (Lewis 2009). The constitution permits the use of these languages as the medium of education, but only a small number are used in this way in schools, and even fewer are used beyond the first three years of primary education. The great majority of children are taught through the medium of French or English, the two official languages of the country. However, many children are unfamiliar with these languages since they are not commonly used outside of the school, especially in rural areas. Children thus have to learn to read and write in a language which they do not speak well, which inevitably slows their educational attainment. The result is an educational void in which children are not learning in their own language, and are having difficulty learning in a language which they do not understand well.

Hints of Family Learning in Cameroon

Although family literacy projects do not exist in Cameroon in the formal sense of the term, there are nevertheless a variety of non-formal and informal initiatives which attempt to supplement the formal education offered in schools. Naturally, a great deal of informal family literacy takes place in the normal interactions between parents and their children centred on the passing on of essential life skills such as self-care, relating to others, and contributing to the running of the home through sharing household chores. Some parents also take formal responsibility for the development of their children's knowledge and understanding of their religion in the home.

Some family literacy initiatives of a more organised nature are evident. In the main cities, where many languages are spoken alongside French and English, some parents run complementary schools in the form of holiday clubs for their children to ensure that their children do not lose their ethnic language. In this way, the children can communicate with their relatives in their extended family when they visit them in their home area as well as more fully entering into their cultural heritage.

In rural areas, where there is less likelihood of language loss, but where the local languages are not used in school, some parents have organised

after-school clubs, bringing together groups of children to read and write in their own language and to enjoy its inherent power for expression. In areas where local languages feature in formal schooling, parents have become alert to the educational potential of their language. They have shown an increased level of interest in their children's education, coming to school to observe what their children are doing and subsequently joining adult literacy classes. They are thus empowered to help their children in their schooling in a way which is not possible for them when education is exclusively through French or English. The choice of the local language as the medium of instruction in school has enabled parents to fulfil their desire as parents to facilitate their children's learning and development.

Family Learning for the Fulani

An innovative family literacy project is currently under development for the Fulani community in the North West Province of the country. The Fulani are marginalised in the area as they are semi-nomadic pastoralists, whose way of life, ethnicity and language, and their Islamic religion, distinguish them sharply from the settled indigenous communities. This has led to an uneasy relationship with the settled population, evidenced especially in conflicts over the use of land for their cattle. Although the Fulani are choosing increasingly to settle in fixed locations, they remain in dispersed homesteads and their life continues to revolve around the possession and care of their cattle; this requires the men of the community to migrate on a seasonal basis to obtain pasture for their animals.

Few Fulani children attend school. Boys have little time free from the demands of looking after cattle, and girls are not encouraged to venture far from their homes, an issue which is compounded by the distance which Fulani children may have to walk from their homes on the edge of a village to the local school.

Nevertheless, the Fulani have a long history of informal education centred on their home, way of life and religion. Boys are taught how to look after cattle by their fathers, and girls learn from their mothers how to carry out their home responsibilities. Fulani families have a strong tradition of passing on their religious values to their children through the joint study of the Koran. This is particularly necessary as their semi-nomadic way of life prevents them from easily accessing religious teachers or schools. Such religious literacy has impacted other literacies and some Fulani are literate in their own language, using Arabic script to write it. Remarkably, within families, there are no constraints on who can be taught by whom, and it is accepted that children and younger people can teach their elders; whoever knows may teach

whoever does not know, irrespective of age or standing in the family.



Fig. 1 A Fulani mother and daughter reading together. (C. Huber)

The Fulani are now becoming increasingly attracted to formal education as they recognise that they are becoming socially and educationally disadvantaged relative to the majority population. They desire to connect with majority culture and all that it entails in terms of knowledge and education, without losing their own identity and culture. This includes learning the majority languages and literacy in Roman script, as used for the other languages of the country.

Since 2008, a small literacy project has been undertaken with the Fulani, in which mothers are encouraged to bring their daughters to the class to learn together the basic skills of literacy in their own language. It has been noted that those mothers who are learning with their daughters have made greater progress in acquiring literacy skills than those mothers who are learning on their own. The interaction at home between these two generations of learners may contribute to this. As has been observed by the project leader, mothers and daughters experience the excitement of "entering a new land together" as they share literacy texts together. It has also been noted that the Fulani girls involved in this project are now attending school more frequently.

The second stage of the project will commence later this year with the development of literacy materials which can be studied within the home by parents and children together. These will continue to be in the language of the community, using Roman script to facilitate interaction with the majority community and a smoother transition for children into school. The curriculum will echo that of the formal school but will be drawn up to enable parents and children to learn together without being dependent on a teacher or attending a special class.

Discussion

Ian's presentation generated a great deal of discussion both about the challenges of education in Cameroon and the approach taken by the Fulani family literacy project. Several participants expressed surprise at the complexity of the language profile of Cameroon and how language clearly presented an even greater challenge to educational provision than it does in South Africa.

In relation to the Fulani project, one participant commented that the approach envisaged would in effect "put a teacher in every home". Another advised that the project should seek to validate Fulani culture, not only in the language used, but also in the methodology of teaching, such that traditional ways of teaching within the community should be incorporated into it. It was also suggested that if a link was to be made between Fulani families and local schools, the teachers would need to be willing to build bridges with the families by taking the initiative to contact them in their homes.

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2.4 Creating Conditions for Biliteracy Development in Community Settings

Neville Alexander

Director, PRAESA

Carole Bloch

*Co-ordinator, PRAESA
Early Literacy Unit*

Neville and Carole's opening address on behalf of PRAESA introduced the work of this NGO in promoting literacy with children in South Africa. Neville first reflected on what he himself had learned about literacy as he engaged with young literacy learners and inspired the audience to become further involved in vitally important interventions of this kind.

Carole described the work of PRAESA in South Africa which is helping to imbue children and adults with a love of reading. She showed how the interaction between adults and children is enormously influential in enabling children to enjoy reading and writing. The audience found her presentation highly inspirational.

Neville emphasised the importance of literacy as an essential part of one's survival kit in the 21st century. He underlined the importance of the work PRAESA had been able to initiate at the request of the Zisukhanyo Youth Empowerment (ZYE) community organisation in Langa, Cape Town, with the establishment of the first Vulindlela Reading Club. In the meantime, the number of clubs in the Cape Peninsula has increased beyond all expectations. A few reading clubs, inspired by the Vulindlela example, have been established further afield in South Africa. Although he had originally explained the nature and direction of the intervention in terms of a narrow class analysis, he said that he had been persuaded by his colleagues in the Early Literacy Unit of PRAESA to take a wider view of the matter. Consequently, he now believed that it is possible to create conditions conducive to learning to read and write for children whose homes are not able to provide such conditions. In South Africa, these homes are to be found mostly in rural areas and in urban townships and shacklands. The inspiration that such children get from committed, nurturing adult role models, who volunteer their time and experience on a regular basis, undoubtedly sparks off that love

of reading which is the beginning of the virtuous circle all of us want to bring into being.

Carole pointed out that at the heart of the literacy teaching issue is the systemic lack of appreciation that learning the technical skills of reading (like recognising letters and sounds, and putting them together to make words and sentences) is only one part of learning to read (and write). There are other hugely significant aspects, which have to do with becoming motivated to want to read through experiencing and appreciating the power and value of stories and other texts. This often happens 'naturally' in homes where books and writing (usually in English) are part and parcel of everyday life, and where there is a huge body of (English language) story and other books that are shared with children from when they are babies. When this doesn't happen in home settings, as is the case for many, mostly poor, children in South Africa, they are at an enormous disadvantage in learning to read and write. Because of the way teachers are trained to teach the beginnings of reading and writing, these essential but informal aspects of literacy are often totally absent.

The Vulindlela Reading Clubs were established in order to create conditions in community settings which inspire, promote and support reading for enjoyment and the development of reading habits in mother tongue and additional language/s among children and adults. They aim to create a nurturing space which motivates children to want to read and write, gives them a sense of identity and belonging, and demonstrates through action that 'we' are adults who care enough to be there every week to play, read and write and above all, listen to them.



*Fig. 1 Getting down to reading together
(I. Cheffy)*

The Reading Clubs in Cape Town take place each week at the same time of day. For instance, since 2006, a 2 hour session takes place every Saturday morning at the oldest Vulindlela Club, in the grounds of St Louis Primary School in Langa. Up to 150 children aged between 3 and 15 are met there by a group of volunteers who are ready to play games, sing songs, tell, read and write stories with the children. The volunteers include parents and others in the community or from further afield, as well as PRAESA staff. The PRAESA staff, who initiated the reading club at the request of the Zisukhanyo Youth Empowerment (ZYE) community organisation in Langa, have the relevant theoretical knowledge and practical experience to mentor volunteers. Volunteers can include high school or tertiary education students, teachers, lecturers, parents—in fact anyone with an interest in children and young people. Sessions alternate between isiXhosa and English. Following an initial training session for volunteers, regular workshops are held around issues relating to how to choose appropriate books, which languages to read and write in, how to read a story to a group, as well as planning and organisational matters.

Activities at the reading clubs include storytelling, reading and writing, games, rhymes and songs. Outings are also planned and take

place when feasible. These include visits for the children to places of interest, and also outings to places like old people's homes and children's hospitals where the reading club children 'give back' by reading to others. Challenges include obtaining enough appropriate, enjoyable books, especially books in African languages, getting enough committed people to volunteer regularly, particularly people who speak, read and write in isiXhosa and fundraising so that there are funds to buy books, to offer the children a snack and a drink and to take them on outings and to help pay for travel costs of the volunteers.

There is no formal assessment to ascertain the 'success' of the reading clubs. However, the fact that the children return week in and week out is testimony itself. Moreover we have many reports from parents and teachers about the increased confidence levels of children, and improved reading and writing desires and abilities at home and in class. Thus, success can be 'measured' by changes in behaviour. At present, we are documenting the Vulindlela Reading Clubs as part of a research project in which PRAESA is involved.

2.5

Exposing Vulnerable Children to Stories through an Adult Literacy Programme

Lynn Stefano

Director, The Family Literacy Project

Lynn's presentation vividly illustrated a family literacy project which is having considerable impact in KwaZulu Natal. Using a Reflect methodology, it focuses on empowering parents in their own literacies and enabling them to help their children develop a love of reading.

After showing a DVD, Lynn discussed the achievements of the project and the key ingredients for its success. Her presentation generated much animated discussion which continued outside of the meeting room.

(The following text is adapted from the script of the DVD, written by Dr Snoeks Desmond.)

The Family Literacy Project started in March 2000 and works in 10 villages in deeply rural areas of KwaZulu Natal, alongside the Southern Drakensberg. As can be expected of a world heritage site, the area is spectacularly beautiful. However for many of the people living there it is a very under-resourced area with few good roads, little electricity or piped water. Most people struggle to make a living and child mortality is high.

The group members joined The Family Literacy Project wanting to learn to read and write or improve existing literacy skills. Most of them had dropped out of school at an early age because their parents could not afford school fees or needed them at home to help with herding cattle or caring for younger siblings.

The Family Literacy Project aims to help people see literacy as a valuable and enjoyable skill. We help people to read and write, but we also encourage reading for pleasure. Another very important aspect is that we encourage every group member to talk to children, to listen to them and to look at books with them. We want to fill this print-poor area with words and images that excite and interest both adults and children.

The Family Literacy Project facilitators are not professional teachers but women chosen by their community. Each facilitator has been trained in the use of participatory tools, adult literacy and early literacy. In the groups they use teaching

units developed by the project. A unit has at least six two-hour sessions, beginning with a participatory exercise where everyone talks about the issue that is the focus of that unit. All sessions include discussion and activities where the group practices literacy skills. One session in every unit focuses on early literacy and how adults can entertain and educate children. The units cover topics of interest to the groups such as Child Protection, budgets, HIV/Aids, Environment. Both isiZulu and English are used in the programme. At their own request, the group members take a test of their literacy skills at the end of each year, using ABET materials.

We use the Reflect approach to adult literacy, which aims to empower communities to take action to improve their lives. The teaching units developed by the project start with an issue that the groups have identified that they want to discuss; they analyse this using participatory tools. There are opportunities for reading and writing, guest speakers attend sessions, and we source relevant and up to date information pertaining to the issue. Importantly, the group agrees to take specific actions to improve the issue/problem situation that is under discussion.

The Family Literacy Project has produced a number of books for group members to read and use. These are used in the sessions. Every book was tested by group members before publication to make sure that the text was relevant and clear and the illustrations representative of the area.

If literacy skills are not used often, they can disappear. The Family Literacy Project provides many opportunities for group members to use their developing skills. For example, every group has either a library building or a box library. Members borrow both adults' and children's books from the libraries. Records of books borrowed are kept by the facilitator and she is helped by a group member.

Many women were so excited by the books they read that they wanted to share them with others in the group. So, book clubs were started by the women themselves. Now every week they meet after The Family Literacy Project session to discuss the books they have borrowed.

The 10 villages are quite far from one another so members now write to one another and almost everyone has a pen friend.

The community noticeboard provides another opportunity to practise literacy skills and to

share newly acquired information. One group member is responsible for encouraging the others to produce drawings or text to put on the noticeboard.

A project newsletter is produced regularly through the year. Group members read it and also send letters in to the editor. Each edition is read with great excitement to see what has been reported and whose letters have been printed.

Early literacy, working with children to help them develop a sense of excitement around books, is vital to the work of The Family Literacy Project. Every member has a small book called “Umzali Nengane” which means “Parent and child”. They paste or draw pictures on a page. Then they talk to their children about the picture and write down the conversation. This helps develop the adult’s literacy. The child can observe an adult writing. The child knows that what she says is important enough to be recorded. The adult uses open-ended questions, encouraging sequencing, recall and prediction—all important early literacy skills. And they both have fun!

Telling stories is important and The Family Literacy Project worked with the groups to help them tell and record their own stories of growing up. The result is a book “Growing up in the Southern Drakensberg”, a selection of happy, sad, good and painful memories.

Many of the women want to use what they have learnt in The Family Literacy Project in their communities. They belong to other groups like sewing or gardening groups or school and church committees. They now take a leading role in these groups. They also want to share what they have learnt with other mothers. They visit their neighbours to read to children and to talk about how to talk and listen to children so that they develop good communication skills. And they share important information about health and wellbeing of young children with these neighbours.



Fig.1 Having fun in the community library

To take the joy and excitement of reading out to nearby crèches and schools, The Family Literacy Project has provided books for crèches and trained the pre-school teachers in how to develop early literacy skills.

In schools The Family Literacy Project facilitators run child to child groups. Each group is made up of children of different ages. Children read to each other, and even the youngest children take books home to look at with grandparents, parents and older siblings. Everyone has fun and the topics of the sessions often mirror those of the adult sessions in The Family Literacy Project.

We believe that families should have books. And if they have books, this will provide a firm foundation for lifelong learning and enjoyment. We all need books and stories:

- looking at bright pictures
- sharing stories
- re-telling stories
- inventing stories
- telling our stories
- learning about the world
- relaxing and enjoying.

The Family Literacy Project members have discovered the joy of reading. They read for their own pleasure. They read to their children. Their children read on their own. Reading books with children is fun. We talk about the cover. We look at the pictures together. Sometimes when we have finished reading the book together, children look at the book on their own.

Books and reading have become part of the lives of The Family Literacy Project members. They have acquired not only literacy skills but new and important information and practical skills to use in their daily lives. They and their children enjoy reading and talking. We are living up to our slogan of Masifunde Njengomndeni—Families Reading Together.

2.6 Strategies for Sharing Stories with Children: Telling and Reading

Ntombizanele Mahobe

*Early Literacy Specialist,
PRAESA*

This was one of two workshops led by PRAESA specialists focusing on practical issues relating to helping children to develop a love of reading. Both workshops were much appreciated by the participants many of whom have daily contact with children in schools and the community.

The workshop aimed for participants to discuss views on different strategies for sharing stories with children. These strategies included:

- reading aloud
- paired and shared reading
- silent reading.

Different books were displayed and the participants were asked in groups to choose appropriate books for the different age groups and discuss why those books were relevant for that age group. This aimed to encourage the participants to think about the importance of choosing books for young children.

Reading aloud was demonstrated and discussed, emphasizing the importance of children seeing adults excited about reading and of adults

being good role models. Participants were also given the opportunity to read to each other to experience that reading aloud to others can be fun.

We discussed paired reading as an important strategy to help young children in the early stages of reading, encouraging them to try reading materials that may be beyond their normal reading level. We talked about the role adults play during paired or shared reading and how their talk about the book shows an interest in the children and their choice of books. The result is that children become more motivated to read.

Book choice during silent reading is another area we explored. During silent reading, children choose their own books to read. During the discussion, some participants shared their own experiences of deciding which books their child should read. Some shared how they had imposed on their children books that they liked when they were young and how this had put their children off. We concluded that children should generally be left to choose their own reading materials during silent reading.

2.7

Writing to Make Books—With and For Children

Xolisa Guzula and Ntombizanele Mahobe

*Early Literacy Specialists,
PRAESA*

The second workshop demonstrated how a love of reading develops from the spoken word and how a child's own language and experience is the foundation for a bridge into the written word.

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- consider the importance of making mother tongue and bilingual reading materials focus on oral stories as an important source for reading materials
- give participants skill and confidence in making books and other reading materials
- provide participants with information and guidance on the different aspects of materials development
- help participants to view writing as a process that develops over time.

Our discussion focused on the following important points about writing with young children:

- children learn to write by writing
- drawing is rehearsal for writing
- pictures tell stories
- oral language is rehearsal for writing
- adults are role models as they demonstrate conventional writing
- the need for adults to accept children's invented spelling as part of the process of learning to write
- copying as another safe way for encouraging children to take risks at writing
- Shared Writing, the process in which an adult and the child write together, where

the adult leads the child/children to share ideas and then records ideas as the child watches (Cunningham and Allington, 1994). Shared Writing as a strategy for modelling writing was shown to have the following benefits:

- It is a bridge between oral and written language.
- It helps children to understand that what we think and say can be written down.

In the workshop, we also suggested some ideas for children to write about, which include:

- recipe books
- original story endings
- news of the day
- stories about families and themselves, my friends, my school
- rhymes books
- song books
- tongue twisters
- riddles.

We also discussed Guided Writing, the process which involves individual or small groups of children writing a range of text types under the guidance of an adult or a teacher (who may provide short mini lessons to demonstrate a particular aspect of text type (e.g. narrative), grammar, punctuation or spelling.

We introduced writing frames as scaffolds for writing, e.g. recount frames.

2.8 Local Stories for Family Learning

Brian Street *President, BALID*

Brian facilitated a discussion about the use of stories for literacy learning by exploring the similarities and differences between the experience of participants in South Africa and that evident in books from other countries, particularly Sierra Leone and Uganda.

After his introduction, the audience broke into groups to discuss the questions which he had put forward. Each group examined a book from one of these two countries, and then a rapporteur provided feedback to the plenary session as a whole.

The final reports were brief, but turned out to be one of the highlights of the session, with rich and insightful accounts being provided in lively fashion. Indeed, a number of the presenters were applauded for the sheer quality of their account and everyone left with a sense of excitement and learning, with lots of interest in applying the comparisons to their own work.

‘Stories and Songs from Sierra Leone’

In 1984, the People’s Education Association of Sierra Leone began collecting stories, riddles and proverbs, writing down oral performance in books that were then published. (A description of this activity was provided in the previous BALID report on the Family Learning Conference held in Sierra Leone in February 2010.)

There were several reasons given at the time for this work:

- Stories and songs are a rich tradition and valuable heritage which represent a major source of literature in the country.
- The transcription and publication of stories and songs, after they have been collected, contributes to the modest stock of written materials from Sierra Leone available for schools, youths and adults.
- The translation of stories and songs into several languages of Sierra Leone contributes to intercultural understanding within the country.

The finished products of the project have been published in a series ‘Stories and Songs from Sierra Leone’ (see text box).

Stories for Children: Uganda

In Uganda, a number of initiatives have been developed in recent years to make stories available to schools in order to help teachers support children’s literacy and to provide a source for key messages regarding avoidance of HIV/Aids etc., as well as the ‘cultural heritage’ prominent in Sierra Leone.

- Tales from the Past provided stories that were told to children to help them understand the importance of love, honesty and good manners.
- The Fountain Junior Living Youth Series made available stories by some of Uganda’s leading writers of stories for children. This series aimed ‘to help youth enhance their self esteem and life skill and to resist temptations that may expose them to risky behaviour, which may lead to them contracting HIV/Aids. Stories are drawn from youths’ backgrounds using characters they can identify with and experiences they are familiar with’.
- The Our Heritage series included carefully selected and graded children readers intended to improve English language reading and comprehension skills. ‘Stories are chosen to meet the language needs of both rural and urban primary schools. The stories come from different parts of the country so that they can widen the children’s knowledge of both the language and the cultural values of the different societies of Uganda’.

Brian raised the following questions for discussion in groups:

- Comparing the books:
 - How do these books compare with books currently in use in South Africa?
- Pedagogical Issues:
 - How might teachers make use of books such as these?

- What problems might arise in just passing them to teachers without providing learning support?
- What ideas do these books raise regarding scaffolding vs. direct instruction; 'autonomous' model of literacy; central ideology vs. local knowledge?

Relation of 'Use of Stories' to 'Social Literacies' Approach

Finally, Brian linked the issue of pedagogy in the use of such stories with consideration of the social literacies approach to literacy learning which he had presented at the beginning of the conference (see page 8), using the notions of 'avoid' and 'work with'.

The session then split up into discussion groups and members spent about 20 minutes looking at the book they had been given and discussing how it related to their own use of stories and books in South Africa and, more broadly, how all of this related to the social practice approach.

Discussion outcomes

Comparing Books

- common themes e.g. revenge, beauty, love, husband-wife relationships
- moral tone and message e.g. relating to rape, HIV/Aids
- contemporary books often tell reality stories dealing with challenging life issues whereas books published in the 1970s and 80s tended to be folk stories or animal stories; there is still a place for these
- writers need to be encouraged and helped to try new approaches to the old themes

- books need to be attractive (have coloured pictures), but this creates challenges for local publishing.

Pedagogical Issues

The teacher should:

- be familiar with a book before using it with their children
- select books according to the relevance of their topic for the children
- select books which are appropriate for the children i.e.
 - reading level, especially if the children are to read the story themselves
 - layout and amount of text
 - contain a story which interests and grips the children.

Using books

- use will depend on the teacher's purpose—to develop skills of accurate reading, grammar, vocabulary etc. (didactic purpose), or exploration and discussion of the themes and ideas of the book, answering the questions it raises (moral purpose)
- stories must be told in an attractive way
- children can re-tell the story in their own words
- the story can be linked with song, drama, dance (as in the Vulindlela reading clubs).

‘Stories and Songs from Sierra Leone’

The Series Editors are Edward D.A. Turay, Peter O. Koroma, Frederick B. James and S.A. Tamu. An original leading participant in the project was Professor Eldred Jones, a distinguished faculty member at Fourah Bay College who has recently published further stories in the series, in the Krio language—‘Stori Go Stori Kam; Folktales collected by Eldred D. Jones’ (2009 Knowledge Aid, Sierra Leone). The German Development Agency DVV was involved in the early project and Heribert Hinzen was the Series Editor in 1987.

The following books from the Sierra Leone Project were circulated at the Cape Town conference:

- *Stori Go Stori Kam: Folktales* collected by Eldred D Jones (2009) **Knowledge Aid**
- *Stories from Wonderland* (2009) **Community Empowerment for Rural Development**
- *The Bossy Wife* by **Lele Gbomba** (1987) Stories and Songs from Sierra Leone, People’s Educational Association of Sierra Leone (PEA)
- *Lice in the Lion’s Mane; poets and poems of Sierra Leone* (1995) Edited by **Hannah Hope Wells. PEA**
- *My Country: Sierra Leone* (2009) **CEFORD**
- *Adult Education in Sierra Leone* (1996) **Journal of PEA**

Appendix

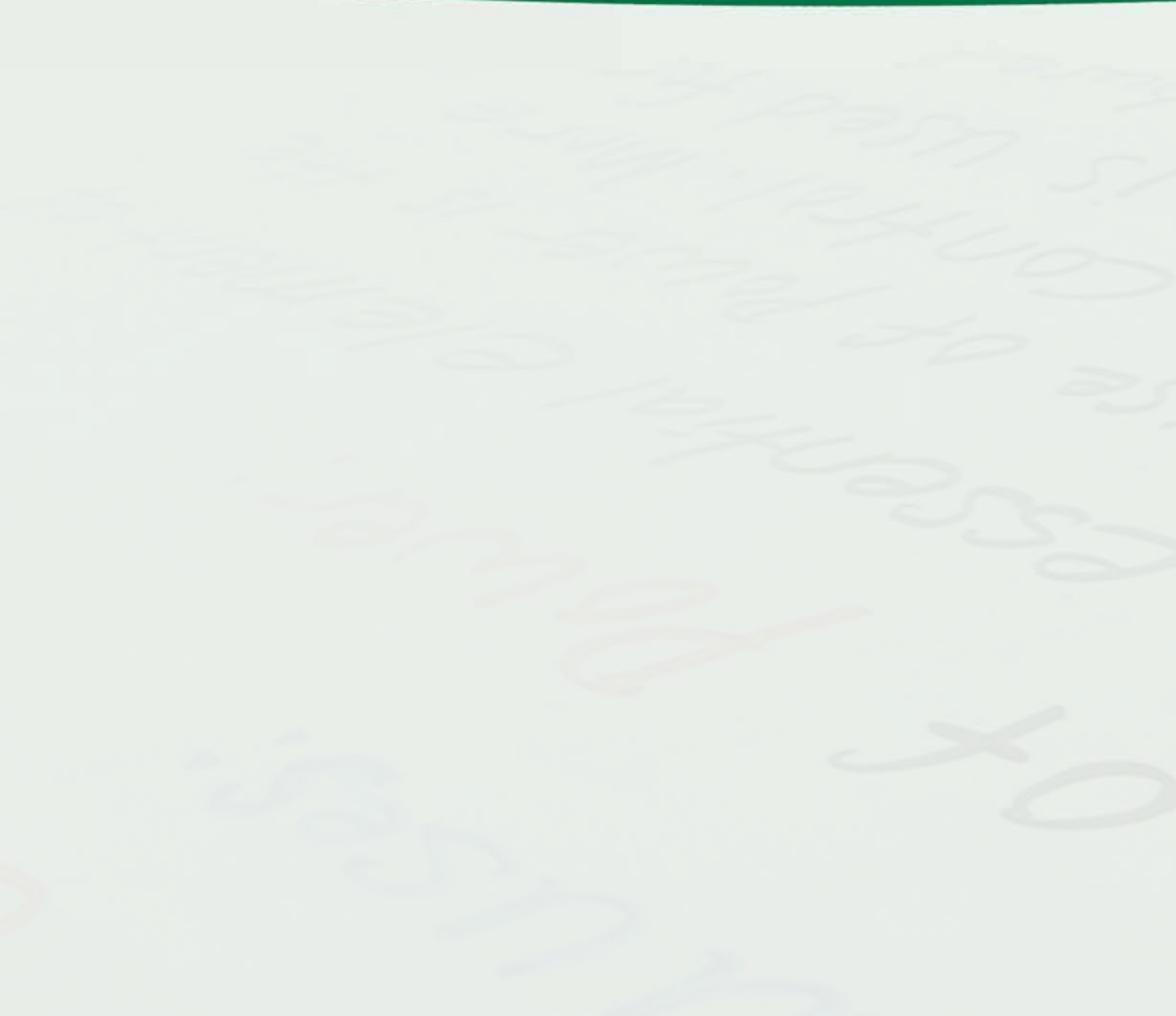
Conference Participants

More than 80 people attended the conference. The following have given permission for their details to be published.

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