Games go abroad

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Abstract

The research that is reported in this paper is part of an ongoing collaboration between two universities and two schools on two continents. It began in 2001 as a small scale literacy study: *Critical literacy, social action and children's representations of 'place'. Fun and games* is a book produced by Grade 4 children at Phepo school, a poor school in Atteridgeville, an African township outside of Pretoria for students at Ridley Grove, a poor school in Adelaide, South Australia. The challenge for the teacher was to support young children who speak different African languages and who are learning through the medium of Setswana to show and explain their games to children in an English medium school, living in Australia. Multiple forms of semeiosis - words, drawings, photographs, models, video - were essential resources for meeting this challenge as was the use of children's multilingual repertoires for the production of an English text. This classroom project on children's games is theorised in relation to the use of out-of-school literacies in education, multilingualism as a pedagogic resource and multimodal literacies. The extent to which this work on games contributes to the overarching critical literacy project is considered with reference to the interlocking dimensions of power, diversity, access and design, enlivened by children's pleasure when the worlds that they enjoy are embraced by their schools.

Introduction

This article tells the story of how a class of forty-four African children in Grade 4 at Phepo school produced, *Fun and Games*, a book explaining and illustrating their township games. The occasion for this project was the upcoming visit of their teacher, Emily Langa, their principal, Paulina Sethole, and a Grade 7 teacher, Clever Shikwambane, to Ridley Grove, a poor school in Adelaide South Australia, in July 2003. Frank Cairns, the principal of Ridley Grove, and Marg Wells, a Grade 3/4 teacher, had visited Phepo school in 2002 as part of an ongoing collaboration between researchers at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of South Australia and the two research-site schools.

It begins by situating the games project in a broader cross-country research project and goes on to provide a rationale for the focus on games as well as an overview of the games archive. The article then moves to a consideration of the challenges of producing a book in English with Grade 4s in this South African school. Specific texts produced by the children are discussed in order to show how both multimodal and multilingual pedagogies were enabling. The article finishes with a discussion on the relationship between literacies, identity and power.

Situating the games project

The games project is a small part of a larger literacy study: *Critical literacy, social action and children's representations of 'place'* (Comber, Thompson and Wells, 2001, 2002; Janks, 2002; Janks and Comber, 2006). Pat Thomson and Barbara Comber had been working with Wells and Cairns to theorise how children engage with their 'place' in the world and how 'critical literacy' might make new resources available for neighbourhood as a social practice (de Certeau, Giard & Mayol, 1998). They invited Hilary Janks from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg to join them, in the belief that a comparative study across different contexts of poverty would produce a better understanding of the relationship between 'habitus' and 'habitat' (Bourdieu, 1999) that might open the way for thinking about the local in relation to the global. The project on games does not focus on the link between habitat

(place) and habitus (embodied subjectivity) as explicitly as in other work based on this research (Janks, 2003). Nevertheless, township games are both embodied and placed. By making them the subject of cultural exchange with children who are differently placed, township children's identities and knowledges are given both recognition and validation. In addition, the movement of educators has enabled staff from these two schools to gain an understanding of what more might be possible in their own contexts at the same time as giving children an opportunity to project and receive the knowledges, rooted in their own places, to children elsewhere.

As researchers, we have been concerned to show how the work of the educators in these two schools is making a material difference to the lives of the children. Janks (2003) shows how Sethole's school garden project provides a hot meal every day for the 750 children in the school; Comber, Thomson and Wells (2001, 2002) provide an analysis of the social action projects, initiated by Wells in relation to an urban renewal project in the school neighbourhood, which gave children the power to effect changes to the designs for a local park. The students undertook research on native flora and fauna and produced artefacts that were incorporated into the park.

Elsewhere (Janks and Comber, 2006), I have discussed the alphabet book, *A is for Atteridgeville*, produced by Shikwambane's Grade 7 students, on life in Atteridgeville, a large township of mainly sub-economic housing and shack settlements situated on the outskirts of Pretoria. In terms of apartheid policies of separate development, Africans were forced to live in designated areas outside the cities. Ten years after independence only wealthy, middle class Africans have been able to move to the more affluent, former whites-only suburbs. While this book includes activities that the students take pleasure in: the annual picnic at Moroe Park, the ice-cream centre, soccer and netball, the local gospel singer, most of the pieces deal with crime, poverty, HIV AIDS, drugs, xenophobia, poor housing, inadequate hospitals. The students do not, however, construct themselves as victims but as agents able to take pleasure and pride in South Africa's new democracy. They write of their ability to grow

their own food as well as the transformation of their school, asserting that 'Poverty does not stop people from enjoying life' (*A is for Atteridgeville*, 2003).

Fun and Games, produced by the Grade 4s, enacts this enjoyment and the pleasures of childhood. The children's township songs, games and pastimes become the focus for a school literacy project, 'bridging the divide between out-of-school literacies and classroom practice' (Hull and Schultz, 2002: title). The challenge was to build on students' existing 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, 1992) to extend their literacy repertoires. Crucially important to our success was our collective desire to emulate our Australian peers, the energy that flowed from the children's excitement at sharing their games with children overseas, and the motivation that flowed from the knowledge that *their* teacher would take *their* book to Australia.

Why games?

I became interested in the children's games when I saw them playing during break. I thought that these games might be different from the games played by children in Australia and I hoped that the diversity across the different research sites would be productive. I discussed this with Langa and she and I worked with the children to produce a video archive of their games and pastimes to take to Ridley Grove. While the ultimate goal was to produce a book of the children's games, the video created a safety-net: whether or not we were able to produce a book written in English, we would have a televisual text to take to Australia. From the start we knew that we would need to understand the games in order to help the children translate them into print text; the camera invited performance and the affordances of the medium allowed students to speak with their bodies.

The choice of games as our subject matter also had a number of pedagogical advantages.

1. It enabled me to demonstrate the importance of using play for learning (Vygotsky, 1978). I was able to discuss with both Langa and Sethole the skills and values that the children were learning from their games. These included number work, hand eye co-ordination, creativity, and

the social skills needed to take turns, to act as referee, to be inclusive and to accept defeat like a good sport.

2. The teaching at Phepo school remains fairly traditional as can be seen in the photograph in Figure 1. Games allowed both Lange and Sethole to experience the effects of not banishing children's pleasures from the curriculum, and how centring the classroom on the children's lives can help them to excel.

Figure 1

3. The power vested in knowledge lay with the children as they knew more about their games than we did. In schools that are only beginning to work with child-centred approaches to education, members of staff were able to experience children's expertise as non-threatening and they could see the value of using the knowledge that children bring to school as a resource (Comber and Simpson, 2001; Vasquez, 2005 ; Moll,1992; Dyson, 1993,1997, 2003).

4. Games allowed us to embrace the students' multilingualism and enabled students to engage in hybrid language and literacy practices (Gutiérrez et al, 1999).

5. Games lent themselves to multi-modal representation (New London Group, 1996; Kress, 2000; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001): performance, video, photography, drawing, model building, demonstration, and writing. Multimodality allowed us to use the

affordances of the different modalities and to compensate for their constraints. Two of the games, *See bana ba kae?* (Children where are you?) and *Tsotsi* (Gangster) are very difficult to explain in words; moving images are needed to show their complexity.

6   Games are a powerful illustration of how children can play and learn with limited material resources.

In making their games part of the curriculum, in inviting children to record and share their games, we gave their everyday out-of-school knowledge a privileged status. That we were interested, and that they were allowed to play these games out of the classroom during school, increased their pleasure. But it was the knowledge that children in Australia were the real audience, that gave the work meaning. See Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2: Students at Phepo with wire cars in process

Figure 3: Students in Australia with the wire cars

The archive of games

From April, when we knew that Langa would be going to Australia until I left in mid-June, Langa worked with the children who chose which games and activities they wanted to video. During that time we recorded seven games and two pastimes.

1. *Bana bakae e tlang gae* (My children come home): This is a game of catch in which the mother calls the children to come straight home from school because there are 'dangers' on the way. You have to get home without being caught by one of the 'dangers'. This game takes place in response to chanting and singing.

2. *River Bank*: This is a game in which children have to jump to one side or the other of a line, based on oral instructions called out by one of the children.

3. *See bana bakae*? (Where are the children?) is a movement game orchestrated in time to a chant. A square is divided with diagonal lines joining the corners into four triangles. Four children co-ordinate their movements – alternately jumping, criss-crossing their feet, smacking their feet together in the air, while moving from one triangle to another, in time to a chant which they and the spectators sing. They may not stand on any of the lines or bump into one another. Anyone who makes a mistake is out and their place is taken by another child.

4. *Tamati so so so* (Tomato sauce, sauce, sauce): In this game, children choose one another in succession to form a train. While a song is sung the child-formed train runs around the waiting children. The song is repeated until the last child remains standing and s/he is then patted on the head by everyone.

5. *Tsotsi* (Gangster): Played on a large chequer board of squares, this game has such intricate foot movements that it almost defies verbal description. Here a child has to move in a set pattern across, as well as backwards and forwards, along the blocks and rows of the board, and it includes changing direction. The movements which involve a mixture of light-touch steps and stamping are complicated

enough for a child to accomplish on his or her own. But the game is played by four children all moving in different directions at once and it is easy to get confused. The game is accompanied by a chant.

6. *Hopscotch*: This is a township version of a hopping game played by children all over the world.

7. *Diketo* (Stones) is similar to the game of *Jacks* except that it is played with no-cost stones. The object of the game is to pick up or move a designated number of stones with one hand, before catching another stone that has been thrown into the air.

Although, all these games, with the exception of Diketo, are played by both boys and girls, we were keen to capture some gender-specific pastimes, so we filmed the boys making wire cars and girls braiding hair. Boys are taught how to make toys from scrap materials by brothers and uncles and fathers and mothers, sisters and girlfriends teach young girls to braid hair.

In the time available we were unable to complete the archive. For example, *Khati*, variations of skipping with elastics or rope, is missing. We allowed the students to select the games and decided that other games could be the topic of a different book or they could be added at a later stage to the existing open-ended book.

The challenge of working at the Grade 4 level
When she visited South Africa in 2002, Marg Wells brought two books that her Grade 3/4 students had produced specially for the students at Phepo school. These books are magnificent. In *A is for Arndale*, each child wrote a text for one letter of the alphabet about their neighbourhood and illustrated it with a painting in bold, striking colours. Careful attention was given to layout and presentation: the texts were typed, the pages were laminated and the book was ring bound[1]. Similar attention to detail was evident in *Letters from Ridley Grove*. Here each child designed a page to introduce him or herself to fellow students across the world. Their pages included photographs, images of

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[1] Support was provided by the University of South Australia.

things that were important to them – their pets, The Simpsons, Britney Spears, Play Station games, Game Boys, their families, Disney, their homes, Pokemon and so forth, as well as written text about who they are. In each of their pages, the children's out-of-school lives cross over into their school literacies, enacting what Anne Haas Dyson has called a 'permeable curriculum' (Dyson, 1993,1997, 2003). To help her students decide what to write about themselves and what visual representations to include, Wells asked her students what they would like to know about the children in South Africa. With a brilliant pedagogical reversal, she then suggested that the South African children would probably want to know the same kinds of things about them. The Ridley Grove students used this understanding to guide them in deciding what to say and show about who they are.

For the teachers at Phepo who had never before produced a book, the splendour of the Ridley Grove books was both a threat and a challenge. Initially they decided that Grade 3/4 children could not produce a book in English, so Shikwambane, Matolong and Janks (Janks and Comber, 2006) worked with Grade 7s to produce *A is for Atteridgeville*.

In the hope that we might be able to produce a book with Grade 4s, Emily Langa and I, set out to establish whether or not this was possible. We had to overcome the following difficulties:

1. The class had 44 children. The classroom was crowded with little space for movement, play, or art work.
2. Children had to produce a book in English, with limited skills in the language. Collaboration across continents and the move from the local to the global, necessitated the use of English. The children in Langa's class spoke a range of African languages. Setswana was the medium of instruction in school from Grade 1 to Grade 4, with English increasingly used as the medium from Grade 5.
3. I could not visit the school more than once a week; I have very little primary school experience; and I do not speak an African language.
4. Material resources were limited.

5. A multiliteracies approach to curriculum was not part of the school's practice. Children did not have ongoing access to picture books; free drawing and art were not an established part of the curriculum; and the school had none of the new digital technologies. Neither the students nor the teachers had had access to computers and were therefore not computer literate.

Langa and Janks managed to overcome some of these difficulties by working together and pooling their resources. Langa who speaks the children's languages worked as the teacher: she negotiated which games the children wanted to demonstrate, she supervised their demonstrations outdoors, she worked with them in class to produce their verbal texts. Janks did the video recording, typed the students' work, supervised the children who chose to do drawings and provided the materials and the know-how for producing and assembling a low-cost book.

The problem of numbers and space was solved by moving the children outdoors to stage their games and pastimes for the camera. Langa is experienced at working with large classes and most of the games enable everyone to be involved. While waiting for their turn, children join in the singing and chanting. At times the class was split. Different children were involved in the wire cars, hair braiding and drawing.

The children in Grade 4 who wanted to, worked on visual representations of the games. We spent several hours on different days working in the staff room, with the students sharing felt-tip pens. Often the colour selected was based on what was available at that moment. Some children elected to draw, others to outline or colour in. The drawings became a collaborative effort, rather than the vision of one child. As with the video recordings, the spatial constraints meant that this activity was done outside of the more 'formal' space of the classroom. The children worked together around a large central table, made by pushing big tables together. The atmosphere was more relaxed than they were used to in the classroom and the children were clearly having fun.

Janks worked with Langa on multimodal and multilingual approaches to literacy and once Langa felt confident, she was able to work on the project without Janks.

Multimodal pedagogy

The decision to work with three different modalities (performance, drawing and words) in representing the children's games was crucial to the success of this project. We knew that we could capture the games on video and previous work made us confident that the children could produce interesting visual representations. What we hoped was that once we had knowledge of the games, we would be able to scaffold their written work. We relied on the visual and performance modalities to act as the platform for writing.

If a game is to be enjoyed, it has to be played. Video is the best medium for representing a game as an embodied performance of an unfolding sequence. A drawing, on the other hand, represents a moment in time of the game or a mood or an emotion. Written instructions on how to play the game focus on the materials needed, the procedures, the chronological order of events. All three of these forms of representations were communal events. The children played the game together, produced the text as a whole class, and worked together to produce the drawings.

What follows is a discussion of *Bana baka e tlang gae* (My children come home) as represented in each of the three modalities. Figure 4 is the children's drawing.

Figure 4: *Bana baka e tlang gae*

This drawing evokes the 'dangers' (Video archive) that lurk in wait for children on their way home from school - the red dog with it's tongue salivating, the brown lion licking its lips in anticipation and the spotted leopard with very red lips and eyes. The representation of the people is more ambiguous. Only two children seem perturbed: the one child, bottom left of the frame, who appears to be running away, and another, top left of the frame, who seems to be standing back. The others look fairly aggressive: one child appears to be throwing something at the 'dangers', all of them have open mouths and are leaning forward, one is gesticulating at the fierce animals. Even the student with his hands in his pockets is leaning towards the danger. Only two of the children have school satchels and only one appears to have a tie, indicative of a school uniform. The students look older than primary children and semiotically are shown as western and hip: purple clothes, bright shoes, red glasses, and modern clothing create this impression. The representation of the mother in traditional attire, symbolised by her bare breasts provides a

strong contrast. It is as if, despite the representations of the 'dangers' as menacing, this is the mother's old-fashioned fear, which most of the children experience as a challenge rather than as a threat. The over-riding impression, however, is one of engaging humour. Both the people and the animals are cartoon-like caricatures. We are reminded that this is after all a game, which should not be taken too literally.

The written text (Figure 5) explains how the game is played. This representation includes the words of the game that are shouted as cues for action but here it is less easy to see the spatial organisation of the game than in the drawing. The atmosphere is also different: here the children say that they are scared of the lions that lie in wait for them, they describe the struggle that ensues to escape the lions, and they voice their reluctance to go to school. In the end there is no escape: all the children are caught and the mother is left alone. The game itself could be a representation of the fears of both mothers and children in communities where the dangers are real and children have to walk home unescorted by adults. It could as easily reflect children's reluctance to go home when mother calls, or to go to school, when they could be playing with their friends.

The video provides another perspective. It is clear that it is as least as much fun to be a lion that catches the children on their way home, as it is to be one of the children. The boys in particular delight in being the lions. As the children who are caught become catchers, the number of lions begins to exceed the number of children. Although everyone will eventually get caught, there is pleasure in being clever and fast enough to evade the lions for as long as possible. There is a great deal of laughter and the children enjoy all the different roles. Even the mother who does not get to run or catch, gets a solo part, and is chosen because she has a big voice.

What this multimodal approach shows is that each of the modalities used, affords different possibilities of representation even when the task, to 'explain' the game, remains constant.

Figure 5: *Bana baka e tlang gae*

Bana baka e tlang gae

1
We need 5 lions.
We need children.
We need a mother.
We need a big space.

2
The mother stands at the door of the house and she calls the children.
Mother: Bana baka e tlang gae. (My children come home).
Children shout: Re a tshaba (We are scared).
Mother: Le tshaba eng? (What are you scared of?)
Children: Re tshaba ditau. (We are scared of the lions).
Mother: Ba ba nthatang le ba ba sa nthateng e tlang gae!
                                     (If you love me or not come home).

3
The children start running home. The lions chase the children who dodge and duck and pull and hide and run away, but the lions catch some children.

4
When the children get home they say to their mother:
Children: Kabošiga ga go iwo sekolong.
                                     (Tomorrow we are not going to school because on the way
                                     the lions are going to chase them).

5
The game starts again. Now there are more lions because the children who were caught become more lions.

6
The game goes on until all the children are lions.

7
At the end the mother is without children.

Because only some of the children worked on the wire cars and hair-braiding, it was decided not to do whole-class written text for these two pastimes. These activities were recorded with photographs, drawings and video. A comparison of a photograph with a visual representation of the same activity makes clear the different affordances of these two media. See Figures 6 and 7.

Figure 6: Hair-braiding photograph

Figure 7: Hair-braiding drawing

The photograph has been designed to show off the hair-style. The child, as model, is shown in the classroom, facing away from the camera to emphasise her head of hair. The medium is able to show the texture of the hair and the details of the partings and the braids. It is a medium that suggests something real. We have to remind ourselves that photographs have been constructed and could have been constructed otherwise. The medium of drawing makes us more aware of the artist's selections. This drawing has 'attitude' and the colours and the setting are imagined. The child's hair is being pulled: this is emphasised by the angle of the head and the slope of the ground; even the tree is leaning away. We are more aware of drawing as a representation than

we are with realistic photography. In contrast to video, both these media tend to capture only one moment that is frozen in time.

Video as a medium is intrinsically multi-modal. It includes visual representations, gesture, movement, bodies in space and sound. In the hair-braiding video we are able to see exactly what the girls do when they braid hair. We can see the girls screwing up their eyes and wincing when their hair is pulled. We can follow the process through time - before, during and after - and watch it unfold. On the video during the braiding, we see and hear Sethole talking to the girls, effectively interviewing them about the cultural practice of hair-braiding and what it means to them.

It is clear that children are able to say a great deal when they represent their world visually. What we needed to ascertain was what they would be able to say in writing.

Mutilingual pedagogy

It was always our intention to move from performance, demonstration and video as well as the production of artefacts (wire cars) to the production of a book. The biggest challenge was to help students write instructions for their games in English. Having played and recorded the games, we all knew what it was that needed to be said. Even in one's own language this is difficult. In writing descriptions of some of the games for this paper, I know that without choreographic notation skills, it is extremely difficult to describe the movements for *See bana bakae*? and *Tstosi*. The affordances of writing are simply not well suited to describing precise steps and movements. Children learn these games from watching, copying and practising not from verbal instructions. In the yard, you can see younger children standing around the older children while they play, learning the songs and moving their bodies to approximate the steps they will need.

Diketo is easier to explain but the following description of *Jacks* (a similar game), downloaded from the internet on 3 April 2005, shows how complex precise instructions can be.

The game is played outdoors on a smooth surface such as asphalt or concrete, or indoors on an uncarpeted floor. There are usually anywhere from two to six individual players. Equipment includes 15 jacks and one small ball. Two players sit face to face; more than two sit in a circle. Deciding who goes first is optional. … Throwing the jacks up in the air and trying to catch as many as possible with both hands together, thumb to thumb, palms down. Whoever catches the most jacks goes first. …

The player up gathers all of the jacks in one hand, gives them a gentle toss and scatters them onto the ground, anywhere inside the space encircled by her and her opponents. Following that, she tosses the ball into the air. The object of the game is to pick up the designated number of jacks with one hand and catch the ball on the first bounce[2] in that same hand. It starts with one jack at a time (onesies), then two jacks (twosies), right on up till the player misses. She continues at that number on her next turn. Then the next player goes. The game continues until someone succeeds at picking up the ball and all of the jacks at once on a single bounce. Frankly, though, I don't recall ever seeing anyone get past tensies. The unofficial rule, based on personal experience, is that whoever gets to the highest number before everyone gets tired of playing is the winner! (http://www.streetplay.com/thegames/jacks).

It was clear that the children in Grade 4 had neither the English nor the literacy skills to undertake this task individually, so Langa worked with the class as a whole. First, she established the genre by asking students to answer the following questions in their own languages and to think about what the Australian children needed to know in order to play the game.

- What materials will they need?
- What instructions do we need to give them?
- What is the correct order for the instructions?

Allowing the children to use the full rage of their multilingual resources enabled all the children to participate and to hone the information and the instructions before they were translated. Once the class was satisfied with the formulation, someone in the class who felt able to, translated the words into English with help from other children and with help whenever necessary from

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[2] When a stone is used instead of a ball, it has to be caught without a bounce. This makes the game of *Diketo* more difficult than *Jacks*.

the teacher. Langa wrote what the children told her in point form on the board and a scribe copied out the instructions. We decided to use point form for two reasons. A numbered list of instructions is appropriate for the genre and short point-form text was more suited to the children's linguistic abilities. Later, I typed the instructions, so that the students would experience the pleasure of seeing their words in professional-looking print[3]. Slowly, step by step, the children built up the instructions for their games. Figure 8 is the written text that the class wrote for *Diketo*.

Figure 8: Students' written text of *Diketo* in *Fun and Games*

DIKETO

We need girls
We need small stones 12 – 24
We need a shallow hole.

Diketo is a game played by girls. It is can be played by one or more girls. Each girl must collect 12 – 24 stones and have one extra stone which is round on hand.

How to play
1
The girls dig a hole on the ground. The size is determined by the number of players and stones.
2
They put the stones into the hole. One girl chooses to play first (the players must go clockwise) she must collect the number of stones that she has contributed before by throwing that extra round stone up into the air at the same time taking out a large number of stones from the hole. Throws that stone up again while pushing all the stones into the hole leaving only one outside before she catches that round stone from the air.
3
She continues doing so up until the last stone.
4
The second round she collects the stone in two's then three's until she takes out all the stones at once.
5
The one who pushes all the stones back into the hole without leaving a single stone remaining outside becomes the winner.

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[3] Now that the school has computers, this work can be done by the children themselves.

While these instructions are not as sophisticated or as free-standing as the instructions for Jacks, we can nevertheless see that the children have accomplished a great deal. Using their knowledge of the game and the linguistic resources of the class the teacher has managed to give the children access to the genre of instruction.

- They have understood the basic features of the genre, although the confusion between the genres of description and instruction in the second paragraph shows that their knowledge of genre is not completely stable.
- They are able to distinguish between materials needed and instructions but as yet are unable to separate out players ('we need girls'), the equipment ('we need small stones 12-24') and the first action ('we need a shallow hole'). These are all conflated as the materials required for the game.
- They are able to arrange instructions in a logical order.
- While some of the sentences show the additive syntax of spoken language, the English is of a very high standard for second language learners of English in Grade 4. The teacher's facilitation during whole-class composition helped them to produce clear, complex sentences with subordinate clauses.

Because these instructions make more sense when read in conjunction with the video, it is clear that the written text is not yet able to carry the full load of meaning in isolation, as in the *Jacks* explanation. Moreover, the video is able to show the skill that is needed to succeed at the game, which this written genre cannot do.

In addition to using the children's multilingual resources to enable them to produce and then translate their instructions for playing the game, the teacher validated the use and translation of the township chants and songs in the children's written texts. Because the games on the video include songs in the children's African languages, the children and the teacher could see the need to provide the words of these songs in their written texts. This respect for the

use of children's languages in writing for circulation outside of South Africa, validates linguistic hybridity and the use of multiple languages. It becomes an important means for children to display their mulitlingual identities to their Australian peers. *See Bana Ba Kae, Bana baka e tlang gae, Tamati so so so* and *Tsotsi* are all games that include children's songs and chants in African languages.

Resources

One of the things that intrigued us was the way in which children transformed existing resources for their own purposes. The mathematical shapes etched into the concrete floor of the yard (a square divided by diagonal lines into four triangles) provided the intersecting lines and the triangles needed for *See bana ba kae?* Usually children draw the lines for this game into the sand. The large chess or chequer board, painted in yellow and black squares onto the concrete floor of the yard, was used for the movement game, *Tsotsi* See Figure 9.

Figure 9: Fun and Games Students drawing of the game *Tsotsi*

The children use stones instead of balls and jacks and the boys making wire cars tell us explicitly that their fathers, uncles and brothers 'are teaching us to make these cars' from plastic-coated wire hangers and tangled recycled wire

'because they don't have money to buy us fancy *selatlha*, that's a BMW open coupé' (Video archive: *Wire cars*).

At the time that this project was taking place, the digital equipment for photographs and video recording was only available because of the research. The material resources such as felt-tip pens, paper and flip files were also provided by research money. Now that the school has two computer centres, two digital cameras (with a 15-second video capability), and ongoing donor money for stationery, it is no longer reliant on research-based money for material resources.

Janks typed and printed the written texts to give the work a professional appearance. The black-backing for all the texts in the book, makes the children's work stand out; this is reinforced by the black outlining of the figures in all the drawings[4]. The use of A4 plastic, display-folder flip-files was a cheap way of compiling the separate written texts and the children's drawings of their games into a book. The flip-file makes it possible to continue adding to the book, leaving it as an open-ended, ongoing text. The plastic protects the children's work, makes it look good and provides a suitable, low-tech, low-cost equivalent of lamination that meets the challenge of limited material resources.

It mattered that the teacher and the children felt proud of their artefacts. In giving children access to the means of production, while at the same time creating the possibility for their wider, international circulation, we understood that their identities were at stake.

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[4] This black outlining is used in both schools' alphabet books. This technique is used in *A is for Aunty*, an Australian alphabet book by artist and writer Elaine Russell which was used as a model for both books.

Literacies, identity and power

It was not just the example set by Ridley Grove that drove the book part of the project. One of the weaknesses of ethnographic approaches to language and literacies is that often they do not take seriously enough, the power of dominant languages, standard varieties and elite literacies. In my own model of critical literacy (Janks, 2000), I argue that the productive and creative power of diversity has to be balanced against issues of power and access. I believe that educators have a responsibility to give students access to powerful forms, while simultaneously using diversity as a resource for challenging and transforming what counts as powerful. Phepo school, like other schools in South Africa, has to ensure that students, while maintaining their own languages, can read and write English (Janks, 2004), and have the tools for both creativity and critique. At the same time, the school has to support the development of student identities that are able to embrace social action and effect change (Janks, 2003).

Street's (1984) work on the autonomous model of literacy has shown conclusively that the dominant model of literacy found in schools has been produced by relations of power. There is nothing natural or inevitable about the literacies privileged by educational institutions and standardised testing. One of the main achievements of New Literacies Studies[5] has been to successfully pluralise the concept of literacy by looking at literacy practices cross-culturally, in different domains, in different discourses and as it varies in relation to different sign systems and different technologies. This work poses a challenge to autonomous models of literacy which view writing and text as autonomous modes of communication, independent of social context. Street (1993: 5) quotes Ong to explain his choice of the word 'autonomous' for dominant models of literacy.

> By isolating thought on a written surface, detached from any
> interlocutor, making utterance in this sense autonomous and indifferent

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[5] NLS is embodied in the work of Heath (1983), Street (1984), Barton (1994), and Gee (1996). It has been further developed in edited collections by Street (1993), Barton and Hamilton (1998), Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič (2000), Breir and Prinsloo (1996) and Baynham and Prinsloo (2001).

to attack, writing presents utterance and thought as uninvolved in all else, somehow self-contained, complete (Ong, 1983:132).

In contrast to the autonomous model, the New Literacy Studies turns its attention to how literacy is used in different social and institutional contexts. Using anthropological theories and ethnographic methods, New Literacy Studies attempts to understand literacy events and practices. A literacy event is

any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretations of meaning (Heath, 1983:196 and endnote p 386).

While an event takes place in time and place and is an observable phenomenon, the notion of a literacy practice is an abstraction, and it refers to the underlying, patterned and culture-specific ways of using literacy that are not visible. Literacy practices are shaped by the socio-cultural practices and institutions in which they are embedded. Understanding literacy as a social practice is very different from seeing literacy as a discreet set of autonomous skills. Street called this the 'ideological model' of literacy to signal that 'literacy practices are aspects not only of "culture" but also of power structures' (Street, 1993:7). In order to understand the diversity of literacy practices, New Literacy Studies has focused on 'vernacular' or non-dominant literacy practices, in much the same way as socio-linguists investigated and described 'vernacular' or 'non-standard' language varieties. These 'vernaculars', popular forms used by ordinary people, are at best overlooked or ignored by social elites and the institutions that they control and at worst denigrated and constructed as deficient. Importantly, work in New Literacy Studies has been able to challenge dominant discourses about literacy. While it has been able to show the value of 'vernacular' literacies it has not been able to change the 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1991) that comes with access to educated, school based literacy, any more than socio-linguists have been able to dent the power of standard varieties of globally powerful languages. It is not enough to document the 'vernacular' literacies that exist, a danger inherent in ethnographic case studies. One also has to explore the relationship of these literacies to more dominant literacies. It is important to remember that

difference, including different literacies, is structured in dominance and that not all literacies are equally powerful. In her analysis of *Situated Literacies*, the collection edited by Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič, (2000), Maybin writes,

> The language people use at a local level inserts them into discursive patternings associated with wider social institutions, and … these wider patternings encode particular conceptions of truth, knowledge, power, subjectivity. The articulation of these discourses at a local level, *therefore* provides a key linkage with broader social structures. In addition, because discourses carry potentials for the positioning of individuals and their subjectivity, their articulation in local activities is also tied up with negotiations and struggles around people's sense of their own identity (Maybin, 2000:202-203, my emphasis).

Her use of the word *therefore* suggests that the 'linkage' between the local and the social more broadly defined is obvious and logically inevitable. I would argue that these connections need to be made explicit as do the discursive struggles around positioning and identity. The best work in the New Literacy Studies does this, exploring the complexity of the relationship between the micro contexts of everyday language use and the macro concerns of society, culture, politics and power (Pennycook, 2001:172) and thus providing a critical perspective.

I believe that schools have a responsibility to give students access to dominant literacies, powerful technologies, and the means of production. In this project we wanted students to see themselves as knowledge makers, who could produce artefacts (a book, a video, wire cars) rooted in their own lives that would be valued beyond their own local context. We wanted young Grade 4 children to imagine themselves as agents whose placed and embodied knowledges mattered to their peers on the other side of the world. We wanted them to begin to imagine themselves as players on a world stage thus increasing their capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2002).

At a much simpler level I wanted to shape the way literacy is imagined in township schools. I wanted to embed it in a set of relations that positions multi-modal textual production as a form of global mobility, with real readers

and viewers across the world who without the the affordances of text, would otherwise be out of reach. Literacy here is precisely not 'isolated' or 'detached from any interlocutor' or 'somehow self-contained, complete' (Ong, 1983:132). It enters into practices of circulation which in a modest way helps students to see themselves as part of the global flow of information and knowledge. It gives them a glimpse, in Grade 4, of a wider world to which they can belong, and in which they can claim a space for themselves.

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