Issues in the Development of Multilingual Children’s Literacy and Literature in South Africa – Taking Stock

SEMINAR REPORT
ISSUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MULTILINGUAL CHILDREN’S LITERACY AND LITERATURE IN SOUTH AFRICA – TAKING STOCK

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SEMINAR REPORT
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The cover reveals samples from the isiXhosa version of *George’s Secret Key to the Universe*, soon to published in isiXhosa and isiZulu by Jacana and The Little Hands Trust – PRAESA.
This two-day seminar at Biblionef in Pinelands, Cape Town, was funded by IBBY International and PEN International, and organised by PRAESA, with support from IBBY and PEN SA. About 50 people took part; from PRAESA, Nal’ibali, SA Book Development Council, Puku Foundation, NECT, FunDza, DBE, DACT, Bookdash, The Children’s Book Network, academics from various universities, practitioners, literacy activists, editors, publishers and others. All are involved in different ways and to differing extents in the South African multilingual children’s literacy and literature domain. Increasing attention is being focused on the development of reading culture and on children learning to read and write. Yet the foundational significance of the multilingual children’s literacy/literature domain as part of larger cultural, political and economic transformative action in South Africa tends to be largely overlooked. The intention was to pause and share information about some of the progress and challenges as a step to inform and clarify ongoing action.

**SABDC SURVEY AND PIRLS STUDY**

The seminar started with a ‘big picture’ view of recent research findings about literacy development in South Africa – first societal reading habits, and then in terms of children’s literacy learning progress.

**Elitha van der Sandt (South African Book Development Council) and Sarah Howie (Centre for Evaluation and Assessment, University of Pretoria)**

Elitha van der Sandt, chief executive officer of the South African Book Development Council, said she aims to create better access to reading material, as well as to change the mechanism through which books are available and managed. She discussed the results of the council’s most recent survey tracking the reading habits and proclivities of South African readers over the age of 16. Among its findings was that most South Africans (64%) prefer reading in English, with low numbers expressing a preference for reading in their home languages. The term reading in the survey referred only to reading for pleasure, with reading for academic and other purposes excluded. Among the survey’s other interesting findings were:

- Reading is the fourth most popular leisure activity, with 43% of South Africans over 16 reporting that they had read something in the past month. This represents a marked decline from the 2006 survey, which reported 65% of South Africans having read in the past month.
- Greater levels of education, higher economic class, and younger ages are positively correlated with greater amounts of reading done by South Africans.
- The demographic that reported reading for leisure least frequently is people who live in rural areas (37%).
- South Africans spend an average of four hours a week reading, 7.5 hours a week watching TV/media, and 6.3 hours a week on social media networks.
- Only 8% of South Africans are illiterate; 92% are able to read.
- The most common reason given for not being able to read by participants was a lack of opportunity to practice when they were growing up.
LITERACY THROUGH LITERATURE – INTO A STORY WORLD

This session focused on the role of story, meaning making and imaginative thinking for all young children’s literacy learning.

Sara Stanley, Nolubabalo Mbotshwa and Carole Bloch (PRAESA)

Sara Stanley and Nolubabalo Mbotshwa’s presentation was intentionally interactive and playful, to allow participants to put their imagination and language to work. They began by creatively exploring a South African retelling of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. The presenters posed provocative questions about the story that were deliberately open-ended to allow people to give their opinions and thoughts. The idea was to experience first hand how exploration of ideas invites young children to connect into a story. A note written by the story’s monster to the three goats was read aloud and the participants then went hunting for clues about the story. They were asked to draw what they imagined might have happened.

The two facilitators showed participants just how easily and naturally we make up our own stories, and what fun it can be, even for adults in a professional setting. This fun has a serious purpose though: using stories as a stimulus can motivate children to want to engage and discover. It enables talk, vocabulary development and problem solving. Bringing the story alive in different ways allows children to represent and explore knowledge at the same time as they practice skills. Meaningful print is created in any language, or multilingually. At the same time as adults are the interactive role models for writing and reading in the chosen language, children need to be able to make sense of written language.

Carole Bloch spoke about why the distinction between ‘learning to read and reading to learn’ is disabling for reading culture development and for literacy learning. She said that this popular statement is misleading as it supports a restricted and inadequate view of what is involved in learning to read and write. Put into practice through skills-focused methods in classrooms across South Africa (and other parts of Africa), it has robbed many young children of opportunities to experience the power and purposes of reading and writing as they learn. She discussed how this misguided view could be traced to a remedial education orientation in the United States, backed by a particular interpretation of brain development.

In the context of the goal to develop literacy nationally, PIRLS provides a useful benchmark for South African educators to work towards. The study also constitutes evidence that many South African schools are not being supported in their need to perform at an international standard and can be used by government representatives to justify the necessary allocation of national budget funds toward school supplies and the training of education practitioners.

In the discussion, an important issue raised by Pamella Maseko was the translation of the PIRLS. She said that she had been asked to look over a translated 2006 test and found that the translation had been very badly done. This raised the question of whether the scores were being affected by poor translation. Sarah said that translations had improved for the 2011 and 2016 tests, yet the effect on children’s results was insignificant.

Another point raised in response to Sarah’s presentation was the need to compare South Africa to other African countries in creating a national benchmark. This was because many of the countries that take part in PIRLS are vastly different to South Africa, such as Australia, Singapore and Qatar.
imaging, which is used to explain learning to read as a process that converts print (unnatural language which has to be taught) into ‘natural’ oral language (which doesn’t have to be taught) and into sounds that are only then comprehended by the brain, and learnt. It prioritises decontextualized skills drill and training over making meaning for children from poor and African language speaking backgrounds in particular. In fact, oral language too evolved long ago and is learnt by babies and young children under conducive conditions.

With written language all young children benefit from reading purposefully and with meaning (reading to learn) at the same time as they are learning to read. These contribute to conducive conditions for learning. Carole’s perspective appreciates that using language for personally satisfying reasons is essential for both oral and written language learning. She shared evidence from neuroscience that explains which systems are inbuilt as babies are born, illustrating the centrality of processes like prediction, emotional involvement, play and discovery for learning.

**GROWING READERS AND IGNITING READING CULTURE DEVELOPMENT – WHAT’S WORKING AND HOW?**

The session focused on the challenges relating to the production of reading material and the use of African languages.

Cebo Solombela (University of Fort Hare), Dorothy Dyer (FunDza) and Sabata-mpho Mokae (Sol Plaatje University) in conversation with Xolisa Guzula (University of Cape Town)

The issue of why people are not writing enough in African languages arose immediately in this session. Discussants talked about the perceived low status of African languages, the lack of good reading environments and poor translations. The question was raised why more English stories are not being abridged and translated and how there is a need for more motivated and competent translators and publishers, and more editors and proofreaders. Most books available
in African languages are for children until nine years of age and not beyond that, which means that many older children who want to read in their mother tongue have to re-read the same books and books that are below their expected level of literacy.

Dorothy Dyer noted that in the regular writing competitions that FunDza holds, they struggle to get African language entries. She told of FunDza’s work in getting young people reading by using a mobi site. “Our focus is providing teens and young adults with exciting, accessible local stories that hook them into reading for enjoyment. These stories (with a new one loaded every Friday) are written by professional writers who are paid a fee.” There is also a Fanz section where readers send their work.

The panel discussed how to break into the library supply chains, and the supply chains for bookshops. The perception in the publishing industry is that English is what sells, mostly because it can be marketed internationally.

It was agreed that many translations are done badly and that the process of getting books translated is very expensive. A suggested solution was having more books written in indigenous languages rather than only translating books from English into other languages.

As a writer, Sabata-mpho Mokae spoke about why it is often desirable to write in English and more challenging to write in other languages. Firstly, publishers are more willing to publish English books. Secondly, because English is the language of government and business, writing and publishing in other languages can be seen as “swimming against the tide”.

A topic that was raised and discussed again later during the seminar was that people who want to write are often not aware of, or do not have access to, the opportunities to do so. A suggested solution was that indigenous language writers should look into self-publishing as an alternative to approaching major publishers. FunDza, Nal’ibali and African Storybook Project are stepping stones to this as they promote young people’s writing and have developed an online library of stories that have been written/translated. It was suggested that these and other organisations could collaborate more with tertiary institutions to spread the knowledge about them to trainee teachers who would then be equipped with more resources when they started teaching. Another interesting point made was the possibility of creating audiobooks alongside the written material. An author said that she had done this for her books and that children love to read along. This addresses the culture of storytelling, making reading fun and helping children to hear the correct sounds and pronunciation of words. The issues raised in this session illustrated clearly that although literacy NGOs and some publishers have made important progress, some seemingly intractable challenges persist around African languages development. Much systemic high level policy implementation work is urgently needed.

**PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN MULTILINGUAL STORYBOOK DEVELOPMENT**

The challenges in considering our work as a literature/literacy ecosystem, and some glaring needs, were raised in this session.

**Elinor Sisulu (Puku Foundation)**

Elinor Sisulu’s talk then tied together many of the first day’s discussions. She raised the idea of a literacy ecosystem into which all the agents and influencers of literacy and literature in South African society are woven. Writers, proofreaders, artists, publishers, distributors, translators, interpreters, teachers, teacher-trainers, librarians, employees of the department of education, NGOs and other independent promoters of reading all form part of an ecosystem that works towards the elevation of literacy and, more broadly, education in South Africa. Elinor discussed how the constituent parts of the ecosystem need to be aligned in their common purpose, and that at present parts of the ecosystem can in fact appear to subvert the aims of others. We have many initiatives: FunDza, Nal’ibali, Storybook project, Biblionef, IBBY, Centre for the Book, Sabata-mpho is starting an MA in creative writing at Sol Plaatjie University, etc. We all agree that we know what we need to do, but it is very difficult to get support. Conceptualising ourselves as an ecosystem will allow us to be more strategic about advocacy and funding.

Elinor outlined the debate about the current state of children’s literature, and how we have to address the disjuncture that African-language children experience between home and school. Most still have to grow up in a predominantly English story world at school, yet they, like other children, need literature to mirror their world before they gaze out of the window to the rest of the world. These identity,
language and culture issues described so vividly by Ngugi wa Thiong’o are what many of us work on. There has been a failure by those involved in the decolonisation debate to notice the importance of children’s literature development for transformation.

We need support in developing a transformed and transformational literature from early childhood onwards. NGOs such as PRAESA have provided books in African languages, but they have had to rely on publishers to promote and publish the material. Puku has annual language festivals and undertakes the task of developing children’s literature through workshops and reviews.

Elinor noted South Africa’s lack of what she termed a “vibrant review culture”. Ultimately, all of us rely on the government’s education branches to institutionalise the multilingual reading and writing practices they promote. They and other institutions like the Pan South African Language Board and the National Library of South Africa seem to be inconsistent, buying fewer and fewer books in African languages, with a lack of transparency and a problematic system for choosing books. This also contributes to the difficulties we have in ensuring that the process of reading promotion involves encouraging the reviewing of literature. Parents, siblings, grandparents and others can and should introduce children’s literature to the children in their lives. We still largely undervalue storytelling; our storytellers should be seen as artists who are educators – they should be deployed in schools, to inspire, while prizes for children’s literature and translation should become more prominent.

CASE STUDY 1 – SCIENTIFIC TERMINOLOGY AND OTHER ISSUES IN BOOK TRANSLATION

This session focused on issues arising from the translation process of the science-themed story for children, George’s Secret Key to the Universe, initiated and facilitated by PRAESA and published by Jacana and The Little Hands Trust.

Xolisa Guzula (University of Cape Town) and Xolisa Tshongololo (Language Services, DACT, Western Cape) in conversation with Brian Ramadiro (Nelson Mandela Institute for Rural Development and Education, University of Fort Hare)

In this session, Xolisa Guzula and Xolisa Tshongololo shared the story of their journey translating and editing George’s Secret Key to the Universe by Lucy and Stephen Hawking into isiXhosa. Brian Ramadiro noted that he understands the book to be a significant one. This is the first text in isiXhosa for children that has a science theme. He said that he has found it a struggle to get boys to engage with non-fiction and also that children are not exposed to non-fiction until they reach Grade 4. At this point, when they are expected to read for information, they struggle immensely because they have only read “storybooks”. This book was selected particularly for translation to address this as it is in part an
adventure story and in part non-fiction, offering scientific facts about the universe.

Participants discussed the difficult process of translating scientific and specialised texts into African languages. Xolisa (Guzula) explained how she managed this translation using the help of the community around her because it was a challenge determining the best way to express some scientific terminology in isiXhosa. Through the process, the lesson was reinforced that scientific terms can be used in any language – science does not have to happen only in English. There were several interesting challenges: Often there would not be any words equivalent to the English in the scientific text, which made it necessary for her and her colleagues to invent intuitive options in the translation. African languages have a history of borrowing words from English and Xolisa (Guzula) explained how in some instances she took the time to develop metaphorically grounded terms and ways of expressing scientific concepts in isiXhosa, in consultation with African language experts across several different fields. She also said she feels that it is important to draw the reader’s attention to the use of novel words and she often brackets the equivalent English version alongside them.

Xolisa (Tshongololo) said that what had helped him to read the text was already knowing the sky and the moon. Both were used to interpret the weather in the Eastern Cape. He pointed out the length of this book and described how he had created a style sheet and made notes as he went along, in order to remember and be systematic through the course of the text. He noted that Xolisa (Guzula) had managed to do the translation as if it were a text written in isiXhosa, and she explained that she had translated like a reader.

Participants commented on how encouraging this initiative is and how great the need is to expand it. This led to a discussion about why this is not being done more frequently and on a larger scale. Part of the problem, one writer commented, is the lack of financial incentive to write and translate in African languages. The prizes for competitions are small, and it is more difficult to publish and get books into retail stores. Carole explained how difficult she had found it to raise interest and support for this particular project, providing another example of how the different elements of the ecosystem do not always ‘come to the party’.

**CASE STUDY 2 – TRANSLATION CHALLENGES IN THE NAL’IBALI CAMPAIGN**

This session focused on complexities and challenges in the multilingual publication process.

*Nkululeko Ndiki (PRAESA) and Arabella Koopman (PRAESA) in conversation with Pamella Maseko (Rhodes University)*

This discussion raised the important point that reading material cannot be translated in a technical way but is rather a ‘recreation’ of the text in another language. It is not a matter of merely translating a series of words.
The translation of fiction texts for children poses an additional challenge of finding translators who are sufficiently immersed in children’s literature to be able to reinterpret a text in another language in ways that remain true to the genre.

The challenges discussed moved beyond a focus on translation within the Nal’ibali Campaign. It was pointed out that translation is a highly skilled creative activity that requires a deep understanding of the language being translated from as well as the language being translated into. It requires an interrogation of meaning – both the author’s intended meaning and how this should be interpreted in the context of the text in translation. Given this, it seems obvious that it is inappropriate to ask a speaker of any language to translate something simply on the grounds that they are able to speak and/or read the language. However, this is not an uncommon practice.

To create high quality materials, each translation needs to be treated as an original text. It is essential for it to go through the same editing and proofreading processes that the original text did. However, this is expensive and does not seem to be the norm for translated texts.

The need to translate not only from English into African languages, but vice versa too, and from one African language to another was raised. Accelerating support for writing in indigenous languages was also noted as urgent. All of these would help to ensure a rich storehouse of authentic South African writing for children that reflects truly diverse perspectives together with the more universal story themes.

**MAKING CHOICES: WHAT QUESTIONS ARE WE ASKING AS WE CONSIDER WHICH BOOKS TO WRITE AND TRANSLATE FOR CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA?**

A mentorship programme and a central research library were among the suggestions made in this session.

Jean Williams (Biblionef), Lesley Beake (Children’s Book Network), Carole Bloch (PRAESA) and Lorato Trok (African Storybook Project) in conversation with Nonikiwe Mashologu (Early Literacy Consultant)

Participants stressed that stories should be relevant to South African children, and stereotypes should be avoided. In promoting reading for pleasure and fun, humour is an important element, as is the presentation of a variety of voices. At present, oral stories from all over Africa are being recorded in the form of picture books, through the African Storybook Project, so traditional stories are being recreated for South African children.

More stories about South African heroes and freedom fighters – not only stories about Nelson Mandela – need to be...
written and published. The panel agreed that the books we choose to publish in South Africa should have an African focus. This would be an appropriate approach for developing reading material as many African children enjoy reading books that they can relate to and find interesting. Then, of course, to broaden their knowledge, children should also be encouraged to read books about other cultures and countries.

Creating a mentorship programme for writers was suggested, to grow skills, networks and opportunities for writers. It was also noted that writing books is not a lucrative career. This results in many people who are passionate about writing having to do this at the same time as being in full-time employment. The problem was raised that often only small print runs of titles are published in African languages. This makes it difficult to source the books, especially after some time has passed since publication. A suggested solution was that books need to be retrieved and reviewed to increase the length of their shelf life.

With the scarcity of indigenous language books in mind, the possibility of setting up a central research library for children’s books was discussed. This would serve as a repository where the last copies of books could be kept safe, as well as an access point for people looking for books that may be out of print.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE BY GOVERNMENT, POLICY MAKERS, LIBRARIES AND PUBLISHERS?

The seminar’s last session focused on the role of government, policy makers, libraries and publishers in making the necessary shifts at high levels to enhance multilingual children’s literacy and literature development.

Marianne von Loggerenberg (Pan MacMillan/PASA), Godwin Khosa (NECT), Kulula Manona (DBE), Mandla Matyumza (Centre for the Book) and Khanyi Dubazana (ELITS KZN) in conversation with Elinor Sisulu (Puku Foundation)

Proceedings started with group singing. Powerful parts of the ecosystem were represented in this last session and Elinor Sisulu explained how – with all of us playing a different part in this ecosystem – the important question is how to collaborate and attract investments for it to operate effectively. Mandla Matyumza made the point that government needs to invest more time in children’s literature, in terms of resources and capacity building.

Khanyi Dubazana said that reading policy partnerships and networking initiatives often tend not to be implemented due to inadequate budgets, competing priorities at high level, and low level buy-in from other structures. Although reading programmes should be developed in schools, some do and some don’t. Regarding progress in supporting teachers in reading strategies, she noted that only 10% of schools had been covered to date with their workshops. The provision of reading materials is dependent on budgets.

Godwin Khosa talked about the three things he would take with him from this seminar: 1) The significance of dealing with both micro-level issues about growing readers as well as the macro issues; 2) The challenge to take innovative initiatives to scale (his view is that innovation is not complete until it goes to scale and he said that how we take innovation to scale is a key concern of NECT); and 3) He explained that it is necessary to move away from the idea that ‘government must provide’. Rather, we should ask: Where is the latent energy available to use to grow and improve reading?

Godwin also mentioned specific things that he felt NECT should partner on, such as trying out the potential of George’s Secret Key to the Universe to excite reading and thinking. His point was that we will be able to influence policy by demonstrating the effectiveness of such measures.

With PASA considered to be “the big publishing industry voice,” Marianne von Loggerenberg was asked by Carole to consider what efforts could be made to get high-level authorities to “help unblock some of the blockages that prevent children who should have access to high quality literature in their own languages from gaining access to that.” Elinor gave the example of Puku trying to get a live feed on African language titles available in South Africa. They could only get Nielsen from the UK. She expressed the frustration of so many of those involved, saying that we need a South African generated database of African children’s literature. Such an endeavor would constitute a decolonisation project in itself.

Kulula Manona noted how, for the past 21 years, the education department has been making concerted efforts to develop policies that promote better access to reading materials. We should all be questioning the relevance and effectiveness of these policies and ensuring that they are implemented at provincial level, she said. Standards are set at national level, but it is the responsibility of individual
provinces to stick to the policies that have been set. “We
are in the process of developing a policy that will address
issues of access and procurement,” Kulula said, noting that
provinces are “where the money’s going, it’s where the
budget’s going, none of that comes to national. But national
cannot be absolved if it’s not guiding” the provinces and
providing the necessary oversight. She suggested that we
need to emerge with a set of questions to be asked of the
‘right’ people. Kulula also talked about “neglected pockets”
in the education system and how important it is to have
eamples of good practice as well as to scale up projects to
include these pockets. Mapping needs to happen, followed
by sharing. She acknowledged that publishers could be afraid
that government would not buy books, as government is
the biggest market and needs to use its buying power in an
organised way.

Elinor noted that the importance of supporting initiatives at
ggrassroots level in a scale-up process.

The need for well resourced and functioning school librari-
es was raised, with the comment made that government is
unable to provide this due to a lack of funds. Although the
know-how is in place, many libraries are not functional and
there are low levels of use in the absence of a reading culture.

Genevieve Hart asked Mandla whether the Centre for the
Book, or National Libraries, could house a central collection
of children’s books as a resource and for research purposes.
Though National Libraries has a bibliography for every book
online, we need a usable, comprehensive library collection.

**NEXT STEPS**

Many participants expressed how important this ‘coming
together’ was; it is often difficult to network given the pres-
surising circumstances we all work under. Following such
a gathering, how do we move forward with the important
suggestions? Who should take the lead in ensuring that we
do not remain in relative isolation from one another? The
following summary of some of the points raised is offered to
support future collective action.

- Find ways to encourage and grow competent transla-
tors and publishers in African languages. Find ways to
encourage more writing in indigenous languages. Grow
collaborations to increase awareness of initiatives being
undertaken to address these problems.
- Increase support for schools through allocation of
national budget funds for school supplies and teacher
training. Government investment in children’s literature
in terms of resources and capacity building is needed.

Khanyi Dubazana (ELITS KZN), Mandla Matyumza (Centre for the Book) and Carole Bloch listen to Nompucuko
Zakaza (Lisahluma Footprints) leading the group in song
• Ensure that a vibrant book review culture becomes prioritised. Empower a reading culture through understanding that young children benefit from reading purposefully and with meaning at the same time that they are learning to read. Stop the propagation of an artificial distinction between learning to read and reading to learn.

• Generate a database of African children’s literature and set up a central research library for children’s books. Increase access to reading materials and change the mechanisms through which books are available and managed.

EXCERPTS OF PARTICIPANTS’ COMMENTS

Adré Marshall, PEN SA:
As PEN SA had made a generous financial contribution to the project of translating George’s Secret Key to the Universe, I was particularly interested in and impressed by the inspiring account of this translation undertaken by Xolisa Guzu of UCT. Xolisa has obviously risen to the challenge posed by scientific terminology, and her passionate interest in the subject spurred her to complete the translation in record time. Young readers should find this book fascinating. What better way to stimulate an interest in science and encourage our young people to study further in this field and so make a valuable contribution to the development of the country. In addition to reading fiction for pleasure and gaining insight into the world of other minds, fiction can be used to teach non-fiction; a book such as this can be used as a springboard to teach not only science but various other subjects. More funding is required to pursue and expand projects such as these, which can stimulate the interest of children in the wider world of science, and thus help to produce that new generation of scientists, engineers, mathematicians, astronomers etc that we so desperately need.

Carol Broomhall, Jacana:
I thoroughly enjoyed your seminar. Being on the inside making books, it is always great to hear what goes on outside and it is encouraging to hear what the NGOs in the field are doing and how passionate people are.

Dorothy Dyer, FunDza:
What I found useful about the conference is the foregrounding of the importance – and difficulty – of translation, and how important it is to get it ‘right’. I was reminded just what an art translation is, and I agree with Elinor Sisulu’s emphatic call for the South African government to be investing in the training and development of African languages and literature. She was also calling for government to support current initiatives rather than starting their own. I think she is right in this need for collaboration.

Godwin Khoza, NECT:
Some rich and passionate reading projects were showcased. Noting the widespread need and the importance of these local initiatives (and the need to preserve them), thought should be given to how to increase their spheres of influence. Strategies for innovations aimed at improving the current system (for example, translations) need to be given more thought, and practical steps found to partner with the intended beneficiaries right from the project conception stages.

Cathy Gush, Lebone Education Centre:
I found the event useful and inspiring, and the rich networking and sharing opportunities were invaluable. We need more of these, with even more actors involved. Among the most interesting points were the importance of promoting the whole language experience for children – to create that all-important emotional connection and to counter the heavy emphasis on decoding and encoding skills in a decontextualised environment in classrooms; and that the encouragement of multilingualism is both do-able and necessary. Immersing children in literacy experiences from a very young age is key. We have found that the week-long Library Week and Book Week activities at our centre have been particularly effective in creating literacy awareness in the children.

Nompucuko Zakaza (Lisahluma Footprints):
This a platform I have longed to experience – meeting people who have had a bird’s eye view into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to literacy development from the pre- to post-democratic era in South Africa. Gathering common challenges facing literacy development activists in schools and communities has created in me a sense of belonging with pride to a team that is constantly willing to give their best. I would like to suggest that this platform expands to involve affected people like experts, educators and other community-based literacy development activists as suggested by Elinor’s ecosystem. Provincial, inter-provincial, national and international minds who are realistically involved in this for the benefit of society are necessary. I further suggest skills development on fundraising and research for these initiatives. Those who have readily available resources should, without fear, avail them where they are put to good use, monitor and evaluate functionality while they create concrete skills transfer to ordinary citizens like elders, unemployed youth and women. Action-oriented debates,
seminars etc could culminate in a united front against illiteracy in our country.

Lesley Beake, Children’s Book Network:
It was really good to share with other organisations and individuals who are struggling with the same sorts of problem. We may all be approaching it in different ways, but the basic idea – getting books and children on the same page – remains the constant. I was impressed by the huge commitment shown by everyone attending, and the unshakeable determination to get on with the job. What we need perhaps is something equivalent to the small claims court, something on a smaller scale than the big, official funders, where small organisations can motivate for relatively modest amounts of funding on an ongoing basis. It would be inspiring if we all could work together on some suggestions around this – a way of bringing the focus back to the actual purpose and diminishing the endless search for the money with which to achieve it.