



It starts with a story...

NAL'IBALI READING-FOR-ENJOYMENT CAMPAIGN

BRIEFING NO. 1: STORIES IN PEOPLE'S LIVES

A SNAPSHOT FROM RAWSONVILLE, WESTERN CAPE

Written by Catherine Kell

"Ma would get us onto her bed and we would all fight to see who could lie closest to her while she was telling the story, because if you were the closest one, she would stroke your hair and caress your head (gestures to show how mama did this). This was the time of 'ontspan en streef' (relaxation and stroking), 'Ooh, dit was lekker!'. Then we would argue about which story she should tell 'Nee Ma, nie daie een met die wolf, daie een met die prinses'. If we fell asleep while she was telling, we would be carried off to bed. Next day we would all imagine different endings. Next time we got together Ma would have to tell the ending again, so that we could be sure."

So said Ivy, as she and a small group of other women recalled oral storytelling as they grew up, painting a rich picture of the role of stories, the power of imagination and the building of social bonds in their lives growing up in the Breede River Valley in the 1960s. Many of the adults in the women's families were unable to read and write. This did not prevent a rich set of practices developing, leaving a lasting legacy in the lives of the women, as they now take up the task of promoting storytelling and reading among children in the area, through the organisation Stigting vir Bemagtiging deur Afrikaans (SBA).

Rawsonville is a small town in the wine district, 90 kms from Cape Town, surrounded by high mountains and the vivid green of miles and miles of vineyards. My introduction to the town was via Ivy and the other women who took me down a dusty turn off the main road to end up at a small farm school. The women were doing an afternoon story-reading session at the school, with about 15 children aged between five and eight. These children had been excluded from watching a 'break-up day' film as their parents had not sent the extra money required for that, so luckily the story-reading provided a rich and fun afternoon for the children, who were entranced by the main story.

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A few days later I did a focus group interview with the four women – Ivy, Mina, Marietjie and Sophia – who are facilitators for SBA. The four are known as 'lees-tannies' and SBA provides each with training and with a library of 60 storybooks for children aged between five and 11 years old. These are beautiful books, the best available in terms of quality of story, imagination, illustration and social principles like inclusiveness. The 'lees-tannies' set up reading groups at their homes, in their gardens, backyards, in whatever spaces they can find, and they also work in schools



with storytelling sessions after hours. They act as small neighbourhood libraries, where the mothers of children who are with the reading group, are then able to borrow three books a week and take them home.

With Marietjie, I spent time in the township of De Nova, and the adjacent informal settlement, visiting homes and interviewing four mothers and their children. Two of the mothers were connected with the SBA programme; two were not. I then spent time on three wine farms, visiting the homes of farm workers and interviewing 10 women individually. Most of them had children with them and I was able to speak to the children and look at any reading and writing that they were involved with. I noted the places where the 'lees-tannies' offered their story-reading sessions and the happiness with which they were greeted by children in the surroundings.

The women I interviewed all came from extremely poor backgrounds, growing up in large farm-worker families on the wine farms. Some had later worked in Cape Town or Worcester for short periods of time, but had come back to live either in the township or back on the farms, where they themselves were born or where their husbands were working. Our discussions were filled with a sense of continuity across generations, of traditions being passed down and reflections on the ways in which storytelling was woven into this texture.

THE 'LEES-MAMMIES' TALK ABOUT STORIES

In the group interview with Marietjie, Ivy, Mina and Sophia, there was literally an outpouring of experiences around stories in their own lives. Each had strong memories of fairytales, ghost stories and fables being told to them frequently, mainly by their mothers, but also by others in the family. Memories of reading were much more selective and school related. They were highly articulate and impassioned in their account of their SBA work and of its effects.

As in the extract above, listening to stories was associated with physical experiences. Three women spoke of their experience of lying close their moms during storytelling times and literally gestured to me the movement of their mothers' hands in their hair. They explained how next day would bring the need to discuss among the children what the ending of the story might have been and the offering of alternatives for the ending – these to be later confirmed in the next episode of storytelling. The real ending needed to be known and needed to be correct, but in the interim, alternatives could be imagined. It seems that in that provisional space of interruption in the line of the narrative, imagination flowered, and pictures and possibilities grew in children's minds.

All the women spoke about how the stories were passed on through many recounts. If the little ones were with 'Ma', then the next day they would tell the stories to the big ones, to see if the big ones could tell them the ending.

"It was as if we were turning the pages back to the exact spot (all laugh and nod) where we fell asleep! We each made a picture in our own minds, our imagination worked, and we carried the stories forward, but then we always wanted the real ending."

They spoke with pride about both the stock of stories their parents had, some traditional and passed on; and about the creativity the older generation had in creating and using stories to sustain the family.

"That was the time before we had books and our parents was nie so geletterd (were not so literate). But they had it in their minds. A whole stock of stories. And this was the way Ma kept us together. Maybe Pa was away in the city, and she needed to keep us together in the house. We'd have to go to sleep with the chickens, so she'd call us in and the story would get us ready for sleep, and she'd take us into an underworld, another world, where anything could happen."

There was a rich texture of stories, and many were shared across families, even though the women had not known each other when growing up:

"There were so many threads to the stories. Oooh, do you remember Dom Jan with his tail hanging in the dam? And Hasie en Skilpad? We used to talk them through together, how Jakkals was so very clever. And then we'd have to ask Pa to tell the story that he was best at, and that's how we'd come together as children, learning"

There were no TVs in the period the women were discussing. But some of them then spoke about the importance of storytelling on the radio, as they grew up. They all laughed as they shared powerful memories of jingles to announce the start of the radio story and how they would gather around the radio, taking care to never miss an episode, sometimes even running to get to the radio in time for the start. They described the intense sadness when the batteries would run out and an episode or two would be missed.

The stories
must let you
fly away!

They remembered the introduction of television, of perhaps going on holiday to Cape Town, staying with family in Elsie's River or Bishop Lavis, and seeing television there. But holidays were also good times for stories, and they told of how being told a story would 'trump' watching TV and that even the children who were growing up in the city would gather round for a story. But they all shared a sense of great disappointment when their favourite stories came on TV, because the images were so different from what they had imagined, and sometimes pieces had been cut out of the stories:

"So it just wasn't the same, it's amazing what your imagination can do for you. And even with the radio you just heard the voice and your imagination would work to make the picture, so when you heard Paul Luckhoff on the radio he had a big bass voice but when you saw him he wasn't big at all! That was so disappointing."

The women remembered getting storybooks from school and when the school got a library. It seemed that they were able to take reading books home from school, but these did not provide a strong store of memories. They all had vivid memories how at a later stage photo-comics arrived, and how they would seek these out when they got a little older, sharing them and reading them until their fingers went black from the ink on the pages.

When asked how different it was these days from the old days, they explained that children don't "believe" any more; you can't take them on flights of imagination like they went on when they were young because children are now too aware and too knowledgeable: "In those days you would be told that babies came from an aeroplane, now they know exactly where babies come from". They felt strongly that children are not using their imaginations and don't know how to tell stories anymore: "If you ask them to tell you a story, they just say 'gister het ek gaan speel', (mimicking a step-by-step, boring, factual recount of day to day details), "so they don't know how to write essays, they just get what they need out of books rather than drawing on their imaginations".

On their work with SBA, the women said that they knew they needed to do it differently:

"You MUST get their imaginations to work, so we read with feeling, so that a child who has never been to the sea, can literally feel and hear and smell it. You have to sketch a world for the children, to take them beyond their everyday lives. And you have to be different from their teachers! Children don't laugh any more! If the kids are laughing then you know you are capturing their imagination. When they say... "hier kom tannie"... then you know they are happy for you to be there, and Juffrou likes you to be there because you lighten her load."

"The stories must let you fly away! They must let you relax, escape from the every day, vat jou net 'n bietjie weg. You need to get away from die druk, and the new curriculum is so full, there is no space to just fly. The children need to be in a space where they really feel dat hulle kannie wag om te sien wat wil gebeur."



They thus explained how the storytelling helps with imagination, with construction of narratives and with narrative skills, all of which they saw as crucial to learning:

"Now they will be able to write essays themselves, because they can construct stories themselves"

The women felt that since they had begun with storytelling, the children have changed and become more spontaneous. They explained with passion, that the children now have "something interior" (iets binne) and that they know that the storytelling sessions are spaces where they can be creative and let themselves go. Marietjie explained this by saying: *"When we started off by asking them to draw, they only drew the family members inside the house. Now they draw the outside, they draw everything, they draw the world!"*

The books that SBA is using are inspiring. The women explained that these books are very different from the books the children get at school and in the town library. They are books that are full of surprises, books that have got to the level of the child: *"You have to get into the world of the child."* This means that, as story-readers, you have to be very comfortable with yourself when you are working with children through stories; you have to be able to fall off your chair, to use your voice, and you must have compassion: *"One het lief vir kinders, one is nie soos die juffrou nie, sy moes vir die geld werk, met ons kan die kinders lag!"* They felt that children are not taking to reading and writing, but now that they have stories, they are learning. They spoke strongly about how important it is to take the pressure off and make learning fun.

While they work only in Afrikaans, they would love to have access to books in different languages and for different age groups: *"We have other children coming too; we have the little ones and sometimes we don't know what to do for them. And then we have teenagers and would love to have books for them too... We are a rainbow nation, we must be able to work in three languages. English stays in their thoughts and the little ones learn so quickly. And there are many isiXhosa speakers among us. We need to be able to reach them too."* For these reasons they welcomed the Nal'ibali reading-for-enjoyment campaign and were very comfortable with the name: *"The word, Nal'ibali, itself, it trips off your tongue... It's almost like a story itself!"*

They felt strongly that parents know that they must help their children to develop and learn: *"Every parent wants the best for their children, but it's difficult. In the city people have money, they can buy pencils and paper and a book is a great present. But if not, children don't have dreams. Here*

they can't take books home from school and none of them have books. But with us, it's almost like a veldfire, everyone wants them and everyone can see the benefits."

"So, ons moet dit imprint! And we know the parents are also learning lessons, the parents are also enjoying the books, so it's making everything richer."

STORIES FROM THE TOWNSHIP

These claims were confirmed as I moved with Marietjie into De Nova township. I interviewed two women living in backyard shacks behind established township houses, and two women living in the informal settlement behind De Nova.

Marita is 45 and lives with her husband and two small children. There is a TV and a small pile of books, magazines and Bible on the shelf. Emmarentia is five years old, in Grade 1, while David is two and a half, and is disabled. Marita and Emmarentia are snoozing on the couch in the intense Boland heat as I enter the room. Waking up slowly, Marita tells me that her mother loved to tell stories when she and her siblings were growing up – lots! She is an avid reader and uses the Rawsonville library: "I love fiction because fiction carries you in (dit lig jou in) – it's so clever in that way."

Anthea lives with her husband and her son, Taylor, in a room at the back of another house. The room is taken up with one huge bed, on which her husband is lying, and he joins in the conversation a little. Next to the bed is a neat pile of small plastic-covered novels with codes on them – Anthea is a big borrower from the Rawsonville public library, and despite only going to Std 7 (Grade 9) she is an avid reader and says she cannot go to sleep without reading. She is a 'lees-mammie', as is Marita, and they proudly bring out the beautiful children's books currently on loan from Marietjie's small SBA library. Both Emmarentia and Taylor had favourite storybooks, which they named (Karla Krillebolle and Little Lucky Lolo) and they shyly recounted the stories for me.

Erica and Drika both live in shacks in the adjacent informal settlement. They are not 'lees-mammies' but their children have both attended Marietjie's sessions, which she holds in the backyard of her own house. All four mothers grew up with parents who did not read to them, but storytelling mostly played a rich part in their lives.

"It was very, very nice. We had no TV, but really it was even nicer than watching TV! It takes you to a different world, where you feel relaxed and comfortable. There'd be six of us in the bed with Ma and we'd fall asleep and then Pa would carry us off to bed."

They explained that stories could be about anything and everything. The traditional tales were mentioned, as were ghost stories and animal fables. But then there were also stories about the olden days, about the times when their parents grew up, and about when the English people came to South Africa:

"Some were made up, some were from my grandfather and were about the history of our family. My auntie was the one who made up spooky stories for us, and we were so scared, but we loved it!"

An intense interest in stories was expressed by three of the women. They explained that they loved stories, both as children and in relation to their own children: "You become excited and you want to know what is in that story, how it is going to turn out." Marita said that "stories make you forget about your normal circumstances, they awake emotions in you, like fear – you laugh, cry; they make you feel happy. Although you know it's only a story you feel better afterwards, that puts you in a different mood."

Storytelling and reading practices between the women and their children also varied, as did their attitudes towards their children's own learning. Marita said she loves to tell Emmarentia stories, and that Emmarentia loves them and asks for them:

"Sometimes I read the books from SBA or I tell the stories I have read from those books, or else I make them up myself. If I want to get a message across to her then I put it into a story. My husband does tell stories too, but not as much."

Both Anthea and Marita said they loved the beautiful stories provided by SBA with their large print, bright colours and inviting stories. Both agreed that reading the stories helped their children at school with reading, with knowing the alphabet, recognising words and images, remembering storylines and so on. Marita stressed strongly that the books had been so helpful with David's development. As a result of his disability, he did not respond well to people, but he responded very well to the colours and pictures in the SBA books.

Erica and Drika (who have had less exposure to the SBA groups) are worth comparing in their attitudes to their kids' learning. Both lived in the informal settlement in two-roomed shacks. Erica lived with her partner and her young son, Riedewaan. She had reached matric at school and had done some further education, and was highly positive about Riedewaan's learning, saying that access to books and practising reading at home would make a big difference to his learning. She brought out a set of books that she had taken out of the Rawsonville library for him, as she did not borrow from SBA. It was immediately clear that the library books were not as high quality as the SBA books, but Erica and Riedewaan clearly enjoyed them and Riedewaan was able to tell me about one of the stories. She said that Riedewaan loved to re-tell the stories to his parents after completing them.

Her grandchildren bring books home from school and she asks them to read to her.

Drika was 39, had gone to school as far as Std 5 (Grade 7), and worked full time in a special needs school some distance away. She lived with her fiancé and her daughter, Nadia (aged 8). Another daughter, Suzanne, lived with her father in another part of the township. Although Drika remembered having stories told to her when she was young, she was not continuing the tradition with her daughters. She said she was too tired when she came home and did not feel like it. After further conversation she expressed extreme anxiety about Nadia's learning at school:

"I only went as far as Std 5 and I really want the best for my kids. But Nadia is really struggling. She brings so much homework from school and she has to do it, but when she has a list of words I find she can only do one or two of them. Then I get very stressed (she gestures with a kind of rigid shiver through her whole body). Then my fiancé also gets stressed and we start to panic. It feels like there is no one to help. Once I even slapped her because there was just so much to do; she wasn't getting things right. We try to get through it at night but there is still more to do in the morning before she leaves for school and she cries if she can't get it ready. While she tries to read to me, she is anxious and she touches herself all over her body. It's okay when my sister reads to her, then she is more relaxed. But we struggle to find a place where the children can come for care and to do school work and where we know they can be safe. I would even pay for that, because now it is so difficult with Nadia and I am so worried about her."

There was no reading material in the house at all, apart from WCED workbooks from the previous year of school, which Drika brought out to show us, saying that she felt anxious just looking at how much the children had to do.

Apart from Drika, there was a sense of quite a strong reading culture among these women and within their families, despite the odds. Three of them used the Rawsonville library for themselves and their children. They had limited access to magazines like Huisgenoot and Kuier, and all read the Worcester Standard and Die Son. They did not read any other newspapers, though. Marita had access to regular magazines from her church, which had sections for children in them, and she said her husband loved to read these to Emmarentia. The SBA books seemed to represent a powerful 'input' to family life, enriching and deepening imagination and learning for parents and children.

ON THE WINE FARMS

Visiting three different wine farms, it became very clear that farm workers are so much more isolated. I visited seven homes on the farms and interviewed 10 women, and in some cases, their children. Each farm had distinct conditions and cultures. These differences were well known and frequently discussed and seemed closely related to the 'benevolence', interest and economic success of the farm owners. I was told, and it seemed evident that alcohol abuse was still rife despite the abolition of the 'dop system': "I told them that you were coming today that is why they are not drunk, otherwise they would be drunk already". And two of the women I spoke to had children who were unable to progress at school as a result of what appeared to be foetal alcohol syndrome. Many of the women had grown up on nearby farms and after marrying, had come to their current farm to live. Some had lived on the same farm for generations. Others had experienced disruptions with moves between farms and periods spent in small towns like Worcester and De Doorns. All mentioned that their parents had not been able to read and write, and a few mentioned that their fathers had had alcohol problems.

There was little evidence of any reading materials in the farm workers homes, apart from the Bible, the books which people were accessing via SBA and some school exercise books and workbooks. In contrast with the women living in De Nova, none made use of the Rawsonville library. Newspapers were few and far between (Die Son was the one most mentioned). Although homes did have electricity, there were only three televisions among the 10 families. In most cases, homes had radios but often these were not working as the batteries had run out. Access to writing materials was also difficult for people. Two families used old paper from older children's school exercise books for the younger ones to draw and practice writing on, but many had no pencils, pens or spare paper around. One woman mentioned buying a set of crayons for her five foster children, and one had bought some CDs at a shop for the children to watch on the TV.

Although all were Afrikaans speaking, there was some intermingling with isiXhosa. Two of the women had married isiXhosa-speaking men, and many had other relatives who had married isiXhosa speakers. The women varied in age from 23 to 53. All had children, some had grandchildren or other relatives living with them, and one had five foster children. Their years at school ranged from no schooling at all to matric - the average was Std 5 (Grade 7). I also interviewed a 17-year-old woman who was still at school.

Despite this, they all spoke about stories that had been told to them while growing up. The range of stories was very similar to the women in De Nova: there were the usual folk tales (Liewe heksie) and animal fables (Hasië en Skilpad); then there were tales that parents or grandparents told about the old days (when they had to make ash bread, go to school without shoes; there was no electricity); stories from their own lives with a moral (how someone in the family did not want to work but learnt their lesson, "learning how to have respect for others and how to make decisions about your own life by example"); ghost stories and so on. Some had unusual experiences of first exposure to books: *"Some white people came to a hall near us with books. And they would read to us. It was very nice to listen to them and we saw the big pictures and clear words. It was so exciting! These were the first picture books I had ever seen. I couldn't sleep at night waiting for the end of the story the next time they came"*.

Gertie, aged 47, spent only one year at school and could not read or write at all although she said she managed money very well. She has ensured that her own daughter went as far as Std 9 (Grade 11). Gertie's mother told her stories, and this "helped us to grow well". Her father had a problem with alcohol and "when we asked him where he came from he never told us. But he did have a Bantu story about a man who lost a child, and for years had nightmares until he found the child again. And then the nightmares stopped. This made me think a lot about my own life." She explained that she tells her grandchildren stories to make them go to sleep and uses riddles to tease them and make them think. Her grandchildren bring books home from school and she asks them to read to her and when they get

stuck, then she asks her daughter to help. But most of the reading that happens in the family is Bible reading. Sometimes the family had visitors who would stay overnight and then they would tell stories about their experiences to the whole family. The family specially liked stories that made you feel scared.

Some of these women remembered storybooks from school and being able to bring them home to read: *"I used to bring the books about Rooikappie, Die Drie Varkies, die Gemmerbroodman, and read them at home, even though my parents could not read."*

However, most said that their children currently at school did not bring storybooks home from school to read; they only brought their homework in the WCED workbooks. They did not know why this was the case. Only one family had any reading materials to share with their children, these were three children's books that must have been bought at a jumble sale or shop. Here as well, the SBA storybooks therefore represented a significant input into family life, much enjoyed by adults as well as children, and even adults said that they loved them, loved the bright colours, clever stories and couldn't wait to see themselves how the story would turn out!

There appeared to be a difference between families that borrowed books and families that didn't – in that the 'lees-mammies' were more articulate about the positive effects of the stories, more interested in their children's own reading and writing and more involved in the imaginative aspects of stories and what they can do for people. The other mothers, many of whose children also attended the group, but did not borrow, were very happy with what the children were getting but less connected with their children's learning, with books and the imaginative aspects.

Nelia, aged 28, went as far as Std 6 (Grade 8) at school and has three children, aged 12, six and two. She was born on the farm she was now living on and had married a man from another farm who had come to work there. We sat in her tiny kitchen with broken concrete floors and walls blackened from the soot from a brazier (although the family did now have electricity). There were only two chairs. But Nelia, although very shy to talk, was passionate about the stories her six-year-old daughter, Charlene, was bringing home from the SBA group:

"She asks me to read them to her over and over again. When I read them to her, I find I forget I am reading to them. I was never one for reading, but now I find I am reading into the story myself. . . I want to know what is going to happen! When you are reading it lets you think back to your own childhood. Before SBA we had no books at all, we never went to the library. But with her (Charlene), she comes home from Ivy's group and she is already telling me the story they read that day. My 12 year old is lazy to read but if he hears me reading to her then he also comes. They love the rhymes and songs too. We don't have any toys for them, I know we need them but we can't afford them."

She explained that neither Charlene nor the 12 year old bring storybooks home from school. So the only access they have is through SBA. When asked if there were any materials for the children to practice and play with reading and writing, she said yes, and showed sheets torn from an old exercise book, saying that these were from the 12 year old's school books, and that she gave them to Charlene to use, together with a pen. She said that Charlene had been trying to copy the writing from the story and that *"when they go to sleep Charlene wants to keep doing her writing, so we just leave her. And even the little one is trying now!"* Charlene then took the sheets and the pen, and sat outside on the steps in the sun, doing play writing.

Betty echoed many of these themes. Although she remembered much about storytelling from her own childhood, she said she was not telling stories any more and she could not tell stories. However, she said she was getting the books from SBA and enjoying reading them to the children: *"Dit vat 'n mens terug (it takes a person back) en dit laat 'n mens lekker lag (it lets a person have a good laugh)."*

Francina, aged 45, had parents who drank and had a very disrupted childhood. She only went to Sub B

at school, but once she was 14, she went to work on a farm where “the white child taught me to read, and told me stories like Rooikappie and Aspoestertjie, and also told me riddles and rhymes.” Francina, after drinking seriously herself, losing two children to welfare and having one with FAS, finally managed to give up alcohol and turned to the Church.

Now with the small grandchildren that live with her, she is immensely grateful to Sophia for the SBA story-reading group. She is a ‘lees-mammie’ and borrows three books per week, but in addition she says: *“I find I am telling them more stories now, and reading the books to them. And at night the little one brings me the book and says I must read to her. They sing the songs they learn at Sophia’s group. Before the children always used to fight, now they don’t fight. They are calm; they are on the road to go forward. I have learnt from Sophia that I must buy them some books to have at home and also some colouring books and things to write in. But it costs a lot.”*

Along with the stories many mentioned the fact that the children are also learning rhymes, riddles and songs from the SBA groups. They were highly positive about this and felt that it was making a difference to the children’s behaviour: *“Now the children are getting out of doing ugly things, they are just sitting quiet and listening. Then they come and sing the songs to us.”*

I gained a picture of how the stories were creating a new set of fictional characters and actions, which were entering into the lives of these families and circulating between children, between generations and across spaces. Some spoke of how the children all talk about Dirk who did not like to be hugged, or how the Haarlebolles (from a story called Karla Krullebol) “are going to make church in your hair” if you don’t wash it. *“So they are learning important messages and thinking about their experiences and sharing them!”*

STORIED LIVES

In conclusion, a very rich picture emerged about stories in people’s lives in this area of the Winelands, and about the effects of a small but creative initiative like SBA’s story-reading groups. While it is hoped that the descriptions above provide a sense of the lessons that can be learnt, some explicit lessons are suggested for the Nal’ibali campaign in the hope that messages can be crafted and actions suggested so that they build on what people are already doing rather than draw attention to what they are not doing.

It was clear that people had a rich store of memories about the role of stories in their lives, and were well versed in a range of story genres. This stock was not literacy dependent; in fact, most of the women interviewed had parents who could not read and write. Still, the stories were passed down verbally and helped to build up the fabric of experience, history and reflections on life, which contributed to a shared culture. Where this did not take place seemed to be among families that were more disrupted and had deeper social and economic problems, rather than literacy-related or educational problems.

Among this generation of women, more limited experiences of reading stories from school also played an important role, with a shared cast of characters and narratives emerging. While some were able to keep up their reading through using the public library and through Church magazines and newspapers, others had little access to reading material in their adult lives. And most could not afford to buy reading or writing materials.

Some of this rich tradition of storytelling is passing on to the current generation of young children, although some mothers did admit that they were too tired or too stressed to be creative in telling stories. If there was access to the SBA storybooks, and when children attended the SBA story reading sessions, great gains were seen to be made. While there is no hard evidence for these changes, and

such changes may be due to a much wider range of factors, the following were suggested, discussed and in some cases observed:

- the strengthening of bonds between parents and children
- the strengthening of bonds between children
- improvements in children's behaviour
- the provision of enjoyment, relief and relaxation for parents and children
- improvements and increases in children's reading and writing skills
- encouragement of children's experimentation and practice with reading and writing
- improvements in other cognitive skills like memory
- improvements in children's capacity for narrative
- increases in children's imaginations
- the building up of shared cultural images, icons, metaphors.

Some mothers expressed concern about whether they were doing enough for their children, but they knew what they could do if they had resources and access.

Much can be learnt from the training that the SBA 'lees-tannies' have had. The approach that sees itself as complementing what is happening in schools, and as happening in parallel, seemed very valuable. But what was enormously impressive was the absolute delight in the imagination and the passion and the joy that the 'lees-tannies' exuded in what stories can do for children (and their families), as distinct from what schooling can do for them. This was expressed in their belief that children's creativity, their narrative capacity and their deeply interiorized sense of imagination were all growing. The 'lees-tannies' were freed from the anxieties that attend those involved with learning to read and write as regimented skills that have to be mastered. It is possible that this freedom may do more for children's reading and writing than we currently realize and it certainly appeared this way to me. And at the same time, there was some evidence that this was having positive effects on children's behaviour and social skills.

In addition, much can be learnt from the appreciation expressed about the quality of the books used by SBA. This was crystal clear when one child bought out books that his mother had borrowed from the Rawsonville library. While both mother and child enjoyed these books, there was really no comparison with the SBA books. The library books were small, had minimal pictures that were line drawn, were only in black and white, and had very dense text. The SBA books were made up of brilliant stories closely connected with the life worlds of children, not didactic in their approach, humorous, with stunning illustrations; in fact, totally captivating for both children as well as their parents. In the one story-reading session that I observed, I, too, was desperate to find out how the story about the elephant in the aeroplane was going to end!

The idea of Nal'ibali was very positively received, and seen as complementing what SBA was already doing. It was seen as very important that the reach of story-telling initiatives and practices in the area extends much more widely, and incorporates families that are isiXhosa speaking. It was hoped that Nal'ibali would enable much wider access to and provision of reading material for all ages, including very young children as well as teenagers, and in some cases it was hoped that more reading material would also become available for adults as well.

The visit to Rawsonville was facilitated by Stigting vir Bemagtiging deur Afrikaans (SBA), in particular through the efforts of Adri Meadon and Beulah Nero. The assistance of Marietjie Beneke, Ivy Adams, Sophia Swartz and Mina Makkemella was invaluable in the collection of the data for this report.

NAL'IBALI FORMATIVE RESEARCH BRIEFINGS

This is the first briefing undertaken as part of formative research for the Nal'ibali Campaign. The briefings focus on "Stories in People's Lives" and involve snapshots from three different parts of South Africa. The research and the writing of these briefings were undertaken by Dr Catherine Kell together with Thabisa Xhalisa.

The second briefing is a snapshot of interviews undertaken in Langa, Western Cape – an established township mainly inhabited by isiXhosa speakers. To access this report visit www.praesa.org.za



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The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) is an independent research and development unit attached to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Cape Town, and an initiating partner of the national Nal'ibali Reading-for-Enjoyment Campaign.

For more info visit www.praesa.org.za and www.nalibali.org

