



It starts with a story...

NAL'IBALI READING-FOR-ENJOYMENT CAMPAIGN

BRIEFING NO. 2: STORIES IN PEOPLE'S LIVES

A SNAPSHOT FROM LANGA, WESTERN CAPE

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"I grew up in a house full of children. I remember how we would gather ourselves around the fireside at night begging for more stories from our father. Father would sit up and then his eyes would brighten up. He would tell us about real life stories and animal fables. The stories were always filled with adventure, danger, lies and excitement. My father was a good storyteller. He was a real nitpicker on the details when it came to those bloodcurdling fables about ogres. But we always wanted more even though they were so scary... The children of today know a lot more about Generations [a South African soapie] than about oral tales" [Translated from isiXhosa].

These are the words of Khuthala, as she and her friend, Nosipho, reflect on growing up in the township of Langa, in Cape Town, and on the role that stories and fables played in their lives. Despite the fact that both women are not currently passing on the tradition of storytelling to their children due to "loss of interest", as Nosipho puts it, they spoke passionately about storytelling in their own lives and argued that storytelling stimulates cognitive and language development. "I love reading even though I brand myself a 'lazy reader'," stated Nosipho, "I'd rather read short stories than novels because they are much shorter."

In the busy, urban world of Langa township, in Cape Town, these words and the tensions they express, often rang true. Khuthala and Nosipho, both in their thirties, were born, brought up and still live in Langa, now with their own young children. For them, and for many, it is a struggle to survive in Langa, as high rates of unemployment take their toll and access to services is uneven. However, in an old disused school on the very edge of the township is the the Langa Vulindlela Reading Club, attended by Xhosa-speaking children every Saturday, and run by a group of dedicated young volunteers in their twenties, who work with the children, inspiring them with storytelling, reading and writing and other activities designed to spark their imaginations and develop skills. It was here that the kernel of the idea for the Nal'ibali reading-for-enjoyment campaign was born.

The stories were always filled with adventure, danger, lies and excitement.

We went to Langa Vulindlela to find out more about storytelling in the lives of the young volunteers and the parents or caregivers that bring their children there. From the reading club, we fanned out and entered the neighbourhood of Langa, knocking on people's doors, talking to a group of families in their homes as well as to others

on the street, thus developing a wider lens to provide this snapshot of storytelling in people's lives in this vibrant part of Cape Town. Almost all of the households were headed by women, most of whom were unemployed, and a few were self-employed. These women lived with their children, mothers, siblings and extended family members, spilling out beyond the established houses and into backyard shacks, or living in new flats like the N2 Gateway. Some were born in Cape Town, others in the Eastern Cape. All were isiXhosa-speaking. Unlike in Rawsonville (see briefing No 2), it was not easy to spend time with people whose busy lives were filled with washing, shopping, commuting, informal employment activities and other household chores. Despite this, the discussions were filled with memories of the way in which storytelling had been a communal activity, the role it played in their lives as children, how the youth of today is missing out and the efforts some are making to weave it into their children's lives.

YOUNG VOLUNTEERS SHARE THEIR PASSION ABOUT STORIES

The Langa Vulindlela Reading Club was established by PRAESA (The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in SA) with the Zisukhanyo Youth Empowerment Group. Today it continues to be supported by PRAESA but is run independently by a group of passionate young volunteers, who are there every Saturday morning. We spoke with eight of these volunteer, after one of the sessions as the children were being picked up by relatives. A few children continued to lie on the floor reading the bright books that were piled up and discussing the pictures and characters. The wall was filled with drawings and the emergent writing of young children. We had a very lively discussion, with much laughter and agreement on key experiences and themes.

The group explained that they have divided the children (aged between two and 15) into three groups according to age and they undertake different activities with each group, involving storytelling, reading and writing, games, songs and rhymes, acting and so on. They explained their approach to building multilingualism – they try to work with a range of languages, for example, moving in one story between English and isiXhosa. They all agreed that often books translated from English into isiXhosa are not well done, and they end up, veering away from the written text and doing the translation themselves

The group was adamant about the importance of building a reading culture. They were concerned that parents are not doing enough at home to support their children's development:

"We should just be fine-tuning what the parents are already doing. But the parents don't know how to do this, so we need to push it and encourage them to read and tell stories, from there then the children can use their imaginations. Then we can start to get some quality at the end of Grade 12."

At the same time they felt that schools and teachers could be doing much more. Despite the fact that there is evidence that many teachers are encouraging the children to go to the library, the group was despondent about the cognitive development and the skills of the children with whom they work. By way of contrast one noted that at Langa Vulindlela, "children who arrive aged two, by the time they are five they are able to write," indicating that it is the richness of the experience they get at the club, and the stimulation of imagination, that facilitates easy literacy learning.

The group was also sympathetic, however, to the conditions under which people in Langa are living. They commented that parents are so busy they struggle to get their children to the club and they can't let them walk alone, and that "sometimes there is no food to eat in the house. Sometimes children are living with aunties and uncles who do not worry about their development." One said that when she tries to encourage the children to read, the children often say, "there is nothing to read at home."

They talked about stories in their own lives. Generally their experiences were similar. Storytelling

happened when the family came together and in the dark around the fire. Most remembered storytelling as something that happened in rural areas when they went back to visit grandparents:

"I didn't have it at home. When I went to visit my grandmother, over weekends and holidays that's when I got stories. Looking back now I realised that's what I can build on."

"During the night sitting by the fire, granny would be roasting mielies and she would start telling the stories of how they used to live. We thought she was telling us things just as they happened. Only later did you realise that those were actually legends."

Others explained how their relatives used stories in bringing them up, and passing on knowledge about the world and their places in it:

"I used to go home to the rural area and stay with my grandparents, in the villages high up in the mountains. So it was starting from my grandmother. There were no televisions, no books, no other media. So it was part of the lifestyle itself, the old ways. At that time all the old people, when they wanted to tell you something, they said: 'You come and sit down there, you have to do this'... and then there'd be a story. They'd explain something you needed to do through a story, like... 'there was this king who wanted a wife'... it was always in that format but we never realised what they were doing. They talked a lot about their lives, about how they grew up, what they did when they were little. It was always stories, stories, stories. It was about how to live your life through stories."

At this point the whole group burst into laughter and agreement

"I grew up in a very storytelling household. In the afternoon everyone had come back from work and we'd gather around and talk about the day, while preparing for the evening. Storytelling was like nurturing us in the right path, telling us where we come from. They always told us about how they grew up, the challenges they faced and even though they were facing such difficulties they made it through life. So that takes me back into their times. It gives me a picture of where we came from. My father grew up as a curious boy and as an adult he added to what he knew by doing research about our clan name. But he just added because he knew so much already from the stories that had been passed on. So it was there, that is where I felt at home, while sitting there, with the family - I thought I won't miss this for anything!"

For those who grew up in more urban areas it was sometimes a little different:

"I grew up in a shebeen, literally, but every morning my brother and I would wake my mother and ask her to tell us a story. At night she would be busy, so we children would then sit around the fire and then compete to tell the stories again, to recount them. It was performance. The interesting part was that you had to add salt..."

At this point the whole group burst into laughter and agreement, speaking about the adding of salt as isijekula:

"...yes, isijekula, you had to spice it up and it was all about facial expressions, and gestures. But then our mother would ask us which one did we want to hear? Then we would choose and she would tell us. For me, that was mentally stimulating because when I was in the classroom later that day my brain cells would be working and I would always think about the stories and about what the message was. Like if the girl in the story didn't listen what would happen to her?"

It was traditional to ask who was the best storyteller in the family. The boys were generally seen as better storytellers, were more often encouraged to tell stories and were good at 'adding salt'. This wasn't fixed, however, and storytelling offered ways of exploring and expanding the play of identity: "As a girl, when you were telling stories, then you felt like you were a boy."

Children would tell and re-tell the stories, expanding and exaggerating to the delight of those around who would giggle excitedly as new parts were added or elaborated, knowing that this deviating from the story was both transgressive and exciting, and admiring the skill of those who could do it. The volunteers were reminded of the role of the 'iimbongi' (praise poets) in both traditional and contemporary society, commenting that such talents were developed early on in the contexts described.

All agreed that: "the stories are so much the same, whether they come from our traditional tales or from English or Afrikaans stories. They are just different versions of the same themes." One of the volunteers, however, told a story there and then, all the while explaining how he was deviating from and elaborating the original script of the story. He is currently writing these stories down and getting them published.

Asked who tells stories to whom:

"I only tell stories to one person, that is my younger brother. He always asks me and then I say to him I will only tell you during the night. If I tell you during the day you will grow up with horns..."

At that point the group burst into laughter, translating the idiom as "Uzakuphum'iimpondo xa ubaliselwa iintsomi emini," relishing the shared experience and the humour of it, remembering how it felt to be told that. "We were very scared of that idea", which was explained as a clever and indirect way of "discouraging laziness" in the daytime:

"The African people are very brilliant, they have this way of tricking you. Because they knew that if you were sitting around the hearth all day telling stories, when are you going to be working? So they wanted to avoid that laziness."

But it was also seen as about drawing people's attention. The group has adapted that custom in Langa Vulindlela: "Before you tell the story there is a statement you must make to all the kids. It's like saying 'now pay attention.'" It's about paying respect to that story."

The same young man then continued to talk about telling stories to his younger brother:

"It's [telling him he will grow horns] kind of a way of saying I am not ready now... but that's just what I say. So I tell him the very same stories that my grandmother told me. I'm not so good in isiXhosa, but if I tell them in English they lose that originality. So it's much better to tell it in my own language, Xitsonga. One day I came home from being away, it was the night and I found my brother sleeping on my bed. Just when I arrived he woke up and said 'tell me a story', three in the morning! I couldn't say no."

But the discussion about growing horns raised a fascinating discussion about directness and indirectness. Many in the group had experienced storytelling as an indirect way of 'being taught' what is right and wrong, good and bad, how to live your life. Through metaphor and analogy, these ways were revealed. But then the volunteers questioned that too:

"But maybe our elders had a way of hiding the truth. Of going around [gestures with his hand]. For example, it took me time to realise that a baby is not coming from an aeroplane. This element of avoiding things can be a problem because it takes away your confidence. If you are told from this age that things are like this you will then disagree as you get older."

"But one day I said to myself, I must unpack this whole myth thing. I remember the fear I felt when I was told that I would grow something on my behind, if I sat on the stones that were used around the fire to support the pots while they were cooking. Now this was clever, because obviously you can't sit on those stones – they are used for cooking and you could get burnt. But the story was I would grow

something! So it was indirect. If they wanted to tell me it was an abomination to sit on those stones, maybe they should have told me that."

So they contrasted this with life today, and with the constant stream of information that children are exposed to. "Everything these days is so exposed. We are faced with so many challenges now because we have drifted away from our ways." They argued that this worked against the tradition of storytelling, and some mentioned trying to tell stories to young family members but being told by these same youngsters that, "ach, it is not like that, you can't tell me such things." So they expressed a sense that in a world of greater transparency and access to information, the indirect ways of inculcating moral guidance offered by storytelling were challenged, along with a more general sense of challenge to authority.

They also argued that, "Stories are not told any more in everyday life! People are too busy in their lives, and the only time they use stories are to try to keep children busy," and that "it is less likely to happen now because people work too hard and don't gather as families to the same extent."

After talking to the volunteers, and over a period of a few weeks, we followed some young mothers and grandmothers back to their homes after they had picked up their children. Given that these were family members who had chosen to get their kids to Langa Vulindlela, their perspectives were shaped by that clear intention.

MOTHERS AND GRANDMOTHERS REFLECT ON STORIES AND THE ROLE OF LANGA VULINDLELA

"We make sure our girls go to Langa Vulindlela every Saturday"

Zodwa and Nocawa, aged 29 and 26, are two entrepreneurial sisters who share a small flat at N2 Gateway with their daughters, Zama and Sethu. The two ensure that their daughters go to the Langa Vulindlela reading club every Saturday. The two young women are self-employed. They have their own vegetable garden where they grow different kinds of organic vegetables, which they sell to Harvest of Hope and supply the local Primary School. On Saturdays in summer, they usually take their children for free swimming lessons: "Some of the neighbours have branded us 'white people' because we take our children for swimming lessons," said Nocawa. "What they don't know is that children need exposure, which is what they deny their children." We followed them back to their flat to discuss their lives and their stories.

Nocawa asserted that their dream is to open up a reading club at N2 Gateway to assist schoolchildren with their homework and expressed disgust over township teachers who are abusive towards primary school children. Because of this, the two decided to enrol their children in a Constantia school (a white, upmarket, English-speaking suburb of Cape Town), where Zama is doing Grade R and Sulu, Grade 1. The reason for enrolling their children in an English-medium, expensive school is because of the high quality of education and the fact that it offers English as a medium of instruction. However, Nocawa was not fully impressed with the school's curriculum, saying that she was worried about their reading skills: "They used to be fluent readers (when they were attending in town) but now they are struggling to read. We have to help them at home with their reading." Despite the fact that they use isiXhosa as a medium of communication at home, Nocawa believes that English is a passport to upward mobility and they usually read English books to their children to enhance their English skills.

Zama and Sethu were exposed to a range of media such as children's programmes on television. Their mothers had bought them children's DVDs, word puzzles, children's storybooks, toys and books emblazoned with television characters, word puzzles, pens, crayons, magazines and novels. School literacy practices were also repeated at home before and during bedtime and Zodwa said: "I always

make sure my child does her homework and reads before going to bed. I usually help her when there are problems.”

Zodwa and Nocawa grew up in a house that had a wealth of stories, which they termed ‘iintsomi’, mostly related by their mother, aunts and grandmother. They remembered the evenings spent in the company of their mother/grandmother and siblings who would tell them about their childhoods, animal fables and narrative accounts of their family: “When we reached our teens, we realised that our aunt was also infused in the stories. She would become very angry when we would tell her that she was one of the characters!”

Both felt that stories have an educational value and always project a positive message to the listener. Hence, they remembered their favourite story about two sisters, Tsaliwe and Madzembedzembe who were completely different from each other. Madzembedzembe was lazy and fond of bullying, unlike Tsaliwe, who was diligent. Nocawa recounts:

“Tsaliwe was humble, quiet and industrious. She remained good and continued to show love and appreciation to older people including their parents. Overall, the story is about respect and the message behind it is that one who damages the character of another damages his own, because in the end Tsaliwe managed to overcome Madzembedzembe’s wrath.”

Even though one might think that oral traditions are fading away within African society, Nocawa and Zodwa are still keeping it strong: “Stories help us to learn from our mistakes or to be aware of dangers. It’s a pity these days people are busy and they don’t have time to tell stories [to their children]. I always make time to tell or read stories to Sethu and Zama.” The sisters further maintained that storytelling and reading stimulates imaginative and linguistic development.

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At this point Zama and Sethu competed to tell stories they were once read by their mothers. These included the stories of ‘Utata ubhere nomama ubhere [the translated version of The three little bears; ‘Unwele zelanga [the isiXhosa version of Little Red Riding Hood] and other isiXhosa fables about the Jackal and the Grandmother; The Jackal and the Wolf and many more. The two little girls confirmed that their mothers read the first two stories to them in English. Their storytelling skills were impressive; they were able to introduce the narratives chronologically and to put down their ideas in their own languages. They had an excellent grasp of isiXhosa.

Even though Zama and Sethu were oriented into reading and storytelling, their mothers read to them for a range of reasons. Both, however, used reading and storytelling as ‘safety blankets’ for putting Zama and Sethu to sleep, Nocawa explained: “Both my sister and I tell stories to our daughters. The reason I read and tell them stories is because I want to put them to sleep.” Zodwa said: “Sometimes I tell Sulu to close her eyes, as she listens.”

“This history has helped me to realise my identity”

Sitting outside Langa Vulindlela, we also interviewed Fatima and her sister, Amina, on the way to pick up Fatima’s six-year old daughter, Larisha. Fatima is a nurse who lives with her husband, a doctor, and their six-year-old daughter, Larisha, in a suburb some way away from Langa. They are all English speakers. Fatima and Amina travel all the way from Goodwood to Langa so that Larisha can attend the Langa Vulindlela reading club. The sisters grew up listening to stories that were read to them by their father: “Father did a lot of reading. Oral stories, like family secrets seem to be coming out, now that we are old. This history has helped me to realise my identity.” Amina argued that this openness has helped the older generation to open up as well.

As the only grandchild in the family, Larisha receives a lot of attention from her grandparents and her aunt, Amina. “We all read storybooks to Larisha,” maintained Fatima. “I read her Charlie and the Chocolate Factory; The King, the mice and the cheese as well as other children’s novels. According to her Fatima, Larisha is currently reading Doctor Seuss.” Amina is reading Larisha The treasure hunt:

Winnie the Pooh. Nadia claimed that despite having been oriented to reading and storybooks at an early age, Larisha is struggling at school and that the reason she brought Larisha to the reading club is because she does not want her to feel stigmatised: "I brought her here [to Langa Vulindlela] because she's struggling a little with reading. I also want her to see that when you are struggling to read you are not alone in the struggle."

Amina further maintained that the reading club will help Larisha establish a love of books. Amina and Fatima both asserted that reading is important not only for a child's mental and language development but for adults as well. For them reading broadens one's imagination and it allows one to see into other people's lives. Unlike Amina though, who reads for her own pleasure, Larisha claimed not to have time to read novels because she always sits under a mountain of work at her workplace. She reads books that are contextualised around nursing to keep her up to date.

"Today's youth expect manna to fall from the sky"

Cathy is a fifty-four year old grandmother of three. She lives in a three-bedroom house with 12 family members including her daughters, sons and grandchildren. There are also two extended shacks outside. She is unemployed but sells baked fish for a living. One of her three grandchildren, the 10-year-old, Dineo, is a member of Langa Vulindlela. Cathy expressed sadness over today's youth that they "are lotus eaters that always expect the manna to fall from the sky." A good example according to her is Dineo who is lazy to read despite the fact that she's encouraged to read at the Langa Vulindlela reading club. Another one is her son "who is 17 but hates school with a passion." Catherine also maintained that today's youth is ignorant:

"Things that happened to the past do not concern them. They only live for today. My family anecdotes always land on deaf ears when I relate them to my children or grandchildren. They always laugh when I relate tell them about my difficult childhood. As a child, I had a cousin who went to prison. He used to tell us stories about prison life and warn us about the danger of going to prison. We appreciated these stories because they were not just real stories but were told in a storytelling format."

Stories, for Cathy, especially family anecdotes, help you grow as a person and they encourage listening skills. She argued that today's young children don't have these qualities because they would see "you as wasting their time and preventing them from watching television programmes."

STORIES SQUEEZED OUT BY THE STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE

Moving out from Langa Vulindlela we walked into Langa township and interviewed people and children who were not aware of the club. Deep in the heart of Langa we visited a crèche, quite by chance, since it appeared to be a house. The crèche was a small, single room. Outside the crèche, there were toddlers' toilets lined against the wall, with urine and faeces quite evident. The stench permeated the air and it was difficult to breathe inside and outside. Inside, there were small chairs and small tables for children to sit, an empty cupboard against the wall and a large table in the corner. There were no children's drawings on the walls and no books. There were four posters on the walls: a first aid poster, the Bill of Rights, one on numbers and one on "Good Habits". The children were rowdy and one of the teachers spent most of the time manipulating her cell phone, ignoring the children. Another one shouted loudly at the children, telling them to keep quiet. Bulelwa, a 48-year-old childminder, agreed to do an interview, while the others watched. One smelt of alcohol.

Bulelwa explained that she grew up hearing animal fables about the jackal from her grandmother. She said that the fables were very educational in that they were always warning you about danger. Reading for her, "perforates your mind" and that is the reason she reads together with her niece or assists her with her homework. Bulelwa claimed to be an avid reader of the You magazine and of the

Vukani community newspaper. Asked if she does relate stories to the toddlers in crèche, Bulelwa said the following,

"Yes, we do tell them stories especially when they've finished eating porridge in the morning or after play time in the afternoon, when we realise that they are tired."

Nearby to the crèche Vuyani, a 62-year-old grandfather was basking in the midday sun. Vuyani lives with his six grandchildren, his eldest son, and two daughters. He was babysitting his six grandchildren, while we talked. The eldest son works and the two daughters, who were not at home at the time, are unemployed. There was no furniture at all in the house, except for a two-burner stove, a cupboard, an electric kettle and two crates on which to sit.

"Telling stories to children is a fundamental part of children's growth because they acquire the knowledge of storytelling," claimed Vuyani, who seemed to be the only person in the household who took interest in the children's literacy development. "Sometimes I relate stories to my grandchildren just to kill time," he continued. The grandchildren do not go to the Langa Vulindlela reading club and the family have no knowledge of its existence. Vuyani stated that he enjoys reading the *Sunday Times*, *You* and the Vukani newspapers but confessed that the person in the family who was more into reading was his late uncle who was a writer and director of plays. There was not any form of literature at home "because teachers fear that the children will lose them."

"[Radio stories] would water the wells of those children who were not told stories at home"

Phumla, a 30-year-old mother of two, lives with her daughters, aged three and four; her 68-year-old mother; her aunt; her younger brother who's doing Grade 12; her younger sister, Busi; Busi's one-year-old son and four-year-old daughter. They all live in a three-bedroom brick house, which has an extended shack at the back. In between is a small vegetable garden in which Phumla's mother grows turnips, beetroot, tomatoes, lettuce, potatoes, onions, lentils and carrots. Phumla is unemployed and her mother is a pensioner.

Phumla shared events and experiences that explained the role storytelling played in her life as well as her siblings and cousins' lives: "I remember as a child, there was [a programme called] 'Zanendaba' ('the one who brings news') on radio. It was sponsored by Joko and was always on Saturday mornings. As children we would always make sure we didn't miss getting a taste of the stories." These storytelling sessions, according to Phumla, would "water the wells of those children who were not told stories at their homes." She continued: "I would be happy if radio stations could bring back those children's storytelling sessions because the children of today are glued like robots onto the television screen."

As a child, Phumla could plainly remember the storytelling events at night before bedtime. Her mother and grandmother mostly related the stories to her and her cousins. "The children were always involved and interested," recalled Phumla. According to her, she and her cousins never got enough of these stories and at times, they would even beg for more because her mother always had different types of stories to tell and she would tell them until the children fall asleep. The stories were like an "indirect message" to those who misbehaved, more like a disciplining tool. Nosipho, mentioned at above, who stated that the messages behind storytelling were often directed to ill mannered and lazy children expressed this sentiment. "You would know as a child that you need to clothe yourselves with a well refined manner," continued Nosipho. The tales were punctuated with proverbs such as, 'Isala-kutyelwa sibonwa ngolophu'. This means 'he who will not take advice will suffer a blood flow,' suggesting that the unwilling hearer will be brought to his senses by a violent calamitous experience.

Messages were also sometimes conveyed through animal characters. Children tried not to identify with the Jackal (Udyakalashé) because the jackal is "a trickster who often projects bad manners," said Phumla. Stories therefore carried with them indirect educational and cultural messages that operated

as a light that helped children “to choose the right path[s]” by identifying with animals that were full of wit and goodness.

The stories were also means of conveying cultural experience and values. Phumla also recalled how her mother would tell her stories about her childhood and anecdotes about her family and cultural knowledge about 'Intonjane' [A ritual of the passage of time which welcomes young women into womanhood], a practice, she felt that is non-existent into the minds of young people today. The children of today according to Phumla cannot read or tell stories. They are always “cemented onto their cell phones and television screens.” She referred to her younger sister, Yolanda, who could not summarise a Xhosa novel in her own words. Yolanda also confirmed that she does not read or tell stories to her two children because she does not “have time for that.” Phumla felt that there is a great need for Xhosa-speaking children to be oriented into storytelling and be taught about their traditional food, medicinal herbs and health-related issues, as this will help them to get a deeper understanding of their own culture. Storytelling according to her is very educational.

Even though in her childhood she and her siblings and cousins were not read to at home, Phumla developed a love of reading, which was further nurtured at school. Every morning, according to Phumla, every learner (from her school) was expected to read a story in the morning assembly. As a result, “you had to be fully prepared and you had to read with emphasis and understanding.” This enhanced her reading skills and this skill is perceptible in her mother who constantly visits the library in Langa to borrow out books. Phumla and her mother admitted to be bookworms and her mother reading anything from the Bible, isiXhosa and English novels. Phumla’s mother chimed in:

“We are all members of the library here! I usually take out Xhosa and English novels and at times I also read Yolanda’s school novels.”

We noticed a stack of the magazines in the house and a couple of school isiXhosa novels. Phumza gestured to these saying that these days she’s more into *You, Move and Glamour* magazines, but she also reads dictionaries, saying they are “something that will keep my mind focused.” Like Phumla, Yolanda has much interest in magazines. Buli indicated that she is more into romantic novels but admitted that she is not a fervent reader like her mother.

Despite being oriented into storytelling and reading at an early age and being aware that storytelling enhances imagination, Phumla and Buli have stopped the ritual of sharing stories and family anecdotes with the children: “We don’t read or tell stories to the children. They are busy with TV and movies. Sometimes they fall asleep in front of the TV.” She also mentioned shyly that her children and her sister’s do not go to the Langa Vulindlela reading club, which is about three minutes away from their home. However, Phumla did say that at times she teaches the alphabet to the children and encourages them to draw.

CONCLUSION

All in all, it seemed that Langa Vulindlela is something of an institution in Langa, providing both a ‘place’ for children and stories, and at the intellectual level, a mini-powerhouse for creativity and the adaptation of tradition in current conditions. It seemed that those who had been exposed to Langa Vulindlela, were very positive about stories in people’s lives. They were convinced that the club activities would make a difference to children’s development, both generally and in terms of particular skills; and also that the stimulation of imagination would benefit general cognitive development. The volunteers saw themselves as role models and took their roles very seriously. Spin-offs included the volunteers’ own roles in storytelling way beyond Langa Vulindlela, and their own creative activities in hybridizing stories and engaging with publishing and translation issues and questions. Despite all this, Langa

Vulindlela was not necessarily well known, even by people living close by, and its value not always perceived. There were also those who saw the club as simply being a place to drop the children for a morning of free care. This should not be seen as problematic, as it would offer a way in for some who are not taking children's development seriously, and the informality of the club certainly assists in this perception.

Almost all, however, realised the importance of stimulating children's development outside of schooling, and where this was not apparent, it was rather a function of the struggle to survive being the dominant theme. At the same time there was a kind of questioning about the role of tradition in the contemporary period, and whether it could simply be revived, or whether it needed to be adapted and modified to suit current conditions, where children's lives are saturated with and mediated by technologies and new media. Amongst all informants, a strong picture was painted of the harsh reality of urban life, the crowding out of family life and traditions by new media and the pressures of daily living.

On the use of the name Nal'ibali, many people felt that it was a very catchy name, that draws you in, attracts attention. In the old days there were techniques that drew attention to the moment a story was to be told. The point about how, if you tell stories during the day, you will "grow horns" was repeated many times by interviewees. So the idea of Nal'ibali carried some of that history. "I think of the word, 'Listen!', the telling of tales and listening to radio dramas. The name sounds very good because it translates its purpose: giving people stories."

Some were concerned that people may think the concept of storytelling outdated and only for people from rural areas, where that culture is still strong. Others "may think that this is something for kids only. We know it's for everybody but finding a way to make it appeal to teenagers and adults will be important."

The concept was seen as helping to integrate the 'modern' with the 'old' world. It is about reviving a tradition. But people were keen to point out that it should not be seen as only that, as that could alienate people. It also needs to be contemporary, for example, in hip-hop, stories are being told. Some raised the fact that the term could be linked with gossip, with simply telling stories about other people and what they are doing. But they then considered that this may also be a good thing, that this connotation makes it sound cool and contemporary, not simply allied with traditional ways.

NAL'IBALI FORMATIVE RESEARCH BRIEFINGS

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This is the second briefing undertaken as part of formative research for the Nal'ibali reading-for-enjoyment Campaign. The briefings focus on "Stories in People's Lives" and involve snapshots from three different parts of South Africa.



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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

