

# *Making Space for Literacy Learning: The Impact of Spatial and Temporal Organization in Constructing a Writing Subject in the Early Years*

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## **Abstract**

*The teaching of literacy is an embodied practice. Teacher's pedagogical practices are directed onto children's bodies. These practices are informed by teachers' own knowledge, experiences and beliefs about literacy as well as constructions of literacy in the curriculum. These shape literate subjects children become. It is through these practices that children become literate subjects. This article explores how children become 'writers', by using Foucault's work on power and the spatial as theoretical lenses. The article is underpinned by the view that everything happens in space. We construct space and space constructs us, social relations can only happen in space. But, because space and social relations are mutually constitutive, they can transform each other. Data is drawn from a research project using ethnographic methods in early years classrooms in South Africa. A spatial and temporal lens is applied to observations of the teaching of writing in two preschool classrooms (4-5 year olds and 5 to 6 year olds) and one Grade 1 classroom and illustrates how mundane practices are crucial to learning and teaching. It raises questions about how time and space across the early years produce literate subjects and the influence of globally of technicist approaches to literacy which have implications for teacher education.*

## **Keywords**

Early literacy, Foucault, space, time, writing in the early years, literate subject

## INTRODUCTION

The teaching of literacy is at the heart of the work teachers do. All teachers, regardless of the level they teach, the age of the children, or the subject they specialise in, require children to engage in a range of literacy practices – children listen to written texts, have written texts read to them, they read written texts, they write texts, they see texts in the classroom, they work with written, visual, and multimodal texts, they produce multimodal texts by doing something as simple as combining print with drawing, and they talk about texts.

If children are to be successful in school, careful, sustained, quality work by trained, early years teachers is crucial. This is an obvious but often underappreciated fact. Putting the foundations of literacy in place is fundamental to children’s performance. Children need to have internalised a range of basic literacy skills so that these skills are habituated, unconscious actions that enable them to focus on new content and skills as they move through school. Children cannot learn subjects like science, history and maths if they cannot decode and encode words fluently. But being literate is not only a school requirement. It is a requirement for life and a prerequisite for functioning in a global world; for being both a national and global citizen who can make a contribution to society. This means that children have to be able to use literacy for a range of social purposes, in appropriate, meaningful ways. Literacy then is not merely a set of decontextualised skills to be mastered. It is a set of social practices. How literacy is constructed in schools and classrooms is important. Street (2001, p. 8) argues that [t]he ways in which teachers or facilitators and their students interact is already a social practice that affects the nature of the literacy being learned and the ideas about literacy held by the participants, especially the new learners and their position in relations of power.

This argument is a cornerstone for this article. When there is an increasing emphasis on technicist approaches to education globally, where managerial and skill-based discourses predominate, and teachers are under pressure to teach to standards, teacher autonomy is eroded. This is evident in the presence of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in America and the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in South Africa which prescribes what teachers must cover, when it must be covered, and for how long (DoE, 2011). This trend is also particularly concerning with regards to early childhood education that is framed by ‘a technical search for a universal and stultifying “best practice” (Dalhberg, Moss & Pence, 2007, p. viii). This article argues that it is important to examine the nature of the social interactions around literacy and consider what the consequences are for children when particular understandings of literacy are in place.

A social practices perspective on literacy underpins the examination of conceptualisations and enactments of literacy teaching in early years classrooms. Early years teachers have

to manage young children as they enter schooling and train them to become literate subjects. How children are taught to become literate as they enter schooling has a long term impact on their future engagements with literacy. There are many ways in which the nature of these social interactions around literacy can be analysed. Using the work of Foucault, I focus on how the mundane and routine practices in the literacy classroom work to construct an emergent writing subject. The target of these practices is the body. Teachers' pedagogy, that is shaped by personal knowledge and experience, curricula and content knowledge, targets children's bodies so that a particular writing subject emerges (Luke, 1996).

There is a growing body of work in education that foregrounds the spatial (Christie, 2013; Comber, 2011; Fataar, 2007, 2009; Fors, Backstrom & Pink, 2013; Sheehy, 2009; Leander & Sheehy, 2004). This work draws on a range of theorists (e.g. Lefebvre, Foucault, Deleuze and Guttari, Massey) and from research in number of disciplines outside education. This paper is underpinned by Soja (1996) and Foucault's (2000) contention much intellectual thought of the previous two centuries foregrounded the historical to explain society. But it is insufficient to privilege time without considering space. Rather a trialectic, spatiality-historicity-sociality proposed by Soja (1996) is more useful in providing insights into practices, particularly those that are normalised and mundane. The spatial has as significant an impact on constructions of identity, self and subjectivity as do social and temporal relations.

Thus, in attempting to understand how children are trained to become literate, one specific aspect of literacy, emergent writing is focused on. Writing is under researched in South Africa (Dornbrack, nd.) and there are few South African studies that focus on writing in the early years (Dixon, 2007). An approach that views literacy as a set of social practices informs the article. In examining the positions 'new learners' hold in 'relations of power' (Street, 2001) the work of Foucault provides a theoretical lens.

## **Foucault: Power, Space and Time**

The role of schools is an important one for Foucault (1977). He argues that schools are one of the central institutions that work to regulate society. As places that reflect and replicate the values, norms, practices and cultures of the societies in which we live, schools educate and train children to function in society. In order to produce such subjects the operation of what Foucault (1977) refers to as modern power is required. Modern power operates through 'procedural techniques' that are often invisible because they are mundane (1980, p. 104). In targeting the body, a docile body is created, that can be 'manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces' (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). It is important to note that Foucault is not arguing for mindless docility, but that the principle of docility-utility operate. When we are subjected to power, and when we subject

ourselves to power, we learn to regulate our bodies and perform in useful, productive ways.

Unlike the Marxist view of power, Foucault's (1977) theory of power is generative because he does not see power as a top-down hierarchical relationship. In his work he presents several propositions about power (1977, 1978). He sees power as productive. But he does acknowledge that power can also be repressive. Secondly, power is directed at the body. In schools, pedagogical power is directed at the body – we are told by teachers to sit, stand, speak, read and write in certain ways. This pedagogical power, as Hunter (1994, p. 9) points out, is 'productive of human abilities; equipping students with distinctive capacities for ethical self-concern and self-cultivation'. In addition, power is not static, rather it circulates. Different people can hold power at different moments. Any teacher who has lost control of a class can understand this principle. Fourthly, power operates through the technologies of the self. These are the ways in which individuals police and monitor their own behaviour (Hutton, 1988).

Foucault contends that power and knowledge are joined through discourse. Discourses are historically contingent, subject to change, and limit how things can be talked about and by whom. He claims that 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (1977, p. 27). Foucault's understanding of discourse brings together the idea of discipline as both a body of knowledge (i.e. academic discipline), and disciplinary practices (means of social control). For example, the way in which a body is trained to write is directly related to the teachers' understanding of what writing is. An early years teacher who sees writing as the technical act of handwriting would produce 'scribes', whereas a teacher who sees it as a meaning making act is likely to produce 'authors' (Barton, 2007).

Disciplinary power creates individuals through the play of spatial distribution, the coding of activities, the accumulation of time and the composition of forces (Foucault, 1977, p. 167). The spatial and temporal according to Foucault (2000) are interlocked. Foucault makes a compelling argument that it is important not to see space as empty and fixed:

We do not live in a void, within which individuals and things might be located, we do not live in a void that would be tinged with simmering colours, we live inside an ensemble of relations that define emplacements [relations of proximity between points or elements p. 176] that are irreducible to each other and absolutely nonsuperposable (2000, p, 178).

Discipline, he states, 'proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space' through the techniques of enclosure (a space closed in on itself, like the school), partitioning (where

each individual has their own place and each place its allocated individual), the rule of functioning sites (where a space can have more than one use), and ranking (the place occupied in a system of classification) (Foucault 1977, pp. 141-146). Disciplinary time is insinuated into the body through the implementation of timetables, by the temporal elaboration of the act (breaking down activities into parts), the correlation of the body and the gesture (training bodies to complete tasks in the most efficient way), body-object articulation (the mastery of objects to be manipulated), and the practice of exhaustive use (Foucault, 1977, pp. 149-156). This results in an 'analytical pedagogy' that breaks down subjects into 'its simplest elements', hierarchises stages of development and examines performance (1977, p. 159).

Foucault's theory of power helps to explain the ways in which children are trained to become literate subjects. His notion of discourse enables an interrogation of the ways in which teachers understand the field of literacy and how this understanding translates into pedagogical practices that are directed at the body. In addition, the use of the spatial and temporal as techniques of disciplinary power enable a further understanding of the construction of the literate subject by focusing on the ways in which 'space is organised, how children are distributed in space, how time is ordered and controlled, [and] the movement of children and resources in space and across time' (Dixon, 2011, p. 5).

Before I discuss how emergent writing is constructed and changes over time across three early years classrooms, I present some of the methodological decisions made for this research.

## Methods

The data from this study is drawn from a quasi-longitudinal study that took place over a period of eighteen months in two schools: a preschool, and a primary school. The preschool, Acacia Preschool is the feeder school to Southside Primary<sup>1</sup>. The schools are located in the southern suburbs of Johannesburg in what was a traditionally white, lower middle and working class suburb. There has been a demographic shift as people have moved from the townships into these suburbs. They provide better access to places of work but are still close enough in proximity to the townships to maintain community ties. The schools represent the cultural, linguistic and racial diversity of the local community and outlying communities.

Five classrooms comprised the sites for the original study but only three are reported on in this article. The two preschool classrooms were a Grade 00 class of 4 to 5 year olds at Acacia and a Grade 0 class of 5 to 6 year olds at Southside. There were 23 children in the Grade 00 class and 26 in the Grade 0 class. The preschool classes are still considered to be part of informal schooling. Locating the study in preschool and primary classes enables

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<sup>1</sup>The names of the schools as well as the children are pseudonyms.

an analysis of changes over time. I followed several children from the Grade 0 class in to Grade 1 to track this transition. An observation of a handwriting lesson from one of the two grade one classes is reported here. There were 35 children in this class. Several data sets were collected: observations were recorded in fieldnotes and some were video or audio taped, interviews with the teachers were conducted at the end of each observation period, a range of children's artefacts and administrative records were collected.

Data was analysed by identifying literacy events. Heath (1983:93) describes a literacy event as 'any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretative processes.' I use literacy event to include drawing as well as writing. The literacy events presented here were chosen because they characterise routine, regularly observed lessons or activities in each classroom. It is from these events that literacy practices which provide insight into people's beliefs about literacy can be inferred. In order to do this each example is analysed according to the spatial organisation of the classroom, children's distribution within space, the movement of children and resources in space and across time.

## Learning to write

### Grade 00 Free drawing with Mick and Don

The classroom layout of this Grade 00 classroom is in contrast to the other two classrooms. The classroom is divided into two areas, one where the carpet, which itself is partitioned into a fantasy corner and a larger open carpet area, and one with work tables. The children's tables run across the length of the classroom opposite the carpet area. There are five hexagonal tables and one rectangular desk. The children are divided into groups by their teacher. The composition of the groups is based on ranking in terms of academic and linguistic ability<sup>2</sup>. After children have spent time on the carpet for the Morning Ring they are sent to their desks to complete a range of tasks for the day. Children begin at the table their group belongs to and then move on to the other tables to complete the tasks. By the end of this period each child should have completed all tasks – this is an example of the temporal elaboration of the act. Tasks may include puzzle building, free drawing, cutting and pasting pictures, completing perceptual worksheets, completing art tasks like painting, and baking. At times the fantasy play corner was also incorporated into these activities.

This spatial distribution enables the teacher to spend more time with children who need additional input. The position of the desks enables the teacher to move between them as well as to the carpet when children are also located there. Organising time and space in this way allows the children to have some autonomy in terms of the order of tasks completed. The fact that tasks are repeated enables the principle of exhaustive use to come into effect - where continuous practice results in mastery.

<sup>2</sup>In this classroom groups were reconstituted as children gained mastery of a range of tasks. This is in contrast to the more common practice in many South African primary school classrooms where once children are ranked and grouped their growth is not reflected in reconstituted ability groups.

The design of the hexagonal desks is effective for emergent writers. There is something quite ingenious about these tables – the corners create and maintain an individual space for children who need to learn how to control their bodies and literacy resources at the same time; but the shape invites collaboration. Collaboration and peer learning characterise this classroom space. This is evident in the ways in which the children interact with each other and it is evident in the distribution of resources. All materials for the exercises are provided and placed in the middle of the table depending on the task: glue, paper and scissors, khoki pens, newspaper, paper, paint, paintbrushes. These are illustrated by the photographs in Figure 1.

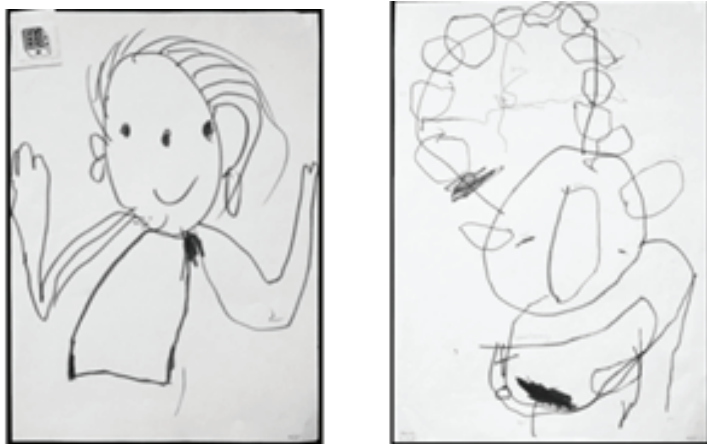


**Figure 1:** Photographs of hexagonal tables and resource placement in Grade 00

The placement of resources at the centre of each desk indicates that these are communal resources. In addition to learning how to master literacy implements like khoki pens, children also have to learn how to use shared resources. For example, children have to replace the khoki pens back into the centre container once they have finished using them before they take another colour. Placing khoki pens back into individual holes in the container is an example of the body-object articulation which requires a fair amount of fine-motor co-ordination.

Sitting together at these tables has other benefits for literacy learning. One of the daily activities children completed is free drawing. The organisation of space relates not just to the physical environment but the internal logic of writing is itself guided by spatial arrangements (Kress, 1997). Drawing and writing are complex bodily acts that require mastery of space on a page and also mental space when one produces texts. An example of an incident with two boys, Don and Mick, illustrates this. Both Don and Mick drew a picture of a human figure as seen in Figure 2. The conversation during the drawing indicated that Mick was influenced by Don's picture and this was a move away from the stick figures he had been drawing. Don's picture shows greater mastery in terms of balancing the proportions

of the figure and using the space of the page. His use of earrings show the gender of the figure. In contrast, Mick's picture is out of proportion. He is less skilled at using the space of the page and the result is a figure whose body parts are not proportional: the nose is bigger than the arms and two stick legs, and the head is about the same size as the body. Mick was fascinated by the representation of ears in Don's picture and replicated them in his own drawing. He was so excited by drawing ears that he repeated them: they are the circles around the top of the head. For some dramatic flair he also added a spider in the middle of the configuration of ears.



**Figure 2:** Don and Mick's free drawings

The organisation of this part of the school day into manageable tasks is one way of holding young children's attention. The position of resources and rules for using them creates a particular classroom environment and constructs a subject able to work with others. This is necessary for later schooling. The placement of children at desks creates an environment where children can learn from each other not just the teacher. The flexibility to create their own pictures allows for experimentation that encourages creativity and also gives children time to gain technical mastery through daily practice (exhaustive use). In this class literacy is a collaborative, meaning-making exercise.

### **Grade 0 Learning to look after yourself**

The children's desks are arranged in groups and take up most of the classroom space. Children sit in groups that are also ranked in terms of their academic ability. They spend a longer amount of time in their desks than the Grade 00 children (see Dixon 2011 for a fuller discussion on time). Once children sit in their allocated space, which is an example



of partitioning, they are expected to stay in their seats. Although language and reading lessons in this class were constructed communally this was not the case with 'writing' lessons. The fluidity of movement from one table to another in Grade 00 allowed for young bodies who could not sit still for long periods of time to still be productive. In the Grade 0 class the children's bodies are trained to sit still in their desks. In this class it is not just the body that needs to be regulated it is the voice. The teacher often began each lesson by getting the children to mime locking their mouths and throwing away the key. Whilst learning to work independently and in silence characterises many classrooms in the later years, what is lost is the opportunity for peer learning as evidenced in the Grade 00 classroom. In this Grade 0 classroom the operation of disciplinary power is visible and the children are placed in desks with instructions to behave so that 'the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all [on the same tasks]' by the teacher '[makes] the educational space function like a learning machine' (Foucault, 1977:147).

There is also a shift in the distribution of resources. All the children have their own resources. Their stationery is kept in the back storeroom. Stationery is only used when children are at their desks, in the time allocated in the timetable for more 'formal work'. The literate subject is one who is characterised as responsible. Stationery that is finished, like glue, needs to be replaced. At the end of each lesson used items have to be carefully packed away. The Grade 00 classroom environment that is characterised by conversation and sharing is replaced by a silent individual, working on their own, on a task with his/her own stationery. Being able to work independently, as an individual, is an important part of schooling. But when emergent writing tasks are so tightly constructed and formalised in what is still considered to be informal schooling, this has the potential to limit pleasure and creativity.

When one examines the range of tasks that children had to complete over the course of a year this argument becomes evident. The choice of tasks given to the children are strongly influenced by child development and school readiness discourses. The teacher in this class feels the pressure to make sure the children are 'ready' for Grade 1. The teacher herself is caught in a web of power relations, her performance as a teacher is judged by her children's performances. In addition to this, negative perceptions of the status preschool teachers as being appropriately qualified influence the kinds of tasks the teacher gives this class as well as the expectations she has of her children. This plays itself out in the teaching of emergent writing, particularly handwriting, where an entrenched view held by many South African teachers is that the teaching of writing is the hallowed domain of the Grade 1 teacher. This view is in direct contrast to Grave's observation, and the particular wishes of many children in this class, that children want to write (Newkirk & Kittle, 2013).

The power of development and school readiness discourses permeate the archive of Grade 0 work, shaping what constitutes early literacy, who the child is, the ways in which

children are trained to become literate, and the norms against which this work is judged. This archive comprises a file that each child had, kept in the classroom, with a record of all the 'written' work they had completed. I analysed the textual artefacts of one of the Grade 0 girls. It contained fifty seven pieces of work arranged in chronological order. There were no examples of free drawing although the class did do free drawing. Free drawing was sent home to parents. There were only four examples in the file where children were asked to draw their own pictures. Most of the tasks required children to colour in pictures, many which came from colouring in books. There were a few texts where children had used paint. The majority of tasks were perceptual worksheets that asked children to join the dots, identify images, match objects, etc. The file reveals that what is valued in the literate subject is a docile subject who can be measured against readiness norms, rather than one where creativity and imagination are equally valued.

### **Grade 1 Handwriting is a full body workout**

Although the previous example draws attention to prescriptive approaches to emergent writing, one of the skills that children do have to master is that of handwriting. The teaching of handwriting is a labour intensive exercise, and probably one of the heroically, mundane tasks of early years teachers. If the skills required for handwriting are not internalized and become habitual then children are disadvantaged. Graham's (2009) extensive research on handwriting points to far reaching effects on school performance when children do not master handwriting. Although many children who do not master handwriting are successful at school Graham's work does show a link between quality early handwriting instruction and a student's ability to write other texts. It is handwriting he argues that is often the primary constraint in early writing development, 'because if children cannot form letters – or cannot form them with reasonable legibility and speed – they cannot translate the language in their minds into written text' (Graham, 2009, p. 20).

The example presented in this section is a handwriting lesson of the letters 'a' and 't'. This lesson was videotaped and took place at the end of the first month of school. At this time the spatial organisation of the classroom was traditional with forty children seated in rows, two to a desk. Arranging children so that they face the chalkboard when they are learning to write alleviates a range of perceptual problems for the young writer. In terms of resources, the practice of individually owned stationery remains entrenched. Children had their handwriting books and a pencil. Depending on individuals' level of mastery, the teacher had written the date and some of the letters in red so that the children could trace over them (see Figure 3). Children who were more competent writers had red dots in the margins indicating the lines they were to write in.



*Figure 3: Example of a handwriting book*

The excerpts from this transcript of the lesson is a good example of an ‘analytic pedagogy’ that targets the body. Two aspects of the control of activity are clearly in place: the correlation of the body and the gesture which aims at imposing the ‘best relation between a gesture and the overall position of the body, which is its condition of efficiency and speed’(Foucault, 1977, p.152). The second is the body-object articulation where the parts of the body, and the parts of the instrument to be used are broken down and then correlated. The careful management of bodies in space, and the training of bodies to use the space of a page are crucial in teaching a large class.

The lesson begins with exercises to prepare the children for the rigors of writing:

Teacher: Put your hands at your sides...Lift your left shoulder up....Take your right arm and touch your left shoulder. Let your right arm touch your left ear...Stand next to the table. Don't lean on the table. Put your right elbow on your left knee.

The first set of instructions are a way of helping the children to focus through bodily training. Learning to write requires concentration. These exercises are not only a means of social control but also the embodiment of disciplinary knowledge. Requiring children to cross the midline indicates bilateral coordination. Children who cannot use both sides of their body at the same time will struggle with writing. The exercises place the children under surveillance and enable an informal assessment of them. The teacher explained that identifying children who struggled with crossing the midline and general balance and coordination at the beginning of the lesson meant that she could provide additional

support for them during the lesson. At this stage of the year the children were ranked alphabetically rather than academically and she had to think about her own movement through her movement in order to surveil and support the children.

The children are then told to sit down and take out their pencils. The teacher explains and demonstrates on the board:

- Teacher: Ok open your book to today's work....You see the four dots?  
Class: Yes  
Teacher: And today's date is the 28th of January. See where I write January – the capital letter goes over two spaces Grade 1s, alright?  
Class: Yes  
Teacher: Now you may start, you may write the date. I only want you to write the date nothing else (murmuring from class). And when we work we work quietly. Maxine face the front please. Quietly Grade 1s, no talking please. And try to remember to touch your lines. Just start with the date. Please touch the lines.

The references to the four dots draw attention to the space of the page helping children to identify where they need to write. Eventually the dots will be removed and children will have internalised the skills of directionality and laterality, as well as the starting points to begin writing. In addition to recognising letters of the alphabet, children have to master the shape and size and proportion of letters (Landy & Burrige, 1999). These are issues of spatiality. Not only do children need to know that capital letters are larger than lower case letters but these different spatial dimensions have to be demonstrated in their own writing. The teacher draws attention to this difference but also implicitly reinforces the convention that proper nouns begin with capital letters. The sequencing and pace of the lesson is controlled. Not only do children have to manage their bodies they also have to listen very carefully to systematic and sequenced steps in the lesson ('I only want you to write the date'). The children who had been in Grade 0 the previous year would be familiar with working silently as individuals on a teacher controlled task. Observations of these children revealed that for the most part they could regulate their own behaviour and remain on task.

The teacher's understanding of the skills that children need to master for handwriting are implicit in some instructions. Asking Maxine to face the front and Tina and Bongani, in the excerpt below, to put their feet in front of them, indicates her awareness of the relationship between posture and handwriting (Landy & Burrige, 1999). The operation of disciplinary power is evident: the teacher's knowledge of handwriting is directed at the body. This is also evident in the reference to fingerspaces where a level of fine motor control is needed as well as an ability to space letters evenly. Correct spacing indicates children's understanding

that combinations of letters make words and words carry meaning. An incorrect spacing of letters affects meaning. Although learning to create consistent fingerspaces between letters and words is a skill, not mastering this has implications for reading and meaning making.

Teacher: (on her way to the blackboard) Wonderful – some people are using two fingerspaces, some people are not using a fingerspace at all. Right, now that was the ‘t’ sound. What sound was that? And this word is written in your book already. I wonder who can tell me what this word is?

.....

Teacher: Tina sit nicely dear, put your feet in front of you. And who is this again from Letterland?

Class: T/t/Ticking Tess

.....

Teacher: Ticking Tess. Feet together please Bongani, feet together. Bongani put your feet together. (His one leg is stretched out in the aisle) Thank you. Right so we first write our Annie Apple, but remember she doesn’t start on the line she starts below the line, she goes up, around, she touches the line, she closes and comes straight down (she writes ‘a’). And next to her (continues writing) we are not going to make a big space, we write Ticking Tess. Trace over what is in your book. And we have your word: at.

.....

Teacher: (walks around the class checking the children’s work) We go up, around, close her and come straight down....Carry on you mustn’t lift your hand you must go straight down to the line curling like you did the others. Ok. Yes. (Back at the board) Now we are going to make the fingerspace – your two fingerspaces – make Annie Apple around, close Annie Apple, do the ‘t’ and we have our word at.....(she walks around giving help to children struggling)....

Annie Apple and Ticking Tess are characters in the Letterland phonics programme. Their presence reveals a phonics approach to teaching literacy as well as the presence of a systematic programme that aligns the teaching of handwriting to the teaching of reading. In this classroom handwriting lesson reinforce phonics content. The children learn how to write letters, and blending to make a word is reinforced.

An important part of the teaching of handwriting is letter formation. This requires an understanding of letter shapes as well as the movements and directions needed to write them. The teacher not only demonstrates to the children how to form the letters, so

they can see what they must do, she also explains how to form the letters ('Annie Apple remember she doesn't start on the line she starts below the line, she goes up, around, she touches the line, she closes and comes straight down'). Graham (2009) notes that children require access to visuals with arrows that show letter formation that they can trace before these scaffolded supports are removed. But, children who repeat the instructions for forming letters after the teacher perform less well because the language demands add to the cognitive demands the task requires.

The reference to tracing the letters raises some questions about the construction of literate subjects. Clark and Ivanic (1997) have argued that the demands for neat handwriting and particular handwriting styles can have an homogenising effect on populations. While the teacher in this class did want children to write neatly and produce well formed letters she allowed children's individual handwriting styles to emerge. But in many early years classrooms in South Africa where handwriting is the only form of writing taught and form is favoured over meaning, this potential homogenisation is concerning.

As children move from preschool to primary school they learn what it means to be literate. In this Grade 00 classroom the emphasis is on experimentation where creativity and technical mastery are fostered through collaboration. The timetable is flexible enough to include multiple tasks and the spatial layout of the classroom aligns with this construction. The construction of the emergent writer in Grade 0 is influenced by school readiness and technicist discourses that require children to master a set of skills. While children learn to be responsible by managing their resources and to work individually despite being seated in groups, the opportunities for experimentation are limited by these discourses. Learning to be responsible, independent workers holds children in good stead. What these lessons reveal is a particular knowledge of the skills needed to become literate. The combination of disciplinary knowledge and social control are seamlessly integrated in the Grade 1 lesson. Unfortunately in this primary school, as in many schools across the world, skills-based discourses permeate early years classrooms resulting in a view that conflates handwriting with writing. While mastering skills is important, the cost of not making space to develop thoughtful, creative literate subjects has long term consequences.

## Conclusion

Locating enactments of literacy practices across time and in space provides ways to compare and interrogate these practices. When South African children's literacy performances continue to be poor in a range of international assessments we need to ask questions about the quality of teaching they receive. Although such assessments are not always sensitive to local and contextual factors, and should be contested, the pattern of poor performance remains as the latest PIRLS results indicate (Howie et al., 2012). Data

indicates that what teachers consider literacy to be for children in primary school and how time is used are key factors.

Broad surveys and assessments across countries and population groups are useful in providing a general picture of trends (Spaull, 2013) but what they cannot reveal are the ways in which teacher knowledge of literacy is enacted in daily, routine practices. Teacher education does not do enough to disrupt the practices student teachers have internalised from their own schooling. In trying to cover content, theory and method, teacher education courses often miss a critical focus on the impact of mundane, invisible classroom practice.

Making space for spatial analysis perhaps enables a way for teacher educators and student teachers to engage in the work they do. Some of the questions that could be asked are:

- How were our bodies as educators and students shaped in the spaces we were schooled in?
- What invisible, mundane, routine and seemingly innocuous practices are we replicating and to what effect?
- What does it say about the ways in which schools are organised that productive literacy practices located in one classroom or school are not transferred to others?
- Why is it that productive practices in preschool classrooms that create highly disciplined children are not always valued in later schooling? (What does that say about the status of this phase of schooling?)
- How much of what happens during the mundane moments is coloured by who teachers assume children to be and not who children actually are?
- To what extent do teacher education courses make the relationship between disciplinary knowledge and social control explicit?

Foucault is correct in believing that space is not fixed – and the rule of functional sites demonstrates this effectively. Time, space and social relations are mutually constitutive, because they are so, this means that they can also be transformed. Understanding that space is not fixed has a powerful transformative potential in shifting practice. Teachers can organise their classrooms differently, children can be moved in space. Thinking about space and time as flexible means that the social relations teachers have with children can be altered so that, in this case children can become competent scribes and authors.

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