

Indigenous knowledge systems and early literacy development: An analysis of isiXhosa and isiZulu traditional children's folktales and songs

Vuyokazi Nomlomo and Zilungile Sosibo

Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of IsiXhosa and IsiZulu folktales and traditional children's songs in order to highlight the relationship between Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and early literacy development in young children. Through the lens of the cognitive and socio-cultural theories, it explores the kind of knowledge embedded in the IsiXhosa and IsiZulu folktales and traditional children's songs, and the value and relevance of such knowledge in supporting early literacy development. It argues that oral literacy in indigenous languages has always existed, but became dormant and invisible as a result of assimilation and acculturation into the Western norms. The paper concludes with an acknowledgement that folktales and traditional children's songs are a rich and perennial reservoir through which young learners can acquire not only literacy skills, but also cognitive, linguistic and social skills that can help them to become active citizens in the world and the workplace.

Introduction

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) as a field of research has received attention, both internationally and nationally over the past two decades, particularly in Science and Technology (Ogunniyi 1996; Van Wyk 2002; Diwu 2010). IKS research has spread to other fields such as education and African languages, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Hoppers 2004; Nyota et al. 2008; Mapara 2009; Gudhlanga et al. 2012; Meyiwa et al. 2013). In South Africa, IKS became part of the curriculum after 1994 in order to acknowledge the history and cultural heritage of the country (Department of Education (DoE) 2002, 2005; Department of Basic Education (DBE) 2012: 5). It was introduced in education as a means of transformation and of accommodating diversity to foster social cohesion and sustainable development (Battiste 2005; Themane et al. 2011). It is acknowledged in the curriculum, particularly in language learning, as a means of providing learners with aesthetic, cultural and imaginative abilities which enable them to understand the world (DoE 2002, 2005; DBE 2012: 8). In this way, IKS is viewed as a powerful tool of identity construction that reflects language and power relations (DoE 2002).

- Palincsar SA 1998. Social constructivist perspective on teaching and learning. *Annual Rev*, 49: 345-375.
- Piaget J 1973. *The Child and Reality: Problems of Genetic Ppsychology*. Oxford, England: Grossman.
- Prah KK 2003. Going native: Language of instruction for education, development and African emancipation. In: B Brock-Utne, Z Desai, M Qorro (Eds.): *Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa* (LOITASA). Dar-es-Salaam: E & D Limited.
- Pretorius EJ, Machet MP 2004. Literacy and disadvantage: Learners' achievements in the early primary school years. *Africa Review of Education*, 1: 128-146.
- Prosper A 2012. *What do Grade 1 Learners Write? A Study of Literacy Development at a Multilingual Primary School in the Western Cape*. MEd Thesis, Unpublished. Cape Town: University of the Western Cape.
- Sivasubramaniam S 2013. Folktales in Language Classrooms. *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies*, 23(1): 62-73.
- Stein P 2008. *Multimodal Pedagogies in Diverse Classrooms: Representation, Rights and Resources*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Street B 1984. *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Street B 1995. *Social Literacies*. London: Longman. Street B 2005. *Literacies across Educational Contexts: Mediating Learning and Teaching*. Philadelphia: Caslon Publishing.
- Themane MJ, Mamabolo JM 2011. Diversity as a Curriculum Challenge in South African Schools. From <<http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/promo/2011/themane.pdf>> (Retrieved 4 October 2014).
- Turuk MC 2008. The relevance and implications of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in the second language classroom: *ARECLS*, 5: 244-262.
- Van Wyk JA 2002. Indigenous knowledge systems: Implications for natural science and technology teaching and learning. *South African Journal of Education*, 22: 305-312.
- Vygotsky LS 1987. *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky*. New York: Plenum.
- Yilmaz K 2008. Constructivism: Its theoretical underpinnings, variations, and implications for classroom instruction. *Educational Horizons*, 86: 161-172.