Journal for Language Teaching **57(2) 2023, 21 pages**
https://doi.org/10.56285/jltVol57iss2a5950

Stylising agency, identity and solidarities in South African English language classrooms

Salomé Romylos
North-West University, South Africa
E-mail: salome.romylos@nwu.ac.za

Muchativugwa Liberty Hove
North-West University, South Africa
E-mail: 22055215@nwu.ac.za

ABSTRACT

In a call for papers, the English Academy of Southern Africa (EASA) problematises what we perceive as the challenges of stylising agency, identity and solidarities in South African literature in English and English Language classroom encounters. The academy argues that speaking of literature and literacy in a single breath is to assume a linear relationship between literature and literacy. In interrogating ways of reading, this article contends that such proficiency is unstable and shifting, subject to different contexts and approaches inasmuch as these diverse ways are contingent upon material and technological changes. The strategies of particular teachers in particular contexts are shared while we draw on Rosi Braidotti's (2019) critical research perspective, which enables us to perform two methodological moves: a critical philosophical and ethnographic exploration of the concept literacies and then generating affirmative propositions for thinking about teaching and reading for meaning in South African classrooms. Prescribed textbooks for Further Education and Training (FET) phase learners were analysed to reveal the questions posed at learners. Then, the observation of two pre-service teachers revealed questioning techniques in varied contexts, shedding light on their agency and identities as instructors in training. The data analysis are reflective and in situ while we applied hermeneutic heuristics as strategy.

Keywords: identity, literacies, multilingualism, pedagogical content knowledge, questioning, stylising agency,

CITATION

Romylos, S. & Hove, M.L. 2023. Stylising agency, identity and solidarities in South African English language classrooms. *Journal for Language Teaching* 57(2): Article 5950. https://doi.org/10.56285/jltVol57iss2a5950

eISSN: 2958-9320

1. Introduction

Student literacies and university readiness

Trimbur (2009: 1) observes that there has been a significant shift in the politics of language, particularly concerning English and its representations, circulation, and enactments in the post-apartheid period. He attributes these shifts to three reasons: English is not Afrikaans, a language tainted by its historical links to apartheid and the extremist nationalism of the National Party; English is not an African language, and while university institutional policies gesture towards the post-apartheid desire for multilingualism by promoting African languages as LoLT in theory, the same African languages continue to be marginalised in practice; and English is promoted as the de facto LoLT, with Heugh (1990: 2) proleptically calling on a 'democratic variety of South African English.' In 1996, Neville Alexander indicted this re-inscription of English and almost three decades since, this has remained the case. In terms of student literacies and the entanglements linked to university readiness, the English language remains associated with spatial and social mobility, entrepreneurial values, and empowerment of a black middle class. In many studies, there is irrefutable evidence that black parents overwhelmingly wish their children to be schooled in English, to acquire the necessary cultural capital to get ahead in a globalised world order (Plüddemann, 2015; Kretzer & Kashula, 2020). This is the point that emerges when drawing on a critical view, we need to 'deconstruct and make transparent relations of power that contribute to the (re)production of social and epistemic inequalities between individuals in specific contexts' (Milani 2008: 32). Even with such inclinations, uneven and unequal student literacies complicate the terrain as English is asymmetrically distributed in stratified ways that have recast but not overturned the old hierarchies of empire (Trimbur, 2009: 715).

The research problem emanates from an intellectual and pedagogical curiosity to estimate how our teachers enact and promote teaching strategies reflective of the intersection of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), English as first additional language (EFAL) and teacher agency. We document that symbiotic relationship to generate insights into teaching and questioning as instances of knowledge production.

We are interested in tracing the student teachers that we, as university lecturers, train in the School for Language Education (SLE) at one university in South Africa so that we establish how they stylise agency, how they participate in dynamic identity constructions and facilitate reading for meaning in South African English language and literature in English classrooms. Stylising agency in this context entails the ability to infuse a very idiosyncratic manner of teaching.

2. Research questions

Following a taxonomy of questions developed in situ, this article seeks to address the following problems:

- What types of questions in Literature in English and English second language multilingual classrooms generate disciplinary reading episodes?
- How do university lecturers initiate and apprentice practising teachers to enact stylising in varieties of English?

Disciplinary reading episodes entail the meanings that students attach to the texts they read, and how they negotiate and develop meaning. We strive to interpret the questions that teachers ask in their negotiation of texts and contexts as we perceive these practices as engendering rich scholarship that pushes methodological discourse on matters such as ethics, reflexivity, and relationality, while simultaneously meditating on the promise of student specificity in educational research and praxis. Ultimately, we are interested in how questions and questioning might engender ethical and generative relationality with South African students at the nexus of pedagogy, research, language and literary contexts. The creative questioning and presentation of pedagogic tasks of student teachers are being compared to the textbook questions. The next section will initiate the literature review of this research.

Pedagogic dynamics in South African English language classrooms

The training model followed in SLE is an integrated one, i.e. we focus on subject content-knowledge (SCK) and pedagogical knowledge (PK) simultaneously as we tackle pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). This integration of content and pedagogy privileges that ultimate quest to train teachers for the future who are both knowledgeable in the literacies and practices of teaching that literature and language to 'other people's children' (Delpit, 2006). This amalgamation of content and pedagogy into pedagogical content knowledge is comprehensively defined by Shulman (1986: 6) as:

> the most regularly taught topics in one's subject area, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations – in a word, the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others. Since there is no single most powerful form of representation, the teacher must have at hand a veritable armamentarium of alternative forms of representation, some of which derive from research whereas others originate in the wisdom of practice.

In an integrated approach followed by the Faculty of Education at one university, this blend of content- and pedagogical knowledge into pedagogical content knowledge is what students are expected to demonstrate in their teaching. PCK entails making choices about the content that teachers share with learners and how they choose to share this content while keeping the prescribed curriculum in mind, the current grade that learners are in, learners' abilities, interests, beliefs, and experiences. Even though these knowledge domains, such as content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge may be defined separately, one needs to be cognisant that in the art of teaching, these are stylised and integrated. The orchestration of the blending of these domains is crucial for successful teaching while teachers display agency, style and identity. Grossman and Shulman (1994: 27) call the teacher "the practical broker and interpreter of the curriculum," while Breen, Illesca and Doecke (2018: 252) extend this role to affirm the deeply relational and ethically responsive stance that teachers take in exploring the complexities of language and literature classrooms.

Shulman divided the category of content knowledge into subject matter-, pedagogical content- and curricular knowledge with content knowledge referring to the "amount and organisation of content knowledge in the minds of teachers", and curriculum knowledge referring to the "full range of programmes designed for the teaching of particular subjects and topics at a given level" (Shulman, 1986: 9). Shulman later added more categories to the knowledge base of teachers, namely general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds (Shulman, 1986: 8). Shulman's model of teachers' knowledge is by no means the only or even preferred model. It has, however, served as a basis for subsequent models. There is no one-size fits all model of teacher knowledge domains and being prescriptive may point to a negation of the diverse contexts within which teachers work. Agency of the teacher is important not to render teachers' knowledge as generic. Each teacher brings with them their own repertoire of strategies, beliefs and values and these affect how they stylise agency, identity and solidarities in South African English language classrooms as mentioned earlier.

The assumption that stable bodies of knowledge fit into these knowledge domains has been criticised, as knowledge may be seen as remote from the classroom and the complexity of discursive and non-discursive classroom practices are ignored (Doecke et al., 2004, Doecke, 2019, Yandell, 2020). The arguments remain that English and specifically the teaching of literature is not as hierarchically organised as mathematics (Grossman, 1993). Macken-Horarik (2014: 9) speaks of the "unstable knowledge structure" of English and believes that "defining it has been problematic", whereas Green (2016) is of the opinion that the subject English cannot be thought of as having a stable body of knowledge. Yandell (2017: 589) sees the idea of "transformation of knowledge" as "objectivist." This refers to the notion that the process of

change and dynamics in understanding the world is based on universal truths that can be systematically discovered and verified through empirical methods. Individual interpretations and perceptions are not valued, and knowledge is seen as pre-packaged. What is being questioned is whether this notion of transformation is adequate to explain the dialogical nature of English language and literature in English classrooms and the way meanings are constructed and negotiated by teachers and learners simultaneously as they engage with texts while co-constructing ever new knowledges. These arguments against the compartmentalisation of English as subject does not mean there is no content to teach, but what is considered worthy of exploration should be pursued with learners in the social and cultural settings of the classroom. Doecke and Mead (2018: 254) argue that literary works constitute "their own kind of knowledge which can only be understood in all their complexity when the social and linguistic relationships that constitute the context of their reception are understood as primary, including their reception in the everyday world of the classroom." Said (2000: 457) maintains that it is more productive to see history and literature as "mediated by the critical consciousness and the mind of the reader and critic rather than inert bodies of experience" or as "disciplines that exist out there to be mastered by professionals and experts."

What emerges from the previous section is that the teaching of language and literature in English does not entail the inducting of students into particular ways of thinking relevant to the field of teaching literature in English. Literature should not be taught in compartments focusing for example on literary elements, which is very much standard practice at secondary schools in South Africa. This practice may create the perception that setting, character, themes, point of view, style etc. are distinct from one another in a literary work while they are in fact all discursively interwoven.

Another purpose in this article is to examine the spread of English by considering two sociolinguistic metaphors, flows and varieties, that have been used extensively to describe the *circulation* of English in the post-apartheid state. Flow and varieties are organic figures of speech. They are derived from the natural sciences and they uncannily invest the ostensible globalisation of English with a cultural logic of inevitability, identified, on one hand, in terms of the *flow* of English, with the relentless movement of water or lava and, on the other, in the guise of new *varieties* of English, with evolutionary processes of variability and speciation across the South African linguistic landscape. In the idioms of flow and varieties, language is figured unproblematically, in each case, as a natural phenomenon or a genetic population controlled by the laws of nature rather than a contested resource of representation in semiotic activity. As an alternative to these naturalised representations of the spread of English, we propose to take SLE and the university as a unique case study to insert the sociolinguistic term "styling" into an analysis of what has otherwise been seen as 'natural' in the global flow of English and its indigenisation in South African varieties.

The flaws in flows

The term 'flaws' conjures defects, disruptions and imperfections. The homophone 'flows' invokes uninterrupted drift and movement, a seamless and near-perfect connection in language use in our case. In a chapter called 'Locality, the periphery and images of the world', Jan Blommaert (2013: 63) introduces the notion of flows to signify, in the sociolinguistics of globalization theories, the collapse or porousness of national boundaries, the increased velocity of the circulation of information and capital enabled by information technologies, and the reconstitution of economic and cultural activity in nodes located in a neoliberal global network. Blommaert takes 'flows and varieties' from a lineage traceable to other globalisation critics and theorists (Appadurai, 1990; Pennycook, 1994; Hardt & Negri, 2000), but the fallacies in this construal of languaging in multilingual societies are clearly identified in Ferguson and Mansbach (2012). They are incisive in this critique:

> We have grown accustomed to a language of global "flows" in thinking about "globalisation," but flow is a peculiarly poor metaphor for the point-to-point connectivity and networking of enclaves that confront us when we examine Africa's experience of globalisation. Such language literally naturalizes globalisation by making it analogous to the natural process of flowing water… But as the contemporary African material shows so vividly, the "global" does not "flow," thereby connecting and watering contiguous spaces; it hops instead, efficiently connecting the enclaved points in the network while excluding (with equal efficiency) the spaces that lie between the points.

It is this exclusion of the spaces in-between that is focalised in the critique of flows such that as we trace the classroom encounters of our students, we identify the hiatus. Rather than flows, what we encounter in classrooms is a selective interconnection of premium narratives, premium languages and questions on interpretation wherein practising teachers strive to embody agency in stylising identity and solidarities in their classrooms.

Varieties of English has been a widely used but problematic term in explaining language diversity in South Africa. Varieties entail differences in languages, dialect, accent, sociolect, style, and register. Braj Kachru (1990) used varieties of English to designate and validate Postcolonial Englishes (PCEs) developed by non-native and non-monolingual speakers and writers of English. For Kachru and others, varieties of English approximate metropolitan standards as full-fledged Englishes in their own right, in an increasingly diverse and polycentric Anglophone world. Our interest in these varieties of English stems from the term's metaphorical properties and how it invokes the discourse and authority of the natural sciences, in particular ideas about speciation. Varieties of English in South Africa therefore occupy those spaces between species and individual languages, suffused with diverse accents, styles and

registers. There are also diverse forms of questioning in South African literature and English language classrooms that either inhibit or allow for probing, elaboration and reflexivity.

The notion of stylising offers a particularly apt explanation of the representation, circulation, and use of English in post-apartheid South Africa, enabling analysis not of the differentiation of an indigenised national variety but of the dispersed and differential pathways through which English travels. We adopt stylising from Trimbur (2009: 723), who uses "stylising" to mean assigning a more performative and productive role to language variation, to see it as not simply a reflection of social categories but, in a matrix of styled behaviour, constitutive, an exercise of semiotic agency that draws on the available resources of representation (spoken language, text, gesture, questioning, integrating concepts, iteration, emphasis), often combining them in novel or surprising or exaggerated ways, to articulate new identities, relationships, and social solidarities.

In this conceptualisation then, stylising is a process of bricolage, "intentional communication" that samples and mixes semiotic elements, whose meanings are not pre-coded but rather activated through stylistic choice and practice.

To return to the student teacher and their classroom practices, we, as faculty members suggest that our students keep specific lesson components in mind when teaching their learners. These are strategic suggestions to guide students in the execution of their lessons and we do not regard lesson plans as sacrosanct but rather dynamic and elastic. Pre-service teachers have been exposed to teaching for 12+ years before they start their teacher training, and this is what Lortie (1975: 61) refers to as the "apprenticeship of observation." Buchanan (2015: 702) posits that this 'apprenticeship of observation' has a profound influence on pre-service teachers' "understanding of the work and role of a teacher as well as on their own teaching practice." These students therefore enter teacher training with specific ideas of how they want to or do not want to teach. These ideas constantly change as pre-service students develop their CK, PK and PCK. Who teachers are in terms of identity is also subject to change due to external factors, such as school contexts, curriculum, social-, historical- and political forces which contribute to teacher identity. Bakhtin (1981) speaks of a dialogical self, and he believes that our identities are connected to those of others. The self is always in dialogue with more knowledgeable others. Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* is relevant in that it points to the polyphony within discourses (Hove, 2014). Romylos (2018: 42) argues that "teachers have specific ideas about the main aims of their subjects, they have certain orientations towards teaching these subjects, and they have ideas about the learners whom they teach." These ideas do not always coincide with the different role players associated with teaching, such as curriculum developers, parents and principals. This may result in competing discourses. An example may be a pre-service teacher believing in the effectivity of traditional teaching methods based on her own success

as a learner. This same pre-service teacher may start renegotiating her ideas about teaching methods to include more constructivist ways of teaching once exposed to different modalities of teaching during her teacher training. Thus, agency becomes foregrounded as pre-service teachers "manage the external demands with their own internal convictions"; a balancing act that may be "fraught with conflict" (Romylos, 2018: 45). What we explore and develop are the contextually strategic professional actions that pre-service teachers enact in their classrooms when considering the parameters mediating these actions.

The lesson components referred to are context, introduction, pertinent question/s, teaching strategies, learner activities, assessment, resources, and smart task (task-based activity based on the last three cognitive levels of Bloom's taxonomy, namely evaluating, appreciating, or creating) and adhering to being specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and traceable. Content knowledge (CK), general pedagogical knowledge (GPK), subject specific content knowledge (SCK), pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and knowledge of contexts (KoC) are relevant to varying degrees in these components.

We do not elaborate on all these components as what concerns this article are the types of questions in literature in English and English second language multilingual classrooms that generate disciplinary reading episodes. Questions and questioning occur at any phase of any lesson and serve as catalyst for providing entry points into the thoughts and ideas of students, the meanings that they attach to the texts, and the re-interpretations that they develop in the meaning-making episodes.

As we tackle agency and solidarities in literature and English second language classrooms, we privilege teacher-led questions and questioning techniques that play a significant role, specifically in boosting students' comprehension of subject matter. Teachers ask questions to guide meaning-making interactions and to scaffold their students' learning. Questioning helps narrow the gap between students' actual knowledge and the knowledge they are expected to gain in collaboration with the lecturer and teacher who are the more knowledgeable Other regarding the subject. Teacher questions affect the nature of students' interpretation and reasoning, determining therefore the quality and level of students' participation. That is, the quests embedded in questions become indices of quality teaching, generating strong disciplinary reading episodes (DREs). In addition, research has documented that high dialogic teacher talk positively predicts academic outcomes (McKenna et al., 2020). In essence, we understand stylising as a part of a rhetoric of identification and division, whereby individuals and groups draw upon the available means of representation to align with and collaborate with other individuals and groups. One of the components suggested in the pre-service teachers' lesson plans entails pertinent questions. The pertinent question activates prior knowledge of learners and develops critical thinking skills. Answers to these questions allow teachers to

gauge what learners already know and the gaps they may have in constructing new meanings that extend their knowledge. These questions should be open-ended, eliciting varied and elaborate responses from learners. It is important that connections to real-life be made as content should not be seen as remote and discrete. When a teacher is, for example, teaching the short story *On Her Knees* by Tim Winton, and focuses on the theme of racial prejudice and social division in society, a pertinent question may be: how do class divisions affect society? A lesson on pragmatics may be introduced by asking what causes breakdowns in communication between people, while an introductory question to the novel, *Atonement*, by Ian McEwan may be whether atonement is possible for an atheist?

The dialogic method is modelled to pre-service teachers when literary texts are discussed. This method of questioning encourages narration, explanation, analysis, evaluation and justification of ideas and perceptions. Dialogic teaching and learning positively affect many aspects such as language development and communication (Van der Veen et al., 2017); critical thinking (Alexander, 2018); social cohesion and democratic values (Valero et al., 2017), as well as equipping students to be agents of change. Discussions ensuing from the dialogic method are the bedrock of literary analysis and critical thought. Another method modelled by lecturers in the literature class is Socratic elenchus, a term derived from the ancient Greek word ἔλεγχος, meaning refutation and scrutiny. Socrates believed that knowledge is gained in a "dialectical process and relation to others" and that dialogue "helps us to revise our presuppositions and reach agreement with others" (Hani, 2022: 182).

Questions provide pace to every teaching act. These interrogative moments serve three purposes: interpretative (what questions), descriptive (how questions) and the provision of a rationale (why questions). The simplest form of questioning as a pedagogical strategy would be the explanations conveyed through 'when' and 'where' elicitations; the deepest of questions are pitched at the 'how' and 'why' levels. How far a teacher plumbs the depths in such questioning strategies depends in large measure on the analytic and evaluative accents of the students one is teaching.

The national *Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement, Grades 10-12* (hereafter referred to as CAPS) specifies that questions should stimulate participation and advises teachers to excise interpreting literature *for* learners but to instead allow them to participate, explore and reason (Department of Basic Education 2011: 17). Interpretation is more about what is meaningful to the reader, than the focus on what is right or wrong. The CAPS document also encourages class discussions, especially ones that lead to written tasks through which the students analyse, evaluate and synthesise concepts (Department of Basic Education 2011).

The kind of activities learners do at schools in First Additional Language (FAL) and English First Additional Language (EFAL) currently do not prepare them to be students of critical

language literacies and literature at university. Subsequently, they struggle to answer deep questions that require analytical and evaluative skills.

3. Research design and methodology

As mentioned earlier, this research entails a critical philosophical and ethnographic exploration of the concept literacies and then generating affirmative propositions for thinking about teaching and reading for meaning in South African classrooms. Two pre-service teachers, named using pseudonyms, were observed in practice while teaching literature lessons and gave permission for the data of the observations used. In addition, we looked at the types of questions posed in the prescribed anthologies to determine how learners' reading episodes are shaped. What we wanted to see was how they navigate reading disciplines in their classrooms and how they orchestrate agency, style and their own unique identities. Hermeneutic heuristics is applied as data analysis strategy as we interpret texts (questioning techniques of textbooks) and gain insight into how these may shape students' interpretations thereof.

We traced the problem of a lack of applying critical thinking of students to the prevalence of lower order questions in high school textbooks and to some of the second-year module tasks in our university that ask learners to memorise for multiple-choice questions and regurgitate rather than to apply critical literacy skills. These questions relate to a generic module concerned with teaching content subjects through medium of English.

For the prescribed short story anthologies in Grade 10, 11 and 12, we reviewed the nature of activities provided for learners in prescribed English Further Education and Training (FET) short story textbooks, the extent to which the activities promote critical literacy in learners and how these activities prepare learners for higher education studies in English.

Short stories are selected and prescribed for study according to the interests and needs of learners. The activities set on the stories should be interesting as much as they should be challenging and allow students to develop critical reasoning, setting an agenda for stylising agency. They should boost learners' participation in conversations that demand higher levels of thinking. Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) state that short stories challenge and encourage learners to be creative in their process of interpreting language and literary texts, furthering the argument that short story teaching and learning values the diverse repertoires which learners bring to class. PCK of teachers therefore evokes learners' interests in learning short stories, as they may be asked to also write theirs, either as a reflection of the learnt story or a new project.

It is important therefore to exhibit sufficient SCK and PCK repertoires in interpreting stories in relation to sociocultural contexts.

4. Ethics considerations

We adhered to the ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice and respect. No participant endured any discomfort or harm due to this research. We endeavoured to do justice to participants by reporting honestly on what emerged from the data. The next section pertains to the findings that emanated from the analysis of the textbooks and the observations of the two students.

5. Findings

Due to the scope of the article, we will only share some of our observations in terms of the textbooks and questioning techniques and also what we witnessed in the lessons.

All textbooks that were analysed in this study barely have any visual aids. They are largely text-based. Essa and Mendelowitz (2022) argue that language should apply multiple modes, or multimodalities in the parlance of Blommaert and Horner (2017), so that learners are not limited to the visuality of print-based material but concurrently exposed to performance-based story-reading and storytelling. Different cognitive levels of questions should be applied as they inaugurate interaction between learners and text, generating spaces for self-directed learning (Fasselt, et al., 2020). Questions which are well-designed lead to new perceptions, trigger discussions, and develop understanding of the subject matter.

Some research has shown that there are contradicting points of view about using different questioning levels, to the point that the authors suggested the use of both lower- and higher-level questions (Freahat & Smadi, 2014). This is because both types serve different purposes: lower-order questions are used to assess basic skills, while higher-order questions develop critical thinking skills. Research has confirmed that textbook authors use a disproportionate number of lower order questions and this hampers learners' ability to develop critical thinking skills; learners are trained to memorise, but not to be critical thinkers (Freahat & Smadi, 2014). Freire (1972) and McLaren (1989) both see education as an action to bring freedom, not to memorise.

At school level, teachers are obliged to adhere to the suggested cognitive levels of Barrett's taxonomy when setting questions for their learners in the FET phase (Grades 10-12). The cognitive levels and subsequent weightings are Level 1 (literal) and 2 (reorganisation) constituting 40%; level 3 (inference), constituting another 40%, and levels 4 and 5, entailing

evaluation and appreciation respectively and which should constitute 20% of the paper Department of Basic Education, 2011: 79). Papers and tasks may be scrutinised by head of departments to verify whether teachers adhere to these cognitive levels and weightings. By this we do not say that learners and students should not be exposed to questions of varied cognitive levels. However, those few questions that are supposedly on higher cognitive levels oftentimes do not really develop higher order thinking. Two such questions come from the National Senior Certificate Paper 2 (2022) based on *Cry, the beloved country* by Alan Paton. The questions read as follows:

- Reverend Msimangu is fair in judging Absalom's girlfriend harshly. Discuss your view; and
- John Kumalo makes a good decision by going to Johannesburg. Discuss your view.

Three marks were allocated to each of these questions. Although learners are not awarded marks for yes/no responses, these questions do not really require deep and critical thinking, but rather a formulation of an opinion.

Education should address inequalities (Giroux, 1989; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Therefore, curriculum advisors must examine the conditions of school knowledge in terms of how it is produced and what particular interests it might serve. This implies that education is capable of producing certain forms of critical literacy which encourages learners to critique "dominant forms of knowledge", hence giving learners a voice and identity, as they also evaluate their own experiences in the process. In an attempt to highlight the critical literacy of English teachers, Justice and Tenore (2018) include in their book several voices of critical teachers who tell their stories.

We analysed three textbooks that are prescribed for the FET phase. These are:

1. **ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE GRADE 10**
   Dlamini, L. Z. 2016. *Fabulous: An Anthology of Short Stories*. Wynberg: Ilima Publishers.

2. **ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE GRADE 11**
   Krone, B., Mattson, E. 2015. *Short Story Anthology*. Pietermaritzburg: Shutter and Shooter Publishers.

3. **ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE GRADE 12**
   Walter, B. 2015. *Changes: An Anthology of Short Stories*. Midrand: Marang Publishers.

The suggested practices in teaching reading and literary appreciation are to design pre-reading activities, then follow this with while-reading and post-reading tasks. One of the pre-reading tasks in *Changes: An Anthology of short stories* (2015) is the following:

- Discuss some of your happy earlier childhood moments, especially the games you used to play or the type of amusement that brought you much pleasure.
- Are there some family chores which you performed during your younger years, but which you would rather forget? If possible, share these experiences with your classmates.
- Prejudice can take many forms - class, ethnic, gender, religious, racial, national, generational: discuss these and share some uplifting experiences of triumph.

The next segment defines activities and questions on the story:

- In terms of point of view or position of narrator of the events of a story, can you observe a similarity between "A Gathering of Bald Men" and "The Park"?
- What is the central conflict advanced by the story? How does the unnamed protagonist resolve it?
- What inner conflict is experienced by the park attendant? Does he resolve it? If so, how?
- Naming of characters is apparently not the author's main focus: what thematic intention does this serve?
- "The Park" may be said to be a tale of two cities: how does Matthews advance this view?
- An example of a pre-reading activity is set as follows:
- Discuss the question: During your era, what constitutes a 'problem child'?

Then there are activities and questions on the story:

- Discuss the theme of girlhood in a traditional African context
- Would you recommend this story to a friend? Write either: One sentence telling a friend why they should read the story; OR
- One sentence telling a friend why they should not bother to read it. (1)

In *Village People* by Bessie Head, she describes some of the problems faced by the people who live in the rural "desert and semi-desert places" of Botswana. A simple recall question based on the short story is List at least three of the problems she mentions. (4)

One of the student teachers we followed was assigned for teaching practice (TPRAC) at the International School in South Africa (ISSA). They followed the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), a completely different curriculum from CAPS (Department of Basic Education 2011). At Form 4, the equivalent of Grade 10, they used Sadler

Powell's Secondary English Book 4 and we found her teaching a short story by Calvin Worthington, *My Father's Hands* for comprehension purposes. The short story is a narrative of a father whose strong and capable hands could tackle all sorts of tasks but had never learnt to write. The textbook has a set of 15 questions seeking to establish how well the readers understand the text. On first impression, we identified there were nine 'what' questions and six 'why' questions. This initial classification was defective because the 'what' questions were pitched at the evaluative and synthesis levels:

- *What evidence is there that the son also found reading difficult?*
- *What was the son's final act? Can you suggest why he did this?*

The 'why' questions were equally taxing in terms of the depth of interpretation required, generating strong disciplinary reading episodes:

- *Why had the father been unable to take a tablet at the time of his heart attack?*

Beyond the textbook questions that served to pace the lessons, one of the student teachers we followed in the autoethnographic study had a unique way of stylising her agency. She wrote a letter to her students and we quote verbatim the wording of her questions:

> *Dear Literature student,*
>
> *It's unimaginable the first term is over! We've covered quite some work already, but I'm confident you could boost concepts covered through extended reading and reflection. Remember we have 10 stories to cover for the syllabus…I would like you to follow the pattern we used when we dealt with the stories we covered, i.e.*
>
> *Read the story and identify the main theme.*
>
> *Observe the characters and say what they do to each other, with each other, to other people and say what relationships they develop.*
>
> *Indicate the markers of difference in and between the characters.*
>
> *Listen to the pace of the story in terms of time in days, years, periods, encounters and departures.*
>
> *Visualise the setting of the story: the weather, place, colours, light, darkness…all hints that lend atmosphere to the story.*
>
> *Relish the language of the story, i.e. how intense it is, the use of literary devices and their effect, the use of verbs (active or passive), the use of nouns and adjectives and how these features contribute to the quality and tempo of the story.*
>
> *When you are done with all these, write a brief reflection on the story and your impressions.*
>
> *I hope you find some quiet time to do this and enjoy the reading and your holidays. Have fun and explore your world to the full.*
>
> *Keitumetse*

There is a clear recognition of the curriculum specifications: 'we have 10 stories to cover for the syllabus.' Then the student teacher asks both implicit and explicit questions, richly layered to elicit critical pedagogic moments… 'listen to the pace…visualise the setting…relish the language.' The questions might not be immediately clear in terms of the format of the responses, but they do generate sufficient interest in the capacity of the learners to develop responses that go beyond the pedantic what and when lower order questions. The personal touch is clear: 'explore your world to the full', harping to the Socratic 'dialectical process and relation to others' and equally the recommendation that dialogic questions have the capacity of generating strong disciplinary reading episodes. In asking the learners to assess the effects of the literary devices, Keitumetse affirms the deeply relational and ethically responsive stance that teachers take in exploring the complexities of language and literature classrooms.

Another pre-service teacher (Margie), who was assigned to do her TPRAC lesson with Grade 10 EFAL learners, decided to share the poem *Clothes* by Wally Serote. Her focus was on the impact that sensory language and imagery has in the poem, and how it helps convey the overall theme and message of the poem. She established a real-life connection by posing the following pertinent question: It is commonly said that you can tell a lot about someone by the clothes they wear. Do you think you can tell a lot about someone by the clothes he or she wears? Why or why not? This question elicited many responses from learners and generated a lively discussion. Some answers that learners gave were: If someone's shoes are worn out you could possibly deduce that they are on their feet most of the time, possibly has a blue-collar job and does not have the luxury to buy new shoes. Rips and tears in people's clothing could tell you that they have been in some sort of physical distress.

Learners were then requested to do some research on the poet and subsequently predict what the poem may be about by looking at the title as a pre-reading activity. Margie's idea was for learners to discover the significance of the author's background in relation to the choice of title for the poem. The teacher only read the poem aloud to learners after they had shared their ideas.

As a while-reading activity, learners were requested to listen attentively to the teacher's reading and ponder on the imagery. Learners were then divided into five groups of six or seven learners. Each group was assigned one stanza from the poem. Learners, in their groups of six or seven, had to draw a mind map and identify the imagery in their specific stanzas and make their own interpretations as to what idea, message or emotion the imagery conveys. They had to include evidence from the poem to justify their interpretations of the imagery and could depict the imagery with colours or pictures. The level of complexity of tasks was then elevated when learners had to identify the figures of speech in the poem and comment on how these contribute to the message of the poem. Feedback was given to the large group.

Margie allowed learners to discover meaning for themselves through collaborative practices. She displayed subject content knowledge (SCK) in her feedback to learners and her probing to refine their responses. There is a subtle understanding that her classroom is a complex space with the dynamics changing constantly. Margie's PCK is still developing, and it was apparent that she endeavoured to use "the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations" to make the content "comprehensible" to her learners (Shulman, 1986: 6). While doing that she was conscious that her classroom is a social space where the voices of all learners should be heard. She accommodated all perceptions and allowed a variety of Englishes at times mixed with Setswana and Afrikaans without marginalising any attempt to contribute to the discussion.

6. Conclusions

Firstly, in a complex, multilingual and diverse educational context such as South Africa, diversity, not homogeneity, is the norm (Blommaert & Horner, 2017). This diversity and speciation are already manifest in the existing varieties of English academic discourse (such as the prescribed short stories with their gendered thematic concerns, in tandem with the reflective essays that students are expected to write as reactions to the narratives), in disciplinary diversity and in the multilingualism that are already established in the academic landscape (Canagarajah, 2011; Williams, 2017). In the questioning strategies that we have annotated, we witness that students are 'socialized into' a diverse but also fluid academic landscape that elicits critical thinking skills where elaboration and evaluative accents are nurtured. In contrast, we also witnessed that the range of questions designed as follow-up activities in two of the story anthologies prescribed for Grade 10, 11 and 12 do not expose future generations of students to the broader landscape of interrogative questions and it is unlikely that diversity could thrive if stylising and agency practices converge towards a monomodal, monolingual and monocultural standard (Lillis & Tuck, 2016; Vertovec, 2007). Secondly, diversity provides higher education with opportunities rather than constraints in so far as it allows the academy to shift from a 'difference-as-deficit' model to a 'difference-as-resource' consciousness. This shift, as enacted in the questioning techniques in Keitumetse's and Margie's classrooms, ensures learners can bring their multiliteracies and identities to the classroom and create new ways of thinking, writing and representing knowledge. And thirdly, voice, originality and criticality – other qualities that contribute to the curious student – are less likely to emerge when students' agency is constantly corrected and 'socialized' to conform to traditional questioning techniques and stylisations that are designed to disentangle conceptual and thematic concerns in the literary texts that they study. In closing, the episodes we reported in this study reconfigure the possibilities immanent in English language and literature classrooms seeking to inaugurate rights and moral duties resulting from teachers' and students' shared membership of state, but other obligations of social justice that apply to our common humanity and our shared membership in a southern global order.

References

Alexander, R.J. 2018. Developing dialogic teaching: Genesis, process, trial. *Research Papers in Education* 33(5): 561–598. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2018.1481140

Appadurai, A. 1990. Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Theory Culture & Society* 7(2&3): 295. https://doi.org/10.1177/026327690007002017

Bakhtin, M. 1981. *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (edited by M. Holquist, translated from the Russian by Caryl Emerson). Austin TX: University of Texas Press.

Blommaert, J. 2013. *The sociolinguistics of globalisation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blommaert, J. & Horner, B. 2017. Mobility and academic literacies: An epistolary conversation. *London Review of Education* 15(1): 2–20. https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.15.1.02

Boughey, C. & McKenna, S. 2021. *Understanding higher education: Alternative perspectives.* African Minds. https://www.africanminds.co.za/understanding-higher-education/ [Accessed 29 November 2023).

Braidotti, R. 2019. "We" are in this together, but we are not one and the same. *Bioethical Inquiry* 17: 465-469. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-020-10017-8

Breen, L. Illesca, B. & Doecke, B. 2018. Stepping inside an English Classroom: Investigating the everyday experiences of an English teacher. *Changing English* 25(3): 252-263.

Buchanan, R. 2015. Teacher identity and agency in an era of accountability. *Teachers and Teaching* 21(6): 700-719. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044329

Canagarajah, S. 2011. Codemeshing in academic writing: Identifying teachable strategies of translanguaging. *The Modern Language Journal* 95(3): 401–417. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01207.x

Delpit, L. 2006. Lessons from teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education* 57(3): 220–231. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487105285966

Department of Basic Education, South Africa. 2011. *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, Grades 10-12: English First Additional Language*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

DlaminiL Z (2016) *Fabulous: An anthology of short stories*. Wynberg: Ilima Publishers.

Doecke, B., Locke, T. & Petroski, A. 2004. Examining ourselves (to ourselves): English teachers, professional identity and change. *English in Australia* 139: 103-112.

Doecke, B. & Mead, P. 2018. English and the knowledge question. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 26(2): 249-264, https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2017.1380691

Doecke, B. 2019. Rewriting the history of subject English through the lens of 'literary sociability'. *Changing English* 26 (4): 339–356. https://doi.org/10.1080/1358684X.2019.1649116.

Essa, F. V. & Mendelowitz, B. 2022. Remixing storytelling across modes. *Reading & Writing* 13(1): 1-9.

Fasselt, R., Sandwith, C. & Soldati-Kahimbaara, K. 2020. The short story in South Africa post-2000: Critical reflections on a genre in transition. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 55(1): 4-21.

Ferguson, Y.M. & Mansbach, R.W. 2012. *Globalisation: The return of borders to a borderless world.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Freahat, N.M. & Smadi, O.M. 2014. Lower-order and higher-order reading questions in secondary and university level EFL textbooks in Jordan. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 4(9): 804-1813.

Freire, P. 1972. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Seabury.

Giroux, H. A. 1989. *Schooling for democracy: Critical pedagogy in the modern age*. Routledge.

Green, B. 2016. Different Histories? Reading Dartmouth … against the grain. *English in Australia* 51 (3): 25–32.

Grossman, P.L. 1993. English as context: English in context (Technical report S93-2). Stanford: Centre for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching.

Grossman, P.L. & Shulman, L.S. 1994. Knowing, believing, and the teaching of English. In Shanahan, T. (Ed.) *Teachers thinking, teachers knowing: Reflections on literacy and language education* (pp.3-23). Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English.

Hani, K. 2022. The Relationship between the Socratic method and the love of knowledge (Philosophia). *Journal of Philosophical Investigations* 16 (40): 181-195. https://doi.org/10.22034/JPIUT.2022.52220.3263

Hardt, M. & Negri, A. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Heugh, K. 1990. Language policy and education. *Language Projects Review* 5(3): 15–17.

Hove, M.L. 2014. Polyphony and polygraphy: African first-language speakers as learner-writers at a private school in South Africa. *Journal of Social Sciences* 5(14). https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n14p319

Justice, J.E. & Tenore, F.B. (Eds.). 2018. Becoming critical educators: Narratives of disruption, possibility, and praxis. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kachru, B. 1990. *World Englishes and applied linguistics*. Wiley Online Libraries. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.1990.tb00683.x

Kretzer, M.M. & Kaschula, R.H. 2020. (Unused) potentials of educators' covert language policies at public schools in Limpopo, South Africa, *Current Issues in Language Planning* 21(3)¨ 254-278, https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2019.1641349

Krone, B. & Mattson, E. 2015. *Short story anthology*. Pietermaritzburg: Shutter and Shooter Publishers.

Lillis, T. & Tuck, J. 2016. Academic literacies: A critical lens on writing and reading in the academy. In Hyland, K. & P. Shaw, P. (Eds.) 2016. *The Routledge handbook of English for academic purposes* (pp. 30–43). Routledge.

Lortie, D. 1975. *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Macken-Horarik, M. 2014. Making productive use of four models of school English: A case study revisited. *English in Australia* 49(3): 7-19.

McKenna, S & Muthama, E. 2020. The unintended consequences of using direct incentives to drive the complex task of research dissemination. *Education as Change* 24(1). http://dx.doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/6688

McLaren, P. 1989. *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education.* Routledge.

Milani, T.M. 2008. Language testing and citizenship: A language ideological debate in Sweden. *Language in Society* 37(1): 27–59. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404508080020

Pennycook, A. 1994. The Cultural politics of English as an international language. London: Longman.

Plüddemann, M. 2015. Unlocking the grid: Language-in-education policy realisation in post-apartheid South Africa. *Language and Education* 29(3): 186–199.

Powell, S.H. 1987. *Secondary English Book 4*. Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers.

Romylos. S. 2018. *Knowledge and identities: The relation between professional identities and PCK (Pedagogical Content Knowledge).* Doctoral thesis, North-West University. http://hdl.handle.net/10394/31457

Said, E. 2000. *Reflections on exile, and other essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP

Shulman, L.S. 1986. Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher* 15: 4-14. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X015002004

Trimbur, J. 2009. English in a splintered metropolis: South Africa after Apartheid. *Journal of Advanced Composition* (JAC) 29 (1-2): 711-740.

Van der Veen, C. de Mey, L., Van Kruistum, C. & Van Oers, B. 2017. The effect of productive classroom talk and metacommunication on young children's oral communicative competence and subject matter knowledge: An intervention study in early childhood education. *Learn. Instruct* 48: 14–22. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2016.06.001

Valero, D., Redondo-Sama, G. & Elboj, C. 2017. Interactive groups for immigrant students: A factor for success in the path of immigrant students. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. 2: 787–802. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1408712

Walter, B. 2015. *Changes: An anthology of short stories*. Midrand: Marang Publishers.

Williams, T. 2017. *Literacy practices and perceptions of agency: Composing identities*. Routledge.

Yandell, J. 2017. Knowledge, English and the formation of teachers. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 25(4): 583-599.

Yandell, J. 2020. English and difference. In Davison. J. & Daly, C. *Debates in English Teaching* (pp. 21–34). London: Routledge.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Salomé Romylos

North-West University

Email: salome.romylos@nwu.ac.za **ORCID**: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8395-842X

Salomé Romylos is Associate Professor at North-West University's School for Language Education where she teaches a number of B.Ed. English for Education modules at undergraduate and postgraduate level. She is also the Subject Group Leader for English for Education. Her research focus is on teaching of literature in English and the different perspectives of how texts are made accessible to students, reading and writing as crucial skills, as well as professional identities of students and teachers.

Muchativugwa Liberty Hove

North-West University

Email: 22055215@nwu.ac.za **ORCID**: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6021-4639

Muchativugwa Liberty Hove is a Full Professor at North-West University's School for Language Education where he teaches several B.Ed. English for Education modules at undergraduate and postgraduate level. He is also Deputy Director of the School for Language Education. He is currently interested in nation and narration, critical literary theory, cultural métissage and pedagogics of teaching English.