

Making sense of place in school-based intervention research

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Abstract

The commentary made here by this intervention researcher arises from a 'place' in which school-based interventions are used to build knowledge, and thereby to bring relief to a young democracy - at once highly diverse and in transition - with aspirations for eradicating inequality. I use the concept of place as a theoretical lens to argue that intervention researchers, whose task it is to consider the meaning of intervention findings in different contexts, require a cognisance of pluriversality and geopolitical variance as a result of unequal development. In this study, I deliberately and reflexively integrate familiar education-place descriptions in my commentary. By means of this representation, I substantiate the argument that intentional reporting of place (rather than assumptions of school-places as normative) informs quality when adapting interventions. I frame my commentary around activism and engagement, ideology and politics, identity culture, and connectedness, which all influence sense of place in school-based intervention. I first show that using activism and engagement to make sense of place may denote emancipatory research in the case of one place, and theory-derived, hypothesis testing in another. I then explain how ideology and politics mean that marginalisation is embodied in high risk schools. Within high risk school settings, randomised control trials become unlikely, and interventions require both fluidity to adapt to crises, and extended time for implementation. I explain that identity culture requires interventions that promote effective literacy instruction in multilingual spaces, and that compel multiple implementation languages. Lastly, I discuss the benefits of partnerships that connect researchers and teachers to an intervention. I conclude that besides the evidence that shows that place variability requires consideration for quality intervention, commonalities also exist across intervention research, irrespective of place. Sharing descriptions of strategies to overcome common challenges in school-based inquiry can be used to plan and implement interventions with a high level of integrity.

Key words: place, emancipatory research, high risk schools, multilingualism, partnerships, pluriversality

Introduction

The purpose of this commentary is to contribute a South African ('scholar of the south') lens on school-based intervention research as disseminated in general, and with this special issue as an exemplar. I identify a 'scholar of the south' to situate my views as an educational psychology scholar located in the Southern Hemisphere, writing from a postcolonial, emerging economy that finds itself transforming towards the conditions of democracy. My insights are based on a decade and a half of intervention partnerships with teachers, leadership and students in urban and rural, primary and high schools in three South African provinces (Ebersöhn, 2014a; Ebersöhn, 2014b; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012) that investigated resilience in high-risk and high-need schools.

When comparing data on intervention processes and outcomes based on a decade-long partnership of teachers in urban and rural schools, we observed that place challenged the intervention process (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012). Like others (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014), we found that the general intensity of adversity and resource constraints were amplified in rural schools (Ebersöhn, Loots, Eloff, & Ferreira, 2014). It was feasible for teachers in rural schools to implement and sustain participation in the intervention over time. However, the intervention time in rural schools had to be extended in order to demonstrate comparable outcomes, such as a school-based vegetable garden. Rural-urban gradient differences were also evident during the dissemination phase. In addition, the fidelity of implementation was lower when rural school teachers transferred the intervention to teachers in neighbouring schools.

Grünewald (2003) argues that a global economy has resulted in gradients of development. These globally uneven places constitute “dramatically disparate economic, social, and political conditions experienced in different geographical areas that are interdependent parts of the same economic system” (Grünewald, 2003, p. 629). Consequently, considering place implies accepting pluriversality (Mignolo, 2013), rather than universality. Informed by Grünewald and Mignolo, I therefore contend that findings from the rural-urban intervention comparison may be equally useful when contemplating variance in school-based intervention research on the place-continua of affluence-scarcity, global north-global south, low risk-high risk, or power-marginalisation.

In intervention research, there is consensus that place matters. However, descriptions and considerations of context were mostly absent from the articles on intervention research in this special issue. In the articles based on research located in Korea (Cheon & Reeve), New Zealand (Rubie-Davis, Peterson, Sibley & Rosenthal) and Portugal (Festas, Oliveira, Rebelo, Damiao, Harris, & Graham) intervention researchers explained place – maybe mirroring an assumption that these places are non-normative from the perspective of the global north. Cheon and Reeve used context to explain the high attendance rates by both teachers and students. The Rubie-Davis team used context to motivate the use of a less-scripted intervention, basing their argument on an intervention principle (Fergusson, McNaughton, Hayne, Cunningham, 2011), where intervention delivery requires adaptation in order to take context into account. Festas and her team refer to ‘policy place’ to substantiate the need for professional development in writing instruction. Although the Cervetti group argue for implementation in an ‘ecologically valid’ way, they do not offer a description of their formulation of place. The assumption of shared sense when it comes to the concept of place between the author and reader is present when their study is described as being situated in ‘intact classrooms...doing little to shape teachers’ use of the materials’ – presuming a broader agreement on what is denoted by an intact classroom, by materials, and by the way in which teachers use these materials.

A lack of clarity when it comes to the concept of place by knowledge producers writing on intervention research may mean that assumptions are being made about what conditions are accepted as normative in schools. Likewise, this unspecified use of the concept may belie assumptions of what recipients of knowledge worldwide experience as normative. How may the knowledge base on school-based intervention research conceivably grow, if it becomes standard practice to assume a pluriversality of context? How may dissemination be planned, published, read and used, without the assumptions of ‘normal’ school context conditions? How would scholars across the globe be able to read, understand, use and add to findings, if context was intentionally declared?

I agree with the Festas team that “the process of adapting programmes to other (places with differing ideology, politics, and identity) cultures, and researching their effects, needs greater attention if evidence-based practices are to be generalized and used globally.” I would add however, that such research requires place consciousness. Adaptations in the absence of explicit knowledge about the place in which (mostly small scale) school-based interventions occur, are questionable. The Festas team paper advises that the integrity of an intervention may be ensured when there is collaboration between originators of interventions with adapters of interventions in other places (countries, etc.). Although this is ideal, this luxury is seldom feasible for consumers of global knowledge. Decisions about integrity and adaptation are consequently compromised in the absence of sufficient descriptions of place, where insight is guided by outsider assumptions of that which may be perceived as ‘normative’ in the school-place where the study was executed. Intentional accounts of place in publications may be one strategy to ensure integrity when making decisions on adaptation of school-based interventions.

In the following sections, I explain how knowledge and the foregrounding of place is significant in school-based intervention research. Like others who favour democratisation through research (Theron, Mitchell, Smith, & Stuart, 2011; de Lange, Mitchell, & Stuart, 2007), I integrate descriptions of my sense of place by actively detailing the contextual lenses used to formulate my commentary. In this way I integrate a self-reflexivity into dealing with the concept of place used in my school-based intervention research. I describe how activism and engagement are ways in which sense of place drives emancipatory agendas in intervention research in high risk South African schools. I then clarify how post-Apartheid ideology and politics have shaped a ‘place of adversity’ in education, which necessitates, yet simultaneously complicates intervention research. I show how

school-based intervention happens, amidst identity development, as expressed in the language used in education. I conclude with the implications of place connectedness as a motivator for teacher recruitment and sustained participation in school-based studies.

Sense of place

For an understanding of place and education research I draw on insights from Grünewald (2003), the work of Parret and Budge (2012) in high-poverty schools, as well as Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane (2008) regarding rurality. Grünewald (2003) contends that no single theory of place exists to inform educational studies. I therefore turn to a sociological lens to argue that insight into place provides access to the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991) of people. Life-world constitutes a salient attachment to place, which is more than the sum total of geography, culture and identity. Parret and Budge (2012) suggest habitual ways in which people experience place in their life-worlds. These place habits include: activism and engagement; ideology and politics; identity development and culture; connectedness; spirituality; as well as interdependence with the land. These are not exhaustive as ways to be in a place, they can occur simultaneously, and are not mutually exclusive.

To understand *activism and engagement* as place habits, pluriversality and inequality have relevance. Perspectives of pluriversality (Mignolo, 2013) and uneven global development (Grünewald, 2003) suggest that, like geopolitical characteristics, worldviews also differ depending on place. Consequently, when place involves marginalisation, resistance and agency may follow, as ways of attaining social justice (Grünewald, 2003). Activism and agency consequently direct intervention research that responds to inequality and includes pluriversality. A sense of place formulated according to *ideology and politics* is therefore closely aligned to activism and engagement habits. School-based inquiry, ideology and politics demand that researchers make sense of a place with inherent power inequality (classism, racism, gender bias, religious discrimination, geographic isolation), as well as structural inquiry, within the confines of a given place. Experiencing place in terms of *connectedness* implies a bond between individuals, groups and community in a place. This shared sense of place appreciates and nurtures common knowledge, obstacles and heritage. *Identity development* that is grounded in place therefore reflects connectedness to a culture. It follows that school-based intervention research would take note of salient identity culture elements (as linked to ideology and politics), and include strategies that connect the researcher and her intervention purpose to the lived place of schools.

Place and purpose in school-based intervention: activism and engagement

Place informs the purpose of an intervention. It follows that places with geopolitical settings differ from one another, giving rise to concomitantly diverse worldviews of those in the place, of those researching the place, of the reader of research, and likewise probably signalling differing agendas for intervention research. This special issue bears out the theoretical hypothesis testing that guided these intervention studies in schools (McMaster, Van den Broek, Espin, Pinto, Janda, Lam, Hsu, Jung, Leinen, and Van Boekel; Star, Pollack, Durkin, Rittle-Johnson, Lynch, Newton and Gogolen; Cervetti, Kulikowich & Bravo). In South Africa, as an example of a high need, scarce resource society, place drives an agenda of change in intervention research (De Lange, Mitchell, & Stuart, 2007). Consequently, school-based intervention studies in South Africa often have an emancipatory focus. This emancipatory focus denotes a view of science as a mechanism for democratisation (Scott, Cooper & Swartz, 2014; Wood & Zuber-Skerrit, 2013; Koshy & Velham, 2008). Where this view is held, intervention research functions as a potentially activist 'place-reaction' against education inequality. Knowledge production becomes an embodiment of activism and engagement, to mirror and motivate social cohesion. Examples of South African school-based intervention studies responding to high-need and focused on change include: school leadership for improved school functioning (Van der Voort & Wood, 2014; Ferreira, Ebersöhn & Botha, 2013; Grobler, Bisshoff & Beeka, 2012); promoting resilience to adapt to HIV&AIDS-related adversities (Theron, 2012; Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011); sexual and reproductive health education (Taylor, Dlamini, Khanyile & Mpanza, 2012); supporting students with learning difficulties (Theron, 2006); school readiness (Pitt, Luger, Bullen, Phillips & Geiger, 2014); curriculum implementation (Scott, Cooper & Swartz, 2014); building teacher capacity for multilingual instruction (Botes & Mji, 2010); and providing psychosocial care (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2007; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011).

Activism and engagement as habits of place also impact on intervention research design decisions. From a pluriversal stance, teachers are acknowledged as knowledgeable. This position is apparent in special issue studies that leverage teacher expertise to obtain fidelity of intervention. Examples include gaining teacher input in interventions (McMaster et.al.); and interventions privileging ecologically valid, less-scripted, problem-solving approaches that regulate instructional decisions (Cervetti et.al.; Bakker et.al.; Harris et.al.; Rubie-Davis et.al.); resulting in places where teachers can choose how they want to implement supplementary curriculum material (Star et.al.). We have also found that a less-scripted approach proved to be an effective implementation strategy with South African teachers (Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011).

The social cohesion agenda for activism in education research is evident in the names we (as researchers and teachers) have given to intervention partnerships – and links activism and engagement with identity culture, to affirm a sense of place. STAR (Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012), an acronym for Supportive Teachers Assets and Resilience, exemplifying a shared belief in teacher capability that aims to promote resilience in schools beset by HIV&AIDS-related loss. Meanwhile, FLY (Ebersöhn, 2014b; Ebersöhn, Malekane, & Bender, 2010) an acronym for Flourishing Learning Youth, is used to capture the hope that a school-based intervention research partnership may provide when it assists students in a remote high school to experience wellbeing, learn effectively, achieve academically and pursue their career aspirations. McMaster and team also note the significance of engaging teachers in naming an intervention. In the naming of their study, place is expressed in the teachers providing an ‘accurate’ theoretical (and policy-place) name, and in teachers and researchers expressing connectedness with regards to the intervention.

This special issue also indicates activism and engagement with ethical considerations related to place. The wait-list control design of the Star group allowed for all teachers to eventually engage in the intervention in an ethical way. Festas and her group have since used an activist strategy of social validity in results as a criterion for future implementation in Portugal.

Adversity in a transitioning ideological and political (school-)place

Chronic and cumulative adversities in South African schools mean that interventions take longer, that relationships are even more significant to attract and sustain participation, and that interventions have to be fluid in order to adapt to constant changes. The place in which intervention research partnerships in South African schools are designed, implemented and sustained, includes myriads of high-adversity and high-need barriers, amidst significant resource constraints (Bantwini, 2009). South African schools, as places of identity culture, ideology and politics, are in many respects characteristic of postcolonial societies in socio-economic transition more broadly (Dzvimbo & Moloi, 2014; De Wet & Wolhuter, 2009). When entering a South African school as an intervention researcher, the high level of need, the high degree of risk and the resource scarcity of place is immediately visible. This is understandable, when one considers that South Africa is currently the most unequal society in the world (World Bank, 2012). In 2011, the total number of households in South Africa was estimated at just over 14 million, with the lowest income group (\$0-\$452/month/household) accounting for nearly 10% of total household income (Masemola, Van Aardt & Coetzee, 2011).

Place provides boundaries when school-based intervention research is designed, implemented, fidelity is monitored, and findings are disseminated. From the examples of emancipatory intervention studies above, it is clear that the complexity of the transitioning South African context (together with the need for democratisation through science), means that randomised control trials (RCT) (as is the standard disseminated in special issue studies) seldom occur in the schools where I conduct intervention research (below I describe the South African school place that substantiates this assertion). As with the Portugal-based study (Festas et.al.), the cost of implementing RCT-designed interventions is a major obstacle in a resource-constrained country.

Another characteristic of school-based research in a transforming society is the long-term nature of such partnerships. Political and ideological transitions imply continuous change and require chronic adaptation in the education system. Continued presence in schools provides access to risk factors and protective resources in the school life-world that enable resilience or portray maladaptation. In this way, prolonged engagement in the school-place assists the intervention researcher with place-based knowledge, to develop shared activist research agendas for effective teaching and learning, child development and wellbeing. As many intervention studies tend to be

more qualitative and narrative in nature, prolonged presence in the field also increases the credibility of data. Long-term school-based intervention studies therefore lead to serial case study data from which generative theory may be built.

Teachers are key partners in school-based intervention research. However, in South Africa, teacher work demands impact negatively on teachers' morale, and often prevents them from volunteering for research studies. In their work on occupational wellbeing, Jackson and Rothmann (2006) found that South African teachers experience high levels of occupational stress and low levels of organisational commitment. They found that significant teaching stressors included job insecurity, overload, job characteristics, work relationships, pay and benefits, as well as work/life balance. Teachers' occupational stress is reported to have manifested as both physical and psychological ill-health. It is unsurprising that teacher demand therefore far outweighs teacher supply, and particularly in the early childhood and foundation phase (Steyn et al., 2014; Bertram, Appleton, Muthukrishna & Wedekind, 2006; Shisana & Simbayi, 2006; Xaba, 2003).

Health issues impact on school-based intervention research in terms of teacher and student availability and wellbeing to participate, as well as on themes for intervention research. Implementation strategies need to accommodate the effect of high AIDS-related illness and death, as well as related high teacher absenteeism, as teachers attend the funerals of loved-ones, take care of severely ailing loved ones, and seek additional ways of supplementing their teacher salaries as a means to support family members unable to work due to HIV&AIDS-related illness (Louw, Shisana, Peltzer, & Zungu, 2009). Students who may form part of school-based intervention studies are severely affected by HIV&AIDS-related deaths. Nearly a fifth of South African children live in orphan-headed households (Wood & Goba, 2011; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2007), with 4.7 percent of South Africa's children having lost both parents (StatsSA, 2012). Of these children, 8.1 percent live in skip-generation households with their grandparents (StatsSA, 2012), and 0.67% live in child-headed households (equivalent to roughly 122 000 children out of the 18.2 million children in South Africa) (Ogina, 2012). FLY educational psychology intervention in a remote, Mpumalanga-province school, are most commonly focused on grief and bereavement counselling for Grade 9 clients.

The concomitant need for intervention research to promote health and wellbeing in schools is evident in the range of programmes that often rely on teachers to create a healthy school environment. School-focused programmes target care and support for teaching and learning; HIV and AIDS life skills education; peer education to role model health promoting behaviour; integrated school health services; curriculum integrated focus on substance use prevention and management and HIV, sexually transmitted illnesses, and tuberculosis. Policy on Continuous Professional Teacher Development (CTPD) provides a framework for much needed in-service teacher training (Du Plessis & Louw, 2008; National Policy Framework, 2006). When it comes to supporting students, similar policies exist (Bojuwoye, Moletsane, Stofile, Moolla, & Sylvester, 2014; Donahue & Bornman, 2014; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Ngcobo & Muthukrishna, 2011; Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009). However these policies do not translate into effective and accessible services for teachers and students. The absence of functional support exacerbates learning difficulties accrued, due to language-related barriers, low parental (or caregiver) literacy levels, and late entrance to or absence of early childhood education (Du Plessis & Louw, 2008).

Acquiring a sense of policy place for effective education

Transitioning ideology, and becoming *au fait* with what it means to be a functioning democracy, is especially evident in a stream of changing education policies in South Africa. Ideology, politics and activism are evident in education policies. The plethora of education policies for social justice target inequality, and include: structures for school improvement (Fleisch, 2006), building school leadership (Mestry, Hendricks, & Bisschoff, 2009; Berkhout, 2006), promoting inclusive education (Donahue & Bornman, 2014; Oswald & De Villiers, 2014; Meltz, Herman, Pillay, 2014; Ngcobo & Muthukrishna, 2011; Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009), impacting literacy and numeracy (Meier, 2011), battling with language of instruction (De Wet & Wolhuter, 2009); and infrastructure limitations in schools (Reprioritisation of 2013/2014 Infrastructure Programme, 2014).

These education policies are, however, not always buttressed by efficient structures for implementation or monitoring and evaluation (Boateng, 2014; Maarman, 2009). As a result, school-based intervention research often includes guidelines for implementing policy. Examples from our

own work is assisting STAR-teachers to develop, implement and maintain the implementation of an HIV&AIDS school plan (Ferreira, Ebersöhn & De Jager, 2013), and partnering with FLY-teachers to understand the language of learning and teaching policy, in order to adjust their classroom practices (Ebersöhn, Swart, Joubert & Kriegler, 2014; Joubert, Ebersöhn, Ferreira, Du Plessis & Moen, 2014).

The necessity of the government-funded National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) at all of the intervention schools where I have partnered since 2003, reflects the effect of low household incomes. The NSNP is a well-implemented policy and indispensable in providing nutrition to students so that they may be able to learn. In some of the schools, the extent of poverty and hunger is such that parents and school-community members also come to schools during lunch for a meal (see Photograph 1). Our on-going presence in schools showed us how this nutrition programme evolved: menu changes (daily hot, cooked meals, instead of a cold meal); including all students, rather than isolating and thereby stigmatising only the poorest students in each school; and an expanding to high schools since 2009. Photograph 2 shows high school students enjoying their lunch cooked by mothers at the school as part of the NSNP. The policy initiative of daily meals also impacted on our intervention. Initially in FLY, we budgeted for and provided a meal for all participating students. Once the NSNP was implemented, the school principal asked that we accrue the meal budget for future partnership years, as well as continue school-based educational psychology services by academic service learning university students.



Photograph 1: Poverty is apparent as students and parents gather over lunch time at a high risk, urban partner-school (Eastern Cape province, 2010).



Photograph 2: High school students eating lunch. Groceries are provided by government and mothers cook the meal on school premises. (Mpumalanga province, August, 2013).

Schools are places that starkly manifest scarce resources, and post-apartheid South African schools often are without water, sanitation and electricity. Limitations to implementing policy that manages school-services (infrastructure needs, sanitation, water and electricity) (Xaba, 2012) physically discourages school-based research, as teachers struggle with pride, confidence and job satisfaction in an apparently forgotten school place. This disjuncture in service provision is observable in our FLY research partnership in remote, Mpumalanga-province (Ebersöhn, 2014b). Despite communication between schools over a two year period at both district and provincial level, school leadership has been unsuccessful, with attempts to repair two severely storm-damaged classrooms (damaged in 2013 and 2014 respectively), pictured in Photograph Two. Although The Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI) policy is intended to implement basic safety norms and standards in school infrastructure (Reprioritisation of 2013/2014 Infrastructure Programme, 2014), it is clear in this partnership school that such measures have not been successfully achieved. As a result, rehabilitation, maintenance, as well as minor repairs and renovations have not happened, nor have any of the ideals to supply new infrastructure (schools and residential facilities for students in rural areas);

additions to and upgrading of existing infrastructure (including much-needed steel palisade fencing to enhance security at schools); and classrooms for Grade R (with a reception year for six-year olds).

School leadership has needed to respond creatively to adhere to policy requirements (De Villiers & Pretorius, 2011; Xaba & Macalane, 2010; Berkhout, 2006). As is apparent in Photographs 3 and 4 (July 2012, Eastern Cape). STAR-teachers in a high risk primary school in an informal settlement in the Eastern Cape remodelled a storeroom to function as a Grade R classroom. To counter the scarcity of available teachers and the lack of government resources to remunerate them, a former student (who successfully completed high school but has not been trained as a teacher) was appointed to teach to 40 students in this classroom, paid from the school budget. Place dissimilarities therefore not only direct an intervention agenda, but place also provides capability required for adaptation (or resilience) within its own parameters (Ebersöhn, 2014c). In the words of Nadel and Sagawa (2002), “there is something very powerful about the sense of place in (rural – or then high risk, emerging economy, Global South) communities that helps them transcend the challenges of poor infrastructure and few resources”, and which may be leveraged in school-based intervention research.



Photograph 3: Evidence of storm-damage to the roof of a remote partner-school (Mpumalanga Province, August, 2013).



Photograph 4: From four storerooms to four Reception Year Classrooms: urban primary school. (Eastern Cape, July 2012).

The language of school as a place of identity culture

As I have described, naming an intervention creates a sense of place that personifies the identity culture of the intervention (merging the school’s sense of place with that of the researcher). Designing an intervention study for a particular school-place would therefore require adequate knowledge of the culture, ideology and politics of that school, and the systems within which it is nested (as portrayed in the previous section). Adapting interventions disseminated in this special issue for use in a dissimilar geopolitical space, equally requires cognisance of school-place identity. From a pluriversal perspective, language is a major consideration when it comes to identity culture, whilst designing or adapting school-based intervention (Festas, et.al.).

The identity culture of the intervention researcher and school-based partners often differ with regards to language, race, geographical space, levels of education, and class. Intervention content and mode of delivery need to accommodate these disparities in a way that might ensure high fidelity and dosage – and include possibilities of sustained use in that (and other) schools. An anecdotal example of the way in which this diversity was negotiated is evident in the STAR study. Here, the initial language of the intervention was English (as the lingua franca for first-language isiXhosa teachers who teach in English, and first-language Afrikaans researchers who write and teach in English). English was retained when it came to an intervention manual developed with the group of teachers. The Afrikaans researchers used the English manual to replicate STAR in three other schools, where the first languages most prevalent were Sepedi, Setswana and siSwati. In the dissemination research phase, the isiXhosa teachers were trained to implement the intervention in cooperation with isiXhosa teachers in four other schools. They used isiXhosa during the implementation, and were guided by the English manual. As Afrikaans researchers, our identity as observers of the fidelity of the implementation in isiXhosa depended on our prior knowledge of the intervention, our trust in the capacity of the implementers, and evidence of intervention products, which were written in English.

Strategies to accommodate multilingualism in the classroom and to improve literacy levels are at the centre of school-based intervention research in South Africa. This is the result of a post-colonial South African situation in which low literacy levels remain high (Du Plessis & Louw, 2008), in a context of high language diversity (official recognition of eleven languages) and is indicative of a high degree of culture diversity. PIRLS 2006 and 2011 results indicate the marked deficiency in South African student development of thinking and reasoning abilities for reading comprehension (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014). It is to be expected that a young South African student entering the school system probably has not had literacy and numeracy preparation in early learning centres or at home; is not able to receive support with homework from caregivers with low literacy levels; would not have a literacy rich home environment; and would, despite this, be confronted by teaching in English (an unfamiliar additional language) from teachers with whom the student may not share a language and teachers who may themselves not be fluent in English, or have adequate training to teach reading (Pitt, Luger, Bullen, Phillips, & Geiger, 2014).

Ideological and political agendas mean that English has been the preferred instructional language in South Africa (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014; Hugo & Nieman, 2010; Nel & Swanepoel, 2010), mostly due to postcolonial attitudes towards English as currency for social and economic mobility (Setati, 2008). More often than not, however, in our intervention studies there have been instances where, despite the fact that teachers and students both share a home language, be it isiXhosa, Sepedi or siSwati, instruction is conducted in English (Ebersöhn et.al., 2014; Joubert et.al, 2014; Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011).

Studying multilingualism in education is especially confounded by limitations of place when it comes to the training of teachers, a teachers' lack of fluency in English as an additional language (Steyn, Harris, & Hartell, 2014; Uys, Van der Walt, Van den Berg & Botha, 2007), and insufficient guidelines for teachers to implement language education policies (Meier, 2011). Emigration trends mean that multilingualism in education is also studied via classroom interventions in other places as is evident in the Cervetti team contribution, and in Germany (LIMA, 2011; Walls, 2010). However, these findings may not be transferable to a place where teachers (not only students) lack proficiency in the language of instruction (Nel & Müller, 2010), and where limitations in teacher training during a previous political time produce teachers with limited subject knowledge, low expectations and similarly low cognitive demand in classrooms (Jordaan, 2011). In multilingual classrooms, teachers are therefore left without clear guidelines regarding language curricula, classroom language practices and assessment (O'Connor & Gaigher, 2009; Vandeyar & Killen, 2007). The instructional consequences include teachers presenting inappropriately complex levels of work to students, inconsistent marking of student work, and teacher modelling of patterns of imperfect English. For students, associated effects are a failure to understand instructions, a limited English vocabulary, a lack of familiarity with phonetics of the language when speaking, and demonstrating poor spelling when writing (Jordaan, 2011; Nel & Müller, 2010).

It is therefore unsurprising that, whenever I am in schools, *multilingualism* is always foregrounded as a research topic by principals, teachers, students and parents. A major education challenge, which is explored via classroom intervention, is to design a common core curriculum for each of the eleven official languages to be taught as school subjects (Murray, 2012). The underlying principle of the Language in Education Policy (Department of Basic Education, 2010) is to maintain the use of a home language as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) (especially in the early years of learning), while providing access to an additional language(s). As school governing bodies determine the language policy of a school, the LOLT provided by a school depends largely on choices made by parents or caregivers, rather than on state intervention. But uncertain parents often alter school language policies (Pitt, Luger, Bullen, Phillips & Geiger, 2014), causing even more challenges to which the school system must adapt.

A new identity culture discourse, accompanied by the promise for field dedicated to school-based intervention research, argues for the provision of home language instruction as a partial solution for problems related to language in education practices - and for the subsequent effects on educational achievement (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014). Instruction in a home language (or mother tongue) optimises cognitive reception, expression and development; is instrumental in identifying and integrating with a culture of origin; and forms the basis for literacy acquisition as well as understanding and logical memory (Cakir, 2000; Heugh, Siegrühn & Plüddeman, 1995; Louwrens,

2003). In this regard, there is a move to study the role of African languages within education (Madiba, 2012). Strategies to address these limitations in the foundation phase in South Africa include policy to ensure a reception year (Grade R) in primary schools, and for Grade R-3 teachers to teach in the local mother tongue (with gradual exposure to an additional language – mostly English – as part of instruction) (Moodley, Kritzinger, & Vinck, 2014). Photograph 5 bears evidence of the uptake of teaching in a regional home language (rather than in an additional language), in Foundation Phase classrooms.



Photograph 5: Inside one of the Reception Year classrooms in a high risk, urban primary partner-school (July 2012).



Photograph 6: Foundation Phase teaching in the Regional home language (isiXhosa) in a high risk partner-school in an informal settlement (Eastern Cape Province, September 2014).

Irre-place-able teachers connected to places of schooling

Without teachers, school-based intervention research is impossible. Teacher presence is obvious in the theme of recruiting and retaining teacher participation in school-based research in many of the studies included in this special issue (Star et.al., Cheon & Reeve, Davies et.al., Bakker, Van den Heuvel-Panhuizen & Robitzsch). Low teacher morale (as is common in high risk schools) naturally also impacts negatively on recruiting and sustaining teacher participation in intervention studies. Various strategies were mentioned to address this barrier. Similar to Cheon and Reeve, as well as the Star team, we found that ongoing support to teachers during the intervention increased dosage (a high degree of implementation). Much can be gained from studying the ways in which McMaster and her team leverage interpersonal skills (trust, rapport, respect, sensitivity, appreciation) to establish and maintain relationships (with teachers, tutors and students), thereby motivating commitment and cooperation to stay the course in intervention research. In their work, Rubie-Davies' team also explain how teacher participation (agency) in an intervention increased, when respect was shown to their capabilities.

The place habit of connectedness (to the intervention-place) seems to be fostered by trust and shared values in relationships between teachers and researchers. We have also found in our long-term STAR and FLY partnerships (Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012; Ebersöhn, 2014b) that teachers were able to be drawn into intervention relationships when we demonstrated respect, sensitivity and appreciation for their time and priorities. Time limitations of both work and personal life prevailed, and teachers were still required to occupy various life spaces. But being connected to others helped teachers to remain engaged in the intervention study. So, irrespective of the school conditions pushing teachers away from participating, like the McMaster team, we found that appreciative, interested and inclusive relationships tend to retain teachers in studies. A partnership perspective between researcher and participant (especially teachers) may therefore counter excessive place, time and space demands (even if the place characteristics reflect acute need).

It follows that initial recruitment and long-term commitment by teachers to sustaining implementation practices seem to be associated with teachers' feeling connected to an intervention. From a place theory perspective (Parret & Budge, 2012; Balfour et.al., 2008) the place habit of commitment (to place of intervention) therefore seems to be positively impacted by trust and shared values in relationships between teachers and researchers. So, irrespective of the harsh school conditions pushing teachers away from participating in, say, South African school-based research, we

(and the McMaster team) have found that appreciative, interested and inclusive relationships retain teachers as participants in studies. In this way, explicitly building a partnership with teachers may draw them into the place of the intervention, and may have a positive effect on agency in the intervention study.

Another strategy that was found to motivate teacher participation was professional development (Harris, et.al.; Cheon & Reeve; Cervetti, et.al.). Although teacher professional development policy exists in South Africa (Mestry, Hendricks, & Bisschoff, 2009), participation in school-based research is not explicated as a mechanism to acquire professional development points. It may be fruitful to build on insights from the Harris and Cheon teams to argue for adjustments to teacher professional development policy that include research participation in school-based interventions.

This special issue bears evidence of certain forces, of both time and space, that pull teachers away from school-based intervention research (McMaster, van den Broek, Espin, Pinto, Janda, Lam, Hsu, Jung, Leinen, & van Boekel; Cheon & Reeve). In South-Africa, expectations of place transformation also push teachers away from participating in research as many of the tasks associated with reconfiguring education is placed on the shoulders of (already burdened) teachers (Mosoge & Pilane, 2014). And indeed, school-based intervention research again requires teacher action. Assuming a similar trajectory as that found in rural, rather than urban schools (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012), intervention research in Southern African (and similar emerging economy) schools, could expect that place might similarly create time and space demands on teachers. Likewise, place can be expected to put additional demands on partnerships for agency, as evident in my argument that researchers may be required to nurture relationships in order to sustain fidelity and dosage in teacher and student agency.

Another intervention strategy that has proven effective in a space of high risk and high diversity intervention, is that of long-term partnerships. Extended time together over school seasons strengthens trust and connectedness between teachers, school leadership and researchers. Intervention spaces within contexts with high place diversity in particular, require prolonged time to establish shared values, trust, and a partnership identity as a prerequisite to implement high quality interventions. High risk place-based barriers also indicate the need for extended time in intervention studies to recruit participation, and deliver quality dosage of implementation amidst intense demands on teachers.

Discussion

Why do scholars of the South read knowledge disseminated on school-based intervention research? The absence of a standard for RCT-designs in South African intervention studies means that local scholars find immeasurable value in the insights more broadly disseminated in the global knowledge economy (Dzvimbo & Molo, 2014; De Wet & Wolhuter, 2007). In particular, for the purpose of this commentary, there is benefit in referencing knowledge to be found in school-based intervention research that is both theoretically-driven, and that is examined by means of controlled design. The added advantage is that findings may be implementable immediately, as theoretical questions are tested in real-life spaces in schools, and claims are posited regarding the fidelity and feasibility of interventions. Consequently, rather than re-inventing theoretical questions at a high cost in South African school-based inquiry, local scholars can apply (theoretically-based) intervention-research findings in order to change their education practices, with the knowledge that such findings are evidence-based. With firm descriptions of the place in which school-based intervention occurred, scholars in dissimilar places may adapt interventions for transfer.

And how do scholars of the South therefore read knowledge disseminated on education research? As depicted in the work of the Festas-group, it is accepted in intervention-research that interventions require adaptation depending on the context of implementation (Domenech Rodríguez & Baumann, 2011; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Fergusson, McNaughton, Hayne & Cunningham, 2011). When scholars in places of high-need adapt the processes and content of peer-reviewed evidence-based interventions (like those included in this special issue), many of the compelling barriers challenging education in the South (with South Africa as an example) may be addressed. Significantly then, the scholar of the South (or from an assumedly dissimilar place) reads disseminated research

while cognisant of the differences between the reported and an 'other', non-normative context, such as those that might be found in place, space and time of the Southern hemisphere.

In this commentary I have argued that, irrespective of place, commonalities exist in school-based intervention research. In particular, it is apparent that doing intervention research in schools is feasible – regardless of place – and that whatever the place, research in schools implies many practical challenges. A central commonality is the need to connect and share identity with teachers as an indelible force in school-based interventions. Another common trend is the commitment by researchers to using interventions as a mechanism to solving problems and to building evidence-based knowledge in a messy, real life school-place. In addition, school-based intervention research involves mostly small samples – with the added imperative to describe place for reasons of transferability, to highly different geopolitical places.

I also found that place matters in intervention research. Significantly, place frames agendas in intervention research. In a place of high inequality, activism is realised in intervention research that drives social justice engagement in schools. Similarly, in places where burdens for immediate relief and solutions in education are low, scholars devise theoretical improvements in teaching and learning to test in school settings. Place also expressly impacts design in intervention research. Knowledge of ideology, politics and identity culture may enable or preclude the use of randomised control trials in research, or the possibility of long-term partnerships with schools, privileging qualitative or quantitative measures (when considering literacy levels, teacher training, and multilingualism), using standard protocol or problem-solving approaches during implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluating the fidelity of the intervention.

In the same way that disseminated literature may benefit from describing place, it may be equally fruitful to divulge how methodological frustrations are dealt with. Such explanations promises utility for the recipient audience to design, budget, implement and monitor future intervention studies. Because we know place matters, researchers may use different strategies to overcome these barriers. Or maybe the strategies are similar, irrespective of context. Besides those strategies referred to earlier to recruit teachers, other strategies included in this special issue are: using a wait-list control design to ethically provide access to all teachers (Star et.al.); establishing connectedness to the place of intervention (via phone calls, online communities or web-based logs) to increase dosage (Cheon & Reeve; Star et.al.; Bakker et.al.); introducing a point system to retain participation by students and teachers (McMaster et.al.); and connecting parents to the purpose of the intervention to increase the rate of consent (Festas et.al.). It may have been equally useful to read how researchers negotiated access to schools.

The discussion of place-based challenges in countries similar to South Africa also announces spaces of distinct knowledge production in this place of school-based intervention work. Scholars of the South may contribute knowledge to the development of academic language in multilingual conditions, use additional languages as the language of teaching and learning, inhabit a multiplicity of roles as facilitators of learning as well as primary caregivers, and use school-based interventions to solve policy implementation divides. The long-term nature of school-based interventions in the context of an emerging economy may also address recommendations raised in several special issue pieces (Harris et.al.; Rubie-Watson et.al.; Bakker et.al.) for longitudinal research, to track the sustainability of teacher implementations.

Conclusion

Scholars working in high-risk, high-need and transforming school settings such as are widely found in the South, may adapt findings from school-based interventions located in the global North. Relevant interventions to consider might include themes that mirror ideological and political adversities, in situations defined by a diversity of culture identity (e.g. developing teacher capacity to effectively support literacy in a space of multilingualism). Content adaptation may be suggested as a response to emancipatory research agendas, and design adaptation may be necessary to accommodate place constraints. Intervention time in high-risk schools may need to be extended to demonstrate comparable outcomes. Participation will increase when an attempt is made to build connectedness with teachers (and schools), and by creating a shared sense of an intervention-partnership identity.

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