

CONCEPTS OF READING IN SOUTH AFRICAN READING PROMOTION CAMPAIGNS

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ABSTRACT

Amid ongoing concerns about the reading decline, the lack of a “reading culture” and children not reading enough, a variety of solutions are put forward, largely in the form of reading promotion campaigns. These campaigns are seldom sustainable, usually owing to sporadic funding. However, this paper considers whether another factor that affects the sustainability of such campaigns has to do with how they are conceptualised, and whether it is a mismatch between aims and outcomes. Working from a theoretical perspective of the social uses of literacy, the paper examines discourses around reading and how they reflect certain dominant ideologies, social meanings and values. Based on a content analysis of the main publicity, communications and speeches associated with some of the dominant reading promotion campaigns in South Africa, the paper examines the words and images being used to promote reading, and how these affect the evaluation of such reading campaigns.

Keywords: reading campaigns; social uses of literacy; metaphors of reading

INTRODUCTION

There are perennial concerns about the reading decline, the lack of a reading culture, and children not reading enough or not reading the right materials. These concerns have become more prominent with apprehensions about the impact of new media on individual behaviour and on society’s moral order. In the South African media, we find regular complaints about the lack of a reading culture. Figures are cited – often without

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attribution – of 85 per cent of South Africans being non-readers, that more than half of all households have no books, and that only five per cent of the population read to their children. The fact is that we have very little research evidence of actual reading in South Africa. There have been some assessments of reading performance among schoolchildren (such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) surveys), but few studies of the actual reading habits and preferences of children or adults. For adults, we find the 2007 and 2016 National Reading Surveys conducted under the auspices of the South African Book Development Council (SABDC), and a few smaller-scale studies of reading within specific communities (SABDC 2007, 2016). Moreover, the data available are contradictory; while the PIRLS surveys reveal poor functional literacy among schoolchildren, the latest SABDC National Reading Survey (2016) finds that one in three respondents with children in the home reads to the children. The lack of evidence does not prevent these complaints from being repeated regularly, and does not hamper ongoing anxieties around children's reading and around the perceived lack of a reading culture in South Africa. This kind of "statistical panic" around literacy is widespread around the world, and some scholars argue that it is actually anxiety around literary reading (the reading of "good" books) as literacy levels are rising overall (Hind 2015). The continuing focus on books, and more particularly on print, within a media-saturated world is seldom questioned.

To forestall what is perceived as a dramatic decline in reading in South Africa, and to prevent impressionable readers from reading the "wrong" kinds of books, a variety of solutions and interventions are regularly put forward, largely in the form of reading promotion campaigns. On the whole, these are modelled on similar campaigns conducted throughout the world, such as the international World Book and Copyright Day activities, and like these initiatives, they tend to emphasise children's involvement through schools and national reading initiatives. These book-centred campaigns focus on libraries and book donations, and are launched amid great fanfare and political rhetoric, based on assumptions about the benefits or consequences of reading. Most campaigns focus on readers, with a lesser emphasis on writers and very little attention paid to publishing. New campaigns are launched regularly, as older ones fade away with few questions asked about their outcomes or sustainability. Rosenberg (2003, ix) confirms that "rigorous monitoring and evaluation of reader development activity in Africa is generally lacking". She goes on to point out that "accounts usually concentrate on describing the various activities that took place and the numbers of people attending", while "[a]ctual tangible outcomes are rarely analysed." An exception is Chizwina's exploratory assessment of reading promotion campaigns in South Africa (2011, 2012), which finds they have met with doubtful results and generally are not sustainable: "There is little government support, haphazard funding, projects are unevenly distributed, and there is no research in the field." An evaluation of reading campaigns from the Department of Education paints a similarly bleak picture of a lack of sustained support and resource allocation (Mhlongo, Khuzwayo, and Duma 2014).

In this paper, such reading campaigns are evaluated from a different perspective, considering the aims, concepts and ideologies that structure these reading campaigns. Even if funding is the main resource problem, perhaps some of the underlying factors affecting the sustainability of such campaigns have to do with how they are conceptualised. Working from a theoretical perspective of the social uses of literacy, I plan to examine reading as not just an ability or “a set of technical skills learnt in formal education”, but as “social practices embedded in specific contexts, discourses and positions” (Street 1996, 1). Such an approach examines discourses around reading as they are embedded in certain specific kinds of institutions, how they attach social capital to specific cultural resources and practices, and in this way how they reflect certain dominant ideologies, social meanings and values. Based on a content analysis of the main publicity, communications and speeches associated with reading promotion campaigns, the questions will be asked: what kinds of words and images are being used to promote reading? What metaphors structure how we think about reading, and how are books and readers framed and defined?

READING METAPHORS AND RHETORIC

Ross has categorised the competing metaphors variously used to describe the reading experience itself, and lists the primary images as (a) reading as an addiction, (b) a ladder, (c) eating, (d) mining for meaning, (e) poaching, (f) entrancement, (g) transport to another world, (h) a journey, (i) a blueprint for living, and (j) a cognitive game (Ross 1987). She highlights that the two most dominant metaphors encountered in her research were of reading as a ladder (emphasising the self-improvement or development aspects) and of eating or consumption (the literary enjoyment or commercial aspects). Historical research also points out the importance of eating as a metaphor for reading (see Gilbert 1997; Mailloux 1990). Radway (1986) has strongly criticised the use of eating or consumption as a metaphor when describing the reading of mass-market books, arguing that all of the discrete activities of selecting, purchasing or borrowing, and using books, are reduced to the value of their outcomes, when consumption is reduced to consumerism. The metaphor also emphasises literary reading, and obscures the issue of how people actually engage with cultural products like books. In contrast, the metaphor of reading as a ladder or as a means to an end is commonplace across the developing world, as Ronnås (2009), for instance, notes in her study of reading promotion in Zambia.

An earlier metaphor of reading, which has lost some of its currency, is that of disease. In the 18th century, there was a great deal of concern about the threat posed by people, especially children, reading too much. Furedi describes the moral panic around what was variously diagnosed as reading addiction, rage, fever, mania or reading lust. This led, throughout Europe, to reports on the outbreak of what was described as “an epidemic of reading” (Furedi 2015, 106). Furedi traces this panic to the rise of

commercial publishing, the growing popularity of novels as a new literary genre, and the new ideal of a “love of reading”. Nowadays, it is the lack of reading that is seen as a disease, or as a symptom of a wider social malaise. At its extreme, we find this metaphor used to describe a “book famine” or “book hunger”, especially in developing countries. The language of scarcity is central to the dominant images of African publishing and reading; we find over and over again terms like “lack of access”, “scarcity of locally published material”, and “bookless society” in articles on publishing and reading in African countries (Priestley 1993). The terms are accompanied by visual images of famine, which are mostly of children.

The two key metaphors – of making progress through literacy (the ladder) and absorbing high culture during leisure hours through literary appreciation (consuming books) – have also been found to occur in analyses of reading promotion campaigns (Hind 2015). Here, they are usually referred to as “achievement reading” and “leisure reading” (Smith 1978). As a number of scholars point out, such metaphors portray reading as aspirational – empowering people to become better educated, and through this means to find better jobs and other social rewards (Verhoeven and Snow 2001, 4). Ross (2009, 638) refers to this as a model of “reading with a purpose”. On the whole, readers are portrayed as inherently passive in terms of consumption, but as active when seeking out books for self-empowerment. Children are seen as even more passive than adult readers, lacking agency for the selection of books whether for the purposes of enjoyment or self-improvement. They are impressionable, needing guidance, and the willing recipients of interventions on their behalf.

The significance of these metaphors and models of reading, according to Ross (2009), is that they reveal differing stories about the power of the text, the role of the reader, and the effect on the reader of what is read or the desired outcome of reading; the key question to be asked, she suggests, is “who has agency?” Scholars show that our metaphors of reading usually portray it as an elite occupation; reading as a ladder leads to participation in a community in which literacy activities are characteristic of membership, such as the middle class or the educated elite. Hind has argued that reading campaigns in Mexico trade on “the middle class faith in education” but criticises them for managing “aspirations and anxieties more than it wants to procure sweeping change” (Hind 2015, 37). In other words, such metaphors often serve to sustain the status quo.

READING AND DEVELOPMENT

Reading campaigns tend to be based on a very simple definition of reading, with an essential, assumed, and universal meaning. They identify a perceived problem – such as a “lack of a reading culture” or a “decline in education” – and propose reading as a solution, but only in the vaguest of terms. In other words, they assume that reading and literacy (usually conflated in such campaigns into a single concept) have self-evident benefits. This assumption recalls human capital theory, which posits a correlation

between education and productivity, and argues that a rise in reading levels will improve development outcomes. This rhetoric is widely used to promote reading, for instance by Unesco, which sees a link between reading and progress (Maheu 1972, 5):

It is equally or more important that the book ... promote[s] individual fulfilment and social progress; that it give[s] all persons a chance to appreciate the best that the human mind has to offer; and that it serve[s] to create a better understanding between peoples as a necessary step toward a true and lasting peace.

Unesco's Books for All Programme and other reading promotion campaigns are based on the principle that "everyone has the right to read" (the first article of their Charter of the Book). To achieve the aim of "books for all", Unesco has supported three factors, namely promoting literacy rates, improving the availability of books, and encouraging the reading of books by the literate population. Going beyond functional literacy, their policies to promote reading emphasise the importance of instilling a love of books (Behrstock 1980). In the US, the Centre for the Book has been positioned to promote a link between reading and democracy: "It is important to stress the central moral importance of the enterprise of reading itself for the health of our kind of society" (Cole 1991, 70). However, in the developing countries their campaigns have usually partnered with development institutions such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the African Union, which has effectively linked reading promotion with economic development (Larrea and Weedon 2007).

This notion of books as equivalent to development, or even as a cause of it, is widespread. Literacy is seen as a precondition for full participation in the political and economic structure of a modern society, and reading as an essential component of such development, modernisation and progress (Oyeoku 1975). In Ghana, for instance, Cabutey-Adodoadji (1984, 130) writes: "Book development and publishing, while not a product of industrialisation, have proved to be the catalyst by which the human resources of industrialised societies are nurtured. Similarly, if the developing countries are to progress toward industrialisation, they would have no other course than to promote book development and publishing." Similarly, Agwu and Kalu (2011) write approvingly of the possibility of reading helping to promote national development in Nigeria. In spite of changing paradigms around development generally, it seems, the rhetoric around book development has scarcely changed. Rather, it remains uncontested and seen as common sense.

The rhetoric of development and progress has been stringently criticised for its view of a linear progression from "primitive" to "civilised". In the context of reading specifically, it has been termed the "Literacy Myth" – "the belief that the acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to and invariably results in economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement, and upward social mobility" (Graff and Duffy 2008, 41). Studies show that those who read more do better in various tests

(Doiron and Asselin 2011), but this tells us little about the link between reading and progress, as Street (1996, 2) points out:

The autonomous model of literacy works from the assumption that literacy in itself – autonomously – will have effects on other social and cognitive practice. For instance, much of the development literature assumes that as people acquire literacy, so their cognitive functioning will be enhanced, with greater facility in abstraction, logical thought and meta-linguistic awareness. Similarly, social consequences are assumed to follow from literacy, such as ‘modernisation’, ‘progress’ and economic rationality, to name but a few.

Scholars argue that this model disguises cultural and ideological assumptions that are then presented as universal and neutral, such as the assumption of reading as a solitary activity and the cultural stereotyping that perceives certain genders and races as being more inclined to read. Smith (1978, 469), for instance, argues that, “The book should not be naively ennobled as the vehicle of culture and knowledge, but examination must be made of the structure and forces that determine what books are published, who reads them and with what effect”. He notes that the focus on book development has left little space for improved book distribution, with the emphasis falling heavily on literacy, especially among schoolchildren.

ANALYSING READING PROMOTION CAMPAIGNS IN SOUTH AFRICA

To analyse the concepts and aims underlying reading promotion in South Africa, key communications and the websites of a number of the main reading promotions campaigns were examined. These range from government speeches and communications, through high-profile parastatal campaigns to small non-government organisations (NGOs) working directly with readers. The content analysis was conducted during the first six months of 2017, but an attempt was made to examine material that dated from around 2012 until the present.

The first group assessed are government pronouncements and policies. Politicians and government officials make regular pronouncements about the value of books and reading. The majority are associated with the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) or the Department of Basic Education (DBE), but the President and Vice President also make statements concerning reading promotion. These are mostly at events associated with education or libraries, as well as National Book Week and Literacy Week. For instance, a speech by Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa (2015) reflects a mixture of metaphors:

For an individual, reading opens up new worlds, reveals new ideas and suggests new opportunities. For a nation, reading is a gateway to a different, better future. A winning nation actively promotes reading. ... Reading books is not just an enjoyable past time (sic). It is an integral part of our struggle to be a free and prosperous nation.

The DAC established a Books and Publishing unit in 2004. The unit is a component of the Cultural Development section whose strategic focus is “the advancement of the economic potential of creative industries to contribute to job creation, reduction of poverty and skills development”, based on the understanding that “literacy underpins development” (DAC n.d.). The DAC sees reading as “an imperative for nation building” (Mahala 2010, 12). However, the commitment to these ideals is called into question when one considers that this unit currently has no staff or resources allocated to it.

Nonetheless, DAC statements and speeches aim to promote reading and books. The Minister of Arts and Culture, Nathi Mthethwa made the following speech in support of National Book Week (SABDC 2017):

The importance of reading in order to achieve success in life is foundational for the individual and essential for nation building and social cohesion. The Department of Arts and Culture’s Mzansi Golden Economy (MGE) strategy recognises the power of the book sector to contribute to job creation, poverty reduction, skills development and, above all, economic growth. Thus as such, the National Book Week is a strategic intervention to promote a reading culture that will enhance the prominence and socio-economic impact of the South African books sector both locally and globally.

A speech by the Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture, Rejoice Mabudafhasi (2015), raises issues of heritage and uses the journey metaphor:

It is through reading that we will continue to ensure that our diversity and unique heritage unite us as a nation. Reading will take us on a journey to discover who we are as a people and embrace our diversity. It is said that a nation that does not preserve its culture and heritage is a lost nation.

The former Arts and Culture Minister, Pallo Jordan (2009), raised issues of books as a commodity and the development agenda, and also emphasised the youth as the target market:

We need to encourage a reading culture that sparks off critical thinking and debate. ... Reading is an activity that should be encouraged in all age groups. A young reader will be a willing learner and will read throughout his or her life. Lifelong readers mean that there is a market for books and a market for writers and the promotion of writing and publishing is also one of the missions of my department. ... We need to realise that without a culture of reading and high literacy rates, we cannot succeed with our development agenda as these skills form the basis of critical thinking and decision making.

The DBE campaigns and statements are not fundamentally different in their aims, although their emphasis is on literacy and skills rather than on reading enjoyment. The Read to Lead initiative, using the slogan “A reading nation is a winning nation!”, is the latest in a series of reading promotion campaigns, with previous campaigns being the Ithuteng “Ready to Learn” campaign in 1996, SANLI in 1999, and Masifunde Sonke in 2000. It was not always clear which sector of the audience was being targeted; for instance, the Kha Ri Gude campaign (“Let us Learn” in Tshivenda) was a literacy

campaign aimed at young adults, but its logo featured a drawing of a child reading a book. Launched in 2015, Read to Lead is directly aimed at children, aiming “to improve the reading abilities of all South African children” (DBE 2015). The conflation of literacy and literary aims is particularly clear in the following statement: “Whilst the improvement in learner achievement is an important aim of the Campaign, children should be motivated to make reading a lifestyle choice. We therefore need the collective support of everyone to change attitudes and instil a passion for this critical skill” (DBE 2015).

In addition, the Department’s National Reading Strategy (launched in 2008) is a developmental strategy that sees reading as “part of nation building”. It identifies problems such as teacher competency, school libraries, teaching conditions, the print environment (i.e. access to books at home), language issues, and inclusive education. One of the related campaigns is the 100 Story Books Campaign, intended to create classroom reading corners.

As can be seen from even these brief examples, a wide variety of metaphors of reading may be found in government statements, including reading as a journey, a ladder or gateway, a competitive advantage (“winning”), nation building, development and economic growth, heritage, and a skill associated with lifelong learning. These metaphors are mixed and concepts conflated, but show an underlying discourse that links reading and development.

National Book Week

National Book Week is a high-profile reading promotion campaign, run by the SABDC. The SABDC is an autonomous body managed by the DAC, whose mission is to promote “a viable, sustainable book sector, to promote the power of reading and writing in all South African languages and to ensure the book sector is part of national policies and priorities” (SABDC 2017). With their slogan, “A reading nation is a leading nation!” we find a close alignment with the Unesco rhetoric of book development: “Does South Africa need book development? Yes, we need more local books. Yes, we need more indigenous language and diverse content books. Yes, we need transformation and investment in the sector to better serve all South Africans” (SABDC 2017). They go on to clarify this developmental focus:

... a barrier to the country’s development efforts as reading and literacy are at the heart of personal growth, community development and a thriving nation. Having as few as 20 books in the home is proven to have a significant impact in propelling a child to higher levels of education. Furthermore, children who read are able to easily transcend hurdles often imposed by the low educational levels of their parents, their community’s economics or the political systems of their country.

These words are accompanied by images, predominantly of children reading picture books and of schoolchildren holding stationery and books.

National Book Week is the key book development initiative to promote local books and reading, supported by both government and the private sector. The concepts underlying this campaign may be identified in the posters they produce annually that highlight a specific theme, as well as in speeches and press releases. The first aspect to consider is that National Book Week is held in September every year, during Heritage Month, and this positioning was a deliberate attempt to link books and reading with national heritage and culture. This aspect of national heritage recurs in SABDC statements, as in the following by SABDC CEO, Elitha van der Sandt (SABDC 2011, 1): “It is in our interest to invest in reading promotion and increasing access to books. We launched National Book Week last September to instil a sense of national pride and encourage South Africans to read books, be they books in English or in our own languages.”

A press release took this notion of national development further, linking reading directly to economic growth (SABDC 2011, 1):

The New Growth Path of Government requires a more informed citizenry, capable of recognising opportunities being created by various programmes, empowered to actively participate in building a prosperous democratic country. The book remains one of the best mechanisms to help achieve this. Through its emphasis on reading promotion and access to information, National Book Week is a key strategy in government’s New Growth Path ...

The planned theme of “Spreading the Seeds” was to be illustrated by a painting by Ndikhumbule Ngqinambi, called “Reading Recorded History” (SABDC 2009), and this unusual choice was celebrated. Kriel (2014, 775) praised the SABDC for this “refreshing” choice rather than “the stereotypical images of African children in a pedagogical setting”. In practice, however, the actual 2010 campaign featured the theme “Our Voices, Our Stories” beside a drawing of the outline of a child reading under a tree, with African animals like a giraffe behind him. This emphasis on fiction (“stories”) and on children has continued through the years. It is also in keeping with international trends of targeting schoolchildren, and that “Most reader development promotions emphasise fiction, although a few include a mix of fiction and non-fiction” (Spencer and Mathieson 2003, 400).

The 2011 campaign introduced the aspect of community or sociability, with the theme of “Buy Read Share”, and the aim “of promoting and sharing the joy of reading books”. This is supported by the Funda Bala mascot (a cartoon book character), who says, “Let’s read together”. In 2012, under the tagline “Read a Book, Share a Book”, the main purpose was “to encourage reading to the general public, increase awareness of the importance of reading for the development of the nation and to promote publishing industry skills for the benefit of South African and African authors”. The 2013 poster celebrated “the books of our lives” with images of a grandparent reading to a child, two children reading together, and a man reading on a tablet – all against the background of a rainbow. In 2014 and 2015, the theme of “Going Places” was illustrated by an image of a young girl and a young woman reading in front of library shelves. The press release

explained the journey metaphor in more detail: “This theme reflected not only the physical journey of travelling deep into South Africa but it also reflected the magic of books and how reading books can ‘figuratively’ and ‘literally’ take you places. A book has the power to take you to different places, in different eras; it can motivate one and grow one’s knowledge.” The 2016 campaign, using the hashtag #buyabook, featured the image of a young girl leaning against a tree and holding a book. This hashtag encourages readers to purchase low-price books at the chain bookstore, Exclusive Books, and to donate them to the less privileged. With one exception, the images are of black South Africans, representing a confident, comfortable middle class.

The key metaphors relate to literacy and development, and also to community building. There is an element of literary enjoyment, linked to reading as a journey and enchantment: the “thrill and magic of reading books”. The use of “we” and “our” encourages unity and inclusivity. The commercial motivation of developing the publishing industry emerges through the emphasis on buying books, not just reading them – although the metaphor of consumption is not used here nor linked to consumerism. In practice, it is interesting to note that this message is lost on some members of the audience, who read #buyabook not as “buy a book”, but as “*buya* book” (meaning come or come back, in isiZulu).

NGOs and Reading Campaigns

A number of NGOs that are linked to the government and also independent, are also involved in reading promotion, largely among children. They do the bulk of the work in enhancing literacy and improving access to books among schoolchildren in South Africa. While their emphasis and methods may differ, their aims are similar, as are their metaphors of reading. For instance, Read to Rise, an NGO linked to the DBE, promotes “youth literacy”, arguing, “we firmly believe that children need to read in order to rise in their personal development and contribution to society. Children who love reading, excel at school and go on to become constructive members of society. It all starts with reading” (Read to Rise 2017). As can be seen, the notions of literacy and reading are seen as equivalent, and the aims of personal empowerment, social development, and literary enjoyment, are also combined. The NGO targets access to books and reading motivation as the key means to promote reading among schoolchildren. To enhance access, it produces books that are “educational, entertaining and inspirational”.

Nal’ibali, which describes itself as a “national reading-for-enjoyment campaign” (2017), similarly targets reading motivation. This NGO, whose name means “Here’s the story” in isiXhosa, uses the image of an open book as its logo, and its website features a variety of images of young readers or images from children’s books. The focus for this campaign is literary enjoyment, “sparking children’s potential through storytelling and reading”, “change a child’s world with a story”, and “find free and exciting stories

in your language”. However, it also refers to the assumed benefits of literacy in its rationale (Nal’ibali 2017):

Nal’ibali is built on the simple logic that a well-established culture of reading can be a real game-changer for education in South Africa. Literacy skills are a strong predictor of future academic success in all subjects – and children who regularly read and hear engaging stories, in languages they understand, are well equipped and motivated to learn to read and write. A significant body of research reinforces the link between reading for pleasure and improved outcomes for children.

It thus attempts to balance both literacy development and “gaining a genuine love for reading”.

Another NGO, FunDza, was established in 2011 to encourage reading through book distribution. FunDza is described as a literacy trust, and its website features various images of young people reading. The rhetoric of this organisation focuses on empowerment or reading as a catalyst: “We believe that reading books and stories can change lives . . .” (FunDza 2016). A very similar metaphor is employed by the Help2Read NGO (2017): “The ability to read can transform a life.” Using a logo of a child reading a book, Help2Read also uses the metaphors of reading as a gift (“give the gift of literacy”) and aspiration (“improving lives through literacy”). Their rhetoric also closely links reading and development: “Learning to read can change the course of a nation. When a child can read, they’re able to get the most out of school, and can go on to secure a job, breaking the cycle of poverty and building strong, empowered communities and nations.”

These are by no means all the initiatives available in South Africa to encourage reading, especially among young people. However, this sampling shows the core focus on reading for pleasure, although the dominant discourse conflates this with the assumed benefits of literacy to the country’s development. These aims may be valuable and important in themselves, but they are based on unexamined assumptions. Moreover, when we consider the evaluation of such campaigns, the problem of combining concepts of reading becomes clearer.

MEASURING IMPACT

The objectives of such reading campaigns are extremely ambitious, and the metaphors used show that their conceptualisation is too broad to be usefully implemented. But there is a more fundamental problem hindering their success and impact: there is a mismatch between the aims of such campaigns and the ways in which they are evaluated. To put this simply: if reading is a ladder, how do we count the rungs?

For instance, it is difficult to assess the impact so far of National Book Week, although the media depicts it as “highly successful”. While the aims of the campaign largely relate to abstract concepts such as development, national pride or empowerment, the impact is measured in numbers: participants, titles published or donated, publishers involved in #buyabook, the value of media coverage, and the number of events held.

These measures can show how many children were reached through a campaign, but they are unable to provide any insight into the actual effects of the campaign on those children or on society at large. This mismatch may be one of the reasons such reading promotion campaigns are perpetually perceived as having little or no lasting impact.

A similar mismatch between aims centred on both literacy and enjoyment and the measurement of outcomes may be seen in Nal'ibali's documentation. This organisation prides itself on conducting research and impact assessments, but it also measures impact through a set of metrics: the number of reading clubs formed, children reached, reading mentors trained, materials produced and distributed, public presence, events, social media, and awards. Such indicators measure access mostly, they do not actually track improvements in literacy levels, nor children's experience of reading interventions. Similarly, Read2Rise gives numbers on its website to show the project's impact: the number of learners, mini-libraries, books donated, and class programmes conducted. FunDza, too, provides details of "Our work in numbers" – quoting 30 310 books delivered, 74 733 booklets distributed, 573 942 mobi readers attracted, and 16 964 comments received for the 2017 financial year (FunDza 2016). FunDza also attempts to measure impact more qualitatively, with surveys, and this is a step in the right direction when considering the impact and sustainability of reading campaigns. They found, for instance, that "Overall, respondents noted that they had seen a growth in confidence among the young readers and an improvement in reading skills and strategies, vocabulary, and comprehension. Many noted that the books stimulated discussions and writing endeavours among the beneficiaries, and helped to improve writing skills" (2016, 13). These elements of confidence and skills relate to achievement reading, and perhaps such surveys could be taken further to measure aspects of enjoyment as well. They would also need to be conducted over the long term, as short-term interventions can reach only a very limited number of people.

CONCLUSIONS

The reading campaigns assessed use the same three key conceptual pillars as Unesco and other international campaigns – literacy, access to books, and reading enjoyment or culture – but they also go far beyond these. In these campaigns, reading is put forward as a solution to a wide array of social problems, including promoting diversity and tolerance, alleviating unemployment and poverty through the social rewards of improved qualifications or jobs attendant on increased reading, and promoting national unity and development. These aims mostly relate to Ross's metaphor of reading as a ladder to an improved future. Reading in itself clearly cannot fulfil all of these roles, and this problem is exacerbated by the mismatch between the aims and the indicators used to measure the impact of such reading campaigns. This calls into question their sustainability, and perhaps goes some way to explaining why new campaigns are continually being started, rather than older ones extended. As Baatjes (2003) has suggested, reading campaigns

that are poorly funded and conceptualised have little chance of lasting success. Thus, rather than imagining reading as a panacea for social and educational problems, the “structure and forces that determine what books are published, who reads them and with what effect” (to use Smith’s words again) need to be further considered. These concepts, which focus on people’s actual use of books and reading, could lay the basis of future reading campaigns.

What books are published is a fraught question in South Africa, as is access to books. As in other contexts, many of the reading campaigns “focus on making books more widely available, in particular to low-income and minority families” (Verhoeven and Snow 2001, 5). But why do so many of these campaigns attempt to realise this aim by producing or publishing new work? Some specifically aim to improve pricing, but others assume that their selections are more appropriate and of higher quality. There are clearly perceptions – inaccurate ones, in the South African context – that very little is available from local publishers, and that we are operating in a context of scarcity. Without an in-depth knowledge of children’s own selections, and of how these may differ in different age groups, language groups, and socio-economic groupings, it is difficult to know whether the books already on the market fulfil the audience’s needs or not. At the same time, the reading campaigns have limitations in terms of improving access to books, because little focus is placed on improving the system of book distribution.

Secondly, “who reads them”: the campaigns seek to enlarge the reading public. However, the vast majority of campaigns are targeted at children, specifically schoolchildren. This may be because most reading is done at school, for educational purposes. But this target market is largely undifferentiated – what ages, what languages, what socio-economic levels? As Hind (2015) found in Mexico, reading campaigns promote a certain middle-class status associated with books (and she wryly notes that there are no images of fat children reading). There are also repeated references to books with “universal appeal”. This reveals a denial, or at least an obscurement, of social differences and different social contexts, which is particularly problematic given South Africa’s highly stratified society. Previous studies have shown that there is a huge divide between privileged and less privileged children in terms of their knowledge and expectations of books (Van Vuuren 1995, 32). Without specifically considering the aspect of the audience, the reading campaigns can only have limited impact.

The third aspect Smith highlights is “with what effect”, and here we find the most mixed metaphors of reading enjoyment and development. Why is it so important for our children to read more books, and to enjoy them? The reason lies in the implied assumption that children’s books have a moral force and can be inherently didactic – providing a model of acceptable behaviour and reflecting “good” social values and norms. This leads to the assumption of a link between reading and development or nation building. Van Vuuren (1995, 31) has pointed out that studies of children’s books in South Africa regularly assume that reading can fulfil multiple roles: “it is both a means of uniting a fractured country, as well as a reflection of South African society as

it currently stands”. This underlying discourse needs to be re-examined, as it is far from clear that reading can achieve such aims.

In contrast to reading campaigns abroad, there appears to be less anxiety about what children are reading in South Africa, as opposed to the quantity of their reading. What the reading campaigns do not take into account is the amount of reading already taking place. Why not celebrate reading where it is happening? Studies show many scholars do read at home, and interact with text daily (although not necessarily with books). For instance, a study of leisure reading among high school learners in South Africa showed that many learners were active readers: “The current study also revealed that learners engage in leisure reading despite such hindrances as lack of school libraries and limited access to books, or the problems peculiar to schools in previously disadvantaged communities. The suggestion is that a lack of resources should not necessarily be used as a scapegoat for non participation in leisure reading” (Phasha, McLure, and Magano 2012, 326). Similarly, a recent Room-to-Read report (2015) shows that children were reading more than expected.

Whatever mixed metaphors are used, and whatever the mismatch between the aims and the indicators used to measure the impact of reading campaigns, it seems South Africans are still reading.

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