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Doing a School Literacy Information Project in a South African Context

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DOING A SCHOOL LITERACY INFORMATION PROJECT
IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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This dissertation examined how disadvantaged K-12 learners completed an information literacy project (ILP) across two domains, a classroom and a public library, in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Framed by social theories of situated, academic literacies (Cummins, 1996; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2000; 2001; Hawkins, 2005; Lillis & Scott, 2007; New London Group, 1996; Street, 2002), and Bourdieu's (1991) theory of practice, this micro-ethnographic study investigated how learners negotiated these two domains and how their interactions across domains reflected and manifested in their completed ILPs—continuous assessment tasks mandated by a new national curriculum named Curriculum 2005, which has been incrementally implemented since 1997 (Chrisholm, 2005).

I collected data from multiple sources including: Field notes, video- and audio-recorded participant-observations in classrooms and a public library, documents, and semi-structured interviews with five learners, two classroom teachers, three public librarians, and a school principal. I used intertextuality as a theoretical framework (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 2004; Omerod & Ivanic, 2000; Maybin, 2000; Seloni, 2008) to analyze data in researching if or how learners' experiences across domains manifested in the texts of their completed ILPs.

Findings showed learners struggled to read sources for/with comprehension and to write their ILPs, which they mostly plagiarized. Learners also had difficulties with the

languages of instruction, which were not their first languages. Results showed that subtractive bilingualism approaches were implicated in learners' poor acquisition of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Teachers cited insufficient time, due to the demands of the new OBE curriculum and syllabi, for teaching learners the requisite CALP skills to complete ILPs.

Findings indicate a change towards an additive bilingualism approach would help learners acquire reading and writing skills in the languages of instruction. Findings also suggest a reduction in the pace and content of the OBE curriculum and syllabi would afford teachers sufficient time to teach the reading and writing skills needed to complete ILPs. Such changes are critical if learners are to acquire the requisite CALP skills to exercise options other than plagiarism in completing academic reading and writing tasks, both at the high school level and beyond.