

Children develop in several interlocking systems—in the context of their family, and within the interaction of such settings as home, school, and church (Russell, 2011). In South Africa, children's diverse backgrounds within families, neighborhoods, and sociocultural environments provide them with varied experiences and opportunities to learn. Whether the children are growing up in urban or rural communities, belong to a specific race and ethnic group, or are poor or rich, all are exposed to cultures, lifestyles, amenities, and living conditions that differ in marked ways (Makoe, 2006). For example, the racial and ethnic heterogeneity of South Africa translates into a complex mix of languages: English, Afrikaans, nine indigenous languages, and five Indian languages (Reagan, 2001). Children from diverse backgrounds come to school with different experiences, and the schools struggle to meet their assorted educational needs. The poor performance of learners in South Africa reflects the continued use of an instructional model that emphasizes school-based learning with abstract outcomes, and that evaluates pupils on the basis of constructs and concepts that ignore what children know and learn outside the school environment. In the context of South Africa, much attention centers on improving achievement rates within a framework whereby knowledge is treated largely as objective (Shisana, 2011). Such perceptions of education and achievement ignore other forms and sources of knowledge and seek to fit learners into existing frameworks of formal learning.