TEACHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA:
A RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
(funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy)

PROJECT TITLE:
TEP PROJECT 20: Reading literacy in schools and teacher development
The CEA’s Teaching Literacy Education Project (TLEP)

TRANSCENDING THE GREAT DIVIDE:
LANGUAGE AND LITERACY TRAINING FOR FOUNDATION AND INTERMEDIATE PHASE TEACHERS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

SELECTED FINDINGS FROM THE TLEP UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY

LISA ZIMMERMAN
MARIE BOTHA
SARAH HOWIE
CAROLINE LONG

CONFERENCE PAPER PRESENTED AT THE “TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN AN EVOLVING EDUCATION CONTEXT” CONFERENCE, HELD AT THE KOPANONG CONFERENCE CENTRE, 28 & 29 MAY 2007

PROJECT LEADER:
Prof Sarah Howie

ORGANISATION:
Centre for Evaluation and Assessment, University of Pretoria

CONTACT DETAILS:
sarah.howie@up.ac.za

STATUS OF DOCUMENT:
Work in progress. Not for dissemination or quotation
The aim of this paper is to describe selected preliminary results of a case study of the curriculum for literacy training offered as part of the undergraduate BEd degree for the Early Child Development/Foundation Phase teacher education programme at one faculty of education at a South African university. The aim is to deepen the understanding of teaching literacy via investigating the composition and goals of those BEd modules with a literacy teaching component and the interrelationships between them. To illustrate the challenges of training students for literacy teaching at the Foundation Phase in South Africa, both lecturer and student reflections on this training process are reported. This particular case study is a subcomponent of the Teaching Literacy Education Project [TLEP], which investigates in-service and pre-service training initiatives for literacy teaching in South Africa. The TLEP is a component of the CEA’s Project 20: Reading literacy in schools and teacher development, which is part of the Teacher Education Project [TEP], funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy.

In the first sections of the paper, the background, rationale, research questions and research design for the entire TLEP project will be introduced. Thereafter, the research methodology for the specific case study will be presented and the preliminary findings will be explored, as aligned to the specific research questions addressed. A discussion of these findings will be offered as a conclusion to the paper.

1 BACKGROUND TO PROJECT

1.1 ASSOCIATION WITH PIRLS 2006

The TLEP is a complementary study designed to inform and contextualise the results of the Progress In International Reading Literacy Study [PIRLS], implemented for the first time in South Africa by the CEA during 2006. PIRLS 2006 is an international measurement of reading literacy1 in which more than 38 countries worldwide participated. The study is conducted every five years and was last implemented in 2001. More than 30 000 Grade 4 and 5 learners were assessed using instruments translated into all official languages to cater for South African language populations. Grade 4 learners, with an average age of 9.5 years and older, were chosen, expressly as the fourth year of formal schooling is considered “an important transition point in children’s development as readers. Typically, at this point, students have learned how to read and are now reading to learn” (Mullis et al., 2004). South African Grade 5 learners were also assessed in English, as a National Option.

The PIRLS focused on three aspects of learners’ reading literacy, namely, (1) processes of comprehension, which involves being able to focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information, make straightforward inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and information and examine and evaluate of content, language and textual elements (2) purposes for reading, which includes the examination of literary experience and the ability to acquire and use information, as well as (3) reading behaviours and attitudes towards reading (Mullis, Kennedy, Martin & Sainsbury, 2004). The results of a PIRLS pilot study completed with a Grade 4 learner sample in 2005 already provided indications that learners may be struggling to develop the above-mentioned reading literacy competencies needed to make the transition to reading to learn in the Intermediate Phase in South African schools. The TLEP is therefore aimed at exploring how teachers are trained to develop learner literacy in South Africa both at the Foundation Phase, which serves as the preparatory phase for “reading to learn” in the Intermediate Phase, and, at the Intermediate Phase itself, a phase in which reading skills and overall literacy should be strengthened and consolidated.

---

1 For PIRLS, reading literacy is defined as “the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment” (Mullis et al., 2004: 3).
1.2 THE LITERACY TEACHING LANDSCAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Literacy is considered to be a learner’s key to the mastery of the education curriculum overall (Hannon in Bloch, 1999:41). A factor pivotal to the development of learners’ literacy proficiency appears to be the strategies that teachers initiate to assist in the growth of learners’ reading competency. The development of learner literacy in South Africa as a developing country context is underpinned by numerous challenges. The specific challenges that the South African education system and therefore those organisations that train pre-service teachers currently face are how to:

- Promote multilingualism in South Africa
- Provide all learners equal opportunities to learn, especially, in their own language
- Promote learners’ overall literate language abilities
- Promote learners’ English literacy to such a level that learners can continue learning in this language medium after the Foundation Phase of schooling

The current South African Language-In- Education Policy [LiEP] (DoE, 1997) specifies that all learners must learn to read in their vernacular from grades 1 to 3\(^2\). In schools where English or Afrikaans has not been the medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase, grade 4 signals a shift in the medium of instruction for all learning tasks to English, coinciding with a change in the focus of learning from concrete, basic skill development to progressively more abstract, thinking and learning tasks across a variety of learning areas. Dyers (2003:61) highlights that teachers, in certain schools in the country, feel that the current South African LiEP, which calls for the switch to English instruction after Grade 3 in schools where the majority of learners are English second language speakers and learners, is contributing to educational failure amongst learners. Furthermore, Dyers (2003:61) contends that educators are struggling to respond adequately to the increased linguistic diversity found amongst learners in their classrooms. As Heugh (2006:9) affirms, most learners who have to make the transition to “reading to learn” in Grade 4 “simply fall into the gap between learning in the mother tongue and learning through a second language of education, English. Most teachers do not know how to help their learners successfully bridge this gap”.

Recently, planned alterations to the current LiEP have been announced (Pandor, 2006). Amendments to the policy may lead to the promotion of a further two years of mother tongue education. In effect, this will mean that the switch to English will now more than likely occur at the beginning of the Grade 7 year of schooling for those learners who have been learning in languages other than English or Afrikaans from the beginning of formal schooling. This shift in policy is in line with a large corpus of research into bilingual education “best practices” (Alidou, Boly, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh, & Ekkehard Wolff, 2006). Nonetheless, despite this proposed change to six years of mother tongue education, if learners still have not developed the literacy skills and reading proficiency needed to cope with academic tasks and for academic progress, then there may be little change to learners’ poor academic performance outcomes.

In South Africa, reading problems tend to be masked by language proficiency issues. It is assumed that poor academic performance is caused by poor mother tongue proficiency. An associated assumption is that when learners have difficulty with using reading as a tool for learning then their comprehension problems are a product of limited language proficiency. This then leads to the idea that language proficiency and reading ability are alike (Pretorius, 2002:174). It must be noted that, although English is used as a main language of teaching instruction in South African schools, poor literacy results cannot be solely attributed to second language instruction as teachers and learners are struggling with literacy in the African Languages [AL] as well as English (Pretorius & Machet, 2004:47-48). Improving the language proficiency of learners does not automatically improve their reading comprehension. Attention to reading improves reading skills and as a

\(^2\) The actual implementation of this policy in various contexts is complicated by socioeconomic, political and social factors that are pushing the drive towards English as a language of instruction (see de Wet, 2002).
result language proficiency also improves. Therefore, although reading ability alone cannot guarantee academic success, it is highly likely that a lack of reading ability can function as a key barrier to academic achievement (Pretorius, 2002:175). As Alexander (2006:2) notes “Language medium policy and practice in and of themselves are a necessary but not sufficient explanation of poor academic performance. There are many other factors that are part of the causality. Of these, socio-economic status, teaching method and parental involvement are probably the most important”. Classroom teaching for reading instruction needs to be considered as the critical factor in preventing reading problems and must be the central focus for change (Moats, 1999:10). As such, teachers’ acquisition of the teaching skills necessary to bring about the development of literate language competency are critical, especially as, in South Africa, many assumptions have been largely unquestioned about how to teach reading and writing, which languages to use and what counts as high quality practice in classrooms (Bloch, 1999:55-56). Stoller and Grabe (2001:99) emphasize that the requirements for the development of reading fluency necessitate that teachers as well as curriculum developers determine what instructional options are available to them and how to go about the optimal pursuit of instructional goals in various contexts.

Overall, regardless of medium of instruction, the accepted assumption in South Africa is that after the Foundation Phase of schooling, a phase in which to master basic literacy, numeracy and life skills, learners will be prepared to make the change from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” during the Intermediate Phase of schooling using the default language of instruction, which, in many cases, is English (Lessing & de Witt, 2005). As such, Intermediate Phase teachers may, as guided by national curriculum outcome objectives and policies, anticipate that learners entering their classes will be able to read effectively enough to allow for the mastery of learning area content. However, to the frustration of these teachers, learners, for various reasons, may not be able to read, as would be expected.

2 RESEARCH RATIONALE

It may be that learners enter the Intermediate Phase of education in South Africa without the necessary linguistic tools to access the educational curriculum. Most notably for this study, their educators may not have the repertoire of skills needed to prepare them for this transition or to deal with difficulties associated with this monumental shift in teaching and learning. This evident situation does beg fundamental questions for the development of teacher training curricula in the area of foundational literacy skills and support for learners with literate language development difficulties in South Africa. As the initial teacher training programmes they are exposed to in training institutions may largely determine teachers’ literacy and reading instruction strategies, it is paramount that an exploration into what are considered as effective literacy teaching strategies for learners from diverse backgrounds in South Africa is undertaken. There may indeed be many other factors contributing to the poor reading skills of South African learners, some of which will be addressed through analyses of the PIRLS assessments and questionnaires. However, the overall TLEP study aims to, firstly, investigate how current Foundation Phase teacher training curricula prepare and support teachers in this country to address reading instruction for literate language development in diverse linguistic Foundational and Intermediate Phase settings across South Africa. Secondly, the Intermediate Phase teacher training curricula is investigated to ascertain how IP trainee teachers are assisted towards both a theoretical understanding of learner literacy development and practical know-how for the continuum of literacy levels that they will encounter amongst their diverse learner populations in the classroom, specifically taking into account many of these learners’ developing second language competencies.

The central aim for this specific case study is to determine how undergraduate BEd Foundation and Intermediate Phase teacher training programmes at a South African university are structured to address what the researchers think may be a central factor affecting learners’ ability to develop a reasonable level of literacy in general and English literacy in particular. We believe that, as a means to a positive impact on learning in other learning areas, the training of Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase teachers in effective reading strategy instruction is indispensable. A key aspect of this line of investigation encompasses an exploration of the extent to which the current BEd teacher training curricula for literacy prepare pre-service teachers to deal with the language diversity apparent amongst learners in South African classrooms. The specific focus was placed the determination of what are considered to be (1) effective reading strategy
instruction for learners, and, (2) how teachers are prepared to deal with non-vernacular learner populations. Ultimately, the goal is to explore broad trends in reading strategy instruction training for teachers and to contribute possible strategies to address the training of teachers for their role as literacy instructors in multilingual educational contexts in South Africa.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The TLEP project addresses two primary research questions, A and B below, and the associated sub questions for each, in relation to South African BEd Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase curricula for literacy and reading:

A. How do current teacher training programmes prepare teachers for literacy teaching?

A1. Foundation Phase programmes
   i. Which reading instruction strategies are promoted in teacher training for Foundation Phase learners?
   ii. What are the challenges associated with this training?
   iii. How are these challenges being addressed?
   iv. How are teachers trained to address learner language barriers and associated problems with literate language development?

A2. Intermediate Phase programmes
   i. How do the current teacher training prepare teachers for learner literacy development in the Intermediate Phase?
   ii. How is reading for comprehension/meaning attribution addressed in the curricula for reading skill development?
   iii. What are the challenges associated with this training?
   iv. How are these challenges being addressed?

B. How are teachers prepared for literacy teaching in multilingual contexts?
   i. How do current Foundation Phase teacher training programmes prepare teachers to assist English Second language learners for the transition to learning in English in the Intermediate Phase?
   ii. How do Foundation and Intermediate Phase training programmes address the theoretical and practical underpinnings of learning in a second language?

The research is in progress. In the next section, the overall research design for the entire TLEP project will be introduced. The rest of the paper will focus on addressing research questions A1 i-iii for the BEd Foundation Phase programme chosen for the case study. Subsequent papers will report on the remaining questions.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 DESIGN LOGIC

In the first phase of the overall TLEP project, a survey of training institutions that are involved in the development of Foundation and Intermediate Phase teachers for reading instruction and learner literacy is underway. The members of the organisations responsible for these programmes are completing a survey questionnaire seeking indication of the programme’s general policies and specific course objectives. The questionnaires, curricula documents and study guides from the tertiary institutions will be analysed for content associated with language, literacy and reading training. A cross-comparative analysis of all of these complementary data sets will occur to inform the answering of the research questions and deliberation of the meaning of the findings for teachers’ reading literacy praxis development. Two supplementary survey tasks
will also be initiated during this phase. The first supplementary survey will focus on broadly ascertaining language use patterns in schools across South Africa. This will provide illustrative depth to the discussion of the challenges facing educators in deciding the language of instruction in varying contexts across South Africa. This information will be obtained by means of analysis of provincial education department data. The second supplementary survey will map the reading interventions that have taken place and are taking place across the country. These include reading interventions initiated by NGOs, education departments, private initiatives and tertiary institutions. The survey will result in a geographical picture of where interventions are taking place in the form of a map. In addition, a province-by-province description of where courses are being implemented will be generated.

For phase two of the research, one tertiary training institution, a Non-Governmental Organisation and one provincial education department have been selected to act as descriptive case studies (Yin, 2003). The case studies employ mixed methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) to address the research questions posed. The objective of these case studies is to provide depth in our description of the nature of literacy programmes for teachers being undertaken in the country. The survey questionnaires from phase one will be used to obtain an overview of content. Qualitative analyses of programme syllabi, module study guides, interviews and open-ended questionnaires with individuals from these organisations will assist in this task, whilst providing a means of data triangulation for the surveys. There remains a possibility of a third phase of data collection. Although it is expected that phases one and two of the research will provide a depth of understanding about organisational activities for the development of teachers’ literacy education practices in the country, it is also important to gain insight into teachers’ perspectives of their training for literacy development as this provides the most meaningful information about their experiences of their training and its effect on their teaching practices. These teacher insights are envisaged to enrich the discussion of the phase one and two data that are reported and the implications for development of teacher training programmes. For a visual outline of these research phases, refer to Figure 1 [the focus areas for the tertiary case study are highlighted in grey].

![Figure 1: Illustration of TLEP research design](image-url)
4.2 CASE STUDY OF A TERTIARY INSTITUTION

Mirroring the overall research design for the entire TLEP, survey questionnaires and further qualitative data collection strategies were initiated to investigate pre-service tertiary teacher literacy training at a purposively selected tertiary training institution. In the first phase of the research, survey questionnaires were provided to both the FP Head of Department and IP BEd subject area specialists at the faculty of education chosen. The questionnaire for the FP programme is particularly focused on components generally associated with teacher training strategies for learners who are “learning to read” whereas the IP programme questionnaire is associated with teacher training strategies associated with “reading to learn” across selected elective learning area modules. Thereafter, in the second phase, a more in-depth data gathering process was initiated. A document analysis of the 2007 Regulations and Syllabi of the selected faculty of education (Academic Administration, 2007) served as the first step. The BEd FP and IP syllabi were perused to gain indications of those course modules with a potential association with language, literacy and/or reading instruction. The actual lecturers involved in the presentation of each of these applicable modules were then contacted to gain access to their study guides for further analyses of the content and also to arrange individual interviews and open-ended questionnaire completion to aid exploration of the nature of the module, envisaged outcomes, and, most importantly, the strengths and challenges associated with the module as related to the research questions posed for the project. The presentation of these modules and their relative weighting in relation to other course modules by means of credit allocation and notional hour indications were also ascertained. Figure 2 provides an outline of the research process, which is currently being undertaken for the case study.

Figure 2: Outline of data collection strategy for University of Pretoria case study

In the next section, an outline of the composition of the Foundation Phase programme will be provided. Thereafter, as already indicated, the research questions that this paper aims to address in reference to the Foundation Phase literacy programme will be considered. The TLEP Foundation Phase survey questionnaire results, completed by the Head of Department of the Foundation Phase, who also lectures two modules of the literacy programme, are provided. This is interspersed by the interview data of the course coordinator. Thereafter, the challenges associated with this programme from both lecturer and student perspectives are outlined.
5 CURRENT TEACHER EDUCATION PREPARATION OF TEACHERS FOR LITERACY TEACHING

5.1 THE BEd FOUNDATION PHASE PROGRAMME

It is important to provide a clear, but concise description of the programme design before addressing the research questions targeted. At the faculty of education, trainee undergraduate students can complete a Bacclareus Educationis (BEd) degree in FP teaching to qualify to teach in South Africa. The BEd degree programme extends over a four-year period that encompasses eight academic semesters. 480 Level six NQF credits are allocated to each programme. Both programmes are compiled of fundamental, core and elective modules.

Eight fundamental modules are aimed at providing students with general academic skills such as academic and computer literacy, numeracy skills and skills in the use of language across the curriculum, specifically as it relates to teacher communications. Five core modules are compulsory and are aimed at the content necessary for training to become a teacher. Students must also complete three electives. The first elective is their field of specialisation as FP teachers, and, there are 22 compulsory modules allocated to this elective, together totaling 204 credits for the specialist role within the overall programme. 96 credits are specifically allocated to the precise specialist requirements, which include the four modules of the literacy programme, for teaching in the FP, together with requirements for numeracy and life-skills teaching. FP teacher trainees then have the choice of either Early Childhood Development studies or Special Needs Education as their second elective. This elective consists of four modules over the 4-year training period. FP teachers also have to choose a subject area as a third elective, which extends over their first, second and third year. They can choose a subject area according to the following groupings (only one subject area per grouping is allowed): (1) Afrikaans, History or Music Education; (2) General Science, Art, Geography or Religion Studies; (3) Mathematics, General Mathematics or Design & Technology or (4) English. Depending on their choice they also have to take a module for methodology of the subject chosen as an elective in their third year.

For the purposes of this research, the module descriptions for the FP programme were examined to gain indications of which modules specifically address content associated with learner language teaching, literacy and reading instruction as well as issues pertaining to second language learners. Therefore, only those modules where lecture contact time is provided for language issues impacting teaching and learning and/or reading, as deduced from study guide and syllabi analyses, are included. Due to the number of modules involved, the composition reported in this paper deals only with indications of which modules actually cover these topics and brief indications of the type of content included.

Whilst syllabi and study guide analyses alone do not necessarily provide a complete indication of module content, at this stage of the case study, they do assist to obtain an illustrative overview. The diagram, Figure 3, which follows provides a breakdown of the specific modules within the Foundation Phase programme that were considered to have such content [those modules that are also presented to Intermediate Phase students are highlighted in grey]. In the next sub section, summations of the content of the modules for the literacy programme, as ascertained by study guide content analyses, will be delineated.

---

3 Although further in-service postgraduate qualifications are offered at this institution, this specific case study is focused on initial teacher training only.
5.1 HOW DO CURRENT TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMMES PREPARE TEACHERS FOR LITERACY TEACHING?

Figure 3: BEd Foundation Phase modules with literacy training and/or language-related content

There are currently four modules that form the literacy component of the programme, as reflected in Figure 4. The purpose of the literacy programme offered is to "equip students with knowledge and skills to teach [and] promote language development including reading and writing". Instruction is provided in English and Afrikaans. The main emphasis for the teaching of reading is in the second year language module, but other aspects of language such as writing and speaking are also catered for in the same module (BEd survey questionnaire, pp. 4-6). According to the programme coordinator, the NQF credit allocation for the BEd literacy component specifically creates limitations as to what can be introduced to the students. Of a 480 credit BEd programme, the FP teacher training modules have been allocated 204 credits, and, designers have to work within the boundaries of this credit allocation. The modules for the foundation phase areas of specialisation, namely Numeracy, Literacy and Life Skills, have been specifically allocated 96 credits out of the 204 for the FP modules. The credit allocation for the four literacy modules specifically is 36 credits of these 96 credits. The amalgamation of the university with the previous teachers' training college created a situation in which the literacy modules had to be consolidated into one year due to the credit limitations in place during the restructuring of the programme. The programme designers have tried to place the greatest emphasis of the programme on the literacy modules. When the literacy programme was designed, guidelines were given according to Curriculum 2005 but the designers also considered it important to introduce specific
reading methodology alongside the general literacy programme advocated (course coordinator interview). Although 360 notional hours are allocated to these four modules, actual lecture contact time amounts to 112 hours in total.

In the first semester of their second year of the BEd degree, FP student teachers complete JGL 210 and JLG 210. These modules are presented directly after the students’ first teaching practicals, which they complete at preschools for two weeks. JGL 210, the six credit early literacy module of the programme, is focused on the literacy development of the preschool child. Students are exposed to: notions of what literacy entails; the phases of language development; the outcomes and assessment standards for the Grade R RNCS; the impact of the environment for literacy development; the role of perceptual skills and the printed word in language; opportunities for acquiring literacy; classification, choice of children's literature and grading of this literature according to a child’s developmental status, cultural and language diversity; demonstration of the use of children’s literature; composition of own stories and illustrations; and the development of early writing as part of early literacy (JGL 210 study guide, 2007).

In JLG 210, a 12 credit module, students gain an understanding of the requirements for teaching of languages as reflected in the Foundation Phase RNCS. The study unit exposition for the module reflects module content aimed at exposition to: definitions of language and literacy; home and additional language acquisition theories as well as the development of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (see Cummins, 1981); the development of primary communicative skills such as listening and speaking; acknowledging issues of language diversity reflected in accents and dialects; and, communication in the classroom, specifically bilingual education models and immersion programmes, code switching, Limited English Proficiency learners; and policy issues pertaining to languages (JLG study guide, 2007).

In the second semester of the second year, another 12 credit module, JGL 220 is presented, which entails students’ acquisition of knowledge and skills in the planning, managing and facilitation of the Foundation Phase literacy programme in the learner’s main language. Students either complete this module with a focus on English or Afrikaans main language instruction, depending on their language preference for the entire BEd programme. The module builds on from the foundational basis attained in JGL 210, emphasizing exposure to various methods and approaches for teaching reading and writing to FP learners. The exact study unit emphasis for this module as it relates to reading will be considered alongside the results for the survey questionnaire, reported in the next section of this paper (JGL 220 study guide, 2007). During the third year of the degree no instruction in reading or languages is undertaken for the literacy programme. At the beginning of their fourth year of study, a six credit module with 15 hours of contact time, JGL 451, is presented. As indicated by the lecturer:

“This… module (is) specifically designed for teaching language to second language learners. The emphasis is on promoting and enhancement of multilingualism in an English or Afrikaans class - rather than discouraging the use of other languages other than the LOLT” (HOD survey questionnaire, p.17).

Within this module, students are introduced to approaches and strategies for introducing an additional language to learners, and, content is closely aligned to the Foundation Phase RNCS for additional languages. Content for th module provides information about: the acquisition of an additional language, especially with regard to the South African situation; differences between first and second language teaching; factors contributing to the successful acquisition of an additional language; methods and strategies for teaching an additional language, focusing on learning in a multilingual and multicultural environment; problem areas for children learning in an additional language; and the transition of learners into primary school. Students also attend training in THRASS during this module, a methodology which will be outlined, together with all other reading instruction strategies introduced, resources advocated, assessment and learning support tactics, in the next section that outlines which reading instruction strategies are promoted. As indicated by the section titles, sections 5.2 to 5.4, address the paper’s focus on research questions A1 i-iii. The data reported in the sections are an integration of module study guide content, a research interview
with the BEd programme coordinator and the TLEP Foundation Phase survey questionnaire, as completed by the HOD of the Foundation Phase, who is also a lecturer for JGL 220 and JGL 451. Wording presented in **BOLD** print is meant to provide indications of the focus of a table and/or is aimed at highlighting the main focus of discussion. The tables presented are replications of the HOD’s survey questionnaire responses.

### 5.2 WHICH READING INSTRUCTION STRATEGIES ARE PROMOTED IN TEACHER TRAINING FOR FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNERS?

- **Reading instruction strategies promoted in the Foundation Phase programme**

As indicated by the programme coordinator and lecturers for JGL 220, an “eclectic approach” to the teaching of reading is currently followed, and, as such, students are introduced to a variety of reading instruction strategies. An eclectic reading approach is followed as the aim is not to elevate any method above the others (survey questionnaire, p. 10) and to make sure that students will have a variety of strategies to adapt to the individual needs of their learners. As one potential approach, the students attend training in the Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills [THRASS] phonics programme during JGL 451, in their fourth year. The THRASS programme is aimed at “teaching learners, of any age, about the building blocks of reading and spelling, that is, the 44 phonemes (speech sounds) and the graphemes (spelling choices) of written English. The programme teaches learners that, basically, when spelling we change phonemes to graphemes and when reading we change graphemes to phonemes” ([www.thrass.co.uk](http://www.thrass.co.uk)). Within the eclectic approach to reading instruction exposure, the aim is also for students to gain theoretical insight into and demonstrate practical application of:

- The Phonological approach
- The Whole Word approach
- The Whole Language approach
- The Language experience approach (JGL 220 study guide, 2007).

A major emphasis is placed on reading across the curriculum with no emphasis being placed on reading instruction allocated in periods. The use of a balanced reading programme is encouraged wherein reading activities such as those demarcated with an ‘x’ (those with a ‘-’ symbol signify non-responses) in Table 1 as well as group reading, guided reading and independent reading are used (JGL 220 study guide, 2007).

**Table 1:** Reading activities promoted across the programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>READING ACTIVITIES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud to the whole class</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners reading aloud</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners reading silently</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving time for learners to read own books</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching or modelling different strategies for decoding sounds and words</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching new vocabulary systematically</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping learners understand new vocabulary in texts</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activities…</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2** provides indications of the degree of emphasis placed on topics related to literacy teaching within the FP literacy training curriculum, as ascertained by the HOD, specifically revealing that the main emphases for the programme is on the teaching of reading and on children’s overall language development. Secondary, to these main foci, is the moderate emphases placed on English language, literature and second language learning. Students have some exposure to theory of reading, remedial teaching and education for learners who experience barriers to learning.
Table 2: Topic areas for the Foundation Phase literacy teacher training curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF EMPHASIS WITHIN LITERACY PROGRAMME</th>
<th>No Emphasis</th>
<th>Some Emphasis</th>
<th>Moderate Emphasis</th>
<th>Major Emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Language</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s language development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education for learners who experience barriers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second language learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aside from the methodologies and related topic areas that the programme introduces the students to, the students also learn about follow-up activities that can be used after reading activities. Table 3 reveals that, according to the HOD, reading comprehensions, oral questioning and summaries as well as group tasks are the areas most likely to be promoted i.e. they receive a moderate or major emphasis within the programme. No response category was provided for ‘Writing a response’, ‘Oral questions and summaries’, ‘Do a project’, and ‘Do a quiz’. This has been taken to indicate that no emphasis is placed on these follow-up activities, which, due the focus on FP learners, seems to be educationally appropriate, as learners will only be developing the foundational skills needed for writing and undertaking more advanced reading activities.

Table 3: Follow-up tasks advocated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF EMPHASIS WITHIN LITERACY PROGRAMME</th>
<th>No Emphasis</th>
<th>Some Emphasis</th>
<th>Moderate Emphasis</th>
<th>Major Emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answering reading comprehensions</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing a response</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral questions and summaries</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk with each other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do a project</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do a quiz</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do a group project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the development of reading comprehension specifically, a number of strategies and skills, as outlined in Table 4, are introduced. Again, it would seem that the two areas not addressed “explain, support understanding” and “describe style or structure of text” are perhaps skills to be addressed when learners have reached more advanced levels of cognitive reasoning in the upper grades of schooling.
Table 4: Reading comprehension skills and strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS AND STRATEGIES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predict topic and content</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain, support understanding</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare reading with own experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make predictions</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make generalisations and draw inferences</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe style or structure of text</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Resources for reading promoted in the Foundation Phase programme

According to the HOD’s survey responses, a variety of resources and types of texts for reading instruction, as indicated in Tables 5 and 6, are promoted as part of the programme. Building on guidelines on text choice already introduced in JGL 210, students receive further guidelines on reading material choices in the module, JGL 220. The approach to differentiated instructional reading materials is to advocate that all learners use different reading materials at different levels, according to individual reading levels. In the module, JGL 220, student teachers also learn how to evaluate and compare available reading series on the basis of general criteria and criteria for good children’s literature (JGL 220 study guide, 2007). Workbooks, CDs/ audiotapes and Internet reading materials are not specifically encouraged. As suggested by the HOD’s survey responses in Table 6, descriptions, diagrams, longer stories, plays, charts, instructions or manuals and graphs do not feature as suggested texts. If one considers the importance of these types of texts in learning areas during the Intermediate Phase, it may be meaningful to address the introduction of these types of text to learners for familiarity in higher grades.

Table 5: Resources that are encouraged

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>READING RESOURCES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading series</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workbooks</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-directed newspapers and magazines</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD/ Audiotape</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVD</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet reading materials</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A variety of children’s books</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials from other subjects</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials written by learners</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Types of texts promoted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT TYPES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short stories</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poems</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non fiction</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagrams</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer stories</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charts</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions or manuals</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphs</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment strategies promoted in the Foundation Phase programme

Assessment of reading is covered in JGL 220. It is advocated that assessment is used for the purposes of adapting instruction, identifying learners for remedial instruction and grouping learners for instructional purposes. “Portfolios of learners work and reading logs are promoted as a major source for learner reading assessment” (HOD survey questionnaire, p.17). Varying levels of emphasis are placed on other sources of assessment for reading, as shown in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7: Sources advocated for monitoring learners’ progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF EMPHASIS WITHIN LITERACY PROGRAMME</th>
<th>No Emphasis</th>
<th>Some Emphasis</th>
<th>Moderate Emphasis</th>
<th>Major Emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic reading tests</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom tests</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National or regional tests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your professional judgement</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal qualitative monitoring</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once more, for those assessment strategies where no response has been made, it appears that these are actually strategies that receive no emphasis within the programme. Again, it makes sense that students will not be introduced to these strategies as learners in the Foundation Phase may not have reached a level of development where they will be able to provide comprehensive written answers to questions and paragraph type responses. Apart from the fact that this would be a time-consuming assessment activity within the classroom context, learners may also find it difficult to verbalise their reading processes in a discussion.

Table 8: Emphasis placed on these assessment strategies for monitoring learners’ performance in reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF EMPHASIS WITHIN LITERACY PROGRAMME</th>
<th>No Emphasis</th>
<th>Some Emphasis</th>
<th>Moderate Emphasis</th>
<th>Major Emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple choice questions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short answer written questions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph written responses to materials read</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to learners reading aloud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral questioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral summary or report</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting learner to discuss reading</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus of learning support for reading within the programme

In Table 9, reported strategies that are supported for assisting learners who are experiencing reading difficulties are provided. Indications suggest that individualised attention from the teacher, other learners, parents or individualised educational programme for reading are the strategies promoted.

Table 9: Strategies for reading difficulties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>READING DIFFICULTY STRATEGIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wait and see if learner improves with maturation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time working individually with learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage other learners to work with the learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assign homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask parents to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading specialists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualised reading programmes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next sub section the challenges associated with the literacy programme will be introduced.

5.3 WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS TRAINING?

Challenges of the current reading programme

A thematic analysis of the interview comments of the BEd Foundation Phase programme coordinator revealed a number of themes (highlighted in bold) in terms of challenges. According to the programme coordinator:

‘… a BEd programme is the initial training... that’s also one of the things that I grapple with all of the time. You have to give students basic skills as well but you can’t give them everything’ (coordinator interview, lines 492:498).

Due to credit constraints, there is a general feeling that reading teaching instruction is not an area that has been of optimal success to date:

‘...what we have found is… that one part missing in the programme which the students really felt they needed, [is] more in-depth information on reading. They know how to plan lessons, they know where the whole thing [literacy] fits in but when it comes to teaching phonics and teaching reading I think they… [researcher: need depth?] Ja’ (coordinator interview, lines 146:159).

Survey results further reveal difficulties experienced in terms of the logistics of the programme:

“Time constraints make it impossible for teacher trainees to experience theory unfolding in the classroom context. This sometimes comes months or a year after the language module is over”. (HOD survey questionnaire, p. 10).

The programme coordinator thinks that the reading programme needs to be locally relevant to the South African context. According to the HOD’s survey responses, teacher trainees specifically comment on the inappropriateness of reading materials in schools and the inability of learners to read, especially for those for whom the language is their second language. These difficulties are reinforced by the comments of the programme coordinator:

‘...They also don’t know why children are spelling so badly and why they haven’t grasped the phonics system. Many students comment and say that they can’t understand why grade 3 children can’t read …and they don’t know how to help the children. They get to the class situation and they just don’t know how to help the children….’ (coordinator interview, lines 630:642).
Challenges associated with practical exposure

As reported by the programme coordinator in her interview, one of the greatest difficulties that students experience is a lack of practical exposure and experience with the reading instruction methodologies that the programme introduces them to. Students want basic skills and more strategies via a step-by-step practical guide to the teaching of reading to show them what to do. Otherwise, the knowledge that they learn stays at a symbolic level or is forgotten, especially if they, as newly qualified teachers, do not get opportunities to implement these strategies as they adapt to the programmes of the schools where they start their teaching careers:

‘…the other very big problem that I think happens in a programme is you give students basic principles but if they go into the schools and they don’t see it there … [researcher: It’s gone?] Ja … [new teachers], [are in survivor mode for] the first two years… They have to do what their head of department is telling them…to do…I’ve spoken to first year teachers and second year teachers that have finished here and it seems as if…they don’t remember [what we have taught them]…unless they see it in practice when they go into schools’ (coordinator interview, lines 521:535).

‘If you don’t really go to a school and let a good teacher show them how to do it, it is difficult for them to get that … it stays symbolic, it stays theory (sic) if they don’t see you must give them the theory but then they have to go into a school to make that cognitive connections to see how it happens in practice’ (coordinator interview, lines 566:575).

According to the course coordinator, the students’ actual teaching practicals during their degrees are also problematic for practice in reading instruction. University programme coordinators and lecturers have little control over where the students choose to complete these practicals and which teaching strategies the teacher mentors in these schools advocate. Therefore, the schools chosen are not always conducive for students’ practical learning experiences. The students do not, as such, necessarily get to observe the reading instruction strategies that they have been exposed to as part of the BEd programme. As such, opportunities for practical reinforcement do not occur. Also, it may be that mentor teachers in schools do not have the skills to model good reading instruction to the students:

‘I think also what I’ve gathered from what students say about reading per se is that they don’t see good reading instruction’ (coordinator interview, lines 626:630).

Also, as stated by the coordinator, students report that mentor teachers are not always engaged in active teaching but rather hand out worksheets to their learners for individual completion. Mentor lecturers at the university also have little opportunity to monitor students’ practical experiences due to the number of students enrolled in the programme. Furthermore, lecturers who are subject specialists for Intermediate and Senior phase learning areas act as mentors to Foundation phase students, and, they do not always have knowledge of or experience with Foundation phase content such as reading and writing to provide constructive feedback to students for their further development.

Student feedback on the literacy modules

52 of 153 fourth year ECD/ Foundation Phase BEd students completed anonymous student feedback questionnaires at the end of 2006, following completion of their 18 week practical internship in schools. This 34% response rate is due to a lack of formal lectures after the students’ final year practical, which meant that only a small number of students were accessible to complete the questionnaires during other activities associated with the overall BEd programme. According to population group records provided by academic administration, 149 (97%) of the students registered for the 4th year of the degree in 2006 were White. The remaining 4 (3%) students were Indian. 102 (66.7%) of the 153 students were Afrikaans home language speakers. 49 (32%) of the students were English home language speakers and 1 (0.7%) student had a German vernacular. No students with African language vernaculars were registered for their 4th year of the degree in 2006.
Table 10 provides indications of the students’ response percentages to the likert type questions posed in the informal feedback questionnaire. Thereafter, specific commentary that the students provided in relation to these responses is considered. Only a few selected comments that were deemed to best encapsulate the emerging themes for the students’ feedback are provided. The emerging themes are highlighted in **bold**.

**Table 10: Results of the student feedback questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Very low</th>
<th>2 Low</th>
<th>3 Average</th>
<th>4 Above average</th>
<th>5 High</th>
<th>6 Very high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation or teaching Early Literacy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for teaching the literacy programme</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for teaching reading and writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: the data is derived from informal student feedback for programme monitoring purposes (M. Botha)*

- **Preparation for teaching reading and writing**

Students were asked whether they thought adequate provision was made in the teacher education programme to enable them to successfully teach reading and writing. 50% of the respondents indicated that the programme did not prepare them adequately to teach reading and writing. Due to the relatively large percentage, it is meaningful to consider the nature of the motivations that the students provided for their responses (affirmative or negative) to the question.

Students who answered ‘no’ to this question indicated a variety of aspects in their motivation for their negative response. They felt that they **did not have sufficient time to master the various techniques** due to a lack of focus on reading, as evidenced by the following:

“We had too little time in these modules” (translated from Afrikaans)

They felt that they had a **lack of practical knowledge in the teaching of reading** although they **learnt much during practical teaching**, reiterating the importance of meaningful practical exposure during training:

“While on our teaching internship, I realised how little we really know about teaching reading especially. In our lecture times they tried to focus on as many different methods, instead of focusing on one main method.”

“although we know the techniques that need to be used in the classroom, we do not know how to apply these techniques in a classroom situation”

“No, I feel that a lot more focus should be placed on these concepts. The student teachers need to be provided with opportunities to apply the knowledge in practical situations in the form of school-based tasks”.

“I am still not sure how to teach writing. We know how to write the letters correctly, but not how to really teach it. Reading we know the theory but don’t know how to teach it, especially to learners who battle.”

“No, teach more in depth about how people learn reading and writing, not just the theory” (translated from Afrikaans)

“We are sitting with so much knowledge but we are still not sure how to use everything in practice” (translated from Afrikaans)
Students who answered ‘yes’ to this question indicated that:

They received sufficient information and practical examples to be successful. This possibly indicates that the some students developed insight and a deeper learning for the teaching of reading (Turbill, 2002:70):

“The literature/learning content/theory just provided us with guidelines, but the 6 month internship provided real exposure and experiences” (translated from Afrikaans).

“Yes, while I did my practicals, I relied on my theoretical knowledge that I received” (translated from Afrikaans).

“The resources that we made will help me to do it properly” (translated from Afrikaans).

They seemingly felt that they were confident enough to teach reading and writing. Although they were positive about their preparation, some students felt that more practical exposure was needed. They also wanted more information on children with reading problems and reading instruction, as suggested by the following commentary:

“Yes, all that we need now is practical experience! We will only develop by teaching our own class” (translated from Afrikaans).

“We had a subject which provided complete provision for this. However, the programme was very short and more practical exercises would have been better for writing. For reading not so much provision is made, especially not how to teach children to read” (translated from Afrikaans).

In sum, students did raise a number of issues in relation to their preparation to teach reading and writing. Students reported a lack of adequate time spent in preparation to teach reading and writing and also reported a need for more focus on reading instruction. For both those students who felt prepared and those who did not, the need for more opportunities for application of theory, further practical exposure and training in reading and writing were brought to the fore.

- Preparation for teaching early literacy

Students were asked to elaborate on their preparation to teach early literacy. 79% of the students rated the preparation as ‘above average’ to ‘very high’. Only 6% rated it ‘low’.

- Preparation for teaching in the literacy programme

Students were also asked to indicate their experiences of the extent to which they had been prepared to teach the literacy programme that is part of the core Foundation Phase curriculum. 75% of the students rated the preparation as ‘above average’ to ‘very high’. Only 8% rated it ‘low’ to ‘very low’.

- Preparation for the teaching of reading and writing in the Foundation Phase

59% of the respondents indicated that they felt that the teacher education programme prepared them for the teaching of reading and writing in the Foundation Phase. This is consistent with the 50% positive response rate seeking indications of their opinions of their preparedness to teach reading and writing in terms of the overall literacy programme.

- Problems encountered with reading and writing teaching in the internship

In the student feedback questionnaire, students were asked three open-ended questions were asked to gain further indications of their experiences. In response to a query into the major problems with the teaching and learning of reading that students encountered during their internship, only 6 respondents of 52 indicated that
they encountered no problems. Other students mentioned a number of areas associated with language and reading as being problematic.

Students mentioned the acquisition of **second language skills** as one area:

“*The learners do not speak the language of the school and therefore they battle with all aspects of learning as the medium of instruction at their school is not their home language.*”

“*The learners’ home language was not English and this made it really difficult to communicate*”

“I feel the main problem is that there are many language barriers in many classrooms today. The learners do not speak the language of the school and therefore they battle with all aspects of learning as the medium of instruction at their school is not their home language.”

“The language concern! Learners are taught in a second or third language” (translated from Afrikaans)

Students further indicated that **insufficient attention** was given to the development of **writing skills** and, specifically, early writing skills. They reported that learners experience problems in **spelling** correctly. Many students mentioned that **learners had great difficulty in acquiring reading skills**, and that **not enough time was spent on teaching reading** in classrooms. It was noted that **teachers are overworked and cannot give attention to learners who are struggling**.

Further open-ended questioning focused on the queries raised and/or issues that students experienced with regard to the teaching of reading during the internship. Students’ replies indicated that they experienced a number of **problems in the reading classroom**. Pertinently, students noted that **teachers are not informed on effective reading instruction** approaches and neglect reading instruction:

“*Reading is a very difficult activity. Learners find reading very boring*”

“*Children do not read enough*” (translated from Afrikaans)

“*Reading materials in schools- not up to standard*” (translated from Afrikaans)

“In grade 3, teachers have commented that learners do not know how to read properly. They say it is that from the beginning learners are not taught properly how to read in grade 1 & 2, the teachers themselves do not know how to help them.”

“*Teachers neglect reading because they spend too much time on other aspects of Literacy*” (translated from Afrikaans).

“*there is not enough time every day for reading and writing, especially not for reading*” (translated from Afrikaans)

“I found that teachers did not have the time for reading” (translated from Afrikaans)

“*Teachers are overworked and can’t give attention to problems*” (translated from Afrikaans)

As such, it is apparent that students are confronted with the realities of teaching reading and writing during their teaching practicals. Some are concerned about teaching in second language classrooms. Others register concerns about how reading is taught in schools and about the problems that learners present with in relation to reading and writing. Of significant concern, are their reports of mentor teachers who are seemingly unable to model effective reading instruction that the students can learn from. Despite their concerns, lecturers do not have the opportunity to address students’ questions and needs for further development after the students’ internship. At present, students will thus enter the teaching profession without these concerns and needs having been addressed.
- **Student suggestions for changes to the literacy programme**

The opinions of the students were also sought with regard to the changes that they thought needed to be made to the literacy programme to improve their skills for teaching reading and writing. Students indicated that they wanted to have **step by step instructions on how to teach reading**: 

“A ‘how to guide’. Where to begin”

“I want a recipe to use. In other words, steps that you can use. I also want to know where to begin” (translated from Afrikaans)

“Theory. More in-depth about how a child learns to read. This is something that is missing in our course” (translated from Afrikaans)

“I would have liked more methodology lessons on exactly how to teach reading and writing. There should be a few modules on how to identify reading and writing difficulties and how to rectify them.”

Many felt that they needed **more practical exposure** before they could be effective:

“practical session on how to teach children to read” (translated from Afrikaans)

“Give practical lessons for us to see how one teach reading and writing effectively”

“To do it more practically” (translated from Afrikaans)

“Hands-on experiences” (translated from Afrikaans)

They also wanted **more information on associated language skills**, as suggested by the following comments:

“A course in African languages”

“Expose us to more Afrikaans and English children’s literature”

“How do we teach spelling?”

**Phonics instruction** was a further skill that some felt they needed:

“Focus on one or two specific methods especially with regards to phonics. We are not prepared enough to teach reading especially in the grade 1 class.”

“How to teach phonics- The THRASS programme was excellent, but it was only presented at the end of the module”

A number of students suggested **learning support training for reading problems**:

“I am uncertain what to do with reading difficulties. I realise that you must teach a child sounds and reading in Grade 1. Where must you focus? Where do you begin?” (translated from Afrikaans)

“I am unsure how to ascertain problems” (translated from Afrikaans)

“Want to know how to handle different reading problems” (translated from Afrikaans)
In sum, the students' need for specific instruction on how to teach reading and more practical exposure was apparent from the feedback. Specific comments also suggest that some students want more attention to phonics instruction, children’s literature and are interested in the acquisition of other official languages, besides English and Afrikaans for classroom teaching.

5.4 HOW ARE THESE CHALLENGES BEING ADDRESSED?

Due to departmental awareness that reading training may not be an area where optimal success has been achieved to date, and due to recognition of the importance of training in literacy, changes to the programme are underway. As such, modules of the literacy programme will be offered across all four years of the BEd, instead of just during the second and fourth year.

JGL 210 (Emergent literacy) will be moved to the first year, second semester of the degree, prior to preschool teaching practicals at the beginning of the second year. In the second year, the literacy programme (JGL 220) will be offered, prior to students' third year practicals in primary schools. The designers of the literacy modules intend to shift the reading programme that formed a part of JGL 220 to the 3rd year, where it will be offered during the first semester as JGL 310. Therefore, the teaching of reading will be allocated its own module apart from other aspects of language teaching (HOD survey questionnaire, pp. 4-6). There is recognition that this may be more meaningful for the students. The reason for this is that they will have already had some practical exposure in primary schools, and, may be able to relate content of the module to their prior experiences as gained during these practicals, as suggested by the following:

‘we’re thinking of putting the reading one into the third year because that will…then [the students have] got the background and they’ve already been to a primary school once so that they can make that (sic) cognitive connections [the links between theory and practice] and we were [also] thinking that [this reading module] would be before they go into their internship which is a period of 18 weeks in their fourth year’ (interview, programme coordinator, 105:115).

It is also envisaged that having reading instruction as a module in its own right will allow for greater emphasis on practical reading instruction strategies and opportunities for students to gain more depth in their understanding of the connections between reading theory and practice. In the fourth year, the additional language module (JGL 451), will still take place at the beginning of the first semester. JLG 210 (Learning Area: LLC) will no longer be offered. The academic English (JEN) or Afrikaans (JAF) modules will also become compulsory for the students, and, will be presented during the first and second years of the degree (Proposal for restructuring of the BEd programme: Early Childhood Development and Foundation Phase: 17 July 2006).

6 DISCUSSION

University programme designers in South Africa have to work within the guidelines of national teaching curricula policies and the National Qualification Framework. Professional preparation programmes also have a responsibility to teach a defined body of knowledge, skills and abilities that are based on the best research in the field. This is no less important in reading than it is in other professional fields (Moats, 1999:14). Moats (1999:8) consolidates this argument in specific reference to teacher training by mentioning that “A comprehensive redesign of teacher preparation in reading instruction, founded on a core curriculum that defines the knowledge and skills necessary for effective practice, is vital to improved classroom instruction”. At present, it appears that lecturers at the tertiary institution chosen have to choose the methods that, in their professional experience; they feel will best suit their student populations and the learners that they will teach.

Issues related to the teaching and learning of reading and literacy development in general as well as teacher training for these purposes are not unique to the South African education system. Many of the challenges that students and lecturers brought to the fore, relate to the same concerns that the “Language team” at the University of Wollongong, South Australia, considered to be reasons for their newly qualified teachers' comments of not knowing how to teach reading and writing.
These reasons included (Turbill, 2002):

- A lack of face to face hours to teach students all they need to know
- Not enough time in schools actually interacting with children
- The students’ inability to make the important connections between theory and practice of language and literacy teaching
- A segregated curriculum so students see little relationship between language and learning, see little relationship between literacy learning and their other subjects

As such, it is appropriate to consider the comments of Turbill (2002), in her reporting of the reading teaching situation at Wollongong University. Through a process of ongoing reflection and collaboration, the lecturers for the programme drew up a working document for what they thought students needed to have achieved in terms of knowledge, skills and values during the literacy training process at their university, amongst other areas of focus for change (Turbill, 2002:87). As the aim of this particular TLEP case study has been to ascertain the type of content that students are exposed to, the knowledge component of these guidelines, were considered appropriate for consideration in relation to the literacy programme under investigation, as set out in Table 11 below. This does not mean that other criteria for discussion will be precluded from the analysis at a later stage of the entire project.

Table 11: Knowledge guidelines for a tertiary teacher training language curriculum (Turbill, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KNOWLEDGE GUIDELINES</th>
<th>programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Will know what reading is”</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will know why it is important, reading as a social process</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will know what aspects of language are implicated in reading</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will know a range of assessment strategies</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will know how readers differ (ESL, culture etc.)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will know developmental patterns of readers (emerging, beginning and fluent)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will know what readers do (i.e. how they use the sources of language information; the roles they take as they read-code breaker, text participant, text user, text analyst)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will know what readers read and how different texts orchestrate what readers do as readers in the various content areas (becoming strategic readers)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will know how reading is best learned</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will know of the connections between reading, writing, talking and listening</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will know of a range of classroom practices”</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will know of the links between theories or models of reading and classroom Practices</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, attempts are made to introduce this type of knowledge content to ECD/FP students for the BEd literacy programme. However, as suggested by student and lecturer commentary about the literacy programme, difficulties may occur as a result of at what point in time this content is introduced and in relation to the depth of learning that students actually achieve due to their inability to make vital connections between theoretical insights and practical experience, as mirrored in Turbill’s (2002) observations.
As indicated by the course coordinator, ideally, the literacy programme within the overall BEd programme needs to include opportunities for students to observe reading instruction at schools and then have opportunities to discuss and reflect on their learning experiences. Students also need exposure to good schools that have good reading practices. A module dedicated solely to training in reading strategy instruction may be most effective due to the central importance of the development of good reading teachers.

For the group of students who did provide feedback on the programme, there appears to be a level of ambivalence about their preparedness to actually teach reading and associated areas of language in the Foundation Phase. In terms of knowledge of early literacy and the overall literacy programme, these students were, on the whole, seemingly confident that they were adequately prepared for application of the literacy programme in the classroom and in dealing with preschool literacy development. However, it does appear that students were concerned about their overall preparedness to deal with the practicalities of reading (and writing) in the classroom. Indeed, despite an equal “yes” and “no” response rate to questioning with regard to their preparedness, a number of students who responded positively qualified their responses by still stating needs for further training. It seems that practical experiences may bring the greatest level of insight into level of skills and knowledge as well as further needs for development. There is an unmistakable gap between what students are taught in pre-service teacher training and what they are expected to do in classrooms. The move into a professional teaching position signals a jump into the unknown, bringing many questions and concerns to the fore (Kervin & Turbill, 2003:22). As such, it is not surprising that students begin to reflect on their abilities and level of competency after these in situ experiences, which may account for their queries. Potentially, their experiences with teachers’ difficulties in teaching children to read in classrooms during teaching practicals may also lead them to question the methods that they have been exposed to in training. Again, it therefore makes inherent sense for programme coordinators and lecturers to be aligning the modules of the literacy programme more closely to the students’ actual teaching practicals, as it may indeed provide more opportunities for students to reflect on theoretical training as it relates to actual classroom experiences. Due to the crucial importance of mentor teachers in the development of students’ teaching skills, further investigation is needed into the quality of the mentorship that students receive during their teacher training.

Understandably, as for many beginning professionals in various fields, students want actual step-by-step reading instruction methodologies which they can follow. This would seemingly provide a level of security in their ability to cope with the reading instruction demands of their new profession. It is also apparent that students would feel more empowered if they had more exposure to methods of learning support for children experiencing reading difficulties. The students expectations of needing to know exactly how to teach reading and how to deal with learner reading problems are reiterated by the comments of Kervin and Turbill (2003:23), which highlight that “there seems to be an expectation from employers, schools and beginning teachers themselves that pre-service primary teacher training will prepare teachers pedagogically; ensure they have adequate content knowledge across the curriculum areas; and have a repertoire of teaching strategies that will assist students with the aim of increasing student achievement. More than ever, it seems, beginning teachers need to be able to “hit the ground running””. They argue that, whilst pre-service training can provide a great deal of the pedagogical knowledge needed for teaching, it is fundamental that pre-service training must not end once a student graduates from tertiary pre-service teacher education. It needs to be accepted that new teachers still have much to learn about their craft and, as such, their training and development must continue into their professional practice.

Moats (1999:11) argues that “teaching reading is a job for an expert. Contrary to the popular theory that learning to read is natural and easy, learning to read is a complex linguistic achievement. For many children it requires effort and incremental skill development. Moreover, teaching reading requires considerable knowledge and skill, acquired over several years through focused study and supervised practice… No one can acquire such skills by attending a few [university] courses, or attending a few one-shot inservice workshops”.
10 REFERENCES

Academic Administration. (2007). Regulations and Syllabi: Faculty of Education. UP.


