

**Keynote Address at Rhodes University PhD Symposium:
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**Teaching reading in South African schools and teacher education
programmes: what can we learn from recent research?**

1. Introduction

Some years ago, at a literacy conference, I was introduced to the audience as Y Reed. Whisperings and murmurings turned to laughter. For a moment I was extremely anxious and then it dawned on me that, as is sometimes the case with surnames and occupations, the combination of the initial of my first name with my surname is amusingly appropriate for a teacher educator and researcher working in the literacy field. So, today I begin this address with a brief response to the question *Why read?* or, more accurately, to the question *Why is reading literacy important?*

I follow this with a brief overview of findings from:

- (i) assessments of the reading achievements of South African learners in the middle years of primary schooling and at the end of secondary schooling;
- (ii) findings from several research studies, including the *Initial Teacher Education Research Project (ITERP)*.

In the final section I respond to Lenin's famous question *What is to be done?* in order to indicate some directions for possible transformation of reading literacy curricula and practices in schools and in teacher education programmes.

2. Why is reading literacy important?

As a first response to this question I invite you to read and think about three extracts from a personal literacy history assignment, written for a teacher professional development course that I taught in the late 1990s.

Extract One

One day I went to town with my mother when I was doing Standard 1 (Grade 3). On our way back in a bus I saw a young man who was sitting next to me on a three seater. His perusal of a newspaper interested me. I watched him closer trying to know why he was so fast. What I saw was that heads of pictures were facing downwards. At first I couldn't believe what I saw. I looked at him, trying to get whether he was aware of this, only to find that he was so absorbed in his reading that he was even moving his lips. I was more puzzled. How could he read with words like this? He continued from one page to the next and I started to realise that this one cannot read and write, because I was doing Standard 1 and I knew how to hold a book. It was somebody from our location working in the mines in Johannesburg. I smiled alone because I couldn't dare say anything or show it to my mother because it would mean I have no respect for adults. At home I told my brother who told me that he is a mine worker and illiterate. He was disguising because he knew that not

everybody in the bus knew him well, who could wonder why he was reading a newspaper.

Extract Two

This was a disgrace and embarrassing experience for me and my friend at this university. It was our first day in the Library to go there for reading material. We were supposed to look for reading material from the computer. We whispered to each other when we noticed that everybody was helping himself or herself here assisted by the computer. We approached a lady who was working on the counter. She referred us to a table where there was nobody. We toiled around there until a certain lady came to help us although that was not her desk. She gave us library booklets and told us to occupy any computer in there. I thought maybe my friend is better than myself because she is a college lecturer. We went to one computer thinking that we were going to help one another. When we were sitting in front of the computer we couldn't move fast. We noticed that this was a waste of time and time was against us for a lecture. I said to my friend I cannot start operating a computer within these few minutes we have. Let's ask anyone to help us. If no-one can, let's leave for the lecture. This time we got someone who sat down with us and did everything for us while teaching us. Unfortunately the books were not available. We never thought of going in there again. We asked the co-ordinator if there is another place we can get reading material other than in the library. The resource centre was a solution for us to avoid the computer.

Extract Three

From the day I was feeling embarrassed in the library, I was just like the young man who was hiding from other people that he was illiterate. When you are illiterate you think of people around you. What are they going to say about me when they discover this about me? You feel ashamed of yourself among literate people. What I experienced about a computer makes me know exactly how that man was feeling when he noticed that people are literate now. He pretended to be like them. I got into his boots. I know exactly what it means. At the moment I have no time to start computer lessons but what I experienced motivated me to do something. We were illiterates among literates. When we were outside we both agreed that a computer is a need these days.

In discussing these extracts in her book *Literacy and Power*, Hilary Janks (2010: 6-7) notes how the writer moves from a position of amused superiority in Extract One to a position of disempowerment in Extract Two and in Extract Three to a position of empathy with the young man and to understanding that she needs to take action in order to continue her literacy development by becoming computer literate. Janks argues that '[A]ll of us face new literacy challenges every day whether we are a child making scribbles to 'label' a drawing, an academic writing a first book, a media student learning how to deconstruct an advertisement, a school principal learning how to use a computer to write letters, a taxi-driver mastering a new route with the help of a road map ...' (Janks, 2010: 7-8).

As a second response to the question posed above I invite you to read a poem written by a ten year-old Cape Town school boy:

Books

Books are wonderful things,
things that can let you travel afar,
They could turn you into a pirate,
or a hero, or a star.
The Bible teaches you about God and Jesus,
encyclopaedias are full of knowledge.
Recipe books tell you how to make food,
such as cake, stew and porridge.
There are books that tell you about sports,
books that tell you how to play them.
There are also books that tell you how to sew,
how to make a shirt and how to fix a hem.
They make you forget everything,
they are lovely companions for a rainy day.
They are also nice things to read
While you are driving to a holiday.
Andrew Tiedt (reproduced in Gultig, 2001: 124)

The poem is used in a teacher education module titled *Learners and Learning* to illustrate 'the magic of books' and is accompanied in this module by a quotation from Bettelheim and Zelan's book *On Learning to Read*:

What is required for a child to be eager to learn to read is not knowledge about reading's usefulness, but a fervent belief that being able to read will open to him [sic] a world of wonderful experiences, permit him to shed ignorance, understand the world, and become a master of his fate.

And finally, think about this paraphrase of observations made by Carol McDonald and Elizabeth Burroughs (1991) in their summary report on the extensive research undertaken for the Threshold Project in the late 1980s. This project investigated the causes of the underperformance of primary school children in what were then termed 'African schools'.

Sentences from a Grade 5 textbook: Every muscle in your body is able to make some part of your body move. Muscle is made up of special cells that can relax and contract, rather like an elastic band.

How the passage would probably be read by Grade 5 additional language learners of English (based on dictation research): Every sumcle on your body is labe to karm some pats of you body move. Sumcle is make up of special sells that can lerax and tracton tharer like and saletic ban.

Learners' probable response to two teacher questions: What are muscles able to do? and What is muscle made of? Sumcles are labe to karm some pats of you body move. Sumcle is make up of special sells.

McDonald and Burroughs' comment: 'The lesson proceeds and the pupils are able to answer quite intelligently in the words of the passage which they do not understand' (1991: 16-17)

The extracts from Lilly-Rose Hlakanyane's literacy history, from Andrew Tiedt's poem and from McDonald and Burroughs' research suggest the following:

- being labelled literate / not literate may have important identity implications for children and for adults;
- being literate enables access to texts in many forms / modes and requires on-going literacy development when new forms / modes are encountered;
- learning to read enables reading to learn;
- learning to read enables reading for pleasure;
- reading the word (and the image) offers possibilities for reading the world both critically and imaginatively;
- learning to read, reading to learn, reading for pleasure, reading critically and imaginatively are all much more challenging when being undertaken in an additional language.

If reading literacy is both important and challenging (for many learners) to achieve, what is 'the state of the nation' in regard to learners' achievements as readers?

3. Some indicators of the 'state' of reading literacy in South African schools

3.1 Main findings from PIRLS 2006

It is likely that many of you are familiar with these widely publicised findings from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (2006), in which approximately 30 000 learners in Grades 4 and 5 across South Africa wrote an internationally designed test of reading literacy which was translated into all eleven official languages.

I quote the main findings from the report prepared by Sarah Howie and colleagues from the University of Pretoria's Centre for Evaluation and Assessment:

- South African Grade 5 learners achieved the lowest score compared to Grade 4 children in 39 other countries that participated.
- South African grade 5 learners were approximately 200 points below the international average score of 500 fixed for the reading literacy of Grade 4 learners internationally.
- There was a significant difference in achievement between Grade 4 learners and Grade 5 learners in South Africa indicating a significant progression in reading achievement across all languages from Grade 4 to Grade 5.
- Three-quarters of South African learners were not able to reach the lowest international benchmarks and only 2% could reach the highest international benchmark.
- Performance across all 11 languages was below the international mean. Learners tested in all African languages achieved very low scores with 86%

to 96% not reaching the lowest international benchmark compared to half of the learners writing in English and Afrikaans. Children writing the test in Afrikaans achieved the highest average score, although children whose home language was English (and who wrote the test in English) achieved the highest score overall.

- Despite low achievement, South African learners have generally high reading self-concepts and reading attitudes. (Howie et al, 2008: 56)

3.2 Data from the 2015 National Benchmark Test cohort

The National Benchmark Tests Project of Higher Education South Africa (HESA) aims to assess the academic and quantitative literacy levels and the mathematics proficiency of students entering university, to provide information to higher education institutions which can assist with selection of students and placement in appropriate curricular 'routes' (e.g. regular, extended, augmented) and to assist with curriculum development, particularly in relation to foundation and augmented courses (Prince & Cliff, 2015). For the 2015 intake into higher education institutions a total of 77108 students wrote the academic literacy test which is designed to assess their ability to cope with the language of instruction and the academic reading and reasoning demands of first year university courses. Their results were as follows:

- 28.87% were categorised as 'proficient' and thus as ready to engage with 'regular' programmes of study;
- 26.90% were categorised as 'upper intermediate' and 28.97% as 'lower intermediate' and thus in need of support (e.g. extended or augmented curricula) if admitted to a programme of tertiary study, particularly if categorised as lower intermediate;
- 15.26% were categorised as having only 'basic' academic literacy and thus as needing extensive and long term support (e.g. bridging programmes) in order to cope with tertiary level studies.

The results of these two examples of large-scale assessments indicate that many South African learners are not proficient readers of texts, in a range of genres, at the levels expected of them either in the middle years of primary school or at the end of secondary school. Research which has aimed to understand why so many learners do not become proficient readers predates both the PIRLS and the introduction of the National Benchmark Tests (see, for example, several of the case studies reported in Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999). However, the learners' poor performance on the PIRLS tests and the accompanying investigation of factors which may have contributed to learners' low scores, were the catalysts for a number of recent studies, both small scale and more ambitious in scope. After a brief summary of key findings from the research of Howie et al (2008) in relation to PIRLS, I outline findings from several case studies which focus on the key role of the teacher in the development of learners' reading literacies and then finally move to what I was invited to speak about: findings from the first phase of the Initial Teacher Education Research Project (ITERP).

4. Research findings that contribute to understanding learner underachievement in reading literacy assessments

4.1 A national study directly linked to learners' responses to the PIRLS test

Howie et al (2008) identified three clusters of factors which are likely to have impacted on learners' ability to read the texts and answer the questions based on them in the PIRLS test: (i) home background; (ii) reading instruction; (iii) school environment.

With reference to home background, three of the key findings were lack of books in the homes of many learners; lack of exposure to early reading literacies activities within the family and high levels of bilingualism in the home. (While additive bi- and multilingualism is promoted in South Africa's language-in-education policy and in many contexts should be considered a resource, it may add to the complexity of initial literacy learning.)

With reference to the school environment, three key findings were that half or more of the learners, in three quarters of the schools in the nationwide study, were from economically disadvantaged homes, more than half the primary schools had neither a school library nor classroom libraries and in almost two-thirds of the schools approximately 10% of the learners spoke a different main language from the language of the test.

Finally, with reference to reading instruction, in line with findings from several other studies (e.g. Dachs, 1999; Duncan, 1999; Schollar, 1999; Pile & Smythe 1999, Marx, 2010; Sibanda, 2014), Howie et al (2008) found that in most schools insufficient time was spent on reading activities or on formal reading instruction, with top-performing schools being the exception to this general trend. A further important finding was that teaching of the more complex reading skills, such as inferencing, is introduced much later in South African schools than in schools internationally and that in some classrooms these skills are not taught at all (also a finding in the studies of Mashatole, 2014; Sibanda, 2014).

4.2 An investigation of learner preparedness for the transition from learning to read in isiXhosa and English (Grade 3) to reading to learn (Grade 4) in ten Eastern Cape schools

In Jabulani Sibanda's comprehensive three part study he first established the high frequency English vocabulary items in Grade 4 textbooks and then used a combination of teacher interviews, classroom observations, analysis of teacher talk and analysis of Grade 3 reading materials and classroom environmental print to investigate the extent to which Grade 3 isiXhosa-speaking learners in ten schools were exposed to and prepared for using that vocabulary. Finally, he tested 297 Grade 4 learners' knowledge of high frequency English vocabulary items by using three tests of word recognition, three of passive word knowledge and three of active word knowledge.

One of Sibanda's key findings was that there was very little deliberate vocabulary instruction in the grade three classes he observed and what little there was focused on providing isiXhosa equivalents of English words that were new to learners. Another was that individual learner needs were rarely recognised. His words echo those of McDonald and Burroughs written 25 years earlier: Drilling was a major feature of the Grade 3 classroom and the individual was hardly recognised. Some learners took advantage of the choral nature of the responses to join others in the chants even when they were not looking at the words being read or paying attention (Sibanda, 2014: 284).

Only in the tests of recognition of high frequency words used in Grade 4 textbooks did the 297 learners tested achieve a mean score over 50%, with mean scores on tests of active vocabulary knowledge of these words as low as 28.7%. Across all nine tests least known were the content words most needed for successful reading in Grade 4.

4.3 Conceptualisations of the ideal reading literate subject in PIRLS 2006, in South African curriculum documents and by four Grade 4 teachers in Gauteng schools

Janet Marx's (2010) analysis of examples of the PIRLS tests and of the assessment standards for reading in the National Curriculum Statement still in use at the time of her study identified a 'match' between the two in terms of what the reading literate subject should know and be able to do with texts. However, interviews with four Grade 4 teachers in Gauteng schools and analysis of the tests of reading literacy which they devised for Grade 4 learners indicated a disconcerting mismatch between the conceptualisations of reading literacy evident in their beliefs and practices and those underpinning PIRLS and the curriculum document. In their Grade 4 classes the four teachers did not teach reading and when they tested learners' reading literacy they asked questions only at the literal, decoding level and based these questions on very short passages varying in level of difficulty from too easy (Grades 1-2 level) to too difficult (Grades 7-8 level).

4.4 An investigation of the literacy teaching beliefs and practices of five Foundation Phase teachers in a Limpopo township school and of their responses to a teaching intervention

Mogakabane Mashatole was interested in finding out whether a targeted teaching intervention could support teachers in revising their literacy teaching theories and practices so that they could introduce alternatives to 'repetitions, rote learning and chorsing' and to viewing reading as a 'mechanical process' (2014: 91). The five teachers were observed by the researcher during a series of literacy lessons in which he found there were almost no opportunities for learners to engage in meaning-making. The teachers were also observers of a series of lessons taught by a team of academic researchers in which more learning-centred approaches to literacy development were demonstrated. The teachers participated in reflective discussions of these lessons and Mashatole's analysis of both the lessons taught by the five teachers prior to the intervention and of their contributions to discussions of the intervention lessons suggests that when teachers understand how to do something differently in their classrooms and why this difference is likely to benefit learners,

they may be motivated to try something new. One example from the study is that having observed the academic researchers re-phrase instructions in the LoLT (English) rather than codeswitch to Sepedi, the teachers decided to try to limit their use of codeswitching in order to support learners' development of comprehension in English.

4.5 A micro-ethnographic study of teachers' and learners' co-construction of early literacy practice

Caroline van der Mescht investigated micro-interactions within the reading literacy event *Reading on the Mat* in three grade one classrooms in Eastern Cape schools. One of her key findings is that while the teachers in her study promoted positive identities for children as successful readers and created positive affect for reading activities, this positive positioning work was undercut by three factors:

... first, the fact that activities on the Mat focus on decoding text fragments rather than interrogating whole texts. The resultant identity offered to children is one of codebreakers alone. ... A second factor that undercuts children's identity as successful readers is that although they are active, they do not have agency. This derives from the strong assessment focus of teachers on the Mat and their questioning practices. A third factor... is that by focusing primarily on decoding fragmented text and on assessment opportunities, teachers avoid issues of differentiation and disregard cultural and linguistic differences (Van der Mescht, 2013: ii).

Findings from each of these studies have implications for both initial teacher education programmes and for professional development initiatives for teachers and so I now turn to the on-going Initial Teacher Education Research Project.

5. A comparative analysis of curricula for English as academic subject and curricula for teaching English in B Ed programmes for Intermediate Phase student teachers at five South African universities (Reed, 2014: ITERP Report on English courses for Intermediate Phase student teachers at five universities)

While regulatory bodies such as the Department of Higher Education and Training provide a broad framework of formal criteria to be addressed by providers of initial teacher education (ITE), these criteria can be interpreted in many different ways. The Initial Teacher Education Research Project, an initiative of JET Education Services in collaboration with the Education Dean's Forum, the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Department of Basic Education, is investigating the preparation of Intermediate Phase teachers of Mathematics and English at five South African universities which represent the major 'types' of institution offering ITE.

The 2014 reports on the English and Mathematics courses offered at the five institutions present an analysis of data obtained by ITERP field researchers in the form of course outlines, reference lists, samples of teaching materials, examples of assessments and interviews with faculty members at each institution. The analysis of the English courses was informed by Banks, Leach & Moon's (1999) model for conceptualising teachers' professional knowledge:

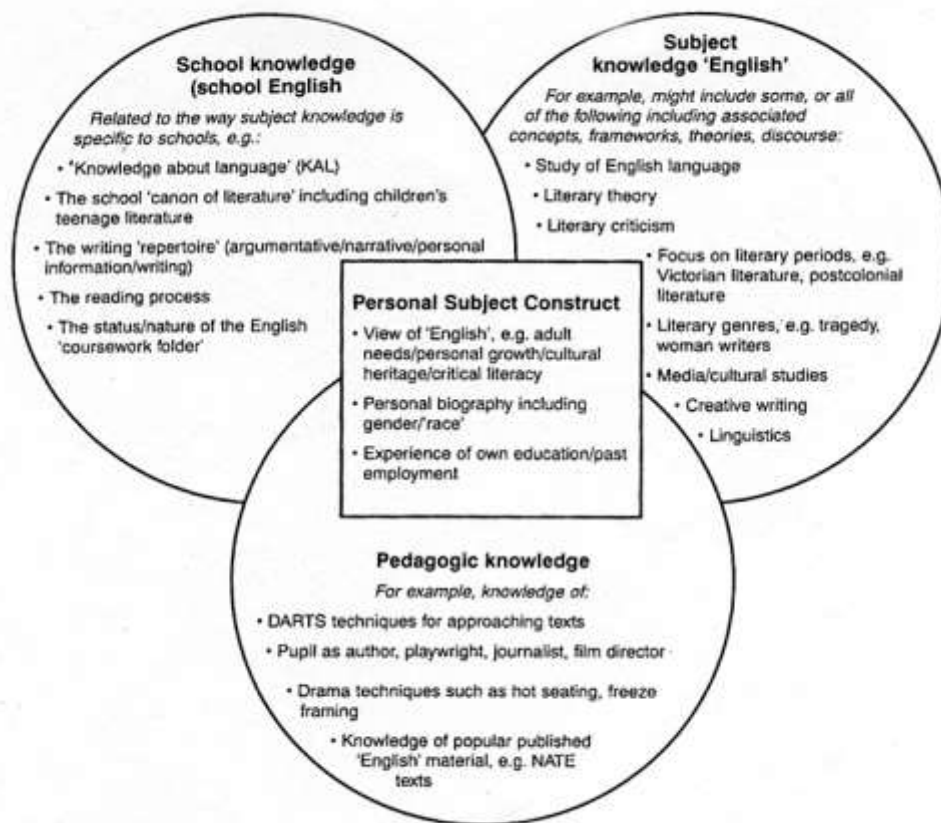


Figure 1 A model for conceptualising teachers' professional knowledge, with examples from a group of English teachers (Banks, Leach & Moon, 1999)

To this model was added 'academic literacy' – an element of most teacher education programmes in South Africa which was not considered by Banks, Leach and Moon, whose framework was devised for teacher education in the United Kingdom where competence in using English for study purposes and in the classroom is assumed.

While the focus of this presentation is on reading literacy, recognising that literacy development is on-going and multidimensional, I present a summary of findings on what is offered to Intermediate Phase student teachers in English subject knowledge courses and in English school and pedagogic knowledge courses at each of the five universities in the study.

Table 1: English Courses for IP BEd English specialists

	A	B	C	D	E
Academic Literacy	1 year course: New Lits for Teachers	2 Semesters: Academic and Computer Literacy	No AL, but some attention to it in Level 2 Eng modules	2 semesters: Academic Literacy	2 year long courses: Academic Literacy
Subject Knowledge	4 year courses: Eng Lang and Lit	6 semesters: Eng Lang and Lit 1 - 3	5 semesters: Eng Lang and Lit	6 semesters: Eng Lang and Lit	4 year-long courses: Eng Lang and Lit
School and Pedagogic Knowledge	2 year courses: Language Method 1 and 2	2 semesters: Eng as Medium of Instruction. 4 semesters: Eng Method	2 semesters: Language Method (one semester each for HL and FAL)	2 semesters: English Method (FAL)	HL: 4 year- long courses: Eng Method

The most striking feature of Table 1 is the variation in both duration and content of what is offered to student teachers specialising in English. Institutions A and E both offer 4 full years of subject knowledge, while Institution C offers only 5 semesters. Regarding school and pedagogic knowledge, Institution E provides specialist English teachers with 4 year-long courses, while the other 4 HEIs offer only between 2 and 4 semesters.

Table 2 (below) summarises the English courses for B Ed IP teachers who do not specialise in English.

Table 2: English courses for IP teachers not specialising in English

	A	B	C	D	E
Academic Literacy	1 year course: New Literacies for Teachers	2 semesters: Academic & Comp Lit: 1 for all students + 1 for weak readers	No Academic Literacy courses	2 semesters: Academic Literacy	2 year courses: Academic Literacy
Subject Knowledge	None	None	2 semesters: One for Eng Lang; one for Eng Lit	None	HL 2 year courses: Eng Lang & Lit. FAL 2 year courses: Eng Lang & Lit.
School and Pedagogic Knowledge	1 year course: Language Method	2 semesters: English as LOLT (FAL)	2 semesters: English Method HL and FAL	None	HL 2 year courses: Eng Method. FAL 2 year courses: Eng Method.

It is perhaps a cause for concern that, despite the ubiquitous complaint that many students enter university with weak English proficiency, and despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of IP teachers will teach through the medium of English, three of the HEIs in the ITERP sample (A, B and D) provide no subject knowledge English for students not specialising in this subject and Institution D offers no school or pedagogic knowledge for teaching English.

Table 3 (below) summarises the number of credits carried by the courses listed in Table 1 and 2. Here too the variation across HEIs is striking, with English courses for specialist English teachers constituting only 15% of the overall degree at Institution C, while the comparable figure for Institution B is 34%.

With respect to those IP teachers who have elected not to specialise in English, it can be questioned whether their formal exposure to English subject and pedagogic knowledge (between 5% and 7.5%) is adequate.

Table 3: Proportion of B Ed degree made up by English courses for IP teachers

Elective	A	B	C	D	E
IP English Specialists	120 (25%)	162 (34%)	72 (15%)	120 (25%)	HL: 72 (15%) FAL: 34 (7% - 11%) AL: credits not specified
IP English Generalists	30 (6%)	28 (6%)	36 (7.5%)	24 (5%)	HL: 28 (6%) FAL: 29 (6%) AL: credits not specified

Before turning to the teaching of reading in ITE programmes for Intermediate Phase student teachers I offer some observations on other aspects of the English courses.

English for academic purposes

The academic literacy courses offered to all IP student teachers at each of the five institutions in the study contribute to very different constructions of literate teachers, as a result of the different learning focus of each course. Some aim to fill gaps in student teachers' syntactic and lexical knowledge of English; others aim to support development of the ability to read and write academic texts and to undertake research. While the need for 'gap filling' for some students is acknowledged, if this is the sole or main focus of academic literacy programmes student teachers are unlikely to gain sufficient epistemic access to 'socially powerful' theoretical knowledge (Shay, 2012).

New literacies for teachers

Only two institutions offer courses (both subject and pedagogic in one institution and pedagogic in the other) that enable students to engage substantively with New Literacy Studies in which literacy practices are considered 'cross culturally, in different domains, in different discourses and as they vary in relation to different sign systems and different technologies' (Janks, 2010, p. 117). Given that literacies are produced and used in diverse ways within and across communities in South Africa and globally, this lack of engagement with new literacies in several institutions is a cause for concern.

English as subject specialisation

The subject courses offered to IP English specialists at each of the five institutions contribute to very different constructions of teachers of English, as a result of the breadth and depth of study (more courses at more levels offered in some institutions than others), differences in content foci (at two extremes, mainly canonical literature on the one hand and mainly descriptive grammar on the other) and the texts (including film texts) and genres chosen by lecturers.

The courses for English specialists at three of the institutions (A, B, E) can be described as 'reading rich' in terms of canonical and contemporary literary texts but the course outlines from Institution D indicate the students 'learn about novels' and 'learn about plays', with no indication that they read and analyse texts other than a limited number of short stories and some poetry.

In an era in which films are not only easily accessible on television but increasingly via a range of new technologies, it is interesting that only three of the five institutions include film study in their courses for English specialists and only one of these (Institution E) includes films for children.

Only one of the five institutions (Institution A) offers courses in reading and engaging critically with a range of media and advertising texts, although Institution C includes some course content on reading advertisements, reading newspapers and becoming a critical reader. Institution D made reference to 'brochures, reference texts, textbooks, cartoons and advertisements but no information was provided about how these texts are used in the curriculum.

Learning to teach English as home or additional language; learning to use English as LoLT

Even in the two institutions which offer more school and pedagogic knowledge courses than do the other three, the allocation of time and course credits is significantly less than for English as subject for IP English specialists. While depth of subject knowledge is centrally important in teacher education, it appears that across all five institutions, there may be insufficient focus on equipping student teachers to guide IP learners to become proficient readers and writers / producers of texts in a range of genres and modes.

In only two of the five institutions is substantial time allocated to microteaching and lesson planning. These two institutions are also the only ones to foreground the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in their school and pedagogic knowledge courses and to teach IP specialists on their own for a one year course.

The language and literacy challenges experienced by many learners in the transition from learning in their home languages(s) to learning in English and in developing their knowledge of English as subject, together with the challenges associated with the linguistic complexity of classrooms in many urban areas, appear to be insufficiently addressed across all institutions, although some pay more attention to addressing these challenges than others.

To conclude that section I present some findings from the ITERP study specifically in relation to school and pedagogic knowledge for teaching reading.

Literature for children

According to Banks, Leach and Moon (1999) 'school knowledge' for English includes 'the school canon of literature including literature for children'. Given that IP English specialists are being prepared to teach learners in Grades 4-6, who are expected to engage with a range of literary genres, and given the potential of literature to stimulate children's interest in reading, the backgrounding of literature for children and adolescents by the five institutions can be questioned. There is no reference to children's literature in the course outlines from Institution D. At Institution C a module which included children's literature was replaced in the curriculum for English by a module on post-colonial literature. At Institution A children's literature is included in a stories course in first year and at Institution B 'young adult literature' is included in a second year course. The most extensive input, coupled with student assignment work, is offered by Institution E, which also uses children's story books in a fourth year philosophy for children module.

Reading pedagogies for a text-based curriculum

In addition to becoming knowledgeable about children's literature and about ways of using literary texts in the classroom, a text-based approach to English requires that students are knowledgeable about working with the full range of texts specified in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for the Intermediate Phase (e.g. generic features of such texts, strategies for assisting learners to comprehend and critique them). In the school and pedagogic knowledge courses, strategies, including questioning techniques for assisting learners to read and respond to texts in a range of genres, are most evident in the courses offered by Institutions A and B, with the former including content on 'before, during and after reading' activities in line with what is advocated in CAPS and also content on what is involved in reading visual texts and in reading critically.

Institution E requires students in its home language cohort to undertake a research project to investigate what learners read but appears not to include a similar project for students in its first additional language cohort where this project would be equally useful. While Institution C includes strategies for teaching reading in its methodology module, many of the example texts and strategies seem more appropriate for Foundation than Intermediate Phase. At Institution D the only evidence that strategies for reading different types of texts are included in a course, is an examination question that asks about these.

Bridging the gap between learning to read and reading to learn

Given the findings of underachievement evident in both large and small scale assessments of South African learners' reading literacy, it is interesting to note that there appears to be no recognition, in school and pedagogic knowledge courses for IP teachers, of the need for these teachers to understand what is involved in emergent literacy and in learning to read. There appears to be an assumption that by Grade 4 learners can read, even the majority of South Africa's learners who face the challenge of doing so in an additional language.

To conclude this section on findings from the ITERP study, it is evident that with reference to texts and to pedagogic strategies the B Ed curricula across the five institutions are more different than similar. However, the data examined (and it should be noted that there were some gaps in the data sets) suggest that it may be useful for teacher educators to reflect on whether their courses enable beginner teachers to acquire the knowledge, skills and professional judgement required to support struggling readers on the one hand and to extend excellent readers on the other.

6. What is to be done?

De Clerq and Shalem (2014) note that '[R]esearch on professional knowledge suggests that to teach well, teachers need a specialised knowledge of what they teach, a broad sense of diverse methods of teaching and, most specifically, ways of explaining and representing the specific content they teach with a view to imparting it to learners of a specific age and level of cognitive development' (2014: 168).

So what should characterise such knowledge for teachers of reading literacy?

For decades there has been so little agreement among scholars about how to teach learners to read that the on-going debates have become known as 'the reading wars'. Initially, combatants supported or opposed the phonics approach or the whole language approach. While each still has its champions, there has been a move towards what has been termed 'a balanced approach' which claims to offer teachers opportunities to utilize the best elements of each approach. However, as noted by Wren (2003) what constitutes these best elements is by no means clear.

Currently, the debates are becoming more complex partly as a result of changes to the material forms of texts. The Reading Association of South Africa (RASA) recently changed the definition of literacy in its academic journal to read as follows: 'the material form of texts is changing and ... literacy involves the ability to 'read' and 'write' more than just words. Literacy should therefore be seen as the ability to consume and produce texts in and across a range of semiotic modes such as oral, visual, gestural, spatial and written.' In South African classrooms literacy teaching also involves providing opportunities for learners to learn to read in more than one language and then to read in two or more languages for interest and pleasure. Current initiatives such as the African Storybook Project (see www.africanstorybook.org) and Nal'ibali (nalibali.org) are making texts in a number of languages much more available and accessible to primary school learners than in the past.

Earlier this year a group of academics and practitioners with a common interest in teacher education, but with divergent views on what should be emphasised in a literacy curriculum for Foundation Phase teachers, were able to draft a preliminary course structure for an ITE literacy curriculum. This document is not yet in the public domain and will be taken further at a colloquium at the Reading Association of South Africa conference in September. Such endeavours hold promise for the long term

transformation of literacy teacher education, classroom practices and learners' achievements as readers. Watch this space!

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