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Nazarana Mather

Varsity College

and

Sandra Land

Durban University of Technology

Exploring educators' understanding of developing learners' reading skills and their readiness to implement CAPS

ABSTRACT

This study explored what three Intermediate Phase English First Additional Language teachers understood about reading and teaching reading, and the strategies they used to develop learners' reading skills. Data gathered through interviews and observations of classroom practice were used to consider the extent of their readiness to achieve the aims implicit in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). It was found that these educators understand reading primarily as the oral performance of decoding text to speech, and view comprehension as a separate and restricted entity; also, limitations in their understanding of comprehension processes involved in reading impeded their readiness to implement CAPS. Shortcomings in educators' schooling experiences, training and professional development were considered with a view to informing future teacher training and workshops. This study formed part of a university led research project which investigated well-documented indications of poor development of literacy skills in South African schools.

Keywords: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), Decoding, Interactive models of reading, Intermediate Phase (IP), Reading skills, Annual National Assessment (ANA).

# 1.	Introduction

This paper analyses how three Intermediate Phase teachers experienced reading at their childhood homes and in primary and high school, how they were trained to teach reading and the strategies they used to develop learners' reading skills. The purpose in doing so is to explore why South African (SA) learners, perform so poorly in national and international assessments. We wanted to address the questions of how teachers understand reading and the extent to which they are sufficiently enabled and prepared to achieve the aims implicit in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). CAPS was introduced in the Foundation Phase (FP) in 2012 and in the Intermediate Phase (IP) in 2013 by the Department of Basic Education as a means of addressing the poor academic performance of SA learners in national and international assessments.

It is tempting to assume that the poor results reflected in national tests like the Annual National Assessments (ANAs), are associated only with the many dysfunctional schools in SA in which high absentee rates of staff and pupils are common (Taylor, 2011) and infrastructure is often less than adequate. At these schools, explanations for poor performance on tests are not difficult to find. However, some schools with good attendance rates, functional facilities and committed staff are among those with poor literacy development and dismal ANA scores (Taylor, 2011; National Education Development Unit, 2013). The school at which this study was carried out is well resourced with high attendance rates, and a principal and staff who are genuinely troubled about the performance of their learners. Their concern about the poor ANA scores of children in their classes led them to ask the university (through which this study was conducted) to assist in finding reasons for their learners' poor performance in literacy tests like the ANA as well as providing possible ways of improving the state of affairs.

Discovering causes for the poor results in the ANA and other assessments entails establishing what is happening on a daily basis in terms of teaching and learning reading in the classrooms of our schools. Thus, this study explored how three IP educators were taught reading at home before starting school and in primary and high school, as these may have an impact on the decisions that they make in the classroom. The training in the teaching of reading they received at tertiary level and in further training, in particular to implement CAPS in their phase, was examined with the aim of discovering possible reasons for the poor levels of literacy in their classes.

# 2.	Research questions

This article addresses the following questions:

1.	How did the participants experience reading at home, in primary school and in high school?

2.	How were the participants trained to teach reading?

3.   To what extent have their experiences and training informed their classroom practices?

4.   To what extent have their experiences and training prepared them to implement CAPS in their classrooms in 2013?

3.   Literature review

The post-apartheid SA government invests heavily in its education system, devoting 20% of government spending to this sector (SouthAfrica.info, 2013). This is a particularly heavy investment in education in African terms (The Economist, 2010), yet its yield remains strikingly low relative to other African countries. According to the 2011 ranking by Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SAQMEC lll), the reading performance of students at SA schools ranked 14th out of 15 African countries (Taylor, 2011). Assessments within SA suggest that this poor ranking is credible: in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), the percentage of grade 4, 5 and 6 learners who scored 50% or more in the 2012 ANA tests for Home Language (HL) was 32%, 27% and 35% respectively; in First Additional Language (FAL), less than 27% of learners in these grades scored more than 50%. In 2013, ANA scores showed some improvement, with learners' average scores shifting from mainly in the 30's to mainly the 40's.

Education experts, however, believe that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) might be manipulating ANA results to conceal SA's education crisis (Coan, 2014). The target for Grade 6 learners in 2011 was an average of 46%, 51% in 2012 and 55% in 2013. In HL the learners fell below the target in 2012, having obtained only 43% but exceeded expectations in 2013 by achieving an average of 55%. In FAL Grade 6 learners showed a 10% improvement from 2012 to 2013 and the percentage of learners who obtained at least 50% increased from 24% in 2012 to 41% in 2013. Overall in this year, the IP results showed a substantial improvement in both HL and FAL. The highest improvement is noted in the Grade 6 HL in North West province, where the average mark increased from 28.2% in 2012 to 58.3% in 2013 (25.2% higher) (DBE, 2013). Educationalist Wayne Hugo coined the term "miraculous jumps" to describe this drastic improvement and suggests that additional investigation needs to be conducted because the data reveal strange patterns that are hard to explain by any normal education process, but instead point to possible manipulation of results either at teacher, school, district provincial or national level (Coan, 2014).

The underperformance of SA in literacy tests could be attributed to the fact that many teachers focus on developing their learners' decoding skills without giving comprehension the attention that it requires (Pretorius & Currin, 2010). In contrast, the CAPS IP FAL document (DBE, 2011) highlights the development of learners' vocabulary, knowledge of language structures, and comprehension skills (such as inferring, predicting and schema activation) in contexts that are relevant and purposeful. CAPS also emphasises learners' ability to relate information in texts to their background knowledge. The following summary of the reading process is provided in CAPS (DBE, 2011:10-11):

The reading process consists of the pre-reading, reading and post-reading stages. The activities the learner will be engaged in can be summarised as follows:

Pre-reading:

- Activating prior knowledge
- Looking at the source, author, and publication date
- Reading the first and last paragraphs of a section
- Making predictions

Reading:

- Pause occasionally to check your comprehension and to let the ideas sink in
- Compare the content to your predictions
- Use the context to work out the meaning of unknown words as much as is possible; where this is not possible, use a dictionary

Post-reading:

- If you will need to recall specific information, make a graphic organiser or outline of key ideas and a few supporting details
- Draw conclusions
- Write a summary to help you clarify and recall main ideas…
- Evaluate - bias, accuracy, quality of the text
- Extend your thinking- use ideas you saw in text

In addition to this summary, different types of reading activities and skills are listed, particularly in the teaching plans. For example, the Grade 4 teaching plans for Term 3, Week 7-8 for the Reading and Viewing skill contains the following:

Reads information text from the textbook or Teacher's Resource File (TRF)

- Pre-reading: predicts from the title and pictures
- Uses a range of reading strategies, e.g. predicting, using phonic and con-textual clues, scanning for specific information

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- Answers and begins to ask more complex questions, e.g. Why? How do you think that happened?

- Interprets and discusses visuals (DBE, 2011: 45)

There is, however, no accompanying explanation of the different aspects of the reading process or the application of the skills such as those noted above, nor any guidance for educators about how to teach these skills. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence frequently indicates that teachers avoid reading policies and materials, so the DBE has to think of creative ways to get teachers to engage with documents (Dornbrack & Dixon, 2014). It is therefore reassuring to note that the 2013 ANA report (DBE, 2013: 10) lists interventions aimed at improving the skills of teachers and subject advisers, such as workshops and additional training measures. The low ANA scores referred to above certainly underline the pressing need for interventions like these. What is of concern, though, is the continued adherence to styles of workshops that have been found by all involved to be ineffective (National Education Development Unit, 2013).

Without effective and sustained support, teachers will need to rely solely on CAPS for guidance in their teaching, and, if so, may be at risk of delivering meaningless reading lessons. For instance, if one considers the pre-reading summary provided above, the teacher could choose, from the list of texts provided by CAPS, a folktale explaining why the zebra has stripes. The teacher could ask the learners what they know about zebras, then ask them to look at the text and say what type of text it is, who they author is and when it was published, and what they think the story will be about. In this instance, even if learners' responses have been minimal, the teacher might believe that she has complied with the policy and completed the pre-reading stage as stated in CAPS. In spite of this conviction, she might have been completely unsuccessful in fulfilling the real intention of this stage, which, as noted above, is not explained in CAPS. In other words, although she has dutifully gone through the questions, she might not have activated learners' schemas so that they could build on and use their existing knowledge in the comprehension process. In addition, she might not realise that her learners are unable to use the conventions of the genre, knowledge of the author and context of the publication to aid their understanding, or that they may not have made any considered predictions, or be interested in reading further.

Unfortunately, this scenario is not unlikely, since many SA educators appear to neglect understanding and place inordinate emphasis on decoding (Pretorius & Currin, 2010). It is important to distinguish between decoding and comprehending: in decoding, symbols are translated into language, a process that may not involve comprehension (Pretorius, 2002). During the 'learning to read' stage from Grade 1-3 there has traditionally been (and still is) great emphasis on decoding skills, and not much on the development of comprehension skills (Pretorius, 2002). Also, according to Pretorius and Currin (2010), many educators teach their learners to decode letters and words before any attention is given to comprehension. This echoes the observation of Trudell and Schroeder (2007) that in many African classrooms across Sub-Saharan Africa, literacy tends to be understood

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and taught with more stress on rote reading and oral production than on reading with understanding. Decoding is necessary for reading with good comprehension, but is not sufficient to ensure this, since learners who are able to decode may read aloud with clarity and correct pronunciation, but without actually understanding what they are reading (Pretorius, 2002). Over-emphasis on decoding may be part of a traditional view of literacy (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007), reinforced by educators' perceptions and beliefs about reading that are rooted in the way they experienced reading when they were in school.

It is well-established that teachers' beliefs and experiences influence their behaviour and the decisions they make in the classroom, and are evident in their teaching (Borg, 2003; Davis & Andrzejewski,, 2009 & Klausewitz 2005). Sources of experience that shape teachers' beliefs about reading and teaching include their personal experiences, their schooling and other experiences of formal training, their work experiences, their places of employment, and their on-going professional development (Graves, 2000). Davis and Andrzejewski (2009) also state that teachers' beliefs originate from their own schooling as students and that those beliefs shape their practice. Therefore, exploring teachers' perceptions and beliefs, and finding out what influences these beliefs is important in gaining insight into their classroom practices (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009). This is particularly relevant in the SA context because many teachers were taught under the inferior schooling system of Bantu education during the apartheid era – so their teaching practices may reflect their own learning experiences, thus perpetuating the cycle of inferior education.

This study draws on Perfetti, Landi and Oakhill's Interactive Activation Model of Reading (2005) of how readers acquire the skill of reading with good understanding. In this model, successful comprehension is the production of a conceptual model of the meaning contained in a text. For this to occur, readers must identify words and understand their meaning, parse sentences, make inferences, and link information gained from the text to their background knowledge. Comprehension processes should thus involve three levels of representation of text meaning:

- the literal level, in which explicitly stated pieces of information are under-stood,

- the proposition level, where the main ideas in the text are grasped, and

- the situation level, where the meaning of the whole text is understood in relation to other relevant contexts.

Understanding different genres of texts, the ability to infer, sensitivity to story structure and comprehension monitoring are all crucial in a reader's ability to scaffold their mental representation of textual meaning (Perfetti et al., 2005). In order to achieve this, Carell, Devine and Eskey (1988) suggest that, firstly, learners should be assisted to develop their bottom-up skills by developing their vocabulary and grammatical skills. This means that the teacher must include instruction on cohesive devices of the language and their

function across sentences and paragraphs as well as pre-teaching vocabulary and background knowledge concurrently. Secondly, their top-down processing skills can be developed by building background knowledge which will help the learners to predict which prior, existing knowledge to access. Lastly, activating background knowledge using text-mapping strategies and developing predictive skills gives the reader a purpose for reading, which will increase motivation and interest.

4.   Research design and methodology

The purpose of this research was to investigate whether the participants were ready to implement the Reading and Viewing skill prescribed by CAPS. Their first experiences of reading, the manner in which they were taught reading in primary and high school and their training to teach reading were explored, using a narrative inquiry research design. Clandinin (2007) defines narrative inquiry as the study of experience as a story that entails the participants telling their stories as they respond to semi-structured interview questions or engage in conversations or dialogue. The researcher then interprets their stories and provides an account of the phenomena being investigated. This design allowed the researchers to collect rich, in-depth qualitative data to answer the key research questions.

The sample consisted of three English IP educators, who teach in a school which is situated in a rural area on the outskirts of a large city in Kwazulu-Natal. All the educators (including the participants) and learners at the school are mother tongue isiZulu speakers. Hence, English is offered at FAL level whilst isiZulu is offered at HL level. As this school is relatively small, there is one Grade 4, one Grade 5 and one Grade 6 class, so the English teacher from each grade was purposively selected. As the sample was small and not representative of all English FAL teachers, the findings cannot be generalised.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. To compare their accounts with their classroom practices, their reading lessons were observed, using a structured observation schedule. Both the interviews and the lessons were tape-recorded. The transcripts from the recordings of the lesson observations and the interviews, the structured observation schedule and the researchers' interview notes were analysed. The data were coded and the research questions used to categorise them into themes. The themes were further broken down to simplify the data and from this, findings were elaborated on, recommendations were made and conclusions were drawn.

We also encountered an unexpected language barrier. Since participants were teachers of English, it was assumed that they would be able to communicate fluently in English, but questions had often to be repeated or simplified as they did not always immediately understand them. At an official level, permission to conduct the study was sought from the DBE. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, and the pseudonyms used for them were 'Njabulo' (Grade 4), 'Pearl' (Grade 5), and 'Andile' (Grade 6).

Discussion of the findings in relation to each research question

Question 1: How did the participants experience reading at home, in primary school and in high school?

AT HOME

Njabulo grew up with her mother, who was illiterate, and six sisters. She explained that she used to look at the pictures in her sisters' books. In contrast, Pearl's mother was a school principal who taught her to read at an early age, before she began school, and encouraged her to use a dictionary if she did not understand what she was reading. No-one taught Andile to read at home but his grandmother told him stories, which he enjoyed.

PRIMARY SCHOOL

Njabulo began school in the early 1960's where she first learnt to read in English. When describing how her teacher taught her reading, she fondly recalled reading from textbooks, poems and papers with pictures. Underneath each picture were words which she and her classmates had to say. Thereafter, they would read sentences which contained the same words and then they would turn to their textbooks and read stories that repeated the same words.

Pearl also spoke fondly of her first teacher who taught her to read in English by introducing her to names of the letters of the alphabet as well as the phonetic sounds of each letter. She said that they used basal readers in class and pointing at the words while reading and observing punctuation marks were emphasised.

Andile said that he first learnt reading at school by learning the vowel sounds, consonant sounds and then blends and that he learnt to read from English poems and readers.

HIGH SCHOOL

In the early 1970's Njabulo began high school, where her teacher used themes to teach reading. She explained that after reading a passage to the class, he would ask the class questions pertaining to the story, particularly about moral lessons that they may have learnt, and if they did not understand any words, they were told to use their dictionaries.

Pearl said that her teacher developed her reading skills by motivating them and building their confidence, using themes from a textbook and poems, which they had to read aloud and memorise.

Andile explained that he changed high schools several times because of political violence. He said that what was common to all was that they read aloud from textbooks that had stories and poems with basic questions after each. He stated that they were not taught how to examine a text critically but had to read and "vomit what we were taught".

DISCUSSION

All three participants were schooled during the apartheid era, so were subjected to Bantu Education, designed to limit their power within the country (Mgqwashu, 2009). Interview data showed that their critical thinking skills were not developed and the genres that they were exposed to were limited to basal readers, textbooks and poems. Participants interpreted understanding a text, not as understanding the writer's purpose and message, and forming a coherent mental representation of the meaning of the whole text, as suggested by the Interactive Activation Model (Perfetti, et al., 2005), but as simply understanding all the words of the text. This is indicated by the fact that all three made reference only to using dictionaries if they did not understand what they were reading. The CAPS reading process states that learners must "Use the context to work out the meaning of unknown words as much as is possible; where this is not possible, use a dictionary" (DBE, 2011: 10-11). The participants did not show learners how to use the context to infer meaning of new words, but referred their learners to dictionaries.

Interview data also indicated that their schooling left them with the understanding that reading is primarily an oral performance of decoding the text into spoken language.

Question 2:   How were the participants trained to teach reading?

Njabulo completed a two-year formal teacher's course at a teacher training college, to teach in the Foundation Phase. She did not study to be a language teacher but due to the circumstances of her school, she teaches English FAL in Grade 4. She has attended many workshops, and although she could not remember their exact details, she found one that dealt with using newspapers to teach reading very helpful.

Pearl said that she decided to become a language teacher because she liked English. She studied at a teacher training college and recalls being trained to teach reading by reading stories aloud and summarising what they read. There was an emphasis on the names of the letters as opposed to the phonics. When asked about teaching reading for meaning, she said, "They used to say whenever we read, we must understand what we are reading and we must get the words through the dictionaries".

After leaving school Andile wanted to pursue a career in journalism but because of a lack of support from his family he became a language teacher. He obtained a teaching diploma from a college, and although he thought the college to be good, he did not think that students were adequately trained to teach reading. Like Njabulo, he said that he had attended many workshops, in particular those that dealt with developing learners' reading skills; at one of which he remembers being taught about different kinds of reading and how to find out whether the learners "know the language".

DISCUSSION

None of the participants' responses revealed any clear recall of any specific methods in which they were trained to teach reading. If they were exposed to any, they certainly did

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not have the discourse or vocabulary to explain what those methods entailed, and were not consciously using any methods learnt in professional training. Again, reading as an oral performance and dictionary usage for word level comprehension were foregrounded.

Question 3: To what extent have their experiences and training informed their classroom practices?

Njabulo explained that when she taught her grade 4 learners reading, she read the text for them first so that they would follow how to read. When they read she corrected their mistakes (pronunciation) as best she could. During her observed lesson, she first asked questions pertaining to the cover, title, author and picture. The whole class was asked to read the story aloud, altogether. What was apparent to the researcher was that some learners were reading but others were just moving their mouths. Thereafter, she asked the learners if they enjoyed the story, to which they all responded (in unison): "The story was very nice." This was seemingly a prepared response and in no way indicated whether the learners really enjoyed the story, nor what they may or may not have specifically enjoyed. Following this, new words were spelt, using the names of the letters, pronunciation was corrected and word meanings were discussed. She proceeded to ask textual questions including: "Where was the house of the sun?", "Who is visiting another one?", "What made Mr Sun nervous?" After these oral questions, groups of learners took turns reading the whole text aloud and then a few individual learners did the same.

Pearl also said that she first read the story to her grade 5 learners from textbooks or readers and then asked them oral questions about the story. During her observed lesson, the learners were seated in mixed ability groups and each group was given a different reader to read. Each group had to read aloud and then answered oral textual questions. Incorrect pronunciation and answers to questions were not corrected and at times it seemed that the educator did not fully understand what the story was about. Below is a vignette that demonstrates this.

> *Educator: Okay group three, we know the story is longer. (signals for learners to stop reading) Tell us what is happening there.*
>
> *Learner A: The frog wanted to marry the princess.*
>
> *Educator: The frog wanted to marry the princess. So what happened? Did he marry the princess?*
>
> *Learner A: Yes.*
>
> *Educator: Altogether group, did he marry the princess?*
>
> *Whole group three: Yes.*

Educator: What happened after they were married?

Learner A: The frog want to marry the princess and change like a man.

Educator: Oh really! The frog want to change like a man (laughs). Was it a female frog?

Learner B: Yes

Educator: Oh really. Thank you. Group four?

In this instance, the educator did not correct incorrect responses and apparently did not understand what the story was about. The learner was (correctly) trying to suggest that the frog would change into a man after marrying the princess but the teacher thought she meant the frog was female and would change gender.

Andile, the Grade 6 teacher, also said that he began his reading lesson by reading the text aloud to his learners, and then he allowed them to read aloud. He explained that as they did so he wrote down words that they mispronounced, and when they were finished reading he modelled the correct pronunciation. During his observed lesson, the learners were given a sheet of paper with a poem printed on it. He began by asking the learners what the title was, who the author of the poem was, and to describe what they saw happening in the picture alongside the poem. Each of the four groups was asked to read the poem aloud twice. Then individual learners, who read with fluency, clarity and observed punctuation marks, were selected by the teacher to read the poem. After those learners had read the poem, Andile asked the class what figures of speech they saw in the poem. When they did not respond, even after he had named some figures of speech as examples, he explained that the line "we learn things as we grow" contained a simile. Upon examination of this line, it becomes apparent that although the word 'as' is present, it is not comparing anything, so there is no simile. A few textual questions were asked, and the message of the poem was discussed. The learners were unable to supply the message and were then told to spend the rest of the lesson reading the poem out loud to each other in pairs.

DISCUSSION

In all the lesson observations, the only kind of reading that the learners were engaged in was reading aloud; they were not asked for any in-depth oral or written responses to the text. This again suggests that these teachers see reading primarily as the oral performance of decoding text to speech. The emphasis was on correct pronunciation and understanding the meaning of individual words, sometimes with the aid of a dictionary. It is clear that when using the strategy of getting all the learners to read aloud together without paying particular attention to each learner, it is difficult for the educator to assess the development of each learner's reading skills. The reading process that is prescribed

by CAPS (DBE, 2011) emphasises the comprehension processes involved in reading, including activation of prior knowledge, making inferences and predictions, drawing conclusions, writing summaries and evaluation of texts. The pre-reading questions that the participants asked their learners did not activate prior knowledge, motivate reading or arouse interest in the text, which is integral to the Interactive Activation Model (Perfetti et al., 2005). Post-reading questions assessed learners' superficial understanding of the text as opposed to their deeper engagement and understanding of the writer's explicit and implied meanings.

It was also evident that the teachers' own understanding of texts, and their conventions, purposes and messages was limited.

Question 3: To what extent did their experiences and training prepare them to implement CAPS in their classrooms in 2013?

During the interviews all three participating educators expressed their eagerness to implement CAPS. They all believed that CAPS would improve the situation in their classrooms, and Njabulo and Pearl attended an hour long CAPS training workshop. The DBE has run CAPS orientation workshops for FP and IP teachers for different subjects since 2012 (National Education Development Unit, 2013). Having attended one of those workshops, it is understandable to one of the authors of this paper why so many teachers described them as a waste of time, were reluctant to attend or left early. For the duration of the workshop, the facilitator simply read the policy statement and paused only when there were questions, several of which they were unable to answer. Many teachers went back to their schools still unclear as to what they were supposed to do.

Of the three participants in this study, Njabulo was the only one who stated that she did not feel adequately prepared to implement CAPS, the Reading and Viewing skill section in particular. Nevertheless, it was observed that she was already attempting to incorporate elements from the reading process (DBE, 2011: 10-11), like pre-reading questions pertaining to the title, author and pictures, into her lessons. She also explained new words and asked questions that were intended to check the learners' understanding of the story. However, it seemed more like a case of going through the prescribed motions listed in the reading process (DBE, 2011: 10-11) as opposed to a real learning experience. Firstly, the pre-reading questions were not structured so as to enable the learners to understand what the story was about or what its purpose was, what the genre was, or to make predictions about what they thought would happen, based on the title and pictures. Secondly, during reading, there were no pauses to clarify content, make new predictions or draw inferences. Lastly, after reading, there was no written activity to assess their understanding, nor was there any real engagement with specific language structures or conventions.

On the other hand, the other two participants felt confident that they understood the expectations of the policy statement. When asked to explain what the Reading and Viewing skill according to CAPS was about, Pearl mentioned that they had been told to use magazines and other types of texts. The types of questions that she asked during

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the oral discussion after each group had read aloud indicates that she attempted to cover technical aspects of the reading process (DBE, 2011: p10-11), like asking the learners about the author's name, and the publication date; she also asked one group to summarise what they had read. Although this at least approached the ideas in CAPS, the implementation of the reading process was not entirely successful, as there were no pre-reading activities and the discussions lacked the depth required to enable the learners to fully understand the text.

Andile said that, although he had had no CAPS training, he was happy to implement the new policy statement because he believed that it would be similar to the old methods of teaching, and the textbooks were better. Through reading the document on his own, he tried to incorporate elements from the reading process (DBE, 2011: 10-11) in his lesson, like asking about the author, title, and picture. He also explained the concept of summarising, and tried to link the text to his learners' experiences. However, like Njabulo and Pearl, this was done superficially because he did not use those questions to delve deeper to facilitate understanding of the text. Moreover, there was no activation of prior knowledge, making predictions, written activities relating to the text, or dictionary usage as is prescribed by the reading process (DBE, 2011: 10-11).

DISCUSSION

The participants expressed positive opinions regarding CAPS. It was evident that they had had some form of engagement with this document and tried to apply aspects from the stages of the reading process. However, it was also evident that they did not fully understand the reason for or purpose of each of those aspects. Additionally, at times the participants demonstrated difficulties with pronunciation, language aspects and comprehending the text.

Conclusion

This study sought to explore the reading experiences of three English IP educators in order to determine possible reasons for their learners' poor performance in literacy assessments like the ANA and the extent of their readiness to implement the Reading and Viewing skill as prescribed by CAPS.

Data gathered through interviews and observations suggest that there is a lack of congruence between the reading concepts underlying the ANA and CAPS and these educators' understanding of the purpose for reading and their application of the aspects of the reading process (DBE, 2011: p10-11). Educators' understanding of reading and of what they are expected to do as teachers of reading clearly arises from their experiences of reading in childhood, their pre-service training and in-service workshops. Their focus, in all the observed reading lessons, was squarely on reading aloud in different forms (individual, group, pairs, educator), while CAPS and ANA are geared more towards the understanding of texts.

The data suggest that the educators in this study used texts (poems and readers) that they were familiar with and that were approved by the DBE for each grade, but since it was observed that learners struggled to read aloud and answer even simple textual questions, the extent to which those texts are appropriate for their learners in the observed grades is uncertain. If they had been able to use creative, interesting pre-reading activities and questions to arouse learners' interest in the text, and to activate relevant schemas in their existing knowledge, learners' comprehension and ability to engage with the integral meaning of the texts they encountered may well have been enhanced.

In their reading lessons, these teachers tried to implement elements of the stages of the reading process as provided in CAPS (DBE, 2011: 10-11). However, they did not seem to appreciate the pedagogical purposes of the activities, or fully understand the depth of engagement required, or the complexities that need to be addressed in the reading process in order to develop their learners' reading comprehension skills. Thus, in spite of sincere attempts to follow CAPS directives, they fell short of enabling the learners to read with the degree of understanding aimed for in CAPS document and tested in the ANA.

To avoid having the educators select and concentrate only on activities from these teaching plans that match their existing practices and understanding of how reading should be taught, and neglect those that do not, the workshop programme currently being run by the DBE will need to aim to introduce and elucidate the pedagogy implied, but not explained, in CAPS documents. In other words, workshops must explain what CAPS says about teaching reading, what that means, and how and why teachers must do so. Moreover, they must be well-organised and worthwhile or teachers may find them to be a waste of time and may not be very keen to attend.

To ensure that teachers do not revert to what is familiar and practised, the workshops will need to be augmented by guided and monitored practice in implementing the curriculum. Without this, it is extremely unlikely that teachers whose backgrounds and teaching contexts are similar to those included in this study will be able to implement it effectively.

Importantly, the cycle of the inferior teaching practices created by Bantu education needs to be broken. In order to improve the chances that students currently being trained to become teachers will be proficient in their understanding of reading and teaching reading, tertiary institutions need to train students so that they will implement the curriculum well, and adequately and holistically understand and implement all aspects of the reading process when they commence teaching. This can be achieved by not only ensuring that these future teachers having a working knowledge of CAPS and the expectations of the ANA, but are trained to be reflective practitioners who overcome shortcomings in their own education so that their learners are not in turn disadvantaged in an entrenched vicious circle.

Unless educators receive effective training and ongoing support, and fully understand the expectations of their policy documents, South African learners cannot hope to benefit from its newest Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Nazarana Mather

Varsity College
Pietermaritzburg

Email: nmather@varsitycollege.co.za

Nazarana Mather has worked as a teacher, in both Primary and High School, for almost ten years. She also tutored part time at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where she completed her Masters in Education: Language and Media. For the past year she has been employed by Varsity College in Pietermaritzburg as an Academic Development Coordinator and lectures on the Bachelor of Corporate Communication and Bachelor of Education qualifications.

Sandra Land

Durban University of Technology

Email: sandraL@dut.ac.za

Sandra Land has worked as a specialist in the fields of literacy and reading development in English and isiZulu for over twenty years in the Centre for Adult Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. From 2015 she will be working in a new initiative at the Pietermaritzburg campus of the Durban University of Technology.