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Linking reading literacy assessment and teaching: Rethinking preservice teacher training programmes in the Foundation Phase

A B S T R A C T Assessment is a common task in education and has many varied purposes. One of these is the use of assessment data to make decisions about teaching and support to struggling learners. Teacher preparation programmes should provide candidates with a rigorous, research-based curriculum and opportunities to practice a range of predefined skills and knowledge, including a focus on linking reading literacy assessment and teaching. According to the International Reading Association (2003) position statement, *Investment in Teacher Preparation in the United States*, teacher education programmes should ensure that teachers, amongst other crucial aspects, "know how to assess the progress of every learner and change teaching when it is not working; know how to communicate results of assessments to various stakeholders, especially parents". The purpose of this paper is to determine to what extent the content of a BEd Foundation Phase teacher preparation programme focuses on the assessment of the essential components of early reading instruction, and to what extent the content focuses on linking the aforementioned assessment with instructional decision-making.

Keywords: reading; literacy; assessment' teacher preparation programmes; innovation configurations

K A K A R E T S O Tlhatlhobo ke tiro ya ka gale ka mo thutong mme e na le mesola e mentsi e e farologanang. Tiro e nngwe ke go dirisa tshedimosetso ya tlhatlhobo go ka tsaya dikgato ka ga go ruta le go ema nokeng barutwana ba ba imelwang. Diporokerama tsa go ruta barutabana di tshwanetse go ba naya kharikhulamo e e maatla e e tshegediwang ke patlisiso le tshono ya go ka dirisa mefutafuta ya bokgoni le kitso e e tlhalositsweng mme

go akareditswe le tsepamo mo kamanong magareng a tlhatlhobo ya puisokwalo ya go bala le go ruta. Go ya ka polelo ya maemo ya Tsalano ya Puiso ya Boditšhabatšhaba (2003) ya Tsadiso mo Katisong ya Barutabana ka mo US, diporokerama tsa katiso ya barutabana di tshwanetse go netefatsa gore barutabana, magareng a mabaka a a botlhokwa, ba tshwanetse go "Itse go tlhatlhoba tswelelopele ya morutwana yo mongwe le yo mongwe le go fetola mokgwa wa go ruta fa o sa siama mme itse go tlhaeletsana diphetho tsa tlhatlhobo mo batsayakarolong ba ba farologaneng le mo batsading".

Maikemisetso a pampiri e ke go tlhomamisa gore ke ka mokgwa ofe diteng tsa porokeramo ya katiso ya morutabana wa BEd wa Kgato ya Motheo di lebelelang thata tlhatlhobo ya dikarolo tse di botlhokwa tsa go ruta go buisa mo tshimologong le gore ke ka mokgwa ofe diteng di kopantshwang le tlhatlhobo ê mme di amana jang le dikgato tsa go tsewa mo go ruteng.

Mareo a a botlhokwa: go buisa, kitsokwalo; diporokeramo tsa tlhatlhobo tsa katiso ya barutabana; dipharologantsho tsa poposešwa

1. Introduction

A number of assessment studies in recent years have shown that the educational achievement of learners in South African schools is unacceptably poor (Systemic Evaluations; SACMEQ II; PIRLS; Annual National Assessments) (RSA DoE, 2003; Moloi & Strauss, 2005; Mullis, Martin, Kennedy & Foy, 2007; RSA DoBE, 2010). The Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998) provided compelling evidence that children who do not learn to read fluently and independently in the early grades have few opportunities to catch up and virtually no chance to surpass their peers who are reading on grade level by the end of grade three. "Contrary to the popular theory that learning to read is natural and easy, learning to read is a complex linguistic achievement" (American Federation of Teachers, 1999:11). As evidence mounts that reading difficulties originate in large part from difficulties in developing phoneme awareness, phonics, spelling skills, reading fluency, and reading comprehension strategies (Snow et al., 1998; NICHD, 2000; Nel & Malda, 2011), the need for informed instruction for the millions of South African learners with insufficient reading skills is an increasingly urgent problem.

Unfortunately, several studies and surveys of teacher knowledge about reading development and difficulties indicate that many teachers are under prepared to teach reading (Moats & Lyon, 1996; Rowe & National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, 2005; Walsh, Glaser & Dunne Wilcox, 2006). The Teacher Education Research and Development Programme (TEP) consortium (2008) identified the ineffectiveness in the training of South African teachers to teach reading and numeracy as an obstacle to the effective functioning of the teacher education system. The RSA DoE (2008) pointed out that many teachers have an underdeveloped understanding of teaching literacy, reading and writing, while others simply do not know how to teach reading, and still others only know one method of teaching reading, which does not cater for the learning needs of all their learners. Teaching reading is a job for an expert (American Federation of Teachers, 1999: 11). However, research indicates that teacher preparation in literacy instruction is very often too brief, too shallow, or too dependent on ideas not supported by research (Moats, 2001; Snow, Griffin & Burns, 2005).

According to the International Reading Association (2003) position statement, *Investment in Teacher Preparation in the United States*, teacher education programmes should ensure that teachers, amongst other aspects, "know how to assess the progress of every learner and change teaching when it is not working; know how to communicate results of assessments to various stakeholders, especially parents." The RSA Department of Basic Education (2010:5) states that two of the purposes of the Annual National Assessments (ANA) are to "provide teachers with essential data about the baseline Literacy/Language and Numeracy/Mathematics capabilities of learners at the beginning of each grade and thereby help them make informed decisions when planning the year's programme; provide parents with a better picture of the levels of learner performance in the school so that parents are better informed when they become involved in efforts to improve performance, for instance through decision-making in the school governing body and support to learners in the home." Assessment is an important part of successful teaching because instruction needs to be calibrated according to learners' knowledge, skills, and interests. It is essential that teachers "administer timely and valid assessments to identify learners lagging behind and monitor progress" (Crawford & Torgesen, 2006:1). These assessments help increase the quality, consistency, and impact of teaching by focusing directly on those areas in which learners need specific assistance.

Zimmerman, Howie and Long (2008:46) state that "[I]t is important that current training programmes for the teaching of reading be investigated, especially given that the South African national DoE has officially acknowledged the difficulties that South African teachers experience in teaching reading". The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent the content of a BEd Foundation Phase teacher preparation programme focuses on the assessment of the essential components of early reading instruction, and to what extent the content focuses on linking the aforementioned assessment with instructional decision-making.

2. Reading literacy assessment within a foundation phase teacher preparation programme

Despite significant advances in the knowledge about what children need to learn to read, the content of many teacher preparation programmes remains disconnected from the knowledge and skills that teachers will need in the classroom (Walsh et al., 2006). A comprehensive redesign of teacher preparation programmes in reading instruction, founded on a core curriculum that defines the knowledge and skills necessary for effective practice, is vital to improved classroom instruction (Zimmerman et al., 2008). Such a research-based core curriculum would provide much more extensive, demanding, and content-driven training to inform classroom practice. A review of the literature (American Federation of Teachers, 1999; Snow et al., 2005) indicates that such a core curriculum for teacher preparation in literacy teaching should include a component on using valid, reliable, efficient assessments to inform classroom teaching.

Increasingly, researchers are finding that classroom-based assessments are an effective and important part of being a successful reading teacher. Effective teachers constantly monitor each learner's reading skills and provide instructional scaffolding to help the learner move to the next stage. This same information is the foundation for communicating with parents about the learner's progress (Morrow, Tracey, Woo & Pressley, 1999; Pressley, 2002; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Raphael, Bogner & Roehrig, 2002). In addition, learners in classrooms

that use classroom-based reading assessments have greater gains in achievement than those in classrooms that do not focus on classroom-based assessments (Ross, 2004; Stecker, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). According to Kanjee (2008), there is a growing trend in South Africa towards the use of assessment to improve learning and also an increased focus on classroom assessment. However, Kanjee (2008) mentions that there is limited guidance, support and information for teachers on "how" to use assessment to improve learning. In addition, the RSA DoHET (2011:53) states that one of the competencies that newly qualified teachers should have is the ability "to assess learners in reliable and varied ways, as well as being able to use the results of assessment to improve teaching and learning".

According to Smartt and Reschly (2007:16), an innovation configuration is a "tool to communicate essential features of scientifically based reading instruction to several audiences …". Innovation configurations specify key competencies literacy teachers should have such as knowledge of the assessment of the major components of reading as well as different levels of understanding and use. The innovation configuration developed for this study is designed to provide language/literacy teacher educators with a tool to evaluate the degree to which their foundation phase teacher preparation programme includes a component focusing on evidenced-based practices of the assessment of the five core early literacy skill components as well as a focus on linking reading literacy assessment and teaching. The essential components of the developed innovation configuration, as applied to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension assessment, are as follows:

- Fundamentals of assessment
- Considerations for decision making
- Familiarity with a range of assessment tools and practices
- Communicating assessment results

These four components are based on the research and best practice literature detailing how reading literacy assessment and teaching can be linked as well as important considerations in assessment and teaching (Snow et al., 1998; NICHD, 2000; Snow et al., 2005; Torgesen, 2006; International Reading Association, 2007; Smartt & Reschly, 2007; Hosp, 2010). The following sections briefly describe aspects related to each component.

2.1 Fundamentals of assessment

This component consists of fundamental information about assessment that is important for literacy teachers to know and apply in their classroom assessment practices (McMillan, 2002; Snow et al., 2005). What are the "big ideas" that, when well understood and applied, will effectively guide good reading literacy assessment practices? Topics that should be covered in a teacher preparation programme preparing literacy teachers in the foundation phase should include: reliability and validity, types of scores that might be produced through assessment and their interpretation, issues of cultural and linguistic diversity, statistical bias and fairness, floor and ceiling effects, technical issues (e.g., administration unit, response format, presentation stimulus, levels of processing and scoring), professional judgment as well as the purpose of assessment (cf. Appendix A).

According to McMillan (2002:6), "[T]he first principle is that professional judgment is the foundation for assessment and, as such, is needed to properly understand and use all aspects

of assessment". Whether that judgment occurs in constructing test questions, scoring essays, creating rubrics, combining scores, or interpreting classroom-based assessment scores, the essence of the process is making professional interpretations and decisions. Understanding this principle helps teachers realise the importance of their own judgments and those of others in evaluating the quality of assessment and the meaning of the results.

Although many definitions exist, assessment, within the educational context, is generally considered as the process of collecting information for specific purposes. Within the framework of decision-making, assessment information can aid in making four types of decisions: screening, progress, diagnostic, or outcome (Torgesen, 2006). Screening decisions relate to identifying learners who are "at risk" for reading difficulties and who may need extra teaching or support if they are to be successful or proficient at the end of the year. Early identification provides a basis for implementing preventive intervention programmes and deals with reading difficulties before they lead to failure (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff & Linan-Thompson, 2007). Progress decisions relate to whether individuals or groups of learners are making adequate progress and aim to identify learners who may be falling behind. Diagnostic decisions relate to what to teach and how to teach it. "Diagnostic information is any knowledge about a learner's skills and abilities that is useful in planning teaching" (Torgesen, 2006:6). For example, if a learner were struggling to acquire phonemic decoding skills, it would be useful to have reliable information about his/her level of phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge, since both are required to understand and use the alphabetic principle in reading. Outcome decisions relate to which learners have or have not met the criterion for proficiency.

2.2 Familiarity with a range of assessment tools and practices

The critical question that many teachers ask is, "Which reading assessments provide the best evidence about learners' accomplishments and progress?" The answer may not be one test or even one type of assessment. In fact, a single test or assessment cannot represent the complexity of reading. Likewise, one type of assessment may not represent the curriculum and teaching diversity among teachers, nor will the same assessments capture all the different skills and developmental levels of learners. That is why teachers should use multiple assessments, choosing those that fit their purposes and reveal the most information about their learners. A developmental approach balances the types of assessments across a range of reading factors and allows all stakeholders to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the learner's reading profile. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach, nor an approach that gives the same test to all learners on the same day. Instead, assessment is embedded in daily classroom activities, in which teachers use formal and informal assessment tools to ascertain if learners are improving their literacy skills and knowledge, mastering the curriculum, and meeting community standards of literacy development. Teacher-developed informal assessments can include anecdotal records, observations, portfolios, checklists, holistic rubrics, informal reading inventories, running records, work samples, journals, written summaries, and oral and written retellings (Paris, Paris & Carpenter, 2002). These practices are effective because they empower teachers and learners alike (Paris et al., 2002).

According to Hosp (2010: 7), all methods of assessment can be considered within one of four different categories: review of information, interview, observation, and testing. Review

of information includes collecting and systematically organizing information that has been collected previously about a learner such as records of his/her prior test results, and work samples. Interview involves talking to others who have knowledge of the learner and his/her performance (e.g., teachers in previous grades). Observation entails watching the learner perform a task, typically in the classroom learning environment. Both interviews and observations can be highly structured or unstructured, depending on the need for information on which to base decisions. Testing is the most common understanding of assessment. It includes methods ranging from informal inventories to individually administered norm-referenced tests.

A review of the literature indicates five critical components of reading skills that learners must master as they progress from non-readers to proficient readers at the end of grade 3. These are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (Snow et al., 1998; NICHD, 2000; RSA DoE, 2007). Teachers should know how to monitor the development of each component in a manner appropriate to each grade level. It is important to know which of the components should be assessed systematically at earlier stages of reading development, and how to assess them independently for diagnostic and teaching purposes if a learner is not reading at the expected level (Snow et al., 2005). The first step is to compare the learner's performance to two different standards: the cutoff for proficiency or mastery (criterion) and the performance of other learners in the classroom (normative). If the learner's performance is below the criterion for acceptable performance, he/she needs additional teaching in that area. If the learner's performance is similar to the peers' performance (but below the criterion), changes to teaching should involve the entire class.

2.3 Considerations for decision making

Assessment that can be used to adapt teaching to meet learner needs is called formative assessment (Kaminski & Cummings, 2008). Because the primary purpose of formative assessment is to support student learning, it may arguably be considered the most important assessment practice in which teachers engage. The RSA DoBE (2010:12) states that "[D]ecisions and plans on what, when and how to teach must be informed by the evidence that comes out of the assessments, both school-based and ANA assessments". Effective use of assessment data to plan, judge, and modify teaching is a fundamental competency for good teaching (Hosp & Ardoin, 2008; Hosp, 2010). A reason for linking assessment and teaching is that teachers need to make screening, diagnostic, progress, and outcome decisions, and those decisions need to be accurate; if they are not, valuable teaching time could be lost using teaching strategies that do not address the learners' needs. When it comes to planning teaching practices for learners, the best way to maximize the accuracy of teachers' decisions is to base them on data (Shepard, Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Rust, 2005). Research indicates that when teachers use assessment data to make their teaching decisions, learner performance increases (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Wohlstetter, Datnow & Park, 2008). The learners whose teachers collect systematic progress-monitoring data, and use it to make decisions, score on average one standard deviation higher than their peers whose teachers do not collect and use these data (Stecker & Fuchs, 2000). In addition, teachers using systematic progress-monitoring data more frequently make changes in their teaching for those learners who are experiencing difficulties (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett & Stecker, 1991). Teachers need to actively

use the information collected via the assessments to critically evaluate their teaching in order to determine how it could be changed to better meet the learner's needs (Fuchs et al., 1991). Generally, schools collect enormous amounts of data on learners' attendance, behaviour, and performance. But when it comes to improving teaching and learning, it's not the quantity of the data that counts, but how the information is used (Hamilton, Jackson, Mandinach, Supovitz & Wayman, 2009). The learning-assessment process can be framed by three questions, namely Where are you trying to go? Where are you now? and How can you get there? (Atkin, Black & Coffey, 2001). Shepard et al. (2005:278) state that, "By answering the assessment question 2 in relation to the instructional goal question 1, and specifically addressing what is needed to reach the goal question 3, the formative assessment process directly supports improvement."

After a learner's performance has been measured, a key component to making decisions about his/her performance and planning teaching is the teacher's ability to make comparisons to a standard for performance. Three ways of determining standards are typically used in education: normative, criterion, and ipsative (Hosp, 2010: 5). *Normative* standards involve comparing a learner's performance on the assessment to that of other learners in a comparable peer group (e.g., learners in the same grade). *Criterion* standards involve comparing a learner's performance to an empirically derived level of proficiency. For example, the performance levels for the ANAs range from level 1 (0 to 34%) labelled as "Not Achieved" to Level 4 (70% and above) labelled as "Outstanding". *Ipsative* standards involve a learner's prior performance as the basis for comparison of his/her current performance. Ipsative standards are often considered when monitoring learner progress because the learner's current performance can be compared to prior performance as well as, later, to future performance.

The establishment of benchmark goals is a challenging, but important task. For teachers knowing which skill areas are crucial for early literacy is an important first step, but equally important is knowing how proficient children are in these critical skills. An effective benchmark goal should be specific, measurable, ambitious, and target a critical indicator of learner performance (Fuchs et al., 1991). "An indicator is a brief, efficient index that provides a fair degree of certainty about a larger, more complex system or process" (Dynamic Measurement Group, 2011:2). An indicator is not intended to be a comprehensive, in-depth assessment of each and every component of a basic early literacy skill. Instead, indicators, such as the DIBELS, are designed to measure key components that are representative of that skill area, and predictive of overall reading competence (e.g., an indicator of accurate and fluent reading of connected text is oral reading fluency – correct words per minute and accuracy) (cf. Appendix A). A benchmark goal for oral reading fluency could be 47 words correct at the end of grade 1.

Barnett, Elliott, Graden, Ihlo, Macmann, Nantais and Prasse (2006) note the need for formative assessment tools that are linked with a well-defined, decision-making model such as the Outcomes-Driven Model (Kaminski & Good, 1998; Tilly, 2008). The Outcomes-Driven Model was developed to address specific questions within a prevention-oriented framework designed to pre-empt early reading difficulty and ensure step-by-step progress toward outcomes that will result in established, adequate reading achievement. The Outcomes-Driven Model accomplishes these goals "though a set of five educational decisions: (1) identify need for support, (2) validate need for support, (3) plan support, (4) evaluate and modify support, and

(5) review outcomes" (Kaminski & Cummings, 2008:3). In order for formative assessment tools to be used effectively to link assessment to teaching, they must "(a) accurately identify risk early, (b) provide meaningful and important goals, (c) evaluate adequate progress toward those goals, and (d) provide a way to evaluate both the overall system of support as well as the students' response to that support" (Kaminski & Cummings, 2008:5).

2.4 Communicating assessment results

Snow et al. (2005:193) state that "a key use of assessment results is to communicate with students about their work." The purpose is to help learners gain insight into their own strengths and needs and develop self-monitoring systems that lead to self-improvement. This self-evaluative interaction is one of the primary assets of classroom-based or formative assessment to improve achievement in the classroom (Stiggins, 1991; 2001). Engaging learners in critiquing their own work serves both cognitive and motivational purposes. The purpose of engaging learners in self-assessment is not to allocate a mark but to gain insight that can be used to further learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Learning to monitor their own learning also helps develop learners' metacognitive abilities. Using classroom assessments supports the concept of a collaborative learning community with many opportunities for the child to reach the goals of the assessments, unlike the more traditional view of assessment as a one-time evaluation at the end of a unit of instruction (Stiggins, 1991; 2001).

Good assessment not only evaluates teaching but will also be instructive as it provides ongoing feedback and involves learners in the assessment of their own reading (Snow et al., 2005). Teachers should be able to analyse learner work and identify patterns of errors and gaps that most need to be addressed. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005: 288) state that "feedback is most effective when it focuses on particular qualities of a student's work in relation to established criteria, identifies strengths as well as weaknesses, and provides guidance about what to do to improve." Teachers who engage in regular classroom assessment can talk authoritatively about each student's strengths and weaknesses. They can provide parents with detailed evidence of their child's progress or lack of progress and also make recommendations in terms of how parents can support their children (Santa, Williams, Ogle, Farstrup, Au, Baker, Edqards, Klein, Kurek, Larson, Paratore, Rog & Shanahan, 2000; Snow et al., 2005).

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because the methodology best allowed the researcher to collect data to answer the research questions: *To what extent does the content of a BEd Foundation Phase teacher preparation programme focus on the assessment of the essential components of early reading instruction? To what extent is linking reading literacy assessment and teaching, related to the five major reading components, addressed within a BEd Foundation Phase teacher preparation programme?* A case study was used for this research project. This descriptive and interpretive study takes place within a bounded context; it focuses on one teacher preparation programme at the NWU.

3.2 Teacher preparation programme

This particular study focused on a Foundation Phase teacher preparation programme. The Baccalaureus Educationis (Foundation Phase) degree is offered over four years and trains

students to teach from grade R to grade 3. The programme prepares teachers to teach English, Setswana or Afrikaans as home language in the foundation phase. In the North West Province the need for foundation phase teachers, based on 2009 statistics, was 364 teachers yearly, with 273 of these being able to teach in an African language (Setswana). The supply was 0 African language teachers, 143 Afrikaans teachers, and 34 English teachers. A total of 177 teachers were delivered in 2009 (Green et al., 2011:117).

3.3 Data collection method

The data collection method included the collection and examination of documents. The following documents were collected, namely study guides, prescribed textbooks, reading compendiums, assignments/projects, exam papers and practice teaching (Work Integrated Learning) portfolios indicating activities completed during practice teaching as well as lessons presented for assessment purposes.

3.4 Data analysis

Data was analysed by developing and using an innovation configuration for determining the extent of inclusion of scientifically based reading component assessments as well as linking reading literacy assessment and teaching. An innovation configuration is a matrix that typically identifies and describes the critical components of a practice that is important to training within a field. The matrix consists of two dimensions: essential components and degree of implementation (Hall & Hord, 1987; Roy & Hord, 2004). The essential components are listed as the row headings of the matrix within the leftmost column; additional descriptors or subcomponents also are included for clarification and use with more specific evaluations. The degree of implementation typically is presented as column headings in the topmost row, with multiple levels of implementation specified—ranging from zero (no mention) through progressively higher scores to a maximum that is used to represent exemplary inclusion and implementation of the component. Innovation configurations have been used for more than 30 years as tools to develop, implement, and evaluate education innovations (Hall, Loucks, Rutherford & Newton, 1975).

The innovation configuration has five levels or variations associated with it, ranging from zero to four. The variations are structured so that with each increase in score, the criterion for the variation increases in complexity. This score is related to the evidence that each module has demonstrated depth of teaching for a given reading literacy assessment component. In other words, merely mentioning that fluency can be assessed by means of focusing on oral reading fluency is a lower variation of teaching than having required reading in addition to discussing the concept. Likewise, application with feedback, in addition to the lower variations, would be considered the highest level of evidence that a concept has been sufficiently covered. Under each category, an "X" represents one particular module within the BEd foundation phase programme.

The following steps were used when scoring modules within the BEd programme with the innovation configuration (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2011: 8):

Step 1: After reviewing a module, an "X" should be placed under the appropriate variations of implementation code for each item for any module contained in the BEd course that meet

the variation criteria. Bulleted items describe the broad category in greater detail and provide examples or descriptors of each component.

Step 2: Each item should be given an overall rating based on the highest variation of implementation score that received an "X." Overall ratings are marked in the last column on the right under "Rating". For example, if under "Fundamentals of Assessment," the highest variation that received an "X" was for mentioning the concept, then a rating of 1 is appropriate for that rated module under that concept.

Step 3: If more than one module was rated on the innovation configuration, the number of "Xs" for each variation can be totalled in each column under Codes 0-4.

Step 4: Transfer the highest item ratings from each variation for each component to the rating column. The scores created to represent different levels of implementation are on an ordinal scale; a higher number indicates more thorough implementation of an innovation component. These scale points cannot, however, be interpreted as if the intervals between the scores are equal. The difference between 1 and 2 cannot be assumed to be of the same magnitude as the difference between 3 and 4. Furthermore, a score of 4 indicates more thorough implementation than a score of 2, but it cannot be interpreted as twice as much of some quality as a score of 2.

Step 5: Use results to identify the similarities, differences, and gaps in content covered and skills acquired within the teacher preparation programme. Results may promote changes in course content and assignments or identify a need to eliminate or restructure teacher preparation programmes.

3.5 Credibility and Consistency

In order to ensure the credibility and consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the qualitative data in this study, the researcher asked a staff member, within the Foundation Phase programme, to analyse the BEd Foundation Phase programme, specifically the eight literacy modules, using the innovation configuration. The code within each column as well as the overall rating was correlated with that of the researcher to ensure consistency. There was 100% agreement in terms of code and rating allocation between the researcher and staff member.

4. Results and discussion

Ten modules in the BEd foundation phase programme were included for analysis purposes. Four English literacy home language modules, two English Medium of Instruction modules, one academic English module, and three general education modules that included references to assessment were included in the analysis. Each module's study guide, prescribed textbook and/or reading compendium, assignments/projects, instructions for class preparation, exam paper and 100 randomly selected student practice teaching (WIL) portfolios per year were analysed in order to determine to what extent the preservice teachers are prepared to assess the five core reading components as well as link reading literacy assessment and teaching. An analysis of the degree of inclusion, in each module, of the assessment components included in the innovation configuration, is discussed separately.

4.1 Fundamentals of assessment

In the first year, two modules were analysed, namely a module focusing on English home language literacy (LITH 113) and a module focusing on English medium of instruction for

foundation phase students (ENGF 121). With regard to the fundamentals of assessment, as related to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, an analysis of the documents for the ENGF 121 module indicated that this component was not focused on at all. A rating of 0 was given to this module for the fundamentals of assessment. Module LITH 113 included content related to the fundamentals of assessment. Students are required to explain or define concepts such as "assessment standard", differentiate between diagnostic, formative, summative and systemic assessment and list the objectives of assessment. The study unit outcomes formulated for the module as well as the requirements for class preparation require students to:

- *Compare the assessment standards of Grade R-3 with reference to the ability of the learner to listen for information and pleasure and suitably and critically react within a wide variety of situations.*
- *Compare the assessment standards of Grade R-3 with reference to the confidence and effectiveness of the learner to communicate in the spoken language within a variety of situations.*
- *Compare the assessment standards of Grade R with the assessment standards of Grade 1-3 with reference to the ability of the learner to use the sounds, vocabulary and grammar of the language to create and interpret texts.*

The prescribed reading material is the Revised National Curriculum Statement: Grades R-9. No assignments or tests on assessment are given in this module. Two questions, relating to the fundamentals of assessment were set in the 2010 exam paper:

- *Discuss the characteristics of continuous assessment (6 marks)*
- *List an assessment strategy for languages (1 mark)*

The content of the practice teaching portfolios indicated that students merely had to list the assessment standards applicable to their lesson focus; this seemed to be a mechanical exercise (i.e., look up the appropriate assessment standard and write it down). A rating of 2 was allocated to this module (cf. Appendix A).

In the second year, three modules were analysed, namely a module focusing on English home language literacy (LITH 223), a module focusing on English medium of instruction for foundation phase students (ENGF 211), and a general education module (EDCC212). None of the mentioned modules focused on the fundamentals of assessment. A rating of 0 was allocated to each of the three second year modules (cf. Appendix A).

In the third year, two modules were analysed, namely a module of English home language literacy (LITH 313) and a general education module (EDCC 312). The EDCC 312 module did not include content related to the fundamentals of assessment and received a rating of 0 on the innovation configuration. In preparation for class participation, the students taking the LITH 313 module are required to do the following:

- *In Article 1, Allor and McCathren (2003:74) have compiled a perception checklist that indicates the developmental progression of phonologic awareness. Now compile a similar checklist for Afrikaans speaking learners. This list must be used for base line assessment during the first term of Grade 1.*

The students are required to draw up a checklist for Afrikaans-speaking learners, but the module is an English home language module.

The prescribed article for the class preparation is:

- ALLOR, J.H. & McCATHREN, R. 2003. Developing emergent literacy skills through storybook reading. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 39(2): 72-79.

A rating of 0 is allocated to the LITH 313 module because the focus was not on the fundamentals of assessment as it relates to phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension in English as home language.

In the four year, three modules were analysed, namely the English home language literacy module (LITH 423), an academic English language module (LITG 413), and a general education module (EDCC 412). All three of the modules received a rating of 0 on the innovation configuration because the content within the modules did not focus on the fundamentals of assessment.

The highest rating for the fundamentals of assessment is a 2 indicating that the content of ten modules that were analysed did not include an in depth focus on the fundamentals of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension assessment and did not require students to apply theory to practice. There was no indication of linking assessment and teaching.

4.2 Range of assessment tools and practices

Nine of the ten modules that were analysed received a rating of 0 for this component on the innovation configuration. The scientific evidence-based literature available on assessment tools and practices relevant for assessing phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension was not addressed in any of these modules. The following outcomes were formulated for the LITH 423 module:

- *demonstrate a complete and systematic knowledge of Learning Outcome 3: Reading and Viewing in the Home Language (English) as well as assessment of the Literacy classroom in the foundation phase, within the context of the learning area Languages, as contained in the National Curriculum Statement*
- *demonstrate efficient choices and application of essential procedures and techniques during reading instruction (Learning Outcome 3: Reading and Viewing) and its assessment*
- *demonstrate the ability to solve unfamiliar, concrete and abstract problems and issues regarding reading instruction (Learning Outcome 3: Reading and Viewing) and its assessment*

For class preparation the students were required to prepare the following questions:

- *Compare the assessment standards of Grades 0 and 1 in relation to letters and words. Explain the main differences and focus especially on progression.*
- *Compare the assessment standards of Grades 2 and 3 in terms of reading for information and enjoyment. Explain the main differences and focus especially on progression.*
- *Compare the assessment standards of Grade 1 and 2 in relation to the meaning of the written text. Explain the main differences and focus especially on progression.*
- *"There isn't just one way to draw up questions on a text." Evaluate this statement. Identify and illustrate a variety of techniques for formulating questions.*
- *Use the Gunning Fog Index, the Flesh-Kincaid Readability Test and the Abecedarian*

Reading Assessment (cf. Articles 6 to 9) and test the readability of "The fat cat" and "On the farm". Evaluate its readability and motivate your answer.
- *Compare the content of standardised and general assessment tests with each other.*
- *How would you go about assessing sound and letter recognition?*
- *How would you go about drawing up informal word recognition tests?*
- *How would you go about assessing syllable division and phrase reading?*
- *How would you draw up and conduct a reading test to assess reading comprehension in terms of informal prose reading tests?*

The following texts were prescribed as reading material:
- *ESTERHUYSE, K.G.F., BEUKES, R.B.I. & HEYNS, P.M. 2002. Die ontwikkeling van die ESSI-lees- en speltoets. South African journal of education, 22(2):144-148.*
- *ANON. 2010. Gunning fog index. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gunning_fog_index Date of access: 4 Mar. 2010.*
- *ANON. 2009. Flesh-Kincaid readability test. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/flesh_kincaid_readability_test Date of access: 4 Mar. 2010.*
- *ANON. 2009. Tests document readability and improve it. http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_improve.jsp Date of access: 4 Mar. 2010.*
- *WREN, S. & WATTS, J. 2010. The Abecedarian reading assessment. http://www.balancedreading.com/assessment/abecedarian.html Date of access: 17 Apr. 2010.*

The 2010 exam paper included the following question:
- *"There isn't just one way to draw up questions on a text." Evaluate this statement. Use Addendum 2 to identify and design four techniques for formulating questions. (10 marks)*

This module received a rating of 3 on the innovation configuration because the content focused on assessment tools, it included reading material on the topic as well as assignments and questions in the exam paper for students to demonstrate their ability to apply theory in practice. Although the module received a 3 on the innovation configuration, the analysis revealed that not all reading components received the same emphasis or any emphasis at all. The majority of the assessment tools focused on the alphabetic principle (i.e., phonemic awareness and phonics). The range of assessment tools that were mentioned is also very limited.

4.4 Considerations for decision-making

Nine of the ten modules that were analysed received a rating of 0 for this component on the innovation configuration. The LITH 423 module included the following texts as prescribed reading material:
- ESTERHUYSE, K.G.F., BEUKES, R.B.I. & HEYNS, P.M. 2002. Die ontwikkeling van die ESSI-lees- en speltoets. South African journal of education, 22(2):144-148.
- ANON. 2010. Gunning fog index. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gunning_fog_index Date of access: 4 Mar. 2010.
- ANON. 2009. Flesh-Kincaid readability test. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/flesh_kincaid_readability_test Date of access: 4 Mar. 2010.
- ANON. 2009. Tests document readability and improve it. http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_improve.jsp Date of access: 4 Mar. 2010.
- WREN, S. & WATTS, J. 2010. The Abecedarian reading assessment. http://www.balancedreading.com/assessment/abecedarian.html Date of access: 17 Apr. 2010.

The students had to prepare the following questions for discussion during class sessions:

- *The assessment of word recognition is an important concept in the foundation phase. How would you go about to conduct and interpret the U.K. Graded Reading Test as well as read the norm tables?*
- *How would you assess and interpret word recognition as well as read the norm table during the One Minute Word Reading Test?*

The students were required to complete the following assignment:

- *You must create a fictitious learner in the foundation phase that demonstrates barriers to learning related to language, reading and spelling.*
- *You must identify the fictitious learner's reading and spelling difficulties by means of the standardised and general assessment tests, contained in the study unit.*
- *You will not only have to conduct the relevant tests, but also complete a historicity and assessment questionnaire for a holistic picture of the fictitious learner.*

The 2010 exam paper included the following questions:

- *Calculate Katy's chronological age when she was enrolled in January 2008 at Let-us-sing Primary School (2)*
- *Calculate Katy's chronological age when she completed the One Minute Reading Test. (2)*
- *Write down Katy's raw score and refer to the applicable norm table to establish her reading age according to the results of the One Minute Reading Test. (2)*
- *Calculate Katy's chronological age when she completed the Shonell Reading Test. (2)*
- *Write down Katy's raw score and refer to the applicable norm table to establish her reading age according to the results of the Shonell Reading Test. (2)*
- *Analyse the reading errors made by Katy as it is portrayed in the results of the One Minute Reading Test and the Shonell Reading Test. Write a critique of the reading problems that Katy is experiencing. Detail the strengths and weaknesses of her reading profile. Justify your conclusion by consulting the results of the standardized reading tests. (5)*
- *After Ms Travolta assessed Katy's reading abilities with the One Minute Reading Test and the Shonell Reading Test, she decided to test her comprehension abilities by means of an informal prose reading test. Compile an informal reading test (considering the minimum requirements for a Grade 1 learner), that will be used by Ms. Travolta to test Katy's reading comprehension. (10)*

The LITH 423 module received a rating of 3 on the innovation configuration. Although the module received a rating of 3, the analysed revealed that the focus was primarily on the *One Minute Reading Test* and the *Shonell Reading Test* (the spelling subtest). Students were required to conduct the tests and interpret the results. However, the students were not required to indicate how instructional adjustments would need to be made based on the results. Only one aspect listed in the innovation configuration was addressed, namely the data collection, analysis and interpretation of results.

4.4 Communicating assessment results

Nine of the ten modules received a rating of 0 for communicating assessment results. One of the module outcomes formulated within the EDCC 412 module requires the following from students:

- *bevoegdheid om effektiewe terugvoer rakende assesserings te gee te demonstreer*

However, no readings, assignments, tests or exam paper questions required students to show proficiency in communicating assessment results. An analysis of the practice teaching portfolios also indicated no proficiency required on this component. The EDCC 412 module received a rating of 1 on the innovation configuration (cf. Appendix A). With regard to the component, communicating assessment results, the analysis indicated that theory and practice were once again disconnected.

Overall, the analysis of the BEd foundation phase teacher preparation programme indicated the following:

A "once over lightly" describes the content of most of the modules within the programme. Preservice teachers do not learn deeply about how to understand and handle real problems of practice, as specifically related to linking reading literacy assessment and teaching. Entertainment is valued over content depth and rigour. Many of the lecturers place more emphasis on keeping their modules fun over learning. This approach results in activities where students rely on their own devices to teach literacy rather than on learning how to use well-tested, scientifically sound approaches.

> *In this assignment you will be expected to produce a set of handwriting cards of the sounds of the alphabet.*
>
> *The assessment criteria for this assignment: Creativity with respect to the development of appropriate picture and story of letters c, q, x and z.*

The majority of what preservice teachers are required to read does not provide an accurate, complete, or sufficiently deep overview of good reading literacy assessment. The quality of the reading material is poor, their content includes little to no evidence of scientific evidence-based research on reading literacy assessment. One of the most critical jobs of a teacher in the early grades is to identify and assess learners who are having trouble and will be at risk for reading failure. For most of these children, reading failure can be avoided, provided they receive the right sort of intense instruction, early enough, to bring them up to speed. None of the reading texts reviewed in this study focused on the essentials of reading literacy assessment. Most importantly perhaps, these texts do little to help preservice teachers reduce the large numbers of children each year who could have learned how to read, given the right intervention early enough in their lives, but do not.

Assignments that encourage or require aspiring teachers to present anyone else's perspective other than their own are a rarity. In a field that now has such a strong research base, the researcher was dismayed to find so few modules that require preservice teachers to demonstrate their understanding of the scholarship and development of the field. The researcher could find little evidence that preservice teachers are expected to be able to look for and read research, separate the good from the bad, organize, synthesise, and criticize.

With regard to the considerations for decision-making, the results seem to indicate that preservice teachers are not given the opportunity to work with data and to make decisions in terms of their own teaching as well as decisions related to monitoring learner progress and making changes when things are not working.

5. Conclusion

Assessment and teaching are two key components of effective teaching and, therefore, are necessary components of preservice teacher training. These components should be intricately linked. Although there is great variation in the details of how information is collected, what it is used for, and the effect it has, research has consistently shown that teachers who base their teaching decisions on assessment data effect greater learner learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986). Not all components of the developed innovation configuration on linking reading literacy assessment and teaching will be equally important for all training activities, but they are important concepts and skills for all teachers to have, specifically those specializing in the foundation phase. As the field of education moves increasingly to evidence-based practice, the role of teachers as data-based decision makers also will increase. With a detailed understanding of and the ability to link reading literacy assessment and teaching, teachers will be well situated for this role. It is recommended that universities offering BEd foundation phase programmes critically rethink these programmes in terms of their ability to provide preservice teachers with the bedrock of foundational skills they need to effectively link reading literacy assessment and teaching.

As opportunities arise for hiring new faculty in reading-related fields, faculties of education need to make reading expertise a priority. Candidates with clearly demonstrated knowledge of the science of reading should be given hiring priority. Only by bringing on new faculty members who are well versed in sound reading instruction and by providing substantive professional development to current faculty members can institutions hope to improve reading instruction for future teachers. If faculties of education want to be respected for the same professionalism and rigour as medicine and law, they need to adopt the same rigorous research-based standards, something that is possible in the field of reading literacy.

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Appendix A:

Innovation Configuration for Linking Reading Literacy Assessment and Teaching

Essential components	**Variations**					
	Code=0	**Code=1**	**Code=2**	**Code=3**	**Code=4**	**Rating**
Teachings: Place an X under the appropriate variation implementation score for each module that meets the criteria specified, from 0 to 4. Score and rate each item separately. Descriptors and examples are bulleted below each of the components	**There is no evidence** that the component is included in the module.	Module mentions **content related to the component.**	Module mentions the component and requires **readings and tests**	Module mentions the component and requires **readings, tests and assignments or projects for application.** • Observations • Lesson plans • Classroom demonstration	Module mentions the component and requires **readings, tests, assignment, projects, & teaching with application & feedback.** • WIL • Tutoring	Rate each item as the number of the highest variation receiving an X under it.
Assessment of Reading Literacy Components: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension						
Fundamentals of assessment • Validity(e.g., criterion, content, construct) • Reliability (e.g., test-retest, split-half, alternate forms, etc.) • Types of scores (e.g., raw scores, total percentage scores, percentile scores, stanine scores, etc.) • Issues of cultural and linguistic bias and fairness • Floor and ceiling effects • Administration Unit Group/individual • Format Multiple choice Written response Checklist Open-ended Record with rubric • Presentation stimulus Auditory Visual Both • Level of processing Recognition Production Identification Combination • Scoring Multiple-choice Right/Wrong Rubric Checklist • Professional judgment • Purpose of assessment Screening Diagnostic Progress monitoring Outcome	X (ENGF 121) X (LITH 223) X (ENGF 211) X (EDCC212) X (EDCC312) X (LITH 313) X (LITG 413) X (EDCC 412) X (LITH 423)		X (LITH 113)			2

Range of assessment tools and practices • Review of prior records • Interview with relevant individuals • Observation of performance in appropriate settings • Administration of tests (formal and informal) ***Phonemic Awareness*** Phoneme matching Phoneme isolation Phoneme blending Phoneme segmentation Phoneme manipulation **Phonics** Pseudo-word (sek, tob, gled) Real words (vowel and consonant sounds, consonant digraphs, CV, CVC, CVCC, multi-syllabic words, etc.) **Fluency** Passages at learner's approximate instructional reading level Number of words read per minute **Vocabulary** Receptive versus productive Levels of word knowledge (unknown, acquainted, established) **Comprehension** ***Reader factors*** Alphabetic understanding Fluency with code Vocabulary knowledge Engagement and interest ***Text factors*** Genre considerations Quality of text Density and difficulty of concepts Narrative versus Expository	X (LITH 113) X (ENGF 121) X (LITH 223) X (ENGF 211) X (EDCC212) X (EDCC312) X (LITH 313) X (LITG 413) X (EDCC 412)			X (LITH 423)		3
Considerations for decision-making • Data collection, analysis and interpretation • Indicators: Phonemic Awareness First sound fluency Letter naming fluency • Indicators: Phonics Nonsense Word Fluency Oral Reading Fluency • Indicators: Fluency Oral Reading Fluency • Indicators: Vocabulary Word Use Fluency • Indicators: Comprehension Combination of Oral Reading Fluency and Retell Fluency Daze • Multiple sources of evidence • Standards/Benchmarks for comparison of performance • Outcomes-Driven Model Identify Need for Support Validate Need for Support Plan and Implement Support Evaluate and Modify Support Review Outcomes	X (LITH 113) X (ENGF 121) X (LITH 223) X (ENGF 211) X (EDCC212) X (EDCC312) X (LITH 313) X (LITG 413) X (EDCC 412)			X (LITH 423)		3
Communicating assessment results • Self-assessment • Feedback • Communicating results with stakeholders	X (LITH 113) X (ENGF 121) X (LITH 223) X (ENGF 211) X (EDCC212) X (EDCC312) X (LITH 313) X (LITG 413) X (LITH 423)	X (EDCC 412)				1
Column Totals	**9**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**0**	