

https://dspace.org/

International, national and local assessments of reading literacy in Grade 4; matches or mismatches?

Marx, Janet

2010-11-09
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8855

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

International, national and local assessments of reading literacy in Grade 4; matches or mismatches?

Abstract

This study examines how reading literacy is constructed at grade 4 level in an international assessment, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2006 (PIRLS 2006), in the National Curriculum Statement and in the teaching and assessment of reading literacy practices of four grade 4 teachers in Johannesburg schools. It is a two part comparative study that focuses specifically on how the reading literate subject is constructed through the texts and questions in the samples of PIRLS 2006 available in the public domain and in the summative assessment practices of the teachers.

The research draws on conceptualizations of reading literacy and the teaching of reading literacy from the 1960s onwards. It also draws on literature in the field of literacy assessment.

Grade 4 marks the transition from learning to read in the Foundation Phase to reading to learn in the Intermediate Phase of primary schools. The findings show that the designers of PIRLS 2006 have conceptualized the reading literate subject as able to decode and interpret substantial texts in the information and imaginative fiction genres. The ideal reading literate subject constructed in the South African curriculum documents for both English as Home Language and English as First Additional Language is a critical and analytic reader who will be a productive and responsible citizen. By contrast the grade 4 teachers in this study have conceptualized the reading literate subject as a decoder of short information texts which, for the most part, are not at an appropriate level for grade 4 learners,

whether they are in an English Home Language or an English First Additional Language class.

This finding suggests that there should be professional development opportunities for teachers to extend their pedagogic knowledge and skills in regard to teaching and assessing reading literacy. All the schools in the case study would benefit from the supply of well designed textbooks and a range of reading materials, a finding that is likely to be applicable to many other schools in South Africa.

Keywords: reading literacy, teaching reading literacy, reading literacy assessment, reading to learn, PIRLS 2006, National Curriculum Statement 2002.