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

Janet Marx

A dissertation submitted to the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Johannesburg

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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.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

_____

Janet Marx

_____ day of _____ in the year 2010.

Dedication

To Selwyn, yes it's done now

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I would like to thank my supervisor, Yvonne Reed who has been my guide and mentor. She has been generous with her time, resources, advice and encouragement. She has taught me what it means to embark on a research journey.

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My thanks to all for a rich and wonderful learning experience.

Presentations emanating from this research

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Glossary of terms and abbreviations

DEAR Drop Everything And Read

DET Department of Education and Training

DoE Department of Education

GCSE General Certificate of Secondary Education

IEA The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement

IIEP International Institute for Educational Planning

LOLT Language of Learning and Teaching

MOI Medium of Instruction

NAEP National Assessment of Education Progress

NICHD National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development

NGOs Non-governmental organizations

NCS National Curriculum Statement

OBE Outcomes-Based Education

PGCE Post Graduate Certificate in Education

PIRLS 2006 Progress In International Reading Literacy Studies

PISA Programme for International Student Assessment

RNCS Revised National Curriculum Statement

SATS Standard Assessment Tasks

SACMEQ Southern and Eastern Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality study

TIMSS Third International Mathematics and Science Study

TED Transvaal Education Department

UK United Kingdom

USA United States of America

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Research Aim and Research Questions
1.2.1 Research Aim
1.2.2 Research Questions

1.3 Rationale

1.1 Introduction

I am a programme[1] manager working for a funding organisation that is involved in development work in the education sector. The organisation has a particular interest in the empowerment of learners through the training of teachers in the fields of Mathematics, Science and Language. The organisation funds teacher education programmes for teachers who work in primary schools as well as teachers who work in the Further Education and Training phase in high schools. In primary schools, projects within these programmes emphasize literacy and numeracy from grades R to 3 and Maths and English from grades 4 to 6. In the secondary schools the emphasis is on Mathematics, Science and English.

As a funding principle, all the projects within programmes are evaluated by external evaluators in order to determine the extent to which the projects, implemented by various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), meet the stated project objectives. Typically, these evaluations look at aspects of project design and delivery as well as teacher and learner performance. Often the external evaluators make reference to international tests which include the Southern and Eastern Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality study (SACMEQ), the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

[1] There are many projects that fall within the broader programmes.

and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS), with the intention of providing some general background context and benchmarking for the performance of learners. Results of these tests seem to be uncritically accepted by highly regarded South African education researchers. For example with reference to these studies, Fleisch claims that "South African learners are reading and doing maths well below comparable international norms and substantially below curriculum expectation" (2008, p. 2). He goes on to state that "without ambiguity or the possibility of misinterpretation the pieces [of research] together reveal the predicament of South African primary education" (Fleisch, 2008, p. 2). Bloch claims that these international tests "are a reasonably true representation of how cutting-edge our [South African learner] skills levels are (or are not) and of the serious problems in the ability of our children to perform simple reading and mathematical functions, crucial for competing and interacting in a modern, globalised world" (2009, p. 67). Howie et al. (2008, p. 19) report that "South Africa achieved the lowest score of all 45 education systems" that participated in PIRLS 2006 even though the learners were tested in what their schools stated were their home languages, although as will be explained in chapter two this was not always the case.

PIRLS 2006 reported benchmark findings at four levels of reading skills and strategies namely: low, intermediate, high and advanced. These benchmarks are explained in the table below which also indicates the performance of South African learners.

Table 1.1: PIRLS 2006, explanation of International Benchmarks

PIRLS 2006, International Benchmark	Description of Benchmark	South African Grade 4 learners achievement in benchmark
Low International Benchmark Basic reading skills and strategies	Learners are able to recognize, locate and reproduce information explicitly stated in texts and make straight-forward inferences	13%
Intermediate International Benchmark Some reading proficiency	Learners are able to understand the plot at a literal level and are able to make some inferences and connections across texts	7%
High International Benchmark Competent readers	Learners are able to retrieve significant details embedded across the text and provide text-based support for inferences. Recognize main ideas, some textual features and elements and begin to integrate ideas and information across texts.	3%
Advanced International Benchmark Advanced readers	Learners are able to respond fully to the PIRLS 2006 assessment	1%
Adapted from Venter, van Staden and du Toit, 2008, pp. 26-29		

As illustrated by the table, the majority of the South African grade 4 learners who were assessed in PIRLS 2006 did not reach the first benchmark. While these results indicate that these learners are not adequately equipped with the basic reading skills and strategies to cope with learning across the curriculum it is also possible that questions need to be asked about the test itself.

Part of the mission of the funding organization for which I work is to support the translation of the curriculum into effective classroom practice through the provision of teacher development projects. Concerns have been raised about the changes that have occurred in both curriculum content and curriculum delivery in post-apartheid South African schools specifically in the area of literacy (Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999; Chisholm, 2004; Fleisch, 2008).

The successful implementation of the curriculum (and by implication the transformation process) is measured by various means from the micro level in the classroom (through continuous assessments in various forms), to macro

systemic evaluations and culminates in the senior certificate examination at the end of twelve years of schooling. In the post-apartheid era the projects that have been funded through the donor organisation have not been as successful as anticipated. The external project evaluations of various funded reading literacy projects have tended to mirror the results found both in national systemic assessments as well as international studies. These results prompted me to question how the literate-reading subject is being conceptualized and how reading literacy is being and could be measured in both international and classroom focused assessments of reading literacy.

I would like to understand how best to support teachers of reading literacy in order to deliver on the funding agency's goal of improving literacy levels, not only in the funded projects, but in the country as a whole.

1.2 Research Aim and Research Questions

The research responds to the need to understand why it is that South African learners are performing far below international benchmarks for their age and grade cohorts with regard to reading literacy (Fleisch, 2008).

1.2.1 Research aim

With a focus on grade 4, this research aims to understand how the reading literate[2] subject is constituted in an international systemic assessment of reading PIRLS 2006[3] and in selected grade 4 classrooms in Johannesburg.

[2] In the literature reviewed there are numerous definitions of what constitutes literacy/ies as well as the constitution of the literate subject. For the purpose of this research, interest resides in the reading aspect of literacy in the broad sense of reading the printed word and imagery on the page.

[3] Throughout this study the Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies will be referred to as PIRLS 2006.

1.2.2 Research Questions

- How do English teachers in four Johannesburg primary schools constitute reading literacy through their teaching and assessment practices in grade 4 classrooms?
- How are reading literacy and the reading literate subject constituted in the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS 2006) systemic assessment?

1.3 Rationale

The new curriculum in South Africa seeks to provide a strong base from which to develop the skills, values, attitudes and knowledge of all learners in order that they can access both the local and global knowledge economy (Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999). In relation to this goal, the funding agency has pledged, as part of its vision, to contribute to the development of skilled and empowered communities that will in turn contribute towards growth, development and democratisation in South Africa.

The research is conducted at grade 4 level as this is the grade in which learners are expected to switch from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'. One of the stated learning outcomes for literacy in the South African curriculum policy documents is that "the learner is able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts" (DoE, 2002a, p. 20). In the Foundation Phase (grades 1 to 3) learners begin the journey towards reading literacy competence by learning to read and this journey becomes more difficult to navigate in the Intermediate Phase (grades 4 to 6) when the learners are expected to have mastered the skills and knowledge involved in 'learning to read' and to make a switch to 'reading to learn'. I chose to investigate grade 4 reading literacy as I wanted to understand how the organisation for which I work can support this transition in its future projects. However I acknowledge the complexity of the South African Language

in Education Policy. This policy has made provision for school governing bodies to decide on language policies at individual school level as a result of which grade 4 learners may be 'switching to English' having been taught in the Foundation phase in a LOLT that may or may not have been their Home Language, in addition to switching from learning to read to reading to learn.

The choice of reading literacy as opposed to writing is deliberate as competence in 'reading to learn' forms the basis for learning across the curriculum which ultimately enhances the efficacy with which the reader can engage texts critically and with meaning (DoE, 2002a). Reading also assists the learner to become familiar with and to consolidate written language patterns and vocabulary which form the basis of good writing (Harp & Brewer, 2005). The curriculum from grade 4 onwards requires learners to be able to engage with and make sense of a variety of texts in a number of learning areas. Up until grade 4 learners are generally with one class teacher but from grade 4 learners in South African schools are usually taught by a number of teachers responsible for specialized learning areas.

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) is an independent international cooperative of national research institutions and governmental agencies. The IEA conducts various comparative studies of learner achievement in school subjects with the purpose of informing educational policies and practices around the world. One such study is PIRLS which is the IEA's assessment of learner reading achievement at fourth grade. PIRLS is positioned as an authoritative study through its association with the International Reading Association. PIRLS was administered in thirty-five countries in 2001 and in forty-five countries in 2006. Grade 4 is considered to be the 'international desired target population' where the transition to reading to learn takes place (Mullis et al., 2007). In chapter five the question is raised as to whether grade 4 is in fact the ideal time to administer such an assessment in view of the international phenomenon of the 'fourth grade slump' (Chall, 1967; Gee, 2003).

I decided to use PIRLS 2006 in particular as South Africa faces similar socioeconomic and linguistic challenges to many of the countries that participated in PIRLS 2006 and because this was the year South Africa participated for the first time. There was also an assumption that learners who wrote the PIRLS 2006 test would have had at least four years of formal instruction in reading literacy and were in the process of becoming independent readers.

As advocated by Fleisch (2008, p. 145) I would like to make a contribution to 'informed conversations' about the teaching and learning of reading literacy. Freebody (2007) argues that the restricted manner in which traditional literacy research has been conducted focussed on 'skill- versus meaning-based' approaches which produced a "gaze [that] might provide a way back, but not forward" (Freebody, 2007, p. 66). With reference to the teaching of reading literacy, Rose (2005) argues that it is not whether teaching practices are promoted as 'learner-centred' or 'teacher-centred', "but whether they focus squarely on teaching all learners in a class to read and write the texts expected of their level and area of study as part of everyday teaching practice" (Rose, 2005, p. 131).

I hope that this research will assist policy makers, teacher development programmes and teachers to find a way of looking forward and of making a positive contribution to the attainment of world class reading literacy in primary schools.

In chapter two I present a literature review of conceptualizations of reading literacy, the teaching and assessment of reading literacy and the post-apartheid context within which the teaching and assessment of reading literacy is unfolding in South Africa.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

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2.2.4 Reading Literacy as applied, practiced and situated
2.2.5 Reading Literacy as text
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2.2.7 Four Resources model of Literacy

2.3 Conceptualizations of reading literacy assessment
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2.4.2.1 Assessment Standards for Learning Outcome 3: Reading and viewing
2.4.2.2 Recommended texts

2.5 Teacher development and take up of the post-apartheid curriculum

2.1 Introduction

In order to understand the orientation to reading literacy evident in PIRLS 2006 and the South African National Curriculum Statement, the first section of the literature review presents conceptualizations of reading literacy and the teaching and assessment of reading literacy. In section 2.4 I explore the context of teaching and assessing reading literacy in the new curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa in order to understand the classroom practices of four grade 4 teachers.

2.2 Conceptualizations of reading literacy

Since the mid-twentieth century there have been on-going debates about what constitutes literacy and, by inference, the literate subject. Janks argues that "competing definitions of literacy and competing approaches to teaching it have divided the field of literacy, so much so, that they have been widely referred to as the 'literacy wars'" (Janks, 2010, p. xiii). One of the aims of this literature review is to engage with various theoretical debates regarding how reading literacy is conceptualized and approached in schools. An understanding of these debates will be useful for identifying how the reading literate subject is defined in the South African Revised National Curriculum Statement for Home and First Additional Languages and in PIRLS 2006. Weaver (1990) claims that most literacy theorists share a common long term vision regarding the purpose of literacy, describing it as the ability of students "to be able to read and write various kinds of texts, for various purposes, so that as adults they will be able to participate fully in the economic, political, social, and cultural life of their communities and nations ... they learn to read and write not only critically and creatively, but with pleasure and for personal satisfaction" (Weaver, 1990, p. 31). It is with reference to the various approaches to teaching learners to read that the debates have become heated. Researchers disagree on the best way to teach learners to become 'reading literate': some advocate a 'phonetic' approach while others privilege 'reading for meaning'. These disagreements have sometimes been referred to as the 'reading wars' (Goodman, 1986; Street, 1995).

In this literature review emphasis is placed on reading literacy, although debates about literacy include aspects of reading, speaking and writing. I begin by describing the skills and knowledge that are required to master the processes of learning to read and reading to learn by addressing two basic questions: 1) what a reader must know and 2) what a reader must be able to do. This section of the review is followed by an exploration of how the teaching of reading literacy has been conceptualized and how this teaching has been

enacted in formal school systems. I have used the framework described in the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2006, p. 148) to present an overview of various conceptualizations of reading literacy. In this chapter I outline four discrete understandings of reading literacy and the implications of these for teaching learners to read:

1) as an autonomous set of skills,
2) as applied, practiced and situated,
3) as a learning process and
4) as text.

I also consider the contemporary view of reading literacy explored in the New Literacy Studies and a model put forward by Freebody and Luke (1990) known as the Four Practices model which touches on many aspects of the approaches mentioned throughout the review.

2.2.1 What must a reader know and be able to do in order to be a competent reader?

Simply put, the cognitive foundations of learning to read include the reader's ability to comprehend spoken language and to decode. Stated differently, in order to become a competent reader there must be mastery of "the ability to construct meaning from spoken representations of language ...and the ability to recognize written expressions of words" (Hoover & Gough, 2001, p. 13.). Fundamental to both is knowledge of the language in which the text is spoken or written. (See Macdonald, 1991; Pretorius, 2000 and Fleisch, 2009 in section 2.2.2).

Researchers in the field of cognitive reading theory (Chall, 1967; Stanovich, 1986; Smith, 1988 and Hoover & Gough, 2001) agree that there are two elements that provide the foundation for reading comprehension, namely comprehension of language and decoding. In order to answer the question what must a reader know and be able to do in order to be a competent reader, I discuss each of these elements in turn.

2.2.1.1 Comprehension of language

In order to comprehend language, a person needs both background knowledge and linguistic knowledge which are explained below.

Background knowledge involves making meaning of the spoken word in context. Spoken language can be formal or informal and take different forms according to social context. For example, adults do not speak to children in the same way that they speak to other adults. There are different ways in which language is understood from literal explicit comprehension to inferential understanding. Sometimes meaning is inferred or read 'between the lines'. An example of explicit comprehension would be where a direct instruction is understood and followed like "put your jersey on". An example where meaning is inferred is someone putting a jersey on after hearing a comment like "it's really cold outside". Background knowledge involves the development of schema that help individuals to make sense of the content and procedural knowledge gained through interaction with the environment. An example of a schema might be playing a board game called snakes and ladders, another might be eating dinner at the table with the family.

Linguistic knowledge consists of an understanding of the sounds that form words which in turn are arranged to form sentences, which serve the purpose of conveying meaning. The three technical domains of linguistic knowledge are phonology, semantics and syntax. Phonology refers to the ability to hear and make distinctions between different sounds in speech. Syntax refers to an understanding of the way different classes of words are combined to express meaning. Semantics refers to the 'information' carried by language at three levels, sentence (discourse), vocabulary and morphology (the meaning of word parts).

2.2.1.2 Decoding

The ability to decode text enables the reader to relate the written and spoken words (whether syncratic or idiosyncratic) in a systematic way to make meaning. According to Hoover and Gough (2001), in order to decode text readers require two forms of knowledge: 1) cipher and 2) lexical knowledge.

Cipher knowledge involves the ability to sound out regular words, using what are often referred to as 'word attack skills'. Lexical knowledge is an internal representation of known words. A lexicon can be considered to be an internal personal thesaurus of words known to an individual.

Hoover and Gough (2001) distinguish between deciphering and decoding. Deciphering involves the use of spelling-sound knowledge of letters to 'sound out' words. Learners who decipher well are able to read 'words' such as 'hin', 'vam' and 'lat'. If a learner pronounced the word 'steak' so it rhymed with 'beak' this would be a demonstration of deciphering skill as opposed to decoding skill.

When reading aloud 'correct' pronunciation is a decoding skill. Concepts about print involve the learner's recognition that the printed words on a page convey communication which may be in different forms such as stories, information, ideas and invitations. According to Pang et al. (2003):

> Word recognition is necessary but not sufficient for fluent reading. The reader must construct meaning from the recognized words. Fluent readers can decode and construct meaning simultaneously because of efficient word recognition and oral language skills (Pang et al. 2003, p. 11).

2.2.2 Reading Literacy as an autonomous set of skills

In the autonomous view of literacy, reading is considered to consist of a set of neutral skills that can be taught in isolation and out of context (Street, 1993). This view is derived from theories of behaviourism in the field of psychology

(Gipps, 1994, p. 5). Its proponents believe that knowledge and skills can be transferred from the teacher to the learner. In its extreme form, learning is perceived to be a passive process and tightly controlled by rigid curriculum guides and educational objectives realized through prescribed basal reading programmes that leave little room for teacher innovation or creativity.

In this approach, reading is viewed as a set of skills that can be broken down into components and taught and tested (Smith, 1997). The components of reading are perceived to be sequential and learned from mechanical letter recognition to whole word recognition. Tied to this approach is the conceptualization that there are discrete stages in learning to read and that they occur in a particular order, with particular books, in a particular place (school) and within a particular time frame (two – three years). In critiquing this approach, Barton and Hamilton (1998) argue that the different points of view regarding when formal reading tuition should begin (at the age of five or seven or eight) probably have more to do with classroom management practice than with a child's developmental readiness for reading. In this approach parents are advised not to assist their children to read or write before entering formal schooling as classroom management becomes problematic when some children are fluent readers whilst others are emergent readers.

Learning to read is considered to consist of discrete stages and reading schemes are artificially constructed to place emphasis on using big print for initial reading with small amounts of text on a page, with the incremental introduction of words frequently used in the language of the classroom and words that have regular spelling patterns. Texts are designed to move from simple to more complex sentences. The autonomous view of literacy includes phonics-based approaches which advocate the use of decodable text as well as highly systematized instruction. Children are discouraged from guessing or leaving words out when they read. Children are expected to use their awareness of phonics to decode words rather than to guess. Research conducted by the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development

(NICHD) in Washington identified seven key principles of effective systematic reading instruction which are typical of an autonomous skills approach to reading.

According to Weaver (1990) literacy practices in traditional, skills-oriented, transmission-based classrooms using approaches such as phonics would include circling correct answers on worksheets, filling in blanks, writing out answers to questions at the end of a story, identifying words, reading aloud word perfectly, spelling words correctly, correctly completing exercises on the mechanics of grammar and giving the correct answers on tests. Such activities may have influenced the format in which some systemic assessments of reading literacy have been constructed.

Some theorists argue that phonemic awareness and alphabetic knowledge are the two best predictors of the progress a child will make in the early years of learning to read (Adams, 1990; Harrison & Salinger, 1998; Stanovich, 1986). Phonemic/phonological awareness is said to develop over time and, as children learn to read, their phonemic/phonological awareness develops and improves. Stanovich (1986) describes this phenomenon as a 'reciprocal relationship' thus phonemic/phonologic awareness is both a cause and effect of learning to read. In order to learn to read, children need to understand that 'print maps speech' (Stanovich, 1986). An important part of learning to read is the ability to work out and recognize previously unrecognized words. Decoding of this kind is not meaningless if the children already have the word in their spoken vocabulary (Stanovich, 1986). It can also be argued that fluent readers recognize words (and the letters with which they are constructed) automatically which frees up the processing capacity of the brain to focus on comprehension. Reading speed is important in comprehension and fluency because if the reader does not read fast enough meaning will be lost. Automaticity in reading develops with practice over time and is related to knowledge of vocabulary and the amount of accessible text a reader is exposed to as well as motivation to read. According to Stanovich (1986) there is a reciprocal causation between these different

factors in reading success, which results in good readers improving and poor readers falling behind. In his research Stanovich (1986) described the 'Matthew principle' as the phenomenon of the widening gap between good and poor readers as good readers read more and more, becoming more proficient and enjoying their reading experience, whilst poor readers stop reading and so their reading experience and competence declines. Similarly, the more that is read the more that vocabulary expands, the more vocabulary that is understood the more one is able to read (Waring & Nation, 2004).

Wolf describes reading automaticity as 'working memory' which is an executive process that provides "a kind of temporary space for holding information about letters and words, just long enough so that the brain can connect it to the children's increasingly sophisticated conceptual information" (2007, p. 131). Wolf cautions that "fluency does not ensure better comprehension; rather, fluency gives enough extra time to the executive system to direct attention where it is most needed – to infer, to understand, to predict, or sometimes to repair discordant understanding and to interpret meaning afresh" (2007, p. 131). In other words as the mechanical skill of decoding text becomes autonomous there is a simultaneous increase in learner vocabulary which the brain no longer needs to focus on allowing more opportunity for the development of higher order cognitive processing.

Macdonald and Burroughs (1991) suggest that the task of learning to read is one of the greatest challenges learners face when entering the formal schooling system. They argue that the process of learning to read in a language one already knows allows the individual to focus completely on the complex set of skills involved in decoding text. Theoretically the reading skills that are developed in one language can be transferred to another language. However, Pretorius has found that many learners do not develop sufficient reading skills in their primary language to be able to transfer reading skills to a second language which is required when they switch to English as LOLT from grade 4 (Pretorius, 2000).

One of the difficulties that South African learners experience in learning to read in their first language is that there is an insufficient variety of texts and that expository text "hardly exist in African languages" (Pretorius, 2000, p. 35). The task of reading to learn becomes more challenging when the 'reading' language is not related to the spoken language with ideas being expressed differently according to the structure of each language (Macdonald & Burroughs, 1991). The Threshold Project found that when learners were taught English as a subject, as opposed to the LOLT, in grades 1 and 2 they were not equipped with sufficient English to switch to English as LOLT or to manage the level of language demanded by the curriculum , textbooks or learning tasks from grade 5 onward (Macdonald & Burroughs, 1991). Similarly Fleisch (2008) argues that:

> ... for children that are second-language English speakers, their first few years of schooling would at best have provided them with a very rudimentary vocabulary (about 500 words) and emergent reading and writing competencies in English, which are very limited in scope. At best, children are able to read simple 3 – 5 word sentences with the simplest of structures in the present tense. (Fleisch, 2008, p. 106)

Wolf (2007, p. 87) argues that the average five year old has an established repertoire of 10 000 words in their primary language before entering school and embarking on the processes of learning to read. There is a clear advantage for learners who start their reading journey with a large vocabulary in the LOLT as automaticity will be achieved more readily than for learners who have a limited vocabulary in an additional language as LOLT.

2.2.3 Reading Literacy as a learning process

According to the Education for All Global Monitoring Report, where reading literacy is conceptualized as an interactive broad-based learning process rather than a product of a more limited and focused educational intervention, as individuals learn, individuals become reading literate (2006). This conceptualization of reading literacy builds on the work of Dewey, Piaget and constructivist educators such as Vygotsky where the focus shifts from transmission models of learning to transactional models which acknowledge

ways in which individual learners make sense of their learning experiences. A tabulation of some of the contrasts between a transmission approach to teaching and learning and the 'transactional' approach to literacy favoured by those who conceptualize reading literacy as a learning process suggests that children would have very different experiences of learning to read (Weaver, 1990).

Table 2.1: Comparisons between the Transmission and Transactional models of teaching and learning

Transmission model	Transactional model
Emphasis is on direct teaching, which is controlled first by the programme and second by the teacher.	Emphasis is on learning, which is facilitated but not directly controlled by the teacher.
Basis is the behaviourist model of learning (for example, Skinner).	Basis is the cognitive/social model of learning (for example, Vygotsky and Halliday).
Learning is viewed as a matter of building from simple to complex, from smaller to larger skills.	Smaller 'parts' of a task are seen as more readily learned within the context of a meaningful whole.
Learning is viewed as habit formation; thus verbalized/writing correct responses and avoiding incorrect responses are seen as crucial.	Learning is seen as the result of complex cognitive processes that can be facilitated by teachers and enhanced by peer interaction.
Since correctness is valued, risk-taking is discouraged and/or penalized.	Risk-taking, and hence 'errors' are seen as absolutely essential for learning.
All learners are expected to master what is taught when it is taught; thus most children experience varying degrees of failure.	Learners are expected to be at different stages and to develop at their own pace and there is no concept of 'failure'.
Ability to reproduce or verbalize a predetermined correct response is taken as evidence of learning.	Ability to apply knowledge and to think in novel ways is considered evidence of learning, as is the ability to use general strategies across a wide range of tasks and contexts.

Weaver (1990, p. 9)

The transaction model presented above implies an expectation of shared learning processes. The process that Wolf (2007) calls the development of 'fluent comprehension' would be located in the transactional model presented above. Wolf argues that "the point of becoming fluent ... is to read – really read – and understand" (2007, p. 130). Wolf cites Lovett's concept of 'comprehension monitoring' as,

> Childrens' meta-cognitive abilities – particularly their ability to think about how well they are understanding what they read in a text – [and] emphasizes the importance of this phase of development of a child's being able to change strategies if something does not make sense, and of a teacher's powerful role in facilitating that role. (Wolf, 2007, p. 132)

2.2.4 Reading Literacy as applied, practiced and situated

At the beginning of the twenty-first century fields of research are converging and there are changing understandings of learning and what constitutes reading literacy. It is to some of those new understandings that I now turn.

Street (1993) developed the concepts of *ideological* and *autonomous* reading literacy, considering coding and decoding to be 'autonomous skills' and ideological reading literacy to refer to the way in which literacy is used and how it is related to various power structures in society. The latter view of literacy focuses on how reading literacy is used in actual literacy events. A literacy event as described by Pahl and Rowsell (2005, p. 9) is the moment of composing or reading a text, whereas a literacy practice is seen as something that people do repeatedly in everyday life, in their homes, at work and at school. The literacy event could be the writing of a letter; the literacy practice would be communication with a distant relative.

Heath (1993), Street (1993) and Hymes (1996) make a strong case for approaching reading literacy in terms of situated practice. In the 1980s, while working in Iran, Street focused on reading literacy practices in different domains. He was able to identify three reading literacy domains in that study namely: maktab, commercial and school literacy. The maktab reading literacy was associated with Islam and taught in the local Qur'anic schools, the commercial reading literacy involved the management of fruit sales in the village and school reading literacy was taught in the state schools. Street's findings support the view that reading literacy is a socially situated practice and not a set of neutral skills. In each situation meaning was negotiated and awarded some form of status or power in the social context where it was enacted. The kind of

reading literacy required in the context of the Qur'an was understandably different from the reading literacy required to negotiate economic transactions in the market place.

Heath's research also supports what has become known as 'situated practice'. In her book *Ways with Words* (1993) she considers how different communities use reading literacy. In a detailed ethnographic study conducted in the Piedmont region of the USA she found that there was a disjuncture between the home reading literacy practices and the school reading literacy practices in two of the communities (black and white lower socio-economic status families living on the borders of the town's suburbs). She found that in the two border communities there was little correspondence between home and school reading literacy and yet there was a richness of 'community' literacy practice embedded in their daily social practices. The expected forms of school reading literacy were not practised in either community.

Hymes (1996) established that African-American learners were sometimes not succeeding in school, possibly as a result of the difference between narrative structures in the homes of children in 'black' and 'white' communities. The African-American style of narrative was not recognized as a form of knowledge in the classroom. This study showed that the African-American learners were practicing different reading literacy discourses in their community in which they lived to the school discourse in which they were expected to operate (Hymes, 1996). Gee (2003) argues that ways of knowing, doing, talking, reading and writing are put together and reproduced in cultural and social practice and interaction. He makes the distinction between understanding a person's language-in-use as 'discourse' consisting of accent, intonation and speech style and 'Discourse' where the style of clothing, gesture and bodily movements also contribute to making meaning. Gee (2003) claims that people assume different or multiple identities in relation to the different discourse communities in which they operate. When Barton and Hamilton (1998) observed the multi-layered literacy reading practices of adults in Lancaster they found that different reading

literacy practices were associated with different domains and discourses such as home, community and school and put forward the idea that people's reading literacy practices were dictated by their 'ruling passions' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). The notion of ruling passions led these researchers to explore why reading literacy mattered to people and the purposes for which they used reading.

The role of the home socialization process in learning how to read is illustrated by Smith (1997) who describes research conducted by Margaret Clarke in which she observed 32 children who could read before entering formal school. Whist considering what was common to all the children, she ruled out aspects of intelligence and social class and identified that the most salient aspect to their success in reading was the desire to read and the strong oral involvement of the parents.

2.2.5 Reading Literacy as text

Some reading literacy theorists and teachers argue for a text focused approach to reading literacy which could involve the following:

1) Integrated Anthology Approach,
2) Language Experience Approach,
3) Literature Based Approach,
4) Whole Language and
5) Balanced Reading Approach.

Supporters of the *Integrated Anthology Approach* to reading have critiqued the construction/compilation and use of basal reading series. In the traditional autonomous transmission based view of literacy, basal readers are designed to reinforce sounds, letters and words. In the Integrated Anthology Approach the instruction focus is broadened to include reading, writing, spelling and grammar. The texts included in the 'new' basal reading series include more authentic children's literature and a variety of formats and genres. Table 2.2 below

provides a comparison between the traditional basal reading schemes where reading is viewed as the transmission of autonomous neutral skills and an emerging shift to reading as part of a broader approach to literacy which also includes reading, writing, grammar and spelling.

Table 2.2: Comparisons between Basal and Anthology reading series

Basal reading series	Anthology reading series
Material written for the beginning levels with a highly controlled vocabulary.	Uses children's literature in largely unabridged formats.
Focused primarily on teaching reading.	Integrates the teaching of reading and other language arts.
Offers pupil texts, teacher's guides, workbooks, assessment and evaluation tools.	Offers pupil texts, teacher's guides, workbooks, assessment and evaluation tools, classroom libraries of multiple copies of titles, little books that can be photocopied for children to take home.
Balances code emphasis and meaning emphasis with attention to skills.	Balances code emphasis and meaning emphasis with attention to skills and strategies.
Assumption was that teachers would place children in static ability groups.	Assumption is that teachers place children in different groups at different levels chosen from approximately 20 levels ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade.
Focus on a set of subskills that would lead to reading.	Incorporates all of the language arts, viewing reading and writing as processes.
Ancillary materials included word cards and pocket charts.	Ancillary materials include word cards, pocket charts, videotapes, audiotapes, computer software, and management system.

(Harp & Brewer, 2005, p. 45)

The Language Experience Approach is largely a reaction against the basal reader approach and its proponents' views are that the best materials for reading instruction are texts composed by children themselves (Van Allen, cited by Harp & Brewer, 2005, p. 48). Reading is perceived to include children's experiences and expressions through processes of speaking, reading and writing. In this way the reading texts are considered to be relevant, current and meaningful to the children involved in the 'reading'.

The *Literature-Based Approach* makes use of 'real' pieces of children's literature as it is argued that authors of children's books do not write for grade specific learners or for the inculcation of specific turns of phrase, spelling or any other such linguistic device (Harp & Brewer, 2005). The children select what they wish to read and they read with the assistance of an expert reader or in a small group of readers. Reading skills are taught as required by the text being read and as the reader needs them. In this approach the children construct knowledge of reading through the act of reading.

Whole Language has been described as an emerging 'philosophy' in regard to language education. In *What's Whole in Whole Language?* Goodman (1986) states that the emerging whole language philosophy is based on the converging disciplines of language acquisition and learning theory.

As new approaches to teaching reading gained momentum during the late twentieth century some parents and teachers began to realize that, whilst particular approaches suited some children, there was in fact no evidence that a panacea had been found. The 'philosophy' behind the *Balanced Approach to Literacy* instruction is that teachers need to make a decision as to which approaches, often in combination, suit the child. The balance comes in the form of attention being paid to word study, engagement with meaningful texts and literature study, instruction in reading strategies and communicative writing instruction (Wildsmith-Cromarty & Gounden, 2006). Advocates of this approach support the integration of reading, writing, listening and viewing across the curriculum and for reading, argue in favour of immersion in reading real texts for skills instruction.

The role that text plays in reading literacy has implications for the nature, format and placement of texts used in systemic assessments.

2.2.6 New Literacies

Pahl and Rowsell (2005) make a compelling case for combining the view of reading literacy as a set of skills with an understanding of how reading literacy is used in everyday life. They argue that the skills and reading strategies that are required to become reading literate can be taught or made explicit in authentic texts as well as in basal reading texts. They further suggest that if reading literacy were to be understood both as a global and 'glocal' social practice, learners would be able to communicate effectively across local cultures, using a combination of skills and strategies effectively in relation to the changing nature and modes of global communication.

Scholars in the field of 'New Literary Studies' are attempting to define what the 'new' reading literacy looks like in the post-millennium world. An international group of ten educators, known as the New London Group, met in 1994 to consider, among others, what was happening with the teaching of reading literacy. They coined the term 'Multiliteracies' as a result of their observation of the variability of making meaning in different cultural, social or professional contexts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2006). Not only was attention being given to various literacies in practice (multiliteracies) but the modality of these literacies as communication was observed through meaning being made in "written-linguistic modes ... [that] interface with visual, audio, gestural and spatial patterns of meaning", a further term 'multimodality' was coined (Cope & Kalantzis, 2006, p. 23).

Scholars of the New Literacies argue that the manner in which language is used separates one community or society from another. If one takes a global approach to reading literacy, one must take cognisance of the power relations that exist within reading literacy events and practices. On a local level, home reading literacies, cultures and social practices need to be included in school practices. Learners need to be able to place themselves in both local and global reading literacy contexts. Proponents of the New Literacy Studies call for

transformed practice within a multiliteracies framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2001). Reading literacy becomes more than the accumulation of skills as it involves the development of a meta-awareness of the complexities of text. Instead of a constant reliance on school reading literacy there needs to be a dialogic relationship between home and school literacies.

In the past, reading was traditionally conceived of as reading printed text. This text was generally laid out on pages in a book. Pahl and Rowsell (2005) trace changes over time in the publishing of reading books for children and find evidence of changing social practice. For example children's readers are filled with various depictions, both through text and illustration, which over time have become more sensitive to a variety of cultural and religious identities. Kress (1997) asks teachers to consider what kind of readers they want to produce. The question should prompt teachers to think about the different kinds of texts children come across in their daily lives. Jewitt and Kress (2003) argue that attention must be paid to the role of the new technologies as different reading literacy skills are required. Traditionally texts are read from left to right or from right to left. Multimodal texts add a layer of choice as to the order in which readers engage with texts, screen technologies in particular. Kress (2003) makes the point that screen technologies can only be read subject to the logic of the screen set up. Learners need to be socialized into the screen technology and to employ appropriate reading strategies. The 'user' decides where to start 'reading'; the learner may open a video clip, sound byte, pod cast, PDF or JPEG file. The learner may read a spreadsheet, power point presentation or a blog.

Cope and Kalantzis (2006, p. 32) cite Gilster who "refers to a new, digital literacy which, contrary to the sequential reading of the printed word, is non-linear and discontinuous". Cope and Kalantzis (2006) argue that there is continuity between print and digital [screen] literacy in that digitalisation has placed text, which still has to be deciphered, onto screen technologies. Where visuals and texts were manufactured separately and tended to be in different

sections of a book, the visual has been repositioned and written textual culture has been revived (Cope & Kalantzis, 2001). Cope and Kalantzis argue that with the introduction of emails and blogging, narrowcasting and point casting "literacy as the formal, standardised stuff of proper expression – correctly spelt words in properly formed sentences measured against standards of official languages and literate middle class expression – will no longer suffice" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2006, p. 34). He goes on to explain that "to be skilled in literacy, learners would need not only knowledge of grammatical conventions but should also be able to communicate effectively in different settings and to use tools of text design such as word processing, desktop publishing and image manipulation" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2006, p. 36).

Jewitt and Kress (2003) suggest that learners are guided by synaesthetic activities. These activities include modes such as the visual, kinaesthetic, three-dimensional and gestural. Ironically, during the early childhood years, learners are encouraged to express themselves in creative ways by using a variety of modes such as paints, collages, sand and coloured crayons. As learners enter into the more formal school years there has traditionally been a shift from the more creative modes to a focus on printed text and the acquisition of decoding and encoding skills. The traditional reading schemes are linked primarily to schooling practices which include; silent, paired, group and independent reading. The New Literacy Studies have brought a greater awareness of the visual carrying its own informational and ideological potential. Gemma Moss, cited by Pahl and Rowsell (2005), notes that the design approaches of Dorling Kindersley in the series Eyewitness Guides, allow readers to make meaning without being 'hampered' by the written text. This series is designed around photographs of objects which are large enough to spread over two pages. The photograph dominates the page with text dispersed around the edges.

2.2.7 Four Resources model of Literacy

The four resources model of Luke and Freebody (1999) draws on the work of Heath (1993), Street (1993) and others on situated literacy. Luke and Freebody (1999) consider reading literacy to involve the building of identities and cultures and argue that "... 'failure' at literacy isn't about individual skill deficits – [but] about access and apprenticeship into institutions and resources, discourses and texts" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 5). This view is similar to that expressed by Gee (1996) who argues that reading literacy is always applied, practiced and situated. Luke and Freebody propose that four elements are involved in becoming reading literate:

1. Breaking the code of texts

Luke and Freebody maintain that in order to be a successful reader the individual needs to be able to engage with the technology of the written script. Technology in this sense refers to the relationship between the spoken sounds and the written symbols as well as the contents of that relationship. To break the code requires knowledge of the alphabet, sounds in words, spelling conventions and patterns of sentence construction and text. These aspects are necessary but not sufficient conditions for becoming reading literate and entail practice as well as the support of an accomplished text user.

2. Participation in the meaning of text

Here the reader is required to develop the resources to engage with the process of making inferences that connect textual elements and background knowledge to complete the unexplicated aspects of the text. The reader is expected to draw on his or her life experience to add a layer of meaning that is not explicit in the text but which forms part of the meaning of the context of the text.

3. The functional use of texts

Being a successful user of texts requires the reader to understand how the various forms of the text are used in in-school and out-of-school contexts. Texts can be used for different purposes and can display different structures, tones, degree of formality and sequence of components. The daily newspaper differs from a novel which in turn differs from a text book.

4. The critical analysis and transformation of texts

The reader develops the skill of recognising that a text is a crafted object displaying a certain point of view, texts are not neutral. A text can be critiqued and presented from other points of view. (Adapted from Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 9)

Luke and Freebody (1999) have suggested in their four resources model that reading literacy consists of repertoires which a reader needs to be able to use in combination as a successful reader. Stein and Janks (2007) in their article *Literacy crucial to bridging the digital divide* argue that for readers to be successful it is not enough to decode text. Learners also need to:

- make meaning from text,
- bring culture, content and context to the active reading process,
- learn how to ask questions and to examine the underlying assumptions, values and positions of texts to understand the interests they serve,
- enjoy reading through reading texts such as books, magazines, comics or websites that are of interest to the reader and which are not too difficult. (Stein & Janks, 2007, p. 20)

Stein and Janks (2007) argue, like Luke and Freebody (1999), that it is the individual with a repertoire of knowledge and skills that are always applied, situated and practised who is a reading literate subject.

Having reviewed various constructions of reading literacy, in the next section I will consider some of the literature on large-scale reading literacy assessment.

2.3 Conceptualizations of reading literacy assessment

In this section attention is given to the increasing use of large-scale assessments, the fitness for purpose of large-scale tests, aspects of large-scale test design and construction and the consequences of large-scale tests.

2.3.1 Large-scale assessments – on the increase

According to Gudmund Hernes, the director of the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), governments worldwide have recognized the role that education plays in building nations and in sustaining economic, social and cultural development and have realized that the primary objective of education is to ensure that children learn to a sufficient level to perform well as future citizens in society (cited in Postlethwaite, 2004). There is an increasing demand for citizens to be educated and to keep abreast of new technology for future success both at local and international levels (Chisholm, 2004). Haertel (1999) argues that the call for more high-stakes testing is a visible, dramatic response to public concerns about education provisioning and standards.

National large-scale assessments and testing appear to be on the increase. Examples of some national large-scale assessments can be found in the 'back to basics' approach of the 'No Child Left Behind' programme in the United States which is assessed through a body known as the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) programme in the United Kingdom which incorporates the national key stage assessment programme and the New South Wales (Australia) Department of Education's National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy. President Bush has been very vocal on the subject of systemic assessment stating that "children must be tested every year in reading and math, every single year" (Bush, 2001). The South African Minister of Education announced in March 2008 as part of the Foundation for Learning campaign that she has introduced 'new national tests for little ones' which will be conducted in

November each year for grade 1 to grade 6 learners (Gower, 2008). In his State of the Nation speech President Zuma has promised that from 2010 onwards "all grade 3, 6 and 9 students will write literacy and numeracy tests that are independently moderated" (Zuma, 2010).

The trend for increasing numbers of countries to participate in international large-scale assessments can be seen in the Southern and Eastern Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality Study (SAQMEC), the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS) all of which aim to measure and compare achievement in education across countries. Although there is not universal consensus on the nature of the education objectives to be assessed and there is recognition that curricula vary across systems, there is general agreement that one of the basic functions of an education system is to "make pupils able to read, write and count" (Postlethwaite, 2004, p. 13).

2.3.2 Large-scale assessments - fitness for purpose

Taylor (1994, p. 233) suggests that there is some ambiguity regarding the use of large-scale assessment. She argues that educators, legislators and policy makers assume that assessment can serve two incompatible purposes: firstly the purpose of determining whether learners are achieving or striving toward desired standards or performance and secondly the purpose of providing relative measurements of students, schools, districts, states and countries on scales of achievement. Stiggins (cited by Gipps, 1994) is of the view that assessment for accountability purposes and to support the learning and teaching process are so fundamentally different that there should not be an attempt to merge the two. He refers to 'trickle down' and 'trickle up' systems of assessment where the 'trickle down' large-scale test score data are gathered for use by local and national authorities and eventually filter down to the teacher, while the 'trickle up' data is collected in the classroom and is aggregated

upward to other levels of decision making. Taylor (1994) argues that national large-scale assessments test the state of the education system for the purpose of improving it. At the level of government, taxpayers and parents there is a need to know how the education system and individual schools are performing and access to this information is necessary for the purpose of general accountability (Gipps, 1994).

Taylor (1994) suggests that there are three main categories of assessment namely: national tests, public examinations and classroom tests. National tests, she argues, serve a mainly formative purpose, testing the state of the system for the purpose of improving it, whilst public examinations assess in a summative way the capabilities of individual students for the purposes of certification and selection into the job market or more advanced educational programme.

2.3.3 The consequences of large-scale assessments

Gipps (1994) argues that multiple choice standardised tests in the USA, and the formal written exam in the UK, have had unwanted and negative effects on teaching and the curriculum because the broader process of classroom education has become stunted as teachers concentrate narrowly on "teaching to the test" (Gipps, 1994, p. 3). According to Jones et al. (1999) the introduction of a high-stakes accountability system known as 'The New ABCs of Public Education' in the American state of North Carolina has had an impact on curriculum, instruction, assessment and school personnel. The focus of the school has changed to reading, writing and mathematics and particularly to the information and skills that would be included in the large-scale test. This has led to material that involved high-order thinking and problem solving falling by the wayside as the large-scale tests typically emphasise discrete facts and skills because they are 'easy' to measure. Siv Shapiro of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has argued that large-scale tests sell education short (as cited by Jones et al., 1999).

Madaus (cited by Shohamy, 2001) agrees that there does not appear to be an end in sight to the dominance of testing. In his view testing is accepted without thought and he makes an appeal for the evaluation of tests not only for the contribution that they can make to bureaucratic goals of efficiency, competitiveness and productivity, but also for the ways in which they can be used to promote specific values and social relations and diminish others. Whilst acknowledging the concern that tests can be viewed either as master or servant of educational achievement, Davies (1990) argues for the leadership role that testing (and language testing in particular) can play. He further suggests that there is a positive influence that can be enhanced from the 'washback' effect of testing. The washback effect can be seen where teachers teach to the test in an attempt to get 'good' scores. Although this may be conceived as a narrowing of the curriculum, teaching to the test at least ensures that learners gain competence in core skills.

2.3.4 Critique of large-scale assessments

Shohamy (2001) contrasts the view of those who believe that the testing era is over and that there is no room for such authoritarian tools in post-modern, multicultural societies with the view of those who argue that large-scale tests are here to stay but in different shapes and forms. She suggests that it is possible for systemic standardised language tests to be constructed in such a manner that they cater for diversity. In the context of a multilingual, multicultural South Africa it would be useful to consider the five principle methods she puts forward for the construction of more inclusive language tests:

1. The inclusion of knowledge of diverse groups
2. the participation of democratic societies
3. the monitoring and limiting of the uses of tests as tools of power
4. the protection of the rights of all citizens from powerful institutions
5. the need for those who develop powerful tests to assume responsibility for their consequence. (Shohamy, 2001, p. 79)

Shohamy (2004) cautions against large scale assessments in which a dominant group defines and, by implication, enforces mastery of knowledge:

> ...tests are often introduced not in order to assess knowledge, but rather to define it and to force test takers to master knowledge that those who introduce the tests believe is important (Shohamy, 2004, p.74)

Shohamy (2004) recommends that consideration to be given to diverse knowledges and practices. She argues that assessments which are based on the notion of 'homogenous knowledge' perform the function of eliminating the unique knowledge of minority groups. In multicultural multilingual societies like South Africa, assessments should recognize and consider differences in knowledge as legitimate knowledge. Instead of acquiring the knowledge of the dominant group (assimilation), assessments could incorporate an interactive model whereby 'other' knowledge is acknowledged and valued and serves to enrich the knowledge of the dominant group.

The value of the assessment of basic reading literacy skills is not in contention, but questions have been raised as to whether the nature of the 'basics' has changed with the broadening of the conceptualization of reading literacy (Johnson, 2003). Very little systematic thinking has been done regarding large-scale assessment in the 'new literacies' although there has been much discussion about the nature of the 'new basics' and what it means to be literate in the new work order (Johnson, 2003). Some theorists have begun the process of conceptualizing alternative assessment or broader approaches to assessment that include aspects such as performance-based assessment, portfolios, self assessment, journals, peer assessment and exhibitions. Kalantzis, Cope and Harvey (2003, p. 24) suggest four assessment techniques which they consider "to be relevant to measuring the aspects of persons who will be most effective in the new economy and most valuable citizens". The four techniques mentioned are:

1. project assessment
2. performance assessment
3. group assessment
4. portfolio assessment.

However, these techniques are more appropriate for classroom based assessment than for once-off large-scale assessment.

There is a debate regarding which aspects of language can and should be tested. If the debate is confined to reading literacy, it continues in terms of what constitutes reading competence. For example, Kress (1997) and Johnson (2003) state that the traditional assessment of reading continues to emphasise general, factual and dictionary type questions about written texts. Many of the children who score well on these assessments might know the literal meaning of the text but cannot read with meaning. Gee (2003) contends that "[the traditional] testing and accountability agenda has often been tied to calls for a return to 'basic skills' and even to scripted forms of instruction in reading ..." (2003, p. 10). The traditional view of language testing is that language is comprised of knowledge and skills that can be atomised and therefore tested. In reality, language systems operate in multiple social systems and contexts. In fact Gee (2003) attributes the phenomenon of the fourth grade slump (described by Chall, 1967) to the fact that the "first three years of school [were] largely devoted to learning to read (in the sense of being able to decode print and get the literal meanings of texts) and fourth grade was where children began to read to learn (in the subject areas)" (Gee, 2003, p. 14). (See section 5.2.4.2.) The assessment at the end of the first three years of instruction in learning to read shows to what extent learners have learned to decode text. Questions should be raised as to the optimal time frame for assessing the extent to which learners have learned to read to learn. Should this be after one, two or three years of further explicit reading instruction? Gee argues that,

> "the common situation in which children who have passed early reading tests cannot 'read to learn' by the time more complex language demands, connected with academic content areas, are made in fourth grade [which] shows that early reading tests do not mean children are learning to read in any academically usefully way" (Gee, 2008, p. 130)

Learners who struggle in grade 4 are often poor readers who are "...poor comprehenders, irrespective of their decoding skills" (Pretorius, 2000, p. 34).

Furthermore, in South Africa when the switch to English as LOLT occurs in grade 4, "many black learners have barely mastered reading comprehension skills in their home or primary language. As a result, they have decoding skills but few comprehension skills to transfer to English" (Pretorius, 2000, p. 34).

Gee's list of six principles for creating an equitable environment for learners to experience a comparable opportunity to learn and thereafter be assessed, could be relevant to the South African context where, in theory, the language policy privileges 'mother tongue' in the Foundation phase of primary school with a switch to English from the fourth grade. The principles put forward by Gee are:

1. People (children or adults) have not had the same opportunity to learn based on how much or how little they have read 'in general', but in terms of how equivalent their experience has been with reading specific types of text in specific sorts of ways.
2. People have not had the same opportunity to learn unless they have had equivalent experiences within the relevant semiotic domain in terms of active and critical learning.
3. People have not had the same opportunity to learn unless they have had equivalent experiences with relevant specific social languages, not with just English (or some other language) 'in general'.
4. People have not had the same opportunity to learn unless they have had equivalent experiences not just with texts, but with the embodied experiences in a given semiotic domain that allow them to situate meanings for words and phrases in that domain.
5. People have not had the same opportunity to learn a given social language unless they have had equivalent experiences dialogically with people who know the language and who have used it in rich enough contexts to allow the learners to 'guess' what perspectives the word and forms being used mean.
6. People have not had the same opportunity to learn unless they have had equivalent opportunities to 'play the game' connected to the texts they are reading. (Gee, 2003, pp. 31-44)

Gipps (1994) argues that different forms of assessment encourage, through their effect on teaching, different styles of learning. Therefore if it is the intention to foster higher order skills including application of knowledge, analyzing, reasoning and interpretation for all learners, then the assessment items need to reflect this. The test items would have to include a variety of questions which could include but not privilege, multiple choice questions.

Hamp-Lyons (2007) argues that the technology already exists to provide a more meaningful interpretation of large scale test scores whereby information about what learners can do can be drawn and reported on to parents and system administrators. Her view is that large-scale test scores are often reduced to a single number which is not capable of providing much information about learner or system performance. This would mean that if the results of large-scale tests could be reported on by presenting more than just one global digit to represent ability, a broader understanding of 'competence' would emerge together with a greater understanding of the extent to which a learner is deemed to be 'literate'. It would serve the dual purpose of getting an overview of how the education system is performing as well as an indication of how much of which aspects of literacy are being achieved which could assist future policy decisions and interventions. Jansen (2010) commenting on the President's promise of large-scale tests for grade 3, 6 and 9 students argues that "what you do with the test results can make a difference, but there is every indication that at provincial and national level there is no planning and operational capacity to do so" (Jansen, 2010, p. 3).

2.4 Conceptualizations and implementation of reading literacy in the post-apartheid curriculum

2.4.1 Introduction

In this section I firstly present an overview of the reading and viewing part of the language curriculum and the accompanying Assessment Statements. This is followed by an overview of teacher training and take-up of the post-apartheid curriculum.

"Reversing the damage of apartheid education has been the task of the entire education edifice, but perhaps language, curriculum and assessment have been critical, as they set the goals and parameters within which teachers and administrators operate" (Chisholm, 2004, p. 18). The Learning Area titled

'Languages' in the post-apartheid curriculum is framed by the Language in Education Policy which stipulates that all learners must be offered at least two official languages from grade 3 until grade 12. There are eleven official languages in South Africa and there is an expectation that learners reach high levels of proficiency in at least two of them, and have an ability to communicate in other languages (DoE, 2003).

In terms of reading literacy, as mentioned in chapter one, it is envisaged that "the learner is able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts" (DoE, 2002a, p. 20).

The synopsis of the Languages Learning Programme (DoE, 2003) states that all learners are expected to learn their home language and at least one additional official language. Learners should become competent in their additional language while their home language is maintained and developed. The Language Learning Area makes provision for a curriculum in Home Languages, First Additional Languages and Second Additional Languages. The assumptions underpinning the assessment standards for the languages taught at the three 'levels' are as follows:

- The Home Language Assessment Standards assume that learners are able to read, understand and speak the language taken at Home Language level. These Assessment Standards support the development of these competencies, especially with regard to various types of literacy (reading, writing, visual and critical literacies). They provide a strong curriculum to support the Language of Teaching and Learning (LOLT).

- The First Additional Language assumes that learners do not necessarily have any knowledge of the language taken at First Additional level when they arrive at school. The curriculum starts by developing learners' ability to read, understand and speak the language, and as such develops literacy. Learners are able to transfer the literacies they have acquired in their Home Language to their First Additional Language. The curriculum provides strong support for those learners who will use their First Additional Language as the Language of Learning and Teaching at some point in the General Education and Training band (Grade R – 9). ***By the end of Grade 9, these learners should be able to use their Home and First Additional Languages effectively and with confidence for a variety of purposes, including learning.***

- The Second Additional Language is intended for learners who need or wish to learn three languages. The Second Additional Language may be an official language or a foreign language. Assessment Standards have been set at Second Language level for the official languages in the intermediate and senior phases. They ensure that learners are able to use their Second Additional Language for general communicative purposes. Less time will be allocated to the learning of Second Additional Languages than to the Home or First Additional Languages. (DoE, 2003, p. 20; bold type in the original)

Whether a learner is learning in the Home or First Additional Language there is an expectation that both will be supported through the curriculum so that the learner gains competence in using these languages as it is "the Languages Learning Area [that] underlies all other Learning Areas, since language is the medium through which all teaching, learning and assessment takes place" (DoE, 2003, p. 19). The intention of the Foundation Phase reading literacy curriculum is to establish the knowledge and skills that support reading competence that enables the learner to read to learn in the next school phase. In the Foundation Phase a 'balanced approach' to reading literacy development is recommended and in the learning outcome 'Reading and viewing' (LO 3) the following is required of the learner (DoE, 2002f, pp.32-33) in both the Home and First Additional Language curriculum statements:

- Grade R: the learner begins to develop phonic awareness
- Grades R-1: the learner is able to role-play reading
- Grades R-3: the learner is able to make meaning of written texts
- Grade 1: recognises letters and words and makes meaning of written texts
- Grades 1 and 2: the learner develops phonic awareness
- Grade 2: the learner recognises and makes meaning of words in longer sentences
- Grade 1-3: the learner reads for information and enjoyment
- Grade 3: the learner consolidates phonic awareness
- Grade 3: the learner reads texts alone, and uses a variety of strategies to make meaning.

It is interesting to note that the First Additional Language curriculum statement sets a target of between 700 – 1500 common words that should be mastered by the end of Grade 3 however; no target is set in the Home Language curriculum.

The respective curricula for Home and First Additional Language in the Intermediate Phase consist of the same six broad Learning Outcomes namely:

Learning Outcome 1: Listening
Learning Outcome 2: Speaking
Learning Outcome 3: Reading and Viewing
Learning Outcome 4: Writing
Learning Outcome 5: Thinking and Reasoning
Learning Outcome 6: Language Structure and Use

2.4.2 The curriculum for Learning Outcome 3: Reading and viewing

The Learning Outcome 'Reading and Viewing' is the same in grade 4 for both Home and First Additional Language, although there are differences in the assessment standards to be achieved and the prescribed texts.

2.4.2.1 Assessment Standards for Learning Outcome 3: Reading and viewing

According to the National Policy on Assessment and Qualifications for Schools in the General Education and Training Band "learners should be measured against the Assessment Standards of the Learning Outcomes in a grade" (DoE, 2002d, p. 5). A copy of the full statement of assessment standards for reading and viewing for English Home Language and First Additional Language is presented in Appendix A. The following table is a comparative summary of the assessment standards for grade 4 English Home and First Additional Language curricula.

Table 2.3: Comparisons between assessment standards for grade 4 curricula English Home and First Additional Language

Outcome 3: Reading and Viewing Assessment standards			
Grade 4 English as Home Language		**Grade 4 English as First Additional Language**	
1	Reads a variety of texts for different purposes, • Skims for general idea • Scans for specific details • Surveys content page, headings, index for overview • Makes predictions and uses contextual clues • Reads aloud clearly and with expression	1	Understands in a simple way some elements of stories • Title • Characters • Point of view • Role that pictures play in making meaning
2	Interprets message Identifies graphical techniques	2	Understands some elements of poetry, rhyme, alliteration
3	Describes feelings	3	Reads for information, follows a route, recipe, timetable
4	Discusses choice of language	4	Understands design and layout of media texts
5	Shows understanding of central idea, characters, setting and plot	5	Reads for pleasure at an appropriate reading and language level
6	Infers	6	Uses reference books and develops vocabulary
7	Understands vocabulary, imagery	7	Demonstrates reading vocabulary of between 1 000 and 2 500 common words
8	Recognises various language structures		
9	Identifies and discusses values		
10	Understands and responds appropriately to information texts		
11	Interprets simple visual texts		
12	Selects relevant texts for informational needs		
(DoE, 2002b, pp. 72-77)		(DoE, 2002c, pp. 62-67)	

Although there are twelve assessment standards for Home Language curriculum and six for First Additional Language curriculum, an assumption underlying both is that learners have mastered the skill of learning to read in the previous phase. The assessment standards for both curricula indicate progression from the competencies required in the previous phase where learners are expected to learn how to read. Learning how to read requires mechanical ability to decode text as explained in section 2.2.1 above. It includes

the "ability to recognise the visual shapes of letters and words, to understand letter sound relationships and the structure of words and sentences" (Janks, 2010, p. xiii). The emphasis has shifted in the grade 4 curriculum from the automatic competencies of mechanical reading to making meanings from a variety of texts. The Foundations for Learning: Assessment Framework Intermediate Phase which, interestingly, makes no distinction between Home and First Additional Language, places emphasis on "learners' understanding of what they read [and that] reading assessment should take place using a seen and prepared passage at the level of the learner, as well as using an unseen passage which everyone in the class will be expected to read" (DoE, 2008, p. 25). Emphasis on the understanding of making meaning from the text is evident in each curriculum document. For example there seems to be some ambiguity regarding what it means for learners to 'read'. There is a possibility reading activities take the form of 'silent' or 'aloud' reading. A wide selection of texts is recommended for both curricula and it includes fiction, nonfiction, text books in other learning areas as well as various forms of print and screen media.

Assessment standard one in Home Language requires the learner to read aloud clearly and with expression whereas there is no such requirement in the First Additional Language. Assessment standard six for First Additional Language requires learners to demonstrate a reading vocabulary of between 1 000 and 2 500 common words and states that learners who will study other Learning Areas through their additional language should aim for 2 500 words. There is no mention of a quantified vocabulary requirement in the Home Language assessment.

A continuous model of assessment is recommended in both curriculum documents and there is an acknowledgement that teachers must have a good sense of what can reasonably be expected of learners at different ages and levels (DoE, 2003). The national assessment policy document defines assessment as "a continuous planned process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about the performance of learners" (DoE, 2002d, p. 5).

The policy states that assessment can be both formal and informal but the following distinction is made between the two. Formal assessment should be recorded and forms a systematic way of evaluating how well learners are progressing in a grade, and informal assessment consists of daily monitoring or assessment of learner progress and need not be recorded (DoE, 2002d, p. 6).

The requirement for the number of recorded formal assessments for grade 4, whether Home or First Additional Language is presented in the table below.

Table 2.4: Number of recorded formal assessments for grade 4

LEARNING AREA	TERM 1	TERM 2	TERM 3	TERM 4	TOTAL
Grade 4 Languages English Home Language	2	2	2	2	8
Grade 4 Languages English First Additional Language	2	2	2	2	8

(DoE, 2002d, p. 12)

It is the classroom teacher who bears the overall responsibility for assessing the progress of learners in achieving the expected outcomes, and the national and provincial departments of education are accountable for the management of the assessment programmes in schools. Teachers are required to keep records of learner performance as well as of learners' promotion to the next grade (DoE, 2002d).

2.4.2.2 Recommended texts

The Languages Learning Area uses a text-based approach to the teaching of languages (DoE, 2003) and has recommended texts for each grade. A copy of the full statement of the recommended texts for reading and viewing for English Home Language and First Additional Language is presented in Appendix A. The following table is a comparative summary of the recommended texts for grade 4.

Table 2.5: Comparisons between recommended texts for grade 4 curricula English Home and First Additional Language

Grade 4 English as Home Language	Grade 4 English as First Additional Language
Recommended texts Written/Visual	
Stories	Books (fiction and non-fiction)
Narratives (e.g. fables, legends, stories)	
Letters	
Diaries	
Textbooks from different Learning Areas	
Poems	Simple children's poems
Reports (e.g. science, weather, accident, sports)	Book reports
Procedures (e.g. recipes, instructions)	Recipes
	Instructions
	Timetables
	Diagrams
Charts (e.g. flow charts)	Graphs and Charts
Bar graphs	
Maps	Simple maps and plans
Mind maps	
Comics/cartoon strips	Comics
	Cartoons
Drawings	Pictures
Collages	Photographs
Reference books (e.g. dictionaries, encyclopaedias)	Dictionaries
	Word puzzles
	Notices
Recommended texts Multimedia	
Children's television dramas	Children's television programmes
Television advertisements	Television advertisements
CD-ROMs and Internet (where available)	CD-ROMs and Internet (where available)
Live performances	Children's films and videos (where available)
Television cartoons	
Advertisements	
(DoE, 2002b, p. 58)	(DoE, 2002c, p. 50)

Similar texts are recommended for Home and First Additional Language curricula. The policy documents stress the importance of selecting texts that are grade and age appropriate, at levels that are understandable but challenging in terms of concepts, vocabulary, sophistication (i.e. genres) and ideas (DoE,

2003). Implicit in the curricula is an acknowledgement that reading in Home and Additional Languages is similar but learners reading in an Additional Language are not expected to have the same range of vocabulary, language structures or intuition for aspects such as style that are available to them in their Home Language. The policy document recommends that in the early stages of learning an Additional Language, graded readers have an important role to play as they are written within a specific vocabulary level and learners can move quickly from one level to the next. It is recommended that teachers support the learning of a First Additional Language through scaffolded reading, analysis and interpretation of texts. Teachers are encouraged to use well-designed questions to facilitate learners' interpretation of texts as well as the provision of appropriate feedback (DoE, 2003). Unfortunately the situation described by Pretorius in 2000 where learners are typically taught to decode in their primary language "...but little sustained effort goes into helping them make the transition from decoding to reading with comprehension, or to progress from the simple and familiar narrative texts to more complicated unfamiliar expository texts (that is texts with the function of conveying information, like texts books" (Pretorius, 2000, p. 35), is still the case in many schools.

The final section of this chapter reviews policy documents and research studies which focus on support for teachers in the implementation of post-apartheid curricula.

2.5 Teacher development and take up of the post-apartheid curriculum

Expectations of teachers, in the reconstituted post-apartheid education system, are different from the post-apartheid era with respect to curriculum and pedagogy. With reference to the implementation of the curriculum, the National Policy Framework For Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (DoE, 2006) recognizes the strategic role that teachers need to play in the intellectual, moral and cultural preparation of the young people. In fact this policy framework acknowledges that:

> The current generation of teachers is the first to experience the new non-racial, democratic transformation of the education system. Since 1994 they have had to cope with the rationalization of the teaching community into a single national system, the introduction of new curricula, which emphasizes greater professional autonomy and require teachers to have new knowledge and applied competencies, including the use of new technologies, and radical change to demographic, cultural and linguistic composition of our classrooms. (DoE, 2006, p. 6)

The following summary based on Harley and Wedekind (2004) sketches the development and take-up of the new curriculum.

The short time between the finalization of the curriculum and its implementation put the National Department of Education (DoE) and its provincial counterparts under enormous pressure to prepare teachers for the transition from one system to another. The Department of Education engaged in a cascade model of training which at best consisted of a 'crash course' in the principles of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE). Many of the education officials trained at 'the top' (of the cascade) were not sufficiently equipped to replicate the training within their districts and schools. The lack of capacity of the education officials led to aspects of the training being sub-contracted to a range of consultants and NGOs. As a result, complex issues of pedagogy were reduced to simplistic dichotomies such as 'teacher-centred' (an 'old', undesirable practice) and 'learner-centred' (a 'new', esteemed practice). The quality of training was uneven across the provinces and education districts. Similarly, 'content' was replaced by 'outcomes'. Amidst much confusion among teachers about the implications for their practice, learner-centredness quickly became one of the defining features of the new curriculum, and for many teachers, implementing group work was the core pedagogical shift required of them (Harley & Wedekind, 2004).

Potenza and Monyokolo claim that "from the outset, teacher development was not an integral part of curriculum planning" (1999, p. 236). They found that the schools in their study were only given one set of policy documents which were kept in the principal's office and seldom used by teachers. Bloch (2009) has

observed that when the revised curriculum was introduced in 2003 the department engaged in the same flurry of cascaded courses and teacher training events with limited policy documents being made available for implementation.

A change in teaching practice, however, involves more than policy change - it involves teachers learning how to teach differently (Christie, 2008). Findings from the President's Education Initiative research project suggest that the most critical challenge for teacher development is the limited conceptual and content knowledge of many teachers which has contributed to low levels of learner achievement (Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999). The C2005 Review refers to widespread evidence that teachers have 'a rather shallow understanding' of the new curriculum (DoE, 2000). Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) argue that in a context in which there is a shallow understanding of the new curriculum, combined with evidence of shortcomings in the subject knowledge and a sense of 'false clarity', symbolic displays of curriculum implementation practice may be widespread (cited in Harley & Wedekind, 2004). Harley and Wedekind (2004) argue that the sense of 'false clarity' that teachers have regarding the new curriculum has created a mismatch between what teachers claim to know and their practice. In a separate study Pahad (1999) reports that teachers demonstrate further 'false clarity' regarding their assessment practices by focusing "on fragmented, mechanical and lower order skills, without building towards the critical outcomes" (Pahad, 1999, p. 262).

Despite the inadequacy of teacher training and resources for implementation, research has consistently pointed to the favourable reception of the new curriculum (DoE, 1997; Kgobe & Mbele, 2001; Vally, 1999, as cited by Harley & Wedekind, 2004). Teachers by and large have been positively disposed toward the intention of the new curriculum. However Jansen (2001, as cited by Harley & Wedekind, 2004) points to the 'racialised' nature of the support for the new curriculum saying that black teachers are more enthusiastic than those from the former white departments of education. Ironically Czerniewicz et al. observe

that "actual practice is more readily seen in ex-TED[4] schools, despite enthusiasm for OBE being greater in ex-DET[5] schools" (as cited by Harley & Wedekind, 2004, p. 208).

The way the new curriculum is played out in South African classrooms depends on the way it is "taken up by local actors in the context of historically-established social relations" (Chisholm, 2004, p. 5). In essence it can be said that "policy cannot mandate what matters" (Fullan & McLaughlin, as cited in Christie, 2008, p. 149). Christie argues that policy is important but not all powerful and often becomes a 'blunt tool' that cannot bring 'fine-tuned' results (2008).

A decade after the implementation of the new curriculum Kanjee (2009) argues that one of the most critical challenges that still face the Department of Education is the lack of support to teachers in the use of classroom assessment. He argues that there are four critical factors that impact on effective classroom assessment practices:

1. Inadequate teacher expertise and content knowledge,
2. Limited access to relevant teaching and learning resources,
3. Poor understanding of assessment and the new curriculum,
4. Continued reliance on traditional assessment practices. (Kanjee, 2009, p. 73)

Airasian and Abrams (2009) claim that good classroom assessment is characterized by:

- Learners being assessed on content they were taught
- The application of assessment questions based on the stated curriculum objectives
- Assessment questions and scoring procedures that are clear, unambiguous and appropriate. (cited by Kanjee, 2009, p. 74)

[4] Prior to 1994 the apartheid education departments were arranged along racial lines ex-TED was the former Transvaal Education Department consisting of schools for 'whites'.
[5] Ex-DET was the former Department of Education and Training for Africans.

Kanjee (2009) argues that for classroom assessment to be effective it is vital that teachers have sufficient subject knowledge, have relevant assessment skills and have access to quality teaching resources.

Gordon (2009) claims that the continued poor performance of learners in schools is proof that the intention of the new curriculum has failed to translate into improvements as South African learners continue to lag behind their peers in other countries. She argues that "teacher education is central to changing this situation, and to creating an education system that meets the county's needs" (Gordon, 2009, p. 44).

The Department of Education has acknowledged that the implementation of the new curriculum has yet to turn around the current crisis in education. Strategies to improve teacher content knowledge and pedagogy have been recognized with initiatives such as the Foundations For Learning campaign introduced by the Minister of National Education which recognizes that:

> national, regional and international studies have shown over a number of years that South African children are not able to read, write and count at expected levels, and are unable to execute tasks that demonstrate key skills associated with Literacy and Numeracy. (DoE, 2008, p. 4)

Rault-Smith, then Chief Director for Curriculum and Assessment Development in the National DoE, (as quoted in Gower, 2008, p. 7) acknowledges that there has been 'misinformation' that learners should be left to read on their own and that in the Foundations for Learning Programme there are explicit milestones that help teachers to get through the curriculum.

Tyobeka, Deputy Director General of General Education and Training, (as quoted in Gower, 2008, p. 7) concedes that although learners 'underperform badly' in international tests, it is "because our own assessments are part of the problem. Teachers are not always sure at which levels to set tests. The [standardized] tests will provide guidance and a benchmark so that teachers will know what level to set the tests' (Mail & Guardian, 25 March 2008).

This chapter contained a literature review of the conceptualizations of reading literacy and the teaching and assessment thereof, together with an understanding of the context of teaching and assessing reading literacy in the new curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa. In chapter three I present an explanation of, and rationale for, the research design in the study.

CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Research Design: Qualitative Comparative Study
3.2.1 Qualitative Research

3.3 Collection and Analysis of Data
3.3.1 Collection and Analysis of Documents
3.3.1.1 Documents for PIRLS 2006
3.3.1.2 South African Education Policy documents
3.3.2 Collection and Analysis of Data for a case study of teachers' practices
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3.3.2.6 Research ethics

3.4 Frameworks and tools used in the analysis of documents and of data from the case study
3.4.1 Text, genre and visual design
3.4.2 Text, mechanical reading demand
3.4.3 Assessment tasks, question type
3.4.4 Assessment tasks, cognitive demand

3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an explanation of and rationale for the research design used in the study. This is followed by a description of the data collection process. The chapter concludes with a description and discussion of the frameworks and tools used in the analysis of data from the study.

3.2 Research Design: Qualitative Comparative Study

The research was conceptualized as a hybrid research design comprising of a two part qualitative comparative study. Comparisons are made between the

conceptualizations of reading literacy embedded in an international systemic assessment of reading (PIRLS, 2006), in the National Curriculum Statements for Home and First Additional Languages, and in local classroom based reading literacy assessments.

The Progress in Reading Literacy Studies 2006 was chosen because at grade 4 level the assessment standards in the National Curriculum Statements "dovetail with the kind of reading activities that are expected in the PIRLS 2006 assessment" (Howie et al., 2008). In chapter two comparisons were made between the Home and First Additional Language learning outcomes for reading and viewing which signal what learners are expected to do when reading across the curriculum. What becomes apparent is that by grade 4 learners are expected to have achieved a degree of competence in reading literacy in the LOLT, which for the majority of South African schools is English, whether a school takes a 'switch to' or 'straight for' English approach when teaching learners for whom English is not Home Language. The LOLT in grade 4 results in more than 80% of learners being taught in an additional language, mostly English, a language spoken as Home Language by fewer than 10% of the population (Howie, 2003). Furthermore, textbooks supporting the curriculum have generally been written in English at the level of Home Language, requiring learners to have reading literacy competence at this level.

PIRLS 2006 was designed for international use as a Home Language assessment of reading progress and in South Africa the texts, test instructions and questions were translated into eleven official languages so that participants could take the test in the language in which they had ostensibly been taught to read from Grade 1 (Howie et al., 2008, p. 12). It should be noted that this language is not always the Home Language of all learners. For example SeSotho speaking children may be in a class in which isiZulu is the language chosen for literacy teaching and learning. One of the findings from PIRLS 2006 was that reading levels differed very little whether learners wrote the test in what was theoretically, though not always the case in practice, their Home

Language or in their First Additional Language (Fleisch, 2008, p. 22). The finding that reading levels differed very little between Home Language or First Additional Language learners provided sufficient relevance for the research to investigate the relevance of the PIRLS 2006 assessment and local reading assessment practice. In order to investigate what teachers do to support the development of learners' ability to read across the curriculum in grade 4, the research compares what is foregrounded in the international reading literacy assessment in English with the reading literacy assessment practices of four grade 4 teachers. These teachers represent the majority of teachers who teach in English as the LOLT (but speak English as an additional language) to learners who speak English as an additional language.

As it is a qualitative study, some of the key features of qualitative research are briefly outlined.

3.2.1 Qualitative Research

A qualitative approach to research may include "several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena, with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). This approach privileges the following: analyzing words and images rather than numerical data, using naturally occurring data rather than establishing experimental settings, using description and interpretation as tools to search for meanings rather than behaviour, and working towards inductive, hypothesis-generating research aims rather than hypothesis testing (Merriam, 1998).

Lankshear and Knobel argue that qualitative research "does not presuppose large samples or, in many cases samples at all – let alone samples designed to be representative of larger populations ... researchers place much importance on data being gathered in natural or real-life settings" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 68). They also point out that the collection of contextualized data takes into consideration socioeconomic factors as well as norms and ideologies

(2004). Silverman argues that qualitative research provides "... a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data" (1995, p. 8).

Bassey makes a distinction between empirical generalizations which are supported through positive quantitative research methods, the intention of which is to be absolutely true as opposed to the 'fuzzy logic' that is applied in education research situations where "very few generalizations (in this absolute sense) about education – and even fewer, if any, that are useful to experienced teachers" can be made (1999, p. 12). Bassey recognizes two kinds of generalization which can be applied to social science research namely; statistical and fuzzy generalization. He makes the following distinction between the two:

> ... statistical generalization arises from samples of populations and typically claims *that there is an x per cent or y per cent chance that* what was found in the sample will also be found throughout the population: it is a quantitative measure. The fuzzy generalization arises from studies of singularities and typically claims *that it is possible, or likely, or unlikely that* what was found in the singularity will be found in similar situations elsewhere: it is a qualitative measure. (Bassey, 1999, p. 12)

As the intended purpose of this research is to support the improvement of reading literacy projects funded by the organization for which I work, I aim to derive 'fuzzy generalizations' from the analysis of teacher interview and biographical data as well as field notes and the teacher assessments collected. The research also takes account of other things happening at the same time locally, in the state or province, nationally or around the world in terms of how reading literacy is constituted in an international reading assessment (PIRLS 2006) as well as in the South African curriculum documents.

I consider a qualitative approach to be best suited to the research as:

- the research has aimed to understand what is arguably a socially constructed phenomenon: how the reading literate subject is constituted in particular assessments of reading literacy.

- the case study data have been collected in authentic settings and consist of a set of transcripts generated by interviewing teachers, analyzing artefacts and field notes collected at sites.

- There is data from existing assessments and documents in the public domain from PIRLS 2006 documents.

- I do not claim objective neutrality as I am clear that my role as researcher and my choice of approach is influenced by my experience, background and interests.

3.3 Collection and Analysis of Data

The research is comprised of a two part comparative investigation. Chapter four presents and analyses data from a case study of the practices of four teachers in the area of teaching and assessment of reading literacy. Chapter five presents an analysis of official documents and of test samples available in the public domain from PIRLS 2006, an international reading assessment. I compare the findings from both parts of the research to understand how the reading literate subject is constituted internationally and locally.

3.3.1 Collection and Analysis of Documents

The following documents available in the public domain were collected:

3.3.1.1 Documents for PIRLS 2006

PIRLS 2006 Assessment Framework and Specifications 2nd Edition
PIRLS 2006 Technical Report
PIRLS 2006 International Report

3.3.1.2 South African Education Policy documents

Department of Education. (2002, May). *National Policy on Assessments and Qualifications for Schools in the General Education and Training Band.* (Government Gazette, Vol. 443, No. 23406)

Department of Education. (2002). *Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 9 (Schools) Overview.* (Government Gazette, Vol. 443, No. 23406)

Department of Education. (2003). *Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools) Teacher's Guide for the Development of Learning Programmes Languages.*

Department of Education. (2002, May). *Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools) Languages English Home Language.* (Government Gazette, Vol. 443, No. 23406)

Department of Education. (2002, May). *Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools) Languages English First Additional Language.* (Government Gazette, Vol. 443, No. 23406)

The analysis of these documents focused on content. Weber (1985) describes content analysis as a "research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text" (cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 332). Lankshear and Knobel state that content analysis "is concerned with the kinds of messages texts send, and with what social norms and ideologies these messages encode" (2004, p. 333).

Content analysis is well suited to comparing a number of texts. Bauer (2000) notes that it "reduces the complexity of a collection of texts by distilling key features into a short summary or description" (cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 334).

However, content analysis has some limitations. The following observations regarding potential limitations have been made by Lankshear and Knobel (2004, p. 334):

1. During the process of classifying words, terms and meanings into fewer words, terms and meanings there is a risk of oversimplification as well as the possibility of leaving out or overlooking important details.
2. There is also a risk of downplaying the theory that informs the study.
3. There is a possibility to overextend inferences drawn from the analysis so that the link between the data and the inferences made from it becomes tenuous and difficult to sustain
4. There might be a disregard for the purpose of the text, such as why it was produced, by whom and for what audience. (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 334).

To mitigate against the limitations articulated by Lankshear and Knobel, the selection of categories for analysis and comparison were guided by the literature review.

3.3.2 Collection and Analysis of Data for a case study of teachers' practices

According to Gillham, "a case can be considered to be a unit of human activity embedded in the real world; which can only be studied or understood in context; which exists in the here and now; that merges with its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw" (2000, p. 1). The research focuses on the reading literacy assessment practices of four grade 4 English teachers as the 'unit of human activity'.

Bassey (1999) describes an educational case study as an empirical enquiry which is:

1. conducted within a localized boundary of space and time (i.e. a singularity;)
2. into interesting aspects of an educational activity, or programme, or institution, or system;
3. mainly in its natural context and within an ethic of respect for persons;

4. in order to inform the judgments and decisions of practitioners or policy-makers;
5. or of theoreticians who are working to these ends;
6. in such a way that sufficient data are collected for the researcher to be able to:
    - explore *significant* features of the case,
    - create *plausible* interpretations of what is found,
    - test for trustworthiness of these interpretations,
    - construct a *worthwhile* argument or story,
    - relate the argument or story to any relevant research in the literature,
    - convey *convincingly* to an audience this argument or story,
    - provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments. (Bassey, 1999, p. 58)

He goes on to describe three types of educational case study:

i Theory-seeking and theory testing

In this kind of study the focus is on a single issue. The issue is selected in anticipation of it being typical of something more general.

ii Story-telling and picture drawing

These are both analytical accounts of educational events, projects, programmes or systems aimed at illuminating theory. Both should give theoretical insights, expressed as a claim to knowledge.

iii Evaluative case studies.

These may be formative (helping the development of a programme) or summative (assessing a programme after the event) in nature, drawing on theoretical notions but not necessarily intended to contribute to the development of theory. (Bassey, 1999, pp. 62-63)

I consider aspects of the story-telling and picture drawing as well as the evaluative forms of educational case study as being suited to my research interest as, by definition, case study in the field of education is a method of research that allows enquiry "... into educational programmes, systems, projects or events, and to convey this to interested audiences" (Bassey, 1999, p. 58). The story telling and picture drawing aspects of the research are articulated in the comparisons between the orientation to reading literacy in PIRLS 2006, in South African policy documents and as practised by the four grade 4 teachers which illuminate reading literacy theory. The evaluative aspect of the research is intended to inform the development of future projects sponsored by the funding agency.

In the case study of teachers' practices a number of sources have been used to collect data for analysis namely: semi-structured interviews, field notes and artefacts. Data from multiple sources help to establish the validity of the findings. The researcher can cross-reference "different perspectives obtained from different sources, or ... [identify] different ways the phenomena are being perceived" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 323). In the collection and analysis of data I have used three of the four methods useful for qualitative research (Silverman, 1995): analyzing texts and documents, interviews, recording and transcribing. As a result of my own time constraints I was unable to include the fourth method which is observation. I was unable to spend time in the classrooms actually observing reading assessment practice, though I recognize that this would have added value to the research. While recognizing that analysis of learner responses to the teacher' summative assessments would also have added value to the research, when teachers were asked for access to these responses it was clear to me that they did not wish to make these available. However I am confident that the multiple sources of data collection (teacher artefacts, teacher biographical questionnaires, audio recorded and transcribed teacher interviews and field notes made at the time of each interview) have made possible the triangulation of data which increases the validity of the research. According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) 'triangulation' refers to "the use of more than one method of data collection within a single study in order to increase the validity of the research" (1995, p. 180). Denzin and Lincoln argue that there are four types of triangulation:

1. data triangulation, where data are collected over a period of time, from more than one location and from, or about, more than one person.
2. investigator triangulation, which involves the use of more than one observer for the same object.
3. theory triangulation, which involves the use of more than one kind of approach to generate categories of analysis.
4. methodological triangulation, which means the use, within a data collection format, of more than one method of obtaining information. (cited in Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 324)

In the research I make use of data triangulation as data is collected over a period of three days from four different locations and from four different teachers. I also make use of theory triangulation as I use more than one approach to generate categories of analysis; I use categories informed by the literature review to analyze the texts and questions in the assessment data as well as tools from readability[6] indexes to analyze technical aspects of the assessment texts. I also use methodological triangulation as I have more than one method of data collection, namely interviews and artefacts from teachers.

3.3.2.1 Research sites and participants

The case study is in fact a case study of cases (Adler & Reed, 2002). To answer my research question; How is reading literacy conceptualized and assessed in the classroom practice of selected grade 4 language teachers? I worked with the grade 4 English language teacher from each of the sites described below. I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews, collected self-reported biographical questionnaires and examples of summative reading literacy assessments from term one and term two of 2008 and made on-site field notes.

The choice of research sites took into consideration two different approaches to language in education policy as enacted in South African schools: the 'straight to English' approach where learners are taught in English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) from Foundation Phase[7] onwards and the 'switch to English' approach where learners are taught in their 'home language' as the LOLT in the Foundation Phase and then 'switch to English' as the LOLT from the Intermediate Phase[8] onwards. Whether the approach is 'straight for' or 'switch to' English it must be noted that the majority of learners and teachers in South Africa use English as an additional language. The Foundation for which I work, funds interventions in schools where the majority of teachers and learners

[6] Readability indexes are explained in section 3.4.2.
[7] The Foundation Phase consists of grades R – 3.
[8] The Intermediate Phase consists of grades 4 – 6.

use English as an additional language and where the LOLT from grade 4 onwards is English.

I was limited by my own language competency which restricted the research sites to schools which teach in English in grade 4. The research sites included two schools where English has been the LOLT from grade 1 and two schools where there is a switch to English as the LOLT in grade 4. I was interested to find out whether there would be a difference in the resources, assessments and/or methodologies used in the two types of sites. All research sites had a majority African home language learner population as this is the profile of the schools in which the funded projects usually take place. Of necessity the research data were collected at sites relatively close to my office as time available for research was a personal constraint.

In the search for appropriate school sites I consulted officials at the provincial district education department. Initially there was some discussion as to the existence of a situation/policy where there was a possibility of 'straight' to or 'switch' to English as the LOLT. This situation is reminiscent of the finding described by Hendricks (2006, p. 46) that in education "policy is ... ambiguous and open to contradictory interpretations, adding to teachers' difficulty in understanding and implementing policy". There is ongoing intense debate regarding the LOLT, previously known as Medium of Instruction (MOI) as demonstrated by the misunderstanding and confusion about policy among district officials. Hendricks (2006) notes that from 1991 when school communities were first given the choice of a MOI there has been a trend towards the 'straight to English' approach. There was obvious support among the district officials for the 'switch to English' approach which they assumed to be in operation in the schools in their district and hence confusion over whether they would even find 'straight to English' sites. Further consultation with the district office led to the identification of four appropriate sites.

The selected sites were accessible to me both in terms of the willingness of principals and teachers to participate in the research and in terms of location.

The four school sites and teachers are described below:

Site One Straight to English; Home Language as the LOLT

School One is situated in a suburb in the western part of Johannesburg and has a learner enrolment of 1 055. The learners are home language speakers of African languages. The school follows a straight to English policy and the English Home Language curriculum is being taught. Principal One expressed an interest in being included in the research project.

Teacher A

The English teacher (Teacher A) is an additional language English speaker whose primary language is SeSotho. At the time of the data collection she was forty-seven years old and had taught English for twenty years. She qualified in 1986 with a teaching diploma and subsequently obtained a Further Diploma in Educational Guidance in 1996. She recalled being part of a mass orientation training programme that was run by Gauteng Education Department officials on Thursday afternoons in 2006. This training was, according to her knowledge and experience of it, an orientation to the Revised National Curriculum Statement. She also recalls being part of in-service training by a non-governmental organization for five days in May 2008, at which the topics were: Why should I read, Teaching Reading, and Reading aloud.

Site Two Straight to English; First Additional Language as the LOLT

Primary School Two is also situated in a suburb in the western part of Johannesburg and has a learner enrolment of 611. The majority of the learners are Afrikaans speaking but the school has introduced a separate stream of learners that are home language speakers of African languages (who reside in the nearby informal settlement) from grade 1. This is a straight to English

stream of African learners as English is the Language of Learning and Teaching from grade 1. The school follows the English First Additional Language curriculum. Principal Two expressed an interest in being included in the research project.

Teacher B

The English teacher (Teacher B) is an additional language English speaker whose primary language is Afrikaans. At the time of data collection she was twenty-four years old and had taught for two and a half years. She qualified in 2006 with a degree in Industrial Psychology and in 2007 attained a Post Graduate Certificate in Education for Intermediate and Senior Phase. She has not been offered any in-service training.

Site Three Switch to English; First Additional Language as the LOLT

Primary School Three is situated in Soweto and has a learner enrolment of 306. This school teaches literacy in Sepedi until grade 3 and from grade 4 'switches' to English as the Language of Learning and Teaching, (LOLT). The school follows the English First Additional Language curriculum. Principal Three expressed an interest in being included in the research project.

Teacher C

The English teacher (Teacher C) is an additional language English speaker whose primary language is Sepedi. At the time of data collection she was thirty-three years old and had taught for nine years. She qualified in 1998 with Junior Primary studies and in 2004 attained a Certificate in English Language Teaching. She recalls attending in-service training in 2005 run by Gauteng Department of Education officials on assessment in the Foundation Phase and again in 2006 on Teaching Reading.

Site Four Switch to English; First Additional Language as the LOLT

Primary School Four is also situated in Soweto and has a learner enrolment of 700. This school teaches literacy in TshiVenda until Grade 3 and from Grade 4 'switches' to English as the Language of Learning and Teaching, LOLT. The school follows the English First Additional Language curriculum. Principal Four expressed an interest in being included in the research project.

Teacher D

The English teacher (Teacher D) is an additional language English speaker whose primary language is TshiVenda. At the time of data collection she was fifty-eight years old and had taught for thirty years. She qualified in 1986 with a Diploma in Education and has since attained an Advanced Certificate of Education, Professional Studies in 2005. She recalled being part of a mass orientation training programme that was run by Gauteng Education Department officials on Thursday afternoons in 2006. This training was an orientation to the Revised National Curriculum Statement.

3.3.2.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The purpose of interviews is to "generate detailed and desired information about an event, programme or person" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 198). I decided to use the semi-structured form of the interview as it lies half way along the structured and unstructured continuum described by Bernard (cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) in which a point on the continuum represents the amount of control a researcher exercises over responses. Semi-structured interviews include a pre-prepared list of questions as a guide that allows the interviewer to probe interviewees' responses. Hitchcock and Hughes state that this form of interview is favoured most by educational researchers because the interviewer "asks certain major questions of all respondents, but each time they can alter the sequences in order to probe more deeply ... which can provide room for negotiation, discussion and expansion of the interviewee's responses" (1995, p. 157). In effect, semi-structured interviews can never be repeated

exactly with subsequent interviewees but they can serve the purpose of comparing different responses to the same questions. The choice of open-ended questions was made deliberately to encourage interviewees to "give their opinions ... describe their experiences, provide insights into how they view the world" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 206).

One limitation of the data collected through semi-structured interviews is that it is always partial and incomplete. Fetterman argues that there is some "conscious shaping of the verbal exchanges" by both interviewer and interviewee during the interview process (cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 199). Cicourel describes the 'interview complex' as the relationship and interaction between questions, interviewer, interviewee responses, and response interpretation (cited in Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). The main problem appears to be the relationship between what the interview is intended to achieve and what is interactionally done in achieving it. Hitchcock and Hughes offer the following observation:

> People do not always say what they mean in so many words, suggesting that social meanings are complex and not unequivocally revealed by a dictionary-like translation of 'responses' to prearranged 'questions' which can then be mechanically 'coded' to reveal patterns for subsequent analysis and generation of theory (cited in Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 159).

Despite such limitations, "it is generally accepted by qualitative researchers that interviews remain the best available means for accessing ... opinions, beliefs, values and situated accounts of events at a particular point in time" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 199).

By interviewing grade 4 English teachers I was able to gather data about how formal reading literacy is thought about, taught and assessed in practice. The artefacts collected enabled analysis of the texts and tasks used in formal reading assessments. This data enabled a comparison of the aspects of reading that teachers claimed to emphasize in their classroom teaching strategies and use in their formal learner assessments. The interviews and collection of artefacts took place at the beginning of the third term when the

teachers had conducted two formal literacy assessments (terms one and two, 2008). Semi-structured interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in the grade 4 English teacher's classroom at each of the school sites on an agreed date and time. It was agreed that the interview would take no more than one hour and would be preceded by the teacher's presentation and discussion of artefacts regarding the assessment of reading literacy. Permission was obtained from the teacher for the interview to be audio tape-recorded prior to the interview. There was a schedule of open-ended questions to guide the interviews (see appendix B). The interviews were transcribed by a third person who has expertise in this field.

The transcribed interviews provided data for making comparisons between local classroom-situated reading assessments and those of the PIRLS 2006 internationally benchmarked reading assessments. The data were also used to compare the teachers' reading assessment practices to the expected outcomes of the Curriculum Statement.

3.3.2.3 Field notes

To support the data from the teacher interviews, field notes were written during the visit to each school. The field notes were written in the classroom where the interview took place prior to the interview and consisted of observations of the classroom environment, notes of what the teacher told me informally about how reading was taught in the school and in her classroom and methods of constructing reading assessments both formatively and summatively. The field notes were written in a notebook and later produced in Word documents for the teachers to read and give consent for use in the research. In accordance with the principles advocated by Lankshear and Knobel (2004) I used codes so that if the field notebook got lost or misplaced it would not reveal the identity of study participants.

3.3.2.4 Artefacts

To support the data collected from the transcribed interviews and field notes, I confined the collection of artefacts to a single facet of the study i.e. the summative reading assessment text and tasks given to grade 4 learners at the end of the first and second school terms. I collected, copied and returned two reading assessments from each of the four teachers, who had provided these at the time of the interview.

I considered the collection of artefacts to add important contextual details to the data available for analysis (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) as they form part of the concrete evidence of the research into actual reading literacy assessment practice in the classroom and could alert me, as a researcher, to useful avenues of investigation and provide additional insights. As with all other data, the role and significance of an artefact are always a matter of researcher interpretation (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

3.3.2.5 Biographical questionnaires

To add contextual data regarding the experience and training of the four teachers, I collected biographical questionnaires from the teacher participants. The questionnaires were presented to the teachers after I had held a meeting with the teacher, the appropriate Head of Department and the Principal in which the purpose of the research was explained and permission given by the Principal and teacher to participate in the study (see Teacher consent form and Teacher Preliminary Biographical Questionnaire in appendix B).

3.3.2.6 Research ethics

Research ethics, according to Bassey (1999), include three components: respect for democracy, respect for truth and respect for persons. This view is supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 662) when they observe that "... the

objects of enquiry in interviewing are human beings, [and so] researchers must take extreme care to avoid any harm to them". Respect for democracy includes aspects of being an accountable researcher. In this regard I obtained permission from the ethics committee of the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand as well as the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research. I gave an information sheet explaining the research project and a consent form to each of the school principals and grade 4 English teachers (appendix B). Concerning the respect for persons, I guaranteed all participants confidentiality and the freedom to withdraw from participation should they wish (appendix B). I also gave schools and teachers pseudonyms. Regarding truth, I asked teachers, as participants, to check the transcriptions of the audio recorded interviews as well as copies of written field notes as recommended by Maxwell's (1992, p. 289) argument that interpretive validity is "central to interpretive research, which seeks to comprehend phenomena not only on the basis of the researcher's perspective and categories, but from those of the participants in the situations studied".

I have agreed to a request that was made by each of the schools, as well as the education department officials from the district in which these schools are located, to write a separate report on the findings of the research as well as a report in which specific recommendations are made for the incorporation of further reading and reading assessment strategies.

3.4 Frameworks and tools used in the analysis of documents and of data from the case study

Whilst data were collected separately from documents (PIRLS 2006 and the National Curriculum Statement) and from a case study (reading literacy assessment as practised in four schools), parts of the analysis involved working across all data sets and required a common framework.

Lankshear and Knobel suggest that "we use concepts to think about and make sense of our world. For researchers to communicate their investigations to others they need to make sure their concepts are clear, that they use them consistently and that they are not too idiosyncratic" (2004, p. 135). In this project data analysis was informed by literature on reading literacy and on reading assessment as well as on taxonomies of educational objectives. While reading the data (interview transcripts, field notes, reading assessment texts and tasks) repeatedly, I looked for "patterns, inconsistencies and contradictions in the data" (Hammersley, 1994, p. 205). Lankshear and Knobel suggest that the researcher "look[s] in the data to find 'samenesses' and then think[s] of labels under which to categorize the instances of each sameness" (2004, p. 137).

I was able to connect and link different parts of the data to make tentative thematic categories. Having considered all the data, I started to select parts for in-depth analysis and categorization. I constantly moved between data and theory. Similarities and differences within the data became apparent within the emerging framework until I reached the point of interpretation and the organization of the data during the writing of the analysis. I am aware however, as Atkins points out, that "one of the disadvantages of ... categories, [is that] they furnish 'a powerful conceptual grid' from which it is difficult to escape. While this 'grid' is very helpful in organizing the data analysis, it also deflects attention away from uncategorized activities" (cited in Silverman, 1995, p. 39).

As stated in section 3.3 above, the research is comprised of a two part comparative investigation which is presented in chapters four and five. The local data is presented first as this provides an understanding of the local language teaching and assessment practices which helps to inform comparisons with the international systemic assessment data.

In chapter four I present and analyze the data from a case study of the practices of four teachers in the area of teaching and assessment of reading literacy. In

chapter five I present a content analysis of official documents and of test samples available in the public domain from PIRLS 2006, an international reading assessment. I draw on the literature review to present and interpret the case study data of the practices of four teachers in the area of teaching and assessment of reading literacy. I weave the case study story (Bassey, 1999) through the following categories: school context, teacher, classroom, reading resources, teaching reading literacy, reading activities, assessment of reading and summative reading assessment. Chapter five concludes with a comparison of the findings from both parts of the research in order to understand how the reading literate subject is constituted internationally and locally.

I decided to reproduce the summative reading tests in the body of the dissertation and not in an appendix because the texts and tasks are central to the comparisons that are made between the two sets of data in chapters four and five.

With regard to the reading assessment tests, I present and compare the following aspects of the texts: genre, visual design and mechanical reading demands. I then present and compare the assessment tasks by question type and cognitive demand.

3.4.1 Text, genre and visual design

The analysis of texts used for reading assessment, in terms of genre and visual design, is informed by my reading in the area of New Literacy Studies. Johnson, whilst reflecting on the nature of literacy as social practice, observes that "reading assessment, more than any other domain of education is resisting movement away from technological thinking" (Johnson, 2003, p. 12).

3.4.2 Text, mechanical reading demand

To understand, present and compare the mechanical reading demands of the texts used in the reading assessments I make use of a table with the following categories: number of words, average number of characters per word, average number of syllables per word, average number of characters without spaces, number of sentences, average number of words per sentence and Fry's Readability Index.

The term 'readability' is used to describe the ease with which a text can be read (Stephens, 2000). In grade 4, learners are expected to have gained competence in 'learning to read' (mechanical reading demands of decoding) and to have entered a phase of 'reading to learn'. It is therefore important that the texts given to learners are at suitable mechanical reading levels for learners at this stage of reading literacy development. Readability indexes were originally developed to assess the suitability of books for learners at particular grade or age levels. Thorndike's (1921) *The Teacher's Word Book* (cited by Stephens, 2000) was published in 1921 and provided a means of measuring the difficulty of words which permitted the development of mathematical formulae. Readability indexes are mathematical formulas which correlate measurable elements of writing such as the number of personal pronouns in the text, the average number of syllables in words, the number of characters in a text and/or number of words in sentences in the text (Summarized from Stephens, 2000 and Dawson, 2009).

The elements in the last paragraph are usually described as 'semantic' if they concern the actual words and 'syntactic' if they concern the length or structure of sentences. Neither measure takes the content or characteristics of the individual reader into consideration as they are surface level measures. In other words not all features that promote readability can be measured using mathematical formulae. Words tend to be measured against a frequency list or according to their length in characters or syllables. Sentences tend to be

measured for average length in characters or words (Stephens, 2000; Dawson, 2009). The readability indexes have been developed for texts that are assumed to be read by readers in their Home Language.

While these indexes have limitations (Davison & Kantor, 1982) such as the inability to recognize the complexity of ideas in a text or whether the content is in a logical order or whether the vocabulary is appropriate, whether there is gender, class or cultural bias, whether the design is attractive and helps or hinders the reader, whether the material is in the form and font style that is easy or hard to read, they do provide a standard method for comparing some aspects of the texts.

According to Dawson (2009) there have been more than 200 readability formulae developed by various scholars since the 1940s. The readability indexes provide a comparable means of analysis of the 'mechanistic' characteristics of texts as well as an indication of the estimated number of years in formal education that are required for a learner to be able to read such a text. The Fry Readability Index was used in the selection of texts for PIRLS 2006 (Mullis et al., 2006). In order to create a standard method of comparison between the texts in the artefacts from the four teachers and those from PIRLS 2006 I make use of the Fry Readability Index (1972).

The length of the text is useful to gain an understanding of the expected level reading rate required of the reader. 'Typical' reading rates at various grade levels are presented in table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Reading rates, Harris and Sipay (2003)

Grade	Wpm	Grade	Wpm
1	60 – 90	6	196 – 220
2	85 -120	7	215 – 245
3	115 – 140	8	235 – 270
4	140 – 170	9	250 – 270
5	170 – 195	10 onwards	250 – 300

(cited by Harp & Brewer, 2005, p. 306)

The texts were run through automated computer software found at http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp and the results are presented in table form in chapters four and five.

With regard to the reading assessment tasks/questions, I present and compare the following aspects: type and cognitive level.

3.4.3 Assessment tasks, question type

In this category the data are analyzed according to the number and type of question in the task as well as the amount of time allocated to the reading literacy assessment. The questions are analyzed according to categories of *open* or *closed* where a *closed* question is one in which there is a limited number of acceptable answers and an *open* question is one in which there are many acceptable answers.

The following summary, adapted from Bachman, provides an insight into the type of responses that are required from various question formats:

1. selected responses, the test taker must select one response from among two or more that are provided, this is typical of multiple choice tasks
2. limited production response, this consists of a single word or phrase
3. extended production response, this is longer than a single sentence and can range from two sentences to free composition. (Adapted from Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 54)

One of the strengths of questions that require constructed open-ended responses like 2 and 3 above is that they may elicit unanticipated responses. A weakness is that they do not ensure that the respondent has considered specific responses which are of interest to a particular reading strategy (Bachman, 1996).

Multiple choice questions may take different forms but their basic structure involves a stem and a number of options, one of which is correct, the others being distractors (Hughes, 1989).

Jacobs (n.d.) describes the following limitations and strengths of multiple choice type questions.

> Limitations of multiple choice questions
>
> 1. Difficult and time consuming to construct
> 2. Depend on student's reading skills and instructor's writing ability
> 3. Ease of writing low-level knowledge items leads instructors to neglect writing items to test higher-level thinking
> 4. May encourage guessing
>
> Strengths of multiple choice questions
>
> 1. Versatility in measuring all levels of cognitive skills
> 2. Permit a wide range of sampling of content and objectives
> 3. Provide highly reliable test scores. (Jacobs, n.d., p. 6)

The data collected for this study are analyzed according to question format, for example; multiple choice, one word answers, one sentence answers, more than one sentence answers. The researcher acknowledges that various levels of cognitive demand can be addressed through any question type.

3.4.4 Assessment tasks, cognitive demand

Conklin and Georgian acknowledge the "covert nature of learning – that we [cannot] look into a student's brain and that we need to find ways to know that a student has learned" (2005, p. 156). Penny McKay (2007) argues that "assessing reading is not straightforward because reading, like listening, can only be measured through other skills" (2006, p. 228). It is assumed that the questions or tasks set in the assessments demonstrate by proxy various kinds of reading literacy skills and strategies. The reading literate subject is constituted by the knowledge, skills and strategies that the assessment tasks foreground. Tasks are designed for learners to demonstrate competence in various reading literacy skills/strategies.

Tyler (1949) argued the importance of objectives or outcomes as 'tools' teachers could use to promote and evaluate learning. He emphasized the value

of the teacher thinking about the behaviours that could demonstrate that learning had taken place instead of just thinking about the content to be taught. Having considered various taxonomies and reading inventories (summarized in the table 3.2), I decided to draw on the work of the Original Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom et al., 1956) to classify the cognitive level of the questions required in the tasks from both the teacher summative reading-literacy assessments and the samples from PIRLS 2006. A poster copy of Bloom's taxonomy can be found in many of the classrooms in Gauteng schools. This taxonomy is also described as 'approved' on the National Department of Education's official Thutong website (www.thutong.doe.gov.za).

Table 3.2: Comparisons between various taxonomies and reading inventories and the categories for classification

Taxonomy or Reading Inventory	Categories of classification
1956, Bloom et al. Taxonomy of Educational Objectives	1. Cognitive Domain 2. Knowledge 3. Comprehension 4. Application 5. Analysis 6. Synthesis 7. Evaluation
1978, Herber Reading comprehension	1. Literal comprehension 2. Interpretive comprehension 3. Applied comprehension
1978, Pearson and Johnson Word comprehension tasks	1. Textually explicit questions 2. Textually implicit questions 3. 'Scriptally' implicit questions
Barrett's taxonomy, 1968 Questions relating to reading questions	1. Literal recognition or recall 2. Inferences 3. Evaluation 4. Appreciation
Elijah and Legenza,1975	1. Literal 2. Interpretive reaction and application 3. Interpreting unfamiliar words and summarizing
Irwin's taxonomy, 1986	1. Micro-information 2. Macro information
(Adapted from Champeau De Lopez, Giancarla Marchi & Arreaza-Coyle, 1997, pp. 32–34.)	

From 1949 to 1956, Benjamin Bloom (Associate Director of the Board of Examinations of the University of Chicago) enlisted a group of measurement specialists to compile a framework for the classification of statements of learning outcomes learners were expected to achieve, as a result of instruction, which would be applicable to all areas of the curriculum, including reading literacy. The development of the taxonomy was an attempt to provide a common language for teachers to describe learning objectives and the assessment thereof.

This Taxonomy provided definitions for six major categories in the cognitive domain[9] of learning. The categories were considered hierarchical and ordered from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 213). The information below illustrates the six categories and subcategories that formed the framework of the original taxonomy.

Structure of the Original Taxonomy

1.0 Cognitive Domain Knowledge
- *1.10 Knowledge of specifics*
- *1.11 .Knowledge of terminology*
- *1.12 Knowledge of specific facts*
- *1.20 Knowledge of ways and means of dealing with specifics*
- *1.21 Knowledge of conventions*
- *1.22 Knowledge of trends and sequences*
- *1.23 Knowledge of classifications and categories*
- *1.24 Knowledge of criteria*
- *1.25 Knowledge of methodology*
- *1.30 Knowledge of universals and abstractions in a field*
- *1.31 Knowledge of principles and generalizations*
- *1.32 Knowledge of theories and structures*

2.0 Comprehension
- *2.1 Translation*
- *2.2 Interpretation*
- *2.3 Extrapolation*

3.0 Application

4.0 Analysis
- *4.1 Analysis of elements*

[9] In the original taxonomy Bloom et al. had included three domains of learning namely cognitive, affective and psychomotor but had only developed categories and definitions for the cognitive domain.

4.2 Analysis of relationships
4.3 Analysis of organizational principles

5.0 Synthesis
5.1 Production of a unique communication
5.2 Production of a plan, or proposed set of operations
5.3 Derivation of a set of abstract relations

6.0 Evaluation
6.1 Evaluation in terms of internal evidence
6.2 Judgments in terms of external criteria. (Bloom et al., 1956, pp. 201-207; italicized in the original)

The six categories shown above were sub-categorized further into two levels of cognitive development; level 1 (lower level) which contains the first three categories of thinking, knowledge, comprehension and uncomplicated application and level 2 (higher level) which includes complex application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Bloom et al., 1956).

The levels of cognitive thinking described by Bloom et al. are congruent with the stages of cognitive development described by Piaget. It would be appropriate to expect the grade 4 learners to operate within the first two levels of cognitive thinking described by Bloom et al. (1956). Piaget describes human cognitive development in four stages; the sensori-motor stage (from birth to about two years of age), the pre-operational stage (from two to about seven years), the concrete operations stage (from seven to about eleven years) and the formal operational stage (from about eleven years of age and beyond). The grade 4 learner typically falls in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development which is characterized typically by thinking that is concrete and not abstract in nature. At this stage the learner would not be expected to think about ideas or to reason in terms of hypotheses but should be able to 'decentre' his or her thoughts and to think about various aspects of a matter simultaneously, no longer relying on transductive[10] reasoning typical of the pre-operational stage. Towards the end of the concrete operational stage the learners start to develop

[10] Transductive reasoning/thinking is when ideas are related from the particular to the particular for example a child of three may reason that because he or she could drink green tea that he or she could eat an unripe green banana. The logic is from the particular (the colour green) to the particular.

inductive (from the particular to the general) and deductive (from the general to the particular) reasoning skills.

It was assumed that Bloom's taxonomy "represented a cumulative hierarchy; that is, mastery of each simpler category was a prerequisite to mastery of the next more complex one ... [and] one of the most frequent uses ... [was] to classify curricular objectives and test items in order to show the breadth, or lack of breadth, of the objectives and items across the spectrum of categories" (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 213). The notion of incremental skill development is consistent with the conceptualization of reading literacy as an autonomous set of skills where the components of reading are perceived to be sequential and learned from mechanical letter recognition to whole word recognition (Smith, 1997). Weaver argues that the "cognitive processing of children proceeds in idiosyncratic uncontrollable ways, not typically one skill at a time" (1990, p. 54) and would therefore refute the argument that skill development is incremental in the linear sequential manner suggested by Bloom et al. (1956).

Marzano and Kendall critiqued the use of taxonomies generally saying that "ultimately, any attempt to design a taxonomy based on difficulty of mental processing is doomed to failure, because of the well-established principle in psychology that even the most complex of processes can be learned at the level at which it is performed with little or no conscious effort" (2007, p. 10).

For example, the coordination required to drive a car is learned initially as a conscious skill of engaging the clutch, putting the gear lever into first gear, slowly releasing the clutch and putting pressure on the accelerator but eventually, with practice, what were initially conscious skills become automatically performed skills requiring little or no conscious effort. To some extent this theory is supported by Stanovich (1986), Wolf (2007) and Janks (2010) who acknowledge that fluent readers recognize words (and the letters with which they are constructed) automatically which frees up the processing capacity of the brain to focus on comprehension.

The decision to use the Original Taxonomy to create categories for task comparison is due in part to the acknowledgement that the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) is a competence and mastery based system (Baxen & Soudien, 1999) and that the taxonomy attempts to describe levels of learning competence.

The use of categories to classify tasks is not intended to demonstrate and support a hierarchy of objectives but is used in an attempt to describe the tasks in the data with a level of consistency. I have matched the stated learning outcomes in PIRLS 2006 with Bloom's levels of cognitive demand for easy reference. The categories are used as part of the framework for comparison, to analyze and describe task items from PIRLS 2006 assessments and the reading literacy assessments of the four grade 4 teachers. The following table is used as a tool to present and compare tasks/questions in the data.

Table 3.3: Categories used for the classification of cognitive demands of the assessment tasks/questions.

Cognitive level according to Bloom's Taxonomy	**Level 1**		**Level 2**	
Category of assessment tasks in PIRLS 2006, data	Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information	Make straight-forward inference	Interpret and integrate ideas and information	Examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements

The number of questions allocated to the levels of cognitive demand is a further indicator of how the reading literacy is constituted in the assessments.

The analysis and comparison of data are presented in the following two chapters. Chapter four presents and analyses the case study data. Chapter five presents and analyses data from PIRLS 2001 and ends with a comparison of the data from the case study as well as from PIRLS 2006.

CHAPTER FOUR – PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDY DATA

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Presentation of Cases
4.2.1 Case One
4.2.2 Case Two
4.2.3 Case Three
4.2.4 Case Four

4.3 Cross Case Analysis
4.3.1 School Context
4.3.2 Preparation for the implementation of the new curriculum
4.3.3 Conceptualizations of reading literate subject
4.3.4 Assessment of reading literacy

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter data from the biographical questionnaire, semi-structured interview, field notes and artefacts are presented and analyzed for each of the four grade 4 language teachers. The final section of the chapter presents a cross case analysis. A copy of the biographical questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions appear in appendix B.

As explained in chapter three, data were collected from four grade 4 English teachers with each teacher representing 'a case'. Two of the four cases represent the 'straight to English' approach to language teaching and learning where learners are taught in English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) from grade 1 onwards; however in the first case learners are taught English as Home Language and the second case English as First Additional Language. The other two cases represent the 'switch to English' approach where learners are taught in their 'home language' as the LOLT in the Foundation Phase (from grade 1 to grade 3) and 'switch' to English as the LOLT

(at the level of English First Additional Language) in the Intermediate Phase (from grade 4 onward). For each case the data are presented to tell the story (Bassey, 1995) of school context, teacher, classroom, reading resources, teaching reading literacy, reading activities, assessment of reading literacy and summative reading literacy assessment. Thereafter two examples of summative reading literacy assessments are presented per teacher.

Each teacher included a summative reading assessment in the examination papers at the end of the first and second term. In sections 4.2.1 to 4.2.4 I present and analyze the texts and questions used in these assessments[11]. The chapter concludes in section 4.3 with a cross case analysis.

4.2 Presentation of Cases

4.2.1 Case One

Site One Straight to English as Home Language as LOLT

School context

As indicated in chapter three, School One is situated in a suburb in the western part of Johannesburg and at the time of data collection had a learner enrolment of 1 055. The school caters for learners from grade 1 to 12. The learners are home language speakers of African languages. The school follows a straight to English policy and the English Home Language curriculum is taught. The school has four double story blocks of classrooms; the secondary school grades are accommodated in two blocks and the primary school grades in the other two blocks. There are grassed 'quad' areas in between each block of classrooms. The school has a hall which adjoins the entrance to the school where there is an administration wing to the left and a hall to the right. The school has a library which is not functioning as the staff establishment does not include a post for a

[11] The examples of reading literacy assessments provided by the teachers have had learner and teacher responses removed to provide a clearer image of the text and tasks presented to the learners.

librarian and there are very few books in the library. Entrance to the school is gained through the parking area. The entrance and all corridors are monitored by security cameras. (Summarized from Field notes, Site 1, 22 July 2008).

Teacher A

Teacher A is an additional language English speaker whose primary language is SeSotho. She has taught English for twenty years. She qualified in 1986 with a teaching diploma and subsequently obtained a Further Diploma in Educational Guidance in 1996. In her response to the questionnaire she recalled being part of a mass orientation training programme that was run by Gauteng Education Department officials on Thursday afternoons in 2006. This training was, according to her knowledge and experience of it, an orientation to the Revised National Curriculum Statement. She also recalled being part of in-service training by a non-governmental organization for five days in May 2008. The topics were: Why should I read, Teaching Reading and Reading aloud. (Teacher A, Preliminary Biographical Questionnaire, 24 July 2008). Harley and Wedekind (2004) have argued that as a result of the initial cascade model of training, many education officials were not sufficiently trained to replicate the training within their districts and schools, which led to aspects of the training being sub-contracted to NGOs and that as a result the training was uneven. Teacher A has received support for the new curriculum from department officials with regard to the orientation of the new curriculum and five days of training from an NGO specifically about reading in the new curriculum. The limited amount of support given may explain the 'shallow understanding of the curriculum' demonstrated by teachers (Harley & Wedekind, 2004).

Classroom

The classroom accommodates thirty-seven learners with the furniture arranged in four rows of double desks facing the front of the class. It is on the ground floor and looks onto a 'quad' on one side through low windows and onto a corridor on the other side. The windows on the corridor side are placed too high to see out of. There is no print material on the walls and no sign of learner

exercise books in the classroom. There is a locked cupboard next to the teacher's desk at the back of the class. (Field notes Site 1, 22 July 2008).

Reading resources

In our informal conversation Teacher A recalled that the school has a small stock of non-OBE compliant readers[12] that have been put into storage. The school receives a donation of newspapers from the *Sunday Times* as well as *The Star* and buys *The Sun*[13]. Teacher A is able to use these newspapers as reading resources. The school has a library which is locked and which has limited stock (Field notes Site 1, 22 July 2008).

As there are very few reading resources in the school, Teacher A makes use of a reading lab (SRA) that she had been given.

"Very few resources that we've got especially reading books. I was once given a reading laboratory by a teacher that was teaching in Australia. That is one of the most tool that I use ..." (Interview Teacher A, School 1, 22 July 2008).

Her willingness to make use of a reading lab produced many years ago is at odds with her earlier comment about 'non-OBE compliant' readers.

Teaching reading literacy

Teacher A perceives the grade 4 learners to have a low level of reading literacy.

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[12] The notion of OBE compliant resources appears to have emerged during initial C2005 training for schools by department officials on how to select materials from government allocated budgets. OBE compliance appears to have been interpreted as resources that state upfront which learning outcome/critical outcome/assessment standard is included. At the recent Reading Association South Africa conference (October 2009) I noticed that some publishers were promoting materials as being Foundations For Learning compliant which indicated that the milestones learners are expected to achieve are explicitly stated in the resources. One can anticipate teachers looking for 'Foundations For Learning Compliant' materials in the future.

[13] Concerns have been raised by teacher educators about the use of this paper in classrooms both because of the poor quality of some of the writing and because of the inappropriateness of some of the subject matter for primary school learners.

"... there's learners that read one word at a time, there's learners that read in phrases, there's few learners that read fluently and there's learners that can hardly read a word or pronounce words because there's no knowledge of phonics" (Interview Teacher 1, School 1, 22 July 2008).

By emphasizing the reading of one word at a time, phrases and fluency, the teacher shows her understanding of what is important in reading. The mastery of mechanical letter and whole word recognition suggests an autonomous view of reading literacy (Smith, 1988). In this view children are discouraged from guessing or leaving words out when they read (Weaver, 1990).

She is sympathetic to the fact that English is not the home language of the teachers or the learners and that it is only when 'formal' teaching is taking place that English is used. There are many informal episodes during class time, "when it is more effective to speak mother tongue, but sometimes the mother tongue is different but anyway we all understand" (Field notes Site 1, 22 July 2008).

Teacher A does not think that her learners read at home.

"... they're [learners] not into reading that much ..." (Interview Teacher A, School 1, 22 July 2008).

She tries to encourage the learners to get access to books by becoming members of the local library.

"... I even tell the parents to buy the children reading books or to take them to the nearest library ..." (Interview Teacher A, School 1, 22 July 2008).

The research conducted by Clarke (section 2.2.3) found that the most salient aspect of success in learning to read was the desire to read and the strong oral involvement of parents. The apparent lack of support for reading at the homes

of these learners may hamper their reading progress. The teacher tries to encourage parental involvement with the institution of a reading card described in the next section.

Reading activities

The learners read to Teacher A individually at her desk. She asks questions orally about the content of stories (Field notes Site 1, 22 July 2008).The activity of reading out loud 'one on one' to the teacher is indicative of the transmission approach to reading literacy (Weaver, 1990).

"... So we first do the reading tasks, then we select words that we don't understand, we look in the dictionary for the meaning of the words, we explain the words together, but mostly I let them to explain the words in their own understanding. Then from there we use the words in sentences of our own" (Interview Teacher A, School 1, 22 July 2008). She appears to take a directed approach to reading literacy where knowledge and skills are considered to be transferred from the teacher to the learner (Gipps, 1994).

Sometimes she reads a story to the class which they are expected to dramatize in order to show their understanding of the text. Dramatizing texts is more in line with the multimodal approach to literacy where learners explore other modes to make meaning of texts like audio, gestural and spatial patterns of meaning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2006).

The teacher has introduced a system to encourage the learners to read daily to someone at home who would sign a reading card to verify that reading had taken place. This activity could reinforce the learning that takes place in school.

"In fact when I was scratching around I found a paper (you know we're always looking for papers). So I found this lovely paper, it's a reading homework page where the child is supposed to go home every day and read for their parents, for their sisters or their mothers (whoever is available at home) and they're then

supposed to sign ... I've introduced the reading cards which I take every Friday and I sign" (Interview Teacher A, School 1, 22 July 2008).

The fact that this teacher was 'scratching around' for papers points to limited access to relevant teaching and learning resources for the implementation of the curriculum (Kanjee, 2009).

Assessment of reading literacy

Teacher A assesses reading twice a week but no records are kept as she "knows how the learner is performing" (Field notes Site 1, 22 July 2008).

"I assess reading twice a week which mostly it's on a Friday and a Monday because on a Friday I will give them a reading piece to read at home and on Monday I assess it and on Friday also I'll be testing them for the week ..." (Interview Teacher A, School 1, 22 July 2008).

Teacher A appears to be following the official policy of informal assessment consisting of the daily monitoring of learner progress which need not be recorded (DoE, 2002d). She assesses the following: understanding, pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary.

"Understanding of the text and I'll also look at pronunciation of words and spelling and I'll be also testing some few words..." (Interview Teacher A, School 1, 22 July 2008).

She appears to be following the autonomous approach to reading literacy where skills are broken down and taught and assessed in isolation (Smith, 1988).

The learners also conduct self assessment tasks by using the SRA box reading system where they take a card, read the text on one side, answer the questions provided on the back and mark their own work from the corresponding answer cards. The teacher does not monitor this activity as the learners "can get the

answers and improve themselves" (Field notes Site 1, 22 July 2008). According to official policy, teachers are encouraged to support the learning of the First Additional Language through scaffolded reading, analysis and interpretation of texts (DoE, 2003). This teacher appears to have what the C2005 Review refers to as a 'rather shallow understanding' of the new curriculum (cited by Harley & Wedekind, 2004) because she leaves the learners to read on their own without any support for developing reading strategies other than correct pronunciation of words. There appears to be very little thought given to going beyond the mechanical decoding skills of reading text to connect to the increasingly sophisticated conceptual framework of comprehension where learners can be taught strategies to infer, understand, predict and sometimes to interpret understanding afresh (Wolf, 2007 see section 2.1.2).

Summative reading literacy assessment

There is a formal language test at the end of each term. The language test includes a reading literacy component. Each teacher is required to compile their own test. The Head of Department does not provide guidance for the content of the test even though each school is required to have a school assessment team (DoE, 2002c). The teachers must adhere to strict deadlines to meet the photocopying timeframes of the administrative staff. The teacher 'scratches around' to find suitable material for the test, which again indicates the limited access to relevant teaching and learning resources for the implementation of the curriculum (Kanjee, 2009). There is a tension between the policy requirement to select texts that are grade and age appropriate, at levels that are understandable but challenging in terms of concepts, vocabulary, sophistication and ideas (DoE, 2003) and the practical limit of the length of text that she can use for her test as the school has limited photocopy capacity. The teachers are expected not to "waste paper" when compiling tests and to "keep them short" (Field notes Site 1, 22 July 2008). This condition places severe limitations on the teacher in terms of the selection of the length of text for assessments as well as the number and kind of tasks that are set.

The teacher is confident that she asks the right kinds of reading questions because they are "on the papers [referring to the departmental documents]".

A copy of the English Language Test that was given to the grade 4 learners at the end of term one and term two was provided by the teacher. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 below are the reading comprehension component of the 'complete' language tests.

Site 1, test 1

ENGLISH GRADE FOUR

Just One Bite!

[30]

Mrs Anno-Filly Mozzie and her daughters are named after the Anopheles mosquito. When the female Anopheles mosquito bites you, it transmits parasites that cause malaria. This story is told from the mosquitoes' point of view. The mosquito family leaves its swampy home to bite unsuspecting people who can get malaria from just one bite. The story tells how the mosquitoes go from house to house looking for people to bite. The people in the story protect themselves from mosquito bites by using mosquito coils, mosquito stick repellent and mosquito nets. The Anno-Filly Mozzie family is disappointed because they must go hungry. Nobody will let them have even one bite.

1. • What were Mrs Anno-Filly and her daughters?

_____

• Who did they want to bite?

_____

• Why did they want to bite people?

_____

• What stopped them from biting the people in the story?

[10]

_____

• Looking at the way the story has been written, do you think the author identifies more with the humans or with the mosquitoes in the story?

_____

The extract above has been taken from the first term English summative assessment and represents the reading literacy component. The text is an information text. The vocabulary is possibly not what would be expected of a grade 4 learner who, while being taught English as if it were his or her home language, is in fact an English additional learner, for example: Anopheles, mosquito, transmits, parasites, malaria, unsuspecting, repellent and unsuspecting. There are no visual clues in the passage in the form of illustrations or photographs.

The entire summative assessment consists of 30 marks. The reading literacy component represents 10 of these marks. This component consists of five questions each worth 2 marks. The rest of the test consists of decontextualised assessments of knowledge and skills such as alphabetical order (8 of 30 marks), the possessive comma (8 of 30 marks) and 'fill in the missing words' questions unrelated to the comprehension passage (8 of 30 marks). The total amount of time given for the assessment was 60 minutes. The learners wrote their answers on the assessment page, not on separate answer sheets and had limited space to write answers.

The photocopied assessment sheets consist of a collection of cut and paste sections from various sources, none of which are acknowledged.

ENGLISH TEST

THE KING OF FROGS

QUESTIONS

TOTAL [40]

Story The frogs of Frog Lake wanted a king to rule over them. They asked the Sun to give them a king. The Sun was annoyed with all their screeching and gave them a log of wood for a king. The frogs were not content with their king because he didn't move or speak, so they asked the Sun for another king. The Sun was so annoyed this time that he gave them a stork for a king. The stork ate so many frogs that they asked the Sun for their old king back. But the Sun didn't hear them. One day, the stork put his long beak into the water, swallowed the log of wood by mistake and choked to death. After a few years the frogs forgot the past and wanted a king again.



HONOR STUDENT

Activities

- Why did the frogs want a king?

- What did the Sun give them for their first king?

- Why did the frogs not like their first king?

[12]

- What did the Sun give the frogs for their next king?

- Why didn't the frogs like the stork for a king?

- Why did the frogs not have a king at the end of the story?

The extract above has been taken from the second term English summative assessment and represents the reading literacy component. The print in both tests appears to be similar which suggests that they may have been taken from the same resource book. This is a literary text. This extract appears to have been taken from a Language text book as there is a short story labeled 'Story' in bold in the left margin of the text followed by the label 'Activities' on the left margin followed by questions. The American spelling of the word 'honor' in the bubble in the left margin indicates that this is an American text. There is a small black and white illustration of a group of frogs piled on top of one another.

The entire assessment consists of 40 marks. The reading literacy component represents 12 of these marks and consists of six questions each worth 2 marks. The rest of the test consists of the decontextualised testing of grammatical knowledge and skills such as collective nouns and the use of the apostrophe. There is also a section where learners fill in missing words to complete sentences. The total amount of time given for the assessment was 60 minutes. The learners wrote their answers on the assessment page, not on separate answer sheets. There was limited space to write answers. The photocopied assessment consists of a collection of cut and paste sections from various sources, none of which is acknowledged.

As explained in chapter three section 3.4.2, table 4.1 presents an overview of the mechanical reading demands of each text used in the assessments.

Text, mechanical[14] reading demands

Table 4.1: Mechanical reading demand Site One

Term	Number of words	Average number of characters per word	Average number of syllables per word	Average number of characters (without spaces)	Number of sentences	Average number of words per sentence	Fry's Read-ability Index
Term one Just One Bite	110	4.94	1.67	543	8	13.75	8
Term two The King of Frogs	135	3.84	1.22	518	9	15	4

The texts consist of 110 and 135 words; these appear to be extremely short passages. Given an expected reading rate of between 140 – 170 words per minute at grade 4 level (section 3.4.2) both texts should have taken the readers less than a minute to read with meaning. The text used in the second term appears to be slightly more demanding than in the first term regarding the total number of words, number of sentences and average number of words per sentence. However according to Fry's Readability Index[15] the text selected for the second term assessment is grade appropriate for grade 4 learners whereas the text selected for the first term assessment is appropriate for grade 8 learners. A possible explanation for this anomaly is the inclusion and repetition of the words such as 'Anopheles' and 'mosquito' in this text.

The next two tables present information relating to the assessment tasks.

[14] The mechanical reading demands refer to the basic decoding levels required.

[15] Fry's Readability Index is discussed in Chapter Three section 3.2.2.

Assessment tasks, question type

As explained in section 3.4.3 the tasks were analyzed according to the question types used. The table below shows the distribution of question types used in the assessment tasks set for the text. In both assessments the teacher has only made use of one sentence student response questions.

Table 4.2: Question types Site One

	Multiple choice questions	One word answers	One sentence answers	Answers consisting of more than one sentence
Term one Just One Bite			5	
Term two The King of Frogs			6	

Assessment tasks, cognitive demands

As discussed in section 3.4.4 the categories constructed for presentation and analysis to show the level of cognitive demand of the questions were drawn from the work of Bloom et al. (1956).

The cognitive demands required in answering the questions are presented in the table below.

Table 4.3: Level of cognitive demand Site One

Cognitive level according to Bloom's Taxonomy	Level 1		Level 2	
Category of assessment tasks in data	Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information	Make straight-forward inference	Interpret and integrate Ideas and information	Examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements
Term one Just One Bite	Questions 1 and 2	Questions 3, 4 and 5		
Term two The King of Frogs	Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4	Questions 5 and 6		

In both assessments the teacher has only asked questions from the first level of cognitive demand namely, the retrieval of explicitly stated information or making straightforward inferences that can be related directly to the text. In current policy documents teachers are encouraged to use well-designed questions to facilitate learners' interpretation of texts (DoE, 2002a) which would be classified in level 2 in the table above.

In both assessments each question is allocated two marks. The marks have not been weighted according to the level of cognitive demand (fewer for retrieval than for inferring).

4.2.2 Case Two

Site Two Straight to English: First Additional Language as LOLT

School context

Primary School Two is situated in a suburb in the western part of Johannesburg and at the time of data collection had a learner enrolment of 611. It is a former Model C school[16]. The majority of the learners are Afrikaans speaking but the school has introduced a separate stream for learners who are home language speakers of African languages (who reside in the nearby informal settlement) from grade 1. This is a straight to English stream of African learners, as English is the Language of Learning and Teaching from grade 1. This class follows the English First Additional Language curriculum whereas the rest of the school is taught in Afrikaans as the LOLT and follows the Afrikaans as Home Language curriculum.

The school feels a sense of social responsibility to the learners in the nearby informal settlement and has taken the decision to accommodate this community by offering English as this is what the parents prefer. The school has an

[16] "The former model C schools grew out of an arrangement in the first transition to democracy, where formerly white schools were encouraged to be part of the public school system but were able to raise funds from parents as an extra contribution to education quality" (Bloch, 2009).

Afrikaans motto which, at the time of data collection, teachers were trying with difficulty to translate into English in order to be inclusive. As the stream of straight to English learners is a recent addition and the parents of these learners are generally not a fee paying community, the school is taking an incremental approach to procuring English teaching and learning resources. The school started procuring English resources for grade 1 in 2006, grade 2 in 2007 and grade 3 in 2008.

From grade 4 onwards the learners are no longer taught by one teacher in one classroom but 'move' to subject teachers who are situated in different classrooms. The school day is broken into periods of forty minutes. English is a subject and the class has an English lesson every day. On the playground the 'English stream' of learners do not mix with the rest of the learners (Afrikaans speaking). The learners in the 'English stream' speak to each other in their home language between classes and on the playground. When they borrow a pencil from their friend the communication is in the home language but when they speak to a teacher they communicate in English (Field Notes, Site 2, 24 July 2008).

Teacher B

Teacher B is an additional language English speaker whose primary language is Afrikaans. She has taught for two and a half years. She qualified in 2006 with a degree in Industrial Psychology and in 2007 attained a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) for Intermediate and Senior Phase[17]. She has had no in-service training from the district. The Head of Department at the school provides general support to the teacher but is unable to provide specific support for the teaching of the English language curriculum. (Teacher B, Preliminary Biographical Questionnaire, 24 July 2008).

[17] The entrance requirements by Higher Education Institutions vary with regard to the inclusion of school teaching subjects in the initial qualification. This anomaly may explain the differing depth of knowledge experienced by some PGCE graduates in the classroom.

Classroom

The classroom accommodates thirty-nine learners and desks are arranged in six groups seating six learners each, with two double desks in the front of the class to accommodate a group of four. It is a print rich environment with posters on the walls, some of which are commercial and some of which have been made by Teacher B. At the front of the classroom there is a large green chalkboard with a section dedicated to the recording of daily homework.

There are windows on both sides of the classroom. The windows that face the corridor are covered with posters and below the windows there are open storage shelves that run the length of the wall. These shelves house piles of learner books and portfolios. The windows on the other side of the classroom look onto the sports fields. There is a sense of space and orderliness about the classroom (Field Notes, Site 2, 24 July 2008).

Reading resources

There is a demarcated reading area in the classroom that contains a small bookshelf with some books (both fiction and nonfiction) that the teacher has provided from her own resources. The bookshelf also has folders of collected magazine articles that have been compiled by the teacher to supplement the reading materials available for individual reading for pleasure. The teacher has mentioned that the school is in the process of adding English books to the school library but she felt that she would like to build a classroom collection as well (Field Notes, Site 2, 24 July 2008).

Teaching reading literacy

According to Teacher B the school has a well established culture of reading which has been institutionalized through a formal reading period at the beginning of the day for fifteen minutes where every class stops everything and reads for pleasure; this includes both learners and teachers (Field Notes, Site 2, 24 July 2008).

"... 'Reading for Enjoyment' is usually done during register periods because they are my register class (lucky for me) so I score on that. 15 minutes reading for pleasure they bring any text that they prefer to bring whether it be a fictional book, an autobiography, a magazine – as long as they are finding that reading could be fun..." (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008).

By providing classroom reading resources for her learners to read the teacher appears to be responding to the lack of home reading practices. Teacher B has made an attempt to expand the opportunity for learners to read at school and in so doing she is supporting the requirements of school reading literacy practices (Heath, 1993, see section 2.2.1).

She perceives the school to have a high standard of reading in general but is unable to state with confidence the level at which her learners are reading. The policy documents stress the importance of selecting texts that are both grade and age appropriate, at levels that are understandable but challenging in terms of concepts, vocabulary, sophistication (i.e. genres) and ideas (DoE, 2003). There is an implicit expectation in the policy documents that teachers are able to distinguish reading levels for learners.

"In my school I must say I think we do have a much higher standard ... but I'm still trying to find out what exact level my children are and what type of texts apply to them. But I must say it's a higher standard" (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008).

She can see that the children read at different levels and has observed that some children appear to read aloud fluently with expression and good pronunciation whereas others are unable to read full sentences. The teacher is not confident that all the learners are sufficiently competent to read for meaning.

"... it varies across the spectrum, ... when [some] read to me it really does seem like they are understanding what they are reading ... focusing more, tone of voice is changing ... and if I ask them questions afterwards they can answer me ... in some cases it's purely about getting the words out ..." (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008).

She is sympathetic to the fact that for some of the learners English is their third or fourth language.

"... but there are definitely some of them that are seriously still struggling because some of them this is their third or fourth language that they do and this is the first time that they are formally introduced ..." (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008).

Reading activities

The teacher makes use of shared reading activities and listens to individual reading.

"... we also do shared reading and writing from The OBE Plus[18] ... every exercise has a reading text that they have to read either independently or guided reading with me in class all together ... we do group work, we do independent work as well ... I think it's important to read on their own because in a group you can get lost sometimes ..." (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008).

Teacher B uses a text book which contains a variety of texts and prescribed questions.

[18] According to 24.com the material, known as OBE-Plus, is available for grades R-11 in Afrikaans and English and is developed by skilled teachers from schools countrywide. All the developers of the OBE learning material are under the guidance of OBE expert Dr Ria de Villiers, a co-director of Future Entrepreneurs. Ria and co-director Nelia Prinsloo say Future Entrepreneurs' products are used in about 3 000 schools across South Africa as all the material complies with the National Curriculum Statement (NCS for grades 10 and 11) and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS for grades R-7).

"OK, well I have 'The Oxford Successful English Reading Book' which is the revised National OBE Curriculum book that we use that has attached activities afterwards ..." (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008). She also promotes prepared reading through the provision of texts and questions to prepare for assessments.

"... and then I also have prepared pieces – shorter pieces about 2 or 3 paragraphs which vary in length and also in difficulty – and this is for prepared reading that they use ..." (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008).

This teacher is making an attempt to follow good assessment practice by assessing learners on content they have prepared (Kanjee, 2009).

Assessment of reading literacy

Teacher B assesses oral reading proficiency once a week by getting the learners to read aloud. "I find my time restraints don't allow me to actually assess more than once a week ... 40 minutes is barely enough time to get them to read each one on their own ..." (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008).

She has little experience in identifying reading literacy skills and strategies and relies exclusively on the prepackaged texts and activities to assist learners to achieve the prescribed outcomes.

"I found some of them in a different source – I can give you the name of it - 'International Competitions and Assessments for Schools English 2007' ... it's got different texts in with already formulated questions ... I use these as practice comprehension tests and then some of them will be selected or maybe one of them will be used as a term test or an exam" (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008).

Teacher B has access to relevant teaching and learning materials but has a limited understanding of assessment and the new curriculum (Kanjee, 2009) and appears to rely on the commercially available resources. She is unable to describe which reading literacy skills and strategies were assessed during the first half of the year. In describing how she assesses reading her focus is on reading aloud: pronunciation, recognition of sight words, fluency and tone of voice/expression. This approach to reading literacy appears to suggest the autonomous skills approach (Weaver, 1990; Street, 1993; Harp, 2005) where decoding and comprehension skills are taught separately as discrete learning events.

"... I look at fluency and speed ... other days I will see how many words – sight words – they can recognize and pronunciation and phonics and those types of things ..." (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008).

Proponents of the sight-based approach to autonomous skills acquisition acknowledge the inconsistencies in the sound/symbol patterns of language and require learners to have a large sight vocabulary (Harp, 2005). This teacher appears to be building the learners' reading vocabulary so they can recognize and pronounce words at a glance (Bush & Hueber, 1970).

In written responses to texts the learners are required to unscramble sentences, identify facts from texts and select correct answers from multiple choice options.

"... we have obviously response to text in the form of comprehension tests, varying either in testing facts that they have to give back ... multiple choice ... I can give them a text and they have to read it, sentences all scrambled up and they have to unscramble the sentences and actually make a paragraph that makes sense ..." (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008).

Teacher B measures reading competency by the quantity and complexity of texts read by learners.

"... well I'm not I'm not really sure what exactly according to what standards my children are supposed to be able to do ... more difficult texts ... sight words ... quantity ... increase..." (Interview Teacher B, School 2, 24 July 2008).

This teacher appears to use the transmission model of teaching and learning where learning is viewed as a matter of building from simple to complex words and from simple to more complex phrases. In this model the ability of her learners to reproduce or verbalize a predetermined correct response is taken as evidence of learning (Weaver, 1990).

Summative reading literacy assessment

There is a formal language test at the end of each term. Each teacher is required to compile his/her own test. The Head of Department provides as much guidance as possible but is familiar with the Afrikaans language curriculum, has limited experience with the English language curriculum and is not able to offer specific advice and guidance (Field Notes, Site 2, 24 July 2008).

Copies of the English Language tests that were given to the Grade 4 learners at the end of term one and term two were provided by Teacher B and are presented as Figures 4.3 and 4.4.

Site 2 test1A

Read *Tarantula* and answer questions 6 to 12.

TARANTULA

As big as a dinner plate and with eight eyes and eight bristly legs, the tarantula looks fearsome. But how scary is it?

There are many different kinds of tarantula, from different parts of the world. For most people, though, 'tarantula' means one of the large, hairy spiders that come from North, Central and South America. The best-known of these spiders is the Mexican red-kneed tarantula.

Big and hairy

Tarantulas are big. The bodies of North American tarantulas can be longer than an adult's middle finger, and their leg span is as wide as an adult's hand. Their South American cousins are even bigger.

Long-lived

Some tarantulas live for only a few months, others for up to 18 months, but tarantulas can live for as long as 25 years or more. In Mexico, one female tarantula lived for nearly 30 years.

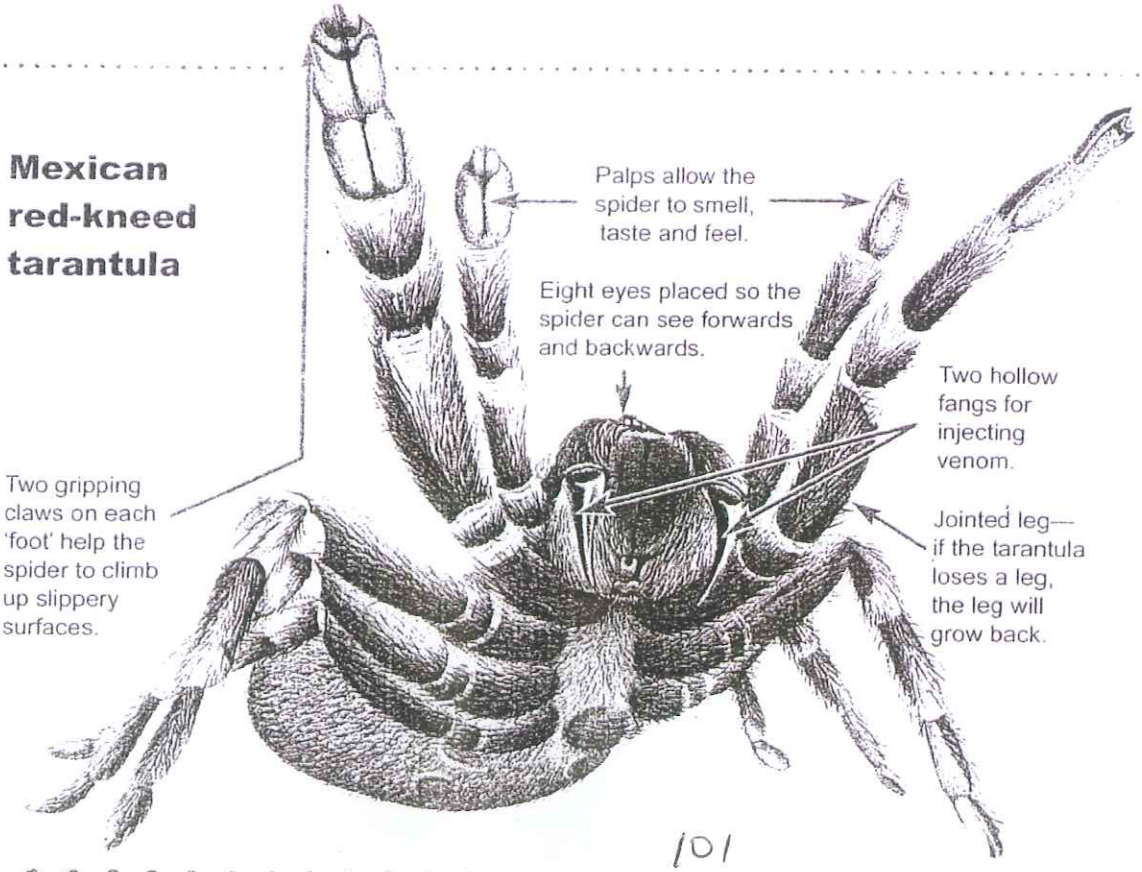
Lying in wait

Tarantulas live in burrows underground, which they dig with their fangs. They line the insides with ribbons of a special substance called spider's silk. Unlike common garden spiders, they don't make webs to catch prey. Instead, they wait to pounce when a likely-looking snack comes along. In the heat of the day, tarantulas rest. They hunt at night for insects, such as beetles. They also enjoy special treats of small frogs, toads, mice or small birds.

Shy spiders

Although they look fierce, tarantulas are in fact shy creatures which stay in their burrows most of the time. Some can be kept as pets.

Mexican red-kneed tarantula



Site 2 test B

6. In the text the size of the tarantula is compared to

(A) a small frog.
(B) a small bird.
(C) a dinner plate.
(D) a garden spider.

7. The tarantula spins spider's silk in order to

(A) build its large web.
(B) trap mice and insects.
(C) make itself appear fierce.
(D) make a lining for its burrow.

8. What do tarantulas usually do in the evenings?

(A) hunt
(B) sleep
(C) build burrows
(D) hide from toads

9. How many eyes does a tarantula have?

(A) 2
(B) 8
(C) 18
(D) 25

10. The Mexican red-kneed tarantula uses its claws to

(A) spin its silk.
(B) catch its prey.
(C) stop it from slipping as it climbs.
(D) dig burrows beneath the ground.

11. Which part of the tarantula injects poison into its prey?

(A) the legs
(B) the feet
(C) the palps
(D) the fangs

12. The purpose of this text is to

(A) warn people about tarantulas.
(B) describe some features of tarantulas.
(C) explain the life cycle of red-kneed tarantulas.
(D) give advice about keeping tarantulas as pets.

The extract above has been taken from the first term English summative assessment and represents the reading literacy component. This is an information text. It consists of paragraphs separated by bolded subheadings, as well as a black and white illustration of a tarantula. The illustration has a heading in bold typography and is labeled. The combination of the print with subheadings together with the labeled illustration is an example of what Cope and Kalantzis (2006) call multimodal texts where the reader decides the order in which to read the picture or information contained in subheadings and paragraphs.

This extract appears to have been taken from a commercially produced booklet *2007 ICAS English Paper A © EAA.*

The entire assessment consists of 7 marks. The total amount of time given for the assessment is not stated. The learners write their answers on the assessment page, by circling the correct answer.

Cape Town Minstrel Carnival

Every New Year, thousands of minstrels take to the streets in a dazzling display colourful satin uniforms, shiny parasols, painted faces and foot-tapping banjo tu that accompany the traditional folk songs, many of Cape Malay origin. The parade known locally as the 'Coon Carnival' ('coon' referring to a member of a minst troupe) among the predominately Afrikaans-speaking 'coloured' community w make up the majority of the performers.

The traditional event has its origins in the 19th century when minstrel entertainers American cruise ships stopped off in Cape Town; their sounds and styles we incorporated into the New Year festivals of the newly-freed Malay slaves. T Carnival begins on New Year's Day and the festivities continue into January wi extravagant street parades; singing, dancing, costume competitions and marche accompanied by drums, banjos and saxophones, through the streets.

Minstrels from America first visited the Cape in 1848, ten years after the Briti colony did away with slavery. The American minstrels were white, their fac blackened with burnt cork. The black face caught on among the former slaves he who adapted popular songs to mock their colonial masters, even making a ru version of "Rule Britannia".

The annual parade, in which the minstrels wear brightly coloured satin uniforms a Panama hats, celebrates the slaves' emancipation. Many of the slaves were Malay and a lot of the minstrels' songs are of Cape Malay origin. They also contin tl tradition of putting their own words to popular songs. Most of the minstrels a Afrikaans-speaking, and make up "moppies", songs about well-known people a popular events which amuse Capetonians but are lost on tourists.

Tourism authorities are organising the carnival this year for the first time, howeve They hope it will rival the annual carnivals in Rio de Janeiro, Notting Hill, and Ne Orleans. The Western Cape provincial government sponsored the carnival for the fir time in 2002. The minstrels previously financed the carnival out of their own pockets

Site 2 Test 2B

1. Where is the Coon Carnival held every year?

2. How often does it take place?

3. Name two musical instruments mentioned in the story.

4. What are "moppies"?

5. Which other cultures' songs are often performed at the Coon Carnival?

6. Why do you think did the writer of this passage write this (passage)?

7. How do you and your family spend New Year? Write three sentences.

a.

b.

c.

The extract above has been taken from the second term English summative assessment and represents the reading literacy component. The text is an information text. The vocabulary is not what would be expected from a grade 4 English Additional Language learner for example: accompany, predominantly, traditional, incorporated, saxophones, minstrels, and emancipation. There are no visual clues in the passage in the form of illustrations or photographs. This is a poor quality text as the last two letters of each word on the right hand side of the page have been cut off. The text is presented on a full page and the questions on a second page with space for learners to write their answers.

The entire assessment consists of 10 marks. The total amount of time given for the assessment is not stated. The learners write their answers on the assessment page, not on separate answer sheets, and there is limited space to write these answers.

The following table presents an overview of the mechanical demands of each text used in the assessments.

Text, mechanical reading demands

Table 4.4: Mechanical reading demand Site Two

Term	Number of words	Average number of characters per word	Average number of syllables per word	Average number of characters (without spaces)	Number of sentences	Average number of words per sentence	Fry's Read-ability Index
Term one Tarantula	309	4.58	1.48	1.415	24	12.88	7
Term two Cape Town Minstrel Carnival	333	5.29	1.75	1.763	15	16.69	College

According to the scores on Fry's Readability Index both texts are inappropriate for the grade 4 learner. However the inclusion and repetition of the word

'Tarantula' may have skewed the scoring of this text. The readability index shows that there is a large difference in grade level between the first (grade 7) and second (college level) assessment texts. While a level of reading literacy progression is expected over time, the difference between the grade reading levels in these texts is unachievable in the six months between these assessments. These appear to be extremely short passages (303 and 339 words respectively). Assessment Standard six for First Additional Language requires learners to demonstrate a reading vocabulary of between 1 000 and 2 500 common words and that learners who will study other Learning Areas through their additional language should aim for 2 500 (DoE, 2002c).

The following two tables present information relating to the assessment tasks.

Question types

Table 4.5: Question types Site Two

Term	Multiple choice questions	One word answers	One sentence answers	Answers consisting of more than one sentence
Term one Tarantula	7			
Term two Cape Town Minstrel Carnival		1	5	1

The first assessment consisted of multiple choice questions only, whereas the second assessment consisted mainly of questions which required answers with a single example of one word and multiple sentence answers. In the second assessment a handwritten correction has been made to correct the spelling of the word 'cultures' in question 5. This is problematic as learners need to be exposed consistently to the correct form and spelling of words and may not be familiar with the convention of the caret symbol indicating that the letter written

above the word should be read as part of the word. More confusing is the insertion of the cursive 'l' to be included in the typed word. In the second assessment Teacher B has mixed the tenses in question 6, Why do you think the writer of this passage write (sic) this (passage)? The last question (question 7) shifts from reading literacy to writing literacy which may suggest that Teacher B experiences difficulty in constructing effective reading literacy questions or that she is following the conventions of language textbooks in which reading is often integrated with other reading activities.

Assessment, cognitive demands

Table 4.6: Level of cognitive demand Site Two

Cognitive level according to Bloom's Taxonomy	**Level 1**		**Level 2**	
Category of assessment tasks in data	Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information	Make straight-forward inference	Interpret and integrate ideas and information	Examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements
Term one Tarantula	Questions 6, 7, 9 and 11	Questions 8, 10, 12		
Term two Cape Town Minstrel Carnival	Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4	Questions 5 and 6		

In both assessments the teacher asked questions from the first level of cognitive demand, namely the retrieval of explicitly stated information and straightforward inferences. The second assessment includes a question (question 7) that does not relate directly to the passage and yet is included in the mark allocation for reading literacy. No differentiation has been made between the marks allocated for information retrieval and inference questions.

4.2.3 Case Three

Site Three Switch to English as LOLT: First Additional Language

School context

Primary School Three is situated in Soweto and at the time of data collection had a learner enrolment of 306. This school teaches literacy in Sepedi until grade 3 and from grade 4 'switches' to English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). The school follows the English First Additional Language curriculum. I was struck by the number of trophies displayed in the principal's office that have been awarded to the school by a well-known NGO that supports reading literacy in schools. All the classrooms are on the ground floor and are built around a 'quad' area that has a well tended garden. There is an administration block on one side of the 'quad' (Field Notes, Site 3, 24 July 2008).

The school has a small library which is a converted toilet block.

"Ja, we have got our own library. We turned the old toilets into a library because we don't have a specifically library so we made it on our own" (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

Teacher C

Teacher C is an additional language English speaker whose primary language is Sepedi. She has taught for nine years. She qualified in 1998 in Junior Primary studies and in 2004 attained a Certificate in English Language Teaching. In her questionnaire she wrote that she recalled attending in-service training in 2005 run by Gauteng Department of Education officials on assessment in the Foundation Phase and again in 2006 on Teaching Reading (Teacher C, Preliminary Biographical Questionnaire, 22 July 2008). Having attended some training on teaching reading with the Department, one would expect to see evidence of this in her teaching and assessment of reading literacy.

Classroom

There are large windows on each side of the classroom. On the one side the windows look onto the school garden and on the other onto a parking area where there are parking places under large shady trees. The classroom accommodates thirty children. The desks are arranged in 5 groups of six (three double desks). The classroom feels spacious. Both sides of the classroom have been fitted with shelving where the learners can store their school bags. There is a green chalkboard at the front of the class. There is a commercially made cardboard book display that contains small paperback reading books supplied by the NGO which has awarded the reading trophies to the school. There are piles of learner exercise books in a corner cupboard. The learners remain in the same classroom and the teachers rotate to teach different subjects in the classrooms. In grade 4 the learners are taught different learning areas by different teachers (Field Notes, Site 3, 24 July 2008).

Reading resources

There is an incomplete classroom set of READ big books and small books[19]. Teacher C explains that she shares her resources with other teachers and this is the reason that her set is incomplete at the time of data collection (Field Notes, Site 3, 24 July 2008).

"The resources that are available are, we are using the READ material. We've got the story kit, books as well as the group reading, shared reading books. That is the big books that goes along with the small books" (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

She thinks that the school has other readers which are not used as they are not 'OBE compliant' (Field Notes, Site 3, 24 July 2008).

[19] READ is a non-governmental organization that has supplied some literacy materials to the school. These consist of 'BIG' books which are intended to be read to the class as well as to be used in 'shared reading' activities. There is a set of 'small' books which accompany the 'BIG' books and which are intended for individual and paired reading activities.

Teacher C explains that the school makes use of newspapers and magazines[20].

"... but we also use the newspapers. There are newspapers that are being brought at schools everyday so we use them as well as the magazine, yes" (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

Teaching reading literacy

The school has an hour of compulsory reading everyday known as 'Drop Everything and Read' time. The learners read a set of class readers supplied by the NGO and/or newspapers during this time. The teacher is concerned that not all staff take this time seriously as the teachers 'just sit' during this time (Field Notes, Site 3, 24 July 2008).

"... every day we have got one hour that we call a DER period. You just drop everything and read. You read every material ... we call it a DER 'D-E-R' (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

She considers the reading ability of her learners to be 'moderate'.

"They are moderate because there are those who are high achievers and under-achievers, but they are coping" (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

She has formed this overall impression by observing that the learners can read aloud phonetically but is concerned about the level of interpreting punctuation. This shows a very limited view of reading literacy.

"The material that we are using here to read, they are able to read them and the phonics that are prescribed[21] for this grade they are able to, most of them in

[20] There was no evidence of newspapers or magazines in the classroom at the time of data collection.

[21] The materials provided by the NGO state explicitly which Learning Outcomes are being addressed as well as the relevant Assessment Statement.

fact, they are able to read ... it is the only book that emphasizes that they are able to recognize the phonics, yes" (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

"... So they must be able to follow the correct punctuation ... punctuations like an exclamation mark you must follow them as they are. It will also show understanding" (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

Teacher C is not familiar with any reading series other than that provided by the NGO (Field Notes, Site 3, 24 July 2008). As mentioned in chapter two section 2.5 the cascade model of teacher training with regard to the new curriculum was at best an orientation to the principles of outcomes-based education with many trainers at 'the top' not being sufficiently equipped to replicate the training within their schools or districts. No 'in depth' information on changes in content or the more complex aspects of pedagogy, including reading pedagogies were included in the training. Various NGOs have subsequently been commissioned by the Department or funding agencies to provide training in specific Learning Areas such as Language and Literacy. Teachers, as is the case with Teacher C, have become dependent on interpretation and implementation of the curriculum provided through such interventions.

Formal reading in the form of allocating time for disciplined engagement with books is valued highly by the teacher.

"So we emphasize that one [reading] very much because we will ... through reading you can go everywhere. Reading is the language that is understood by almost everybody" (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

"... it's [reading] just like money, that talks all the languages. So with reading you can go wherever you ... you can achieve every knowledge that you want to" (Interview Teacher 3, School C, 24 July 2008).

There is no indication, however, that reading strategies are being taught.

Reading activities

The teachers are expected to follow what the NGO has trained them to do as far as reading and writing is concerned (Field Notes, Site 3, 24 July 2008). The reading activities appear to be directed solely by the READ programme i.e. the teachers follow a script.

"... They read comprehension tests and they answer the questions to check whether they understand very well. I tell them, 'Go' and they make their booklets[22]..." (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

"The material that we are using here to read [READ resources], they are able to read them and the phonics that are prescribed for this grade they are able to, most in fact, they are able to read, they are able to sequence after reading because it is the only book that emphasizes that they are able to recognize the phonics[23], yes" (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

Teacher C appears to rely on the Drop Everything and Read time for 'the' reading activity.

"... so that they [learners] must develop this habit of reading because now our learners sometimes are not, you know, are not used to reading ... so we give them quality time for reading so they must develop this habit of reading" (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

The majority of reading activities appear to be unsupervised by the teacher. There appears to be a lack of explicitly taught reading strategies in this classroom. There seems to be an assumption that learners will somehow learn

[22] The learners copy the READ 'little books' to make their 'own' booklets to take home as well as creating their own illustrated stories modeled on the 'little books'.

[24]The READ books indicate explicitly the phonics that are included in each book.

to read by themselves without direct instruction. Whilst the learners in this class may appear to be fluent readers, fluency does not ensure comprehension (Wolf, 2007). Fluency provides extra time for the executive system in the brain to direct attention to make meaning through strategies such as inferring and predicting and these strategies need to be taught explicitly.

"...when they are told to go and read some newspapers they are really delighted to do that ... even when they come back it's easy for them to read anything they come across, ja" (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

Teacher C may be interpreting the learners' ability to decode words as the ability to read with meaning. Wolf (2007) suggests that there should be an aspect of 'comprehension monitoring' where the teacher's role is to facilitate the learners' abilities to think about how well they are understanding what they read in a text. They may need to repair discordant understanding and reinterpret meaning.

Assessment of reading literacy

Teacher C says of the specific reading literacy outcomes and assessment criteria that "you can see [them] in the official documents". She doesn't have her own copy of the documents but says that the materials from the NGO cover all of them (Field Notes, Site 3, 24 July 2008). This is reminiscent of the findings reported by Potenza and Monyokolo who found schools in their research were only given one set of policy documents which were kept in the principal's office and seldom used by teachers (1999). This teacher is more familiar with the resources supplied by the NGO than by the Department.

Teacher C listens to group reading as well as individual reading but keeps no written record of this activity because "you just know how they are". (Field Notes, Site 3, 24 July 2008). She believes that understanding the meanings of text can be assessed through the learners' correct use of punctuation, pronunciation and spelling. As with Teacher B, this approach to reading literacy

appears to suggest the autonomous skills approach (Weaver, 1990; Street, 1993; Harp, 2005) where comprehension skills and decoding skills are taught separately as discrete learning events. In the case of Teacher C there appears to be no evidence that comprehension skills and strategies are taught at all.

"So they must be able to follow the correct punctuation, even the spelling because sometimes they pronounce a word in a different way. You pronounce it ... if you pronounce a word differently it won't have the same meaning. So pronunciation, pronunciations like an exclamation mark you must follow them as they are. It will also show understanding. If you pronounce it in the correct way it means that you really understand what you are reading" (Interview Teacher C, School 3, 24 July 2008).

The understanding that the teacher appears to recognize is the understanding of how to decode and correctly pronounce words.

Summative reading literacy assessment

The teachers are expected to compile their own end of term tests. The teacher "scratches around" for material to use for her formal end of term assessments. She finds "whatever comprehensions" she can (Field Notes, Site 3, 24 July 2008). There is a tension between the limited access to relevant teaching and learning resources for the implementation of the curriculum (Kanjee, 2009) and the policy requirement to select texts that are grade and age appropriate, at levels that are understandable but challenging in terms of concepts, vocabulary, sophistication and ideas (DoE, 2003, p. 24).

Copies of the English Language tests that were given to the grade 4 learners at the end of term one and term two were provided by the teacher and these are presented as figures 4.5 and 4.6.

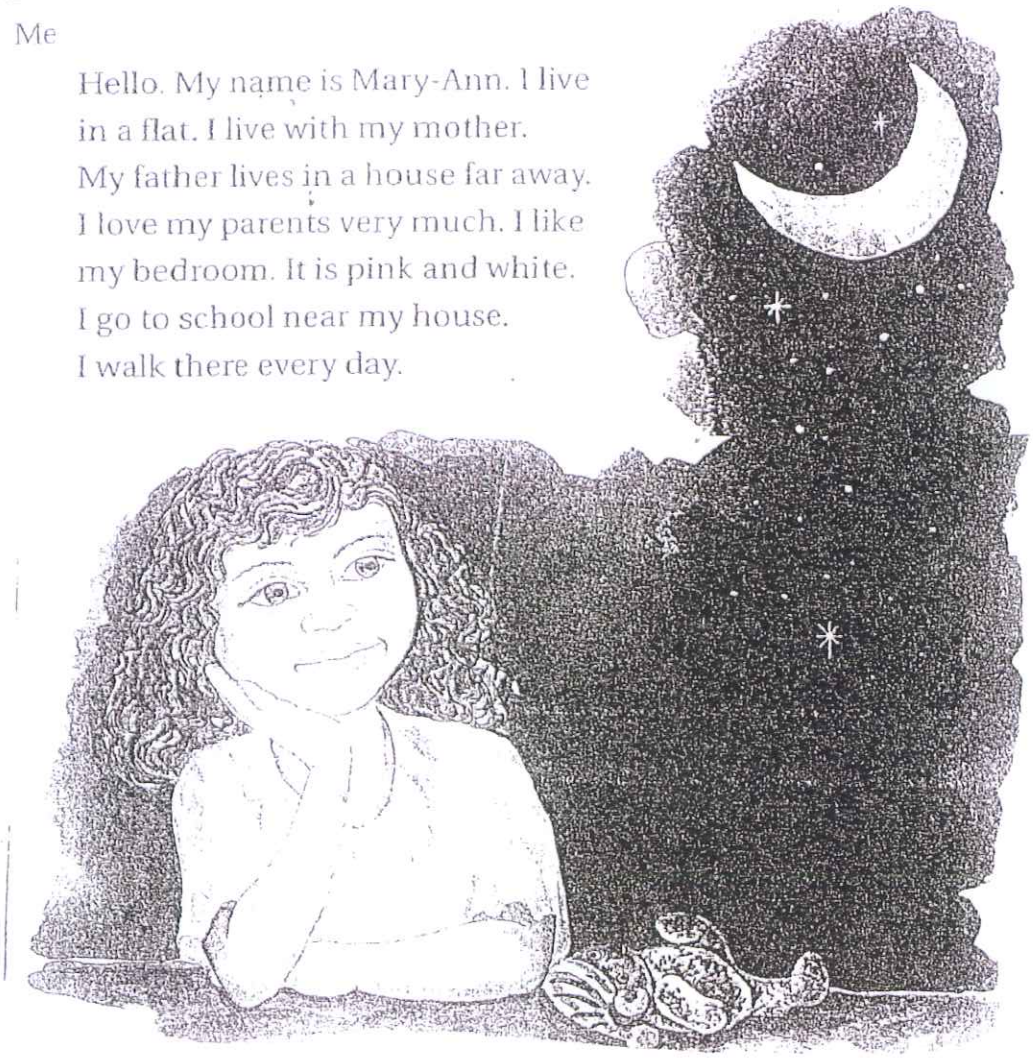
Site 3 Test 1

Question 1.

- **Read the story below and answer questions that follows.**

Me

Hello. My name is Mary-Ann. I live in a flat. I live with my mother. My father lives in a house far away. I love my parents very much. I like my bedroom. It is pink and white. I go to school near my house. I walk there every day.



Questions.

1. What is the name of the little girl in the story?

2. Where does she live ?

3. Does she live with both parents ? Why?

4. What are that colours of her bedroom ?

5. Is the school far from her school? Explain your answer.

The extract above has been taken from the first term English summative assessment and represents the reading literacy component. The text is illustrated with a sketch of a little girl gazing at the moon and stars with a teddy bear at her elbow. The test consists of one page on which both the text and questions have been reproduced.

The entire assessment consists of 20 marks. The reading literacy component represents 5 of the total 20 marks. This component consists of five questions, each with an answer worth 1 mark. The rest of the test is not included here as the teacher says the remainder is about grammar. The total amount of time given for the assessment is 60 minutes. The learners write their answers on the assessment page, not on separate answer sheets, and there is limited space to write these answers.

The photocopied assessment consists of a collection of cut and paste sections from various sources, none of which is acknowledged.

Site 3 Test 2

A Comprehension and exercise

Read the information below and then answer the questions in full sentences.

The Kruger National Park is a very large **area**. It lies between two rivers, the Sabie River and the Crocodile River. At the beginning of the twentieth century that area was full of wild game of every kind. Hunters came from all over the world to shoot the wild animals. Soon, all that was left of the wild animals was a **handful** of elephants, hardly any lions and leopards, very few buffalo and not too many rhinoceroses. Those are our 'Big Five'.

The president of our country decided that he should do something about this. He wanted to reserve a place where wild animals could be safe from the hunter's gun, live peacefully and grow into large herds again.

Paul Kruger or 'Oom Paul' as he was called, established the Sabie Game Reserve in 1902. The first person they needed to employ was a **warden** who would be able to look after the whole area and think of ways of protecting the animals from hunters and poachers. He would need to be a great animal lover who knew a lot about animals. He would also need to be a nature lover, and a person with good ideas. They **eventually** found a man whose name was Colonel Stevenson-Hamilton, to be the first warden. He was very good at his job and soon the local people gave him the nickname, 'Skukuza', which means, 'He who changes things', because he put a stop to the killing of the wild game. He also changed the name to the Kruger National Park after President Paul Kruger.

Questions

Reading for meaning.

1. What was the first name of the Kruger National Park?

2. Who was the first warden in the Kruger National Park?

3. What is the meaning of "The Big Five"?

4. Why was it important to have a game park at that time?

5. Why did the local people call Colonel Stevenson-Hamilton, "Skukuza"?

6. What is the difference between a hunter and a poacher?

Use your dictionary to find out the meanings of these words:

1. area

2. handful

3. warden [15]

The extract above has been taken from the second term English summative assessment and represents the reading literacy component. The text is an information text. There are no visual clues in the passage in the form of illustrations or photographs. The text and questions are presented on one page.

The reading literacy component represents 15 of the total marks. The total number of marks is unknown as the teacher has only provided the reading literacy component of the assessment. This component consists of nine questions. The rest of the test consists of 'grammar'. The total amount of time given for the assessment is 60 minutes. The learners write their answers on the assessment page, not on separate answer sheets, and there is limited space to write these answers.

The photocopied assessment consists of a collection of cut and paste sections from various sources, none of which is acknowledged.

The following table presents an overview of the mechanical reading demands of both texts used in the summative assessments.

Assessment Text, mechanical reading demands

Table 4.7: Mechanical reading demand Site Three

Term	Number of words	Average number of characters per word	Average number of syllables per word	Average number of characters (without spaces)	Number of sentences	Average number of words per sentence	Fry's Readability Index
Term one Me	51	3.31	1.25	169	10	5.10	1
Term two A compre-hension and exercise	261	4.38	1.47	1.142	15	17.40	6

According to the scores on the Fry's Readability Index, neither of the texts used in the assessments is appropriate for grade 4 learners of English as Home Language. The first text assessment appears to be at an appropriate level for grade 1 readers whilst the second text appears to be appropriate for grade 6 learners. Even if we consider that these learners are learners of English as First Additional Language, the texts appear to be extremely short (consisting of 51 and 261 words respectively).

The next two tables present data relating to the assessment tasks.

Assessment tasks, question type

Table 4.8: Question type Site Three

Term	Multiple choice questions	One word answers	One sentence answers	Answers consisting of more than one sentence
Term one Me			5	
Term two A comprehension and exercise			6	

In the first assessment, two of the questions do not make sense i.e. What are *that* colours of her bedroom? And Is the *school* far from her *school*? Explain your answer. One of the questions cannot be answered from the information provided in the text i.e. the *why* in question 3 which asks, does she live with both parents? *Why?* The construction of these questions may indicate that the teacher finds difficulty in formulating appropriate assessment questions.

In both assessments the teacher has used one type of question, namely, one sentence responses. In the second assessment in question 6 the teacher has introduced an exercise in dictionary work which, assuming the learners have had the opportunity to use dictionaries during class work, is helpful for building vocabulary.

Assessment tasks, cognitive demands

The cognitive demands required in answering the questions in both assessments are analyzed in the table below.

Table 4.9: Level of cognitive demand Site Three

Cognitive level according to Bloom's Taxonomy	Level 1		Level 2	
Category of assessment tasks in data	Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information	Make straight-forward inference	Interpret and integrate Ideas and information	Examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements
Term one Me	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5			
Term two A comprehension and exercise	Questions 1,2, 3 and 5	Question 4		

The teacher has favoured questions from the first level of cognitive demand, namely, the retrieval of explicitly stated information with one question in the second assessment asking for a straightforward inference and she has not allocated more marks to this question.

4.2.4 Case Four

Site Four Switch to English as LOLT: First Additional Language

School context

Primary School Four is situated in Soweto and at the time of data collection had a learner enrolment of 700. This school teaches literacy in TshiVenda until grade 3 and from grade 4 'switches' to English as the Language of Learning and Teaching. The school follows the English First Additional Language curriculum. The school is built on extensive grounds and consists of three double storey rows of classrooms with an administration block on one side. The administration block is used as a store room. The administration of the school is

conducted from three classrooms on the top storey of the third block of buildings. The grounds are relatively well maintained. The teachers move from class to class from grade 4 onwards for subject teaching (Field Notes, Site 4, 28 July 2008).

Teacher D

Teacher D is an additional language English speaker whose primary language is TshiVenda. She has taught for thirty years. She qualified in 1986 with a Diploma in Education and has since attained an Advanced Certificate of Education in Professional Studies in 2005. In her response to the questionnaire she recalled being part of a mass orientation training programme that was run by Gauteng Education Department officials held on Thursday afternoons in 2006. This training was an orientation to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Teacher D, Preliminary Biographical Questionnaire, 24 July 2008).

Classroom

The grade 4 classroom is on the top floor at the end of the second block of classrooms. There are small high windows on each side of the classroom. One cannot see the grounds or the corridor from the windows. There is a faded green chalkboard at the front of the classroom and a plain brick wall at the back of the classroom. There is a locked cupboard at the front corner of the classroom next to the teacher's table and chair. The furniture is arranged in four groups of 6 (three double desks). The class consists of twenty learners. There is no print material on display anywhere in the classroom. There are no learner exercise books, portfolio work or any sign whatsoever of written work anywhere in the classroom. No posters, no timetable (Field Notes, Site 4, 28 July 2008).

Reading resources

The teachers are expected to find their own teaching and learning material 'as the department doesn't supply enough'. This is an indication of the limited access to relevant teaching and learning resources for the implementation of

the curriculum (Kanjee, 2009) and the tension between the policy requirement to select texts that are grade and age appropriate, at levels that are understandable but challenging in terms of concepts, vocabulary, sophistication and ideas (DoE, 2003). The teacher finds her material from the workbooks of the children of a friend who attends a former Model C school and explains that the materials are 'on standard'. However, the materials for English as Home Language curriculum from the former Model C school may not be appropriate for the First Additional Language curriculum that is followed in Teacher D's class. She has access to the READ readers but only has multiple copies of one title of the small books in her classroom. She says that she can locate the rest of the books in the school as the teachers all share. She has access to the grade 3 and 5 readers as she needs them for the range of reading ability that she must deal with (Field Notes, Site 4, 28 July 2008).

"We don't have a lot of resources but I also try to go and get them from at home, from my friends so as to add from what I have. What I'm missing at the moment is their language book and the library books" (Interview Teacher D, School 4, 28 July 2008).

Teaching reading literacy

The teacher is uncertain about the reading abilities of her class, she says that half the class can read but the other half can't read anything at all.

"... half of the class was unable to read and then the other half was able to read. So to help ... I went down to the lower level ... I bought stage three books which are grade 3, stage two which are grade 3 (sic), and then from there they started to improve"[24] (Interview Teacher D, School 4, 28 July 2008).

[24] As this is a 'switch to English' school I was unsure whether the teacher 'bought' the 'lower level' books from a storeroom or whether they came from Foundation Phase classes in the school.

"These I borrowed from grade 3. These are for the weaker ones that are not able to read ... I have got a full set of these"[25] (Interview Teacher D, School 4, 28 July 2008).

The teacher does not have knowledge of other reading schemes but thinks that there might be some old readers in the storeroom, "but you know they are not OBE" (Field Notes, Site 4, 28 July 2008).

Reading activities

The teacher sometimes reads to the class "so they can learn the pronunciation and punctuation". She makes use of shared reading activities which take the form of the teacher sharing with the whole class or the teacher sharing with an individual learner. This is an example of the transmission model of reading literacy as the teacher controls the programme by reading with the whole class or one on one (Weaver, 1990).

"And I prefer shared reading why? Because you will read with a learner. They hear how you pronounce, they know where to stop ... where there is an exclamation mark you must raise your voice. Where there is a comma you must rest and you go on, yes" (Interview Teacher D, School 4, 28 July 2008).

If the learners have a large enough vocabulary and correct punctuation the teacher feels that the learners are doing very well. She mentions that she has to spend a lot of time on phonics in the home language as they are not the same as in English but by strengthening the home language there is an improvement in English. She also considers sight words to be helpful in reading (Field Notes, Site 4, 28 July 2008). It is interesting that this teacher teaches in both languages because whether a learner is learning in the Home or First Additional Language there is an expectation that both will be supported through the curriculum as it is "the Languages Learning Area [that] underlies all other

[25] The teacher has multiple copies of one title of the 'little' books. A full set would consist of multiple copies of a number of titles.

Learning Areas, since language is the medium through which all teaching, learning and assessment takes place" (DoE, 2003, p. 19). As with Teachers B and C, this teacher's approach to reading literacy appears to suggest the autonomous skills approach where decoding and comprehension are taught separately as discrete learning events. However there appears to be no focus on the meaning-making aspect of reading.

"I started with the vowels using mother tongue so that they must understand me. And after vowels I introduced to them consonants ... I introduced them to a newspaper where they circle all the words that you're doing – all the vowels again, or the consonants again so that when we start reading they will be able to identify those words and read. And indeed they were able to read. They were ... After getting unlocked they were, you know, they were anxious to read" (Interview Teacher D, School 4, 28 July 2008).

Teacher D is referring to reading aloud. She makes use of sight words and seems to equate word recognition with understanding the word in sentences. The comment that she teaches vowels and then consonants to her grade 4 learners is indicative of the way in which underperformance in reading has been normalized. It also indicates that the procedural knowledge that should already be in place by the middle of grade 1 is not in place. Learners who haven't mastered these basic reading skills read with difficulty, read slowly, make more errors and don't really understand what they are reading.

"... I went all out to go and look for sight words[26] which has helped them a lot ... when I showed my learner a newspaper and the learner was able to pick up the simple words that he saw from the ... that he read from the sight words. And I was also fulfilled. I was also very happy" (Interview Teacher D, School 4, 28 July 2008).

[26] The teacher has a list of sight words arranged in columns on A4 sheets of paper to assist learners to read.

Grade 6 English 24-02-21

This is me!

Enjoying a poem

- Listen carefully as your teacher reads and explains the poem. If you do not understand, ask your teacher to explain the poem to you again.

Hi there!

What is a poem?

A poem has short sentences and the words at the end of the lines usually sound the same (rhyme). A poem tells a story.

Sello meets an alien



I played in the garden
and what did I see?
A strange-looking creature
under a tree.
I wondered and wondered
what it could be
when he started talking
strangely to me.

'My name is Aheda
and I come from Sars,
a planet much larger
and way beyond Mars.'
All I could do
was stand there and stare.
He had two yellow eyes
and one floppy hair.

He started laughing
and pointed at me.
'You look so funny
I can only stare
at so many fingers
and oodles of hair.'

I could have been nasty
(I know that I can!)
But remembered in time
that 'manners make the man'!
'I'll give you my toy
if you show me your gun
We can get acquainted
and have lots of fun!'



1 Copy this table into your assignment book. Find words in the poem that have the same meaning as the words in the first column:

a person or an animal	creature
to look and look	
a place far away like Earth	
get to know each other	
lots and lots	
rude, having no manners	
the good things your parents taught you, like greeting older people and sharing your toys with friends	

Teacher D places responsibility on the parents to teach the learners to read.

"Most unfortunately our parents ... they are lazy to help their children. Normally learners who are being helped, they are the learners who are progressing very well. Learners who are not being helped they are the ones that they're stuck, that they got stuck ... I will even do that work in class" (Interview Teacher D, School 4, 28 July 2008).

Interestingly, in the autonomous approach to reading literacy parents are generally advised not to assist their children to read or write before entering formal schooling. This approach assumes that knowledge and skills are transferred from the teacher to the learner in a sequential manner (Gipps, 1994). Teacher D appears to lean towards the autonomous approach to reading literacy whilst expecting the parents to play an active role in the process.

Assessment of reading literacy

Teacher D 'knows' the reading literacy skills that have to be taught and assessed as they are 'all in the official documents', but she does not have a copy of the 'official documents'. As with Teacher C, this teacher is more familiar with the resources supplied from the NGO than from the Department.

She assesses when she sees the class but does not keep a written record of this continuous assessment. This teacher appears to be following the official policy of informal assessment consisting of the daily monitoring of learner progress which need not be recorded (DoE, 2002d, p. 6). She asks the meaning of words in books to check vocabulary and pronunciation, she also asks the learners to tell her about the story to check for understanding (Field Notes, Site 4, 28 July 2008).

"And then I also assess the reading skills. The learner should be able to listen to me when I'm teaching and also be able to pronounce according to how I have read" (Interview Teacher D, School 4, 28 July 2008).

"Normally I check their vocabulary, their vocabulary – the new words. I show them the book for instance, and view the pictures, and then they are able to tell me what the story is about" (Interview Teacher D, School 4, 28 July 2008).

Teacher D has an understanding of the importance of visual aspects of texts which help in the meaning-making process (Cope & Kalantzis, 2006). She is able to negotiate meaning of the visual aspects of texts with the learners from the pictures before learners attempt to read the actual text.

Teacher D seems to equate progress in reading literacy with the quantity of books read. She does not indicate the need for mastery of progressive reading levels of books.

"And when the learner is giving, is positively reading I give him more work so that the learner must be able to read more and more books" (Interview Teacher D, School 4, 28 July 2008).

Summative reading literacy assessment

The school writes formal tests at the end of each term. The teacher finds texts for these tests 'just from anywhere' she can. The Head of Department does not need to see the tests that are written (Field Notes, Site 4, 28 July 2008).

A copy of the English Language tests that were given to the Grade 4 learners at the end of term one and term two was provided by the teacher and these are presented as Figures 4.7 and 4.8 below.

The extract above has been taken from the first term English summative assessment and represents the reading literacy component. The text is a poem. There are playful illustrations of the main character Sello as well as an alien. The test is reproduced on one page containing both the text and questions. The entire assessment consists of 6 marks. The total amount of time given for the assessment is not stipulated. The photocopied text is stuck into the learners' exercise books. The learners write their answers on the assessment page, not on separate answer sheets. There is limited space to write answers.

The photocopied assessment consists of a page from a commercial text book which is not acknowledged. There is a text box prior to the poem with the icon of a light bulb that signals a message to the reader in which the genre of 'poem' is explained rather simplistically.

Site 4 Test 2

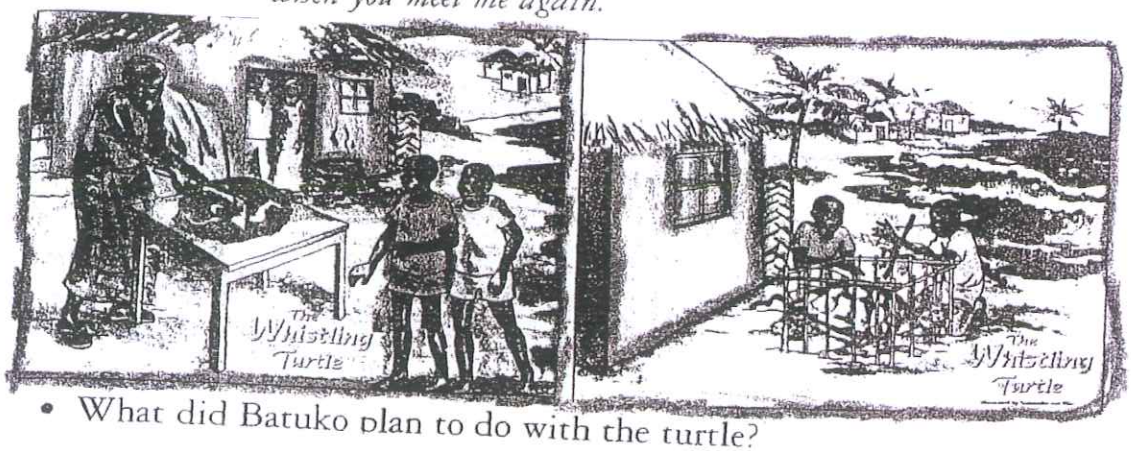
THE WHISTLING TURTLE

Two brothers named Hodi and Mowa lived near the sea with their family. Their father caught a turtle which they would cook and eat with all their relatives. He put the turtle in a wooden cage and, to the boys' surprise, it whistled and then talked to them. The turtle also sang and danced. It told the boys to take it to the beach where it would do even more tricks. When they took the turtle to the beach a big wave swept it back into the sea. The boys were worried about what their parents would say and so they found a large rock and put it in the cage. When their mother cooked and served the turtle, everyone saw that it was a large rock and so they all went away hungry. Nobody asked the boys what had happened. Then Hodi and Mowa thought they heard the turtle calling to them from the sea ... or was it just the sound of the waves?

Key words:

whistle
turtle
beach
rock
waves
sea
hungry

I am Madalamba,
the great Madalamba.
Remember my name
when you meet me again.



- What did Batuko plan to do with the turtle?

- Why did the two brothers, Hodi and Mowa, take the turtle to the beach?

- How did the turtle get back into the sea?

- What plan did Hodi and Mowa think of so that they would not get into trouble?

- What happened when the boys' mother tried to cook the turtle?

The extract above has been taken from the second term English summative assessment and represents the reading literacy component. This is a literary text. It appears to have been taken from a First Additional Language book as there is a heading in the right margin that says 'key words' and seven words appear in blocks under this heading in the right hand margin (the source is not acknowledged). The text is illustrated with two pictures depicting aspects of the story.

The entire assessment consists of five questions for 10 marks. The total amount of time given for the assessment is unknown. The learners write their answers on the assessment page, not on separate answer sheets, and there is limited space to write these answers.

The following two tables present an overview of the mechanical reading demands of both texts used in assessments.

Text, mechanical reading demands

Table 4.10: Mechanical reading demand Site Four

Term	Number of words	Average number of characters per word	Average number of syllables per word	Average number of characters (without spaces)	Number of sentences	Average number of words per sentence	Fry's Read-ability Index
Term one Sello meets an Alien	130	3.94	1.33	512	12	10.83	3
Term two The Whistling Turtle	179	4.02	1.32	720	12	14.92	4

According to Fry's Readability Index the text used in the assessment for term one was easier than the text used in term two. However, both texts appear to be appropriate for grade 4 learners of English as Home Language. These appear to be extremely short passages (consisting of 130 and 179 words respectively).

The second text appears to be slightly more demanding in all categories with the exception of the average number of syllables per word.

The next two tables present information relating to the assessment tasks.

Assessment, question type

There are a total of six questions and the writing demands in answering the questions are analyzed in the table below.

Table 4.11: Question type Site Four

Term	Multiple choice questions	One word answers	One sentence answers	Answers consisting of more than one sentence
Term one This is me		6		
Term two The Whistling Turtle			5	

The first assessment consisted entirely of vocabulary questions whereas the second assessment consisted of one sentence responses.

Assessment tasks, cognitive demands

Table 4.12: Level of cognitive demand Site Four

Cognitive level according to Bloom's Taxonomy	**Level 1**		**Level 2**	
Category of assessment tasks in data	Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information	Make straight-forward inference	Interpret and integrate Ideas and information	Examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements
Term one This is me	N/A	N/A	-	-
Term two The Whistling Turtle	Questions 2, 3 and 4	Questions 1 and 5	-	-

The first assessment consisted of no comprehension tasks as it was an exercise in vocabulary. The second assessment included tasks from the first level of cognitive demand only. No differentiation has been made between the marks allocated for information retrieval and inference questions.

4.3 Cross Case Analysis

In section 4.2 the data for each case were presented to tell the individual story of school context, teacher, classroom, reading resources, teaching reading literacy, reading activities, assessment of reading literacy and summative reading literacy assessment. In this section I present a cross case analysis of the cases in which the following components are discussed: school context, preparation for the implementation of the new curriculum, how the reading literate subject is conceptualized, and the assessment of reading literacy.

4.3.1 School Context

The schools in the case study were selected as reasonably well functioning state schools. In each class in the case study there is an acceptable teacher-learner ratio. Teacher A had 37 learners, Teacher B had 39 learners, Teacher C had 30 learners and Teacher D had 20 learners. Each school had reasonable facilities which included a photocopier. Three of the schools had libraries, School Three had converted one of the toilet blocks into a library, School Two was adding English books into the well established collection of Afrikaans books and School One had a limited collection of books in their library. All schools received daily newspapers. Each school had a small stock of 'non-OBE compliant' readers that were in storage.

Common to all four schools is the practice in the Intermediate Phase (from grade 4 onward) of a 'switch to' reading to learn as opposed to learning to read, as well as a 'switch' from learners being taught in one classroom by one class teacher who taught all the Learning Areas in the Foundation Phase to being

taught by a number of teachers, sometimes in the same physical classroom and sometimes in other classrooms, for various Learning Areas. According to the teachers in each school, learners spoke to each other in their respective Home Languages during breaks and when not directly engaged with the teacher whether the context was 'straight to English' or 'switch to English'. The children in the case study practiced their ways of knowing, doing and talking in the home language (Gee, 2000). In the classroom code switching took place in the case of the teachers that spoke the learners' Home Language. All of this suggests that the learners have limited exposure to the language in which they are taught (i.e. English as Home or First Additional Language).

Macdonald (1991) found that the task of learning to read becomes more challenging when the 'reading' language is not related to the learners' spoken language.

In all four classrooms it was evident that teachers are left on their own to select reading material for both the teaching and assessment of reading literacy. There appears to be little guidance from school management or district curriculum advisors regarding the teaching, learning or assessment of reading literacy. No apparent distinction was made regarding the suitability of materials or teaching methods between schools that implemented a 'straight to' or 'switch to' English policy. The resources ranged from a box of short reading cards (Teacher A) to a reader and OBE-Plus supplemented by a collection of ad hoc reading resources (Teacher B) to an incomplete set of books from a non-governmental organization (Teacher C) to copies of reading materials copied from a former Model C school (Teacher D). All schools, however, claimed to make use of daily newspapers.

The study demonstrates the effects of limited resources in schools. For example there are strict school policies regarding the limits on the photocopying of materials for reading or for reading assessment. There were severe restrictions regarding the length of texts that Teachers A, C and D could use when

constructing end of term summative reading literacy assessments. This placed constraints both on the length of texts as well as the kinds of questions that could be asked. Teachers spoke of 'scratching around' for 'suitable' (short) materials to use for the construction of summative assessments.

The schools have not been supplied with resources from the Provincial Education Department as there is an expectation that schools make individual procurements of books from the funding allocation made to each school. The funding allocation to schools is limited and there is an expectation that schools prioritize their procurement needs on an annual basis to meet curriculum needs incrementally. This has proven to be a difficult task for schools that were previously given resources, to a greater or lesser degree, under the apartheid education system. Schools were generally not accustomed to selecting, prioritizing or ordering books. The implementation of the new curriculum has seen a disregard for stocks of books that were supplied by the previous education system as they are considered to be 'non-OBE compliant'. The notion that books need to be OBE compliant appears to be pervasive in the schools in the study, which has exacerbated the shortage of reading material for learners. The scarcity of resources was also demonstrated by two of the teachers in the study who wanted to supplement reading materials through making copies of magazine articles (Teacher B) or materials from former Model C schools (Teacher D).

4.3.2 Preparation for the implementation of the new curriculum

Three of the grade 4 English teachers in the case study attended mass orientation training sessions provided by the Provincial Department of Education. However, Potenza and Monyokolo (1999) report that "from the outset, [of the implementation of the new curriculum] teacher development was not an integral part of curriculum planning" (1999, p. 236). Harley and Wedekind (2004) note that when the new curriculum was first implemented the Department of Education engaged in a cascade model of training which at best

consisted of a 'crash course' in the principles of outcomes-based education. Bloch (2009) observed that when the revised curriculum was introduced in 2003 the Department of Education engaged in the same flurry of cascaded courses and teacher training events. The training did not include the complexities of the socially constructed pedagogies or areas of content that would be expected for the successful implementation of the new curriculum.

One of the assumptions of the new curriculum is that teachers must have a good sense of what can be reasonably expected of learners at different ages and levels (DoE, 2003). Jansen (1999) argues in his paper *Why Outcomes-based Education Will Fail* that the new curriculum is based on "flawed assumptions about what happens inside schools, how classrooms are organized and what kinds of teachers exist within the system ... [and that the new curriculum requires] highly qualified teachers to make sense of such a challenge" (Jansen, 1999, p. 149). Christie (2008) argues that a change in teaching practice involves more than policy change, it involves teachers learning how to teach differently. The uneven quality of teacher training may explain the finding of the C2005 Review that teachers have a 'rather shallow understanding' of the new curriculum (cited in Harley & Wedekind, 2004).

The teachers in the case study showed a level of confidence in what they were teaching in terms of reading literacy even though they had not familiarized themselves with the content of the curriculum documents. Regarding the specific requirements for language for the new curriculum for the Intermediate Phase, Machet and Pretorius argue that:

> the period from Grade 4 to about Grade 7 is called the transitional stage because the emphasis shifts from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' ..., reading should focus more on reading with meaning ... children start dealing with more abstract concepts and become better at making inferences and deductions. (Machet & Pretorius, 2003, p. 46)

The shifts that have taken place in the curriculum do not appear to have become part of the overt consciousness of the teachers in this study. This has been demonstrated by the consistent reference to the 'curriculum documents'

when probed about the expected skills or outcomes for grade 4 learners. The curriculum documents appear to be available in the schools but teachers do not have individual copies. As was the case with the research findings of Potenza and Monyokolo (1999) the four teachers in this case study did not have easy access to policy documents as they were kept in the principal's office.

Teacher B relies on a commercially purchased set of 'OBE compliant' workbooks and a reader to guide her through the expectations of the curriculum. Teacher D appears to rely on the worksheets from a former Model C school to guide her through the expectations of the curriculum even though these were not designed for the English First Additional Language curriculum. None of the grade 4 teachers in the case study were sufficiently trained in the specifics of pedagogy, curriculum outcomes, learning outcomes or assessment standards for the new curriculum in the Learning Area English as Home Language or English as First Additional Language.

Research has shown that while teachers have embraced the rhetoric of outcomes-based education and the new curriculum, their classroom practice has generally not changed (Fleisch, 2008; Christie, 2008; Bloch, 2009). The data presented in this case study supports this research finding.

Furthermore, during the co-selection with district officials of schools for inclusion in this study, there was considerable confusion regarding the interpretation of the Language in Education Policy. As mentioned in chapter three, there was some discussion at the district office as to the existence of a situation/policy where there was even a possibility of 'straight to' or 'switch to' English as the LOLT. This demonstrates the lack of preparation of education officials for implementing and supporting the new curriculum, as the district officials were not aware of the rights of the parent body to opt for a school policy of 'straight to English' as the LOLT where the home language is not English. There was an obvious bias among the district officials, in this case study against the 'straight

to English' approach, hence the confusion over whether they would even find 'straight to English' sites.

Hendricks observed (2006, p. 46) that the district officials found the Language in Education policy to be "ambiguous and open to contradictory interpretations" which also added to the "teachers' difficulty in understanding and implementing policy".

4.3.3 Conceptualizations of the reading literate subject

The reading literate subject, as constituted by the teachers in the study, appears to be the learner who is able to read aloud fluently and to demonstrate correct pronunciation and punctuation. Reading literate subjects have mastered the skill of decoding and successful readers are identified as those who read substantially more books than their peers as well as, in the case of Teacher B, progressively more difficult texts. These teachers appear to take a transmission approach to reading literacy as a set of neutral autonomous skills that can be taught and tested in isolation (Smith, 1988; Weaver, 1990; Street, 1993). The skills are transferred from the teacher to the learner (Gipps, 1994). The "focus on fragmented, mechanical and lower orders skills" (Pahad, 1999, p. 262) means that the teachers do not teach reading strategies that will prepare learners to study other Learning Areas through their additional language (Assessment Statement 6). The teachers appear to have a narrow conception of reading literacy and how to teach learners to read, there is little evidence to show their understanding of what learners need to know and be able to do in order to read. The learners do not appear to have mastered basic reading skills and teacher ignorance about what reading entails, how it develops and good instructional practice can have devastating consequences on generations of learners.

Teachers A, C and D have instituted a system whereby learners are expected to read at home and have daily reading cards signed as evidence. Teacher A

(learners read from the commercially produced reading card system) and teacher C (learners follow the activities in the learner workbook provided by the NGO) do not supervise classroom reading activities. For these teachers the grade 4 learner is already a reader who does not need guidance in the development of reading strategies. The skills that are being taught in the reading literacy curriculum based on an autonomous model, as described in the case study, represent a small proportion of the skills and reading strategies that learners need in order to make meaning in the world. The Assessment Statements for grade 4 clearly articulate the progression from learning to read in the Foundation Phase to reading to learn in the Intermediate Phase and these have to been ignored by the four teachers.

Freebody and Luke (1990), in their four resources model, (described in detail in chapter two), consider the literate subject to have a range of competencies which begin with code breaking. Gee (2003), and Stein and Janks (2007) consider the reading literate subject to have a repertoire of knowledge and skills that are applied, situated and practiced. Street (1993) makes a distinction between the autonomous code breaking view of the literate subject and the ideological view of the literate subject where consideration is given to how literacy is used repeatedly in everyday life. Heath (1993) and Hymes (1996) support this view which has become known as 'situated practice'. This definition is in accordance with one of the stated learning outcomes for literacy in the curriculum policy document that "the learner is able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts" (DoE, 2002a, p. 20). The teachers have constituted the reading literate subject as a code breaker and have not considered strategies that enable learners to embrace the other roles of a reader such as reading and viewing for information or responding critically to texts.

The teachers appear to consider reading literacy as situated in school practice and do not actively encourage reading in 'everyday life' (Heath, 1993; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). Freebody and Luke suggest that "... 'failure' at literacy isn't

about individual skill deficits [but] about access to apprenticeship into institutions and resources, discourses and texts" (1990, p. 5). The curriculum clearly states that learners should read for a variety of purposes, including pleasure (DoE, 2002a and c). The institution of the Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) time is perhaps one of the strategies that the Department has introduced to help teachers introduce time for reading for pleasure as seen in Teacher C's class. Teacher B makes use of the fifteen minutes she has during 'registration' with her class at the beginning of each day for the learners to select and read texts of their choice.

The implication of the constitution of a reader as a learner who is "able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts" (DoE, 2002a, p. 20) is that reading becomes part of 'everyday life'. Janks argues that if teachers and parents are not readers themselves it would be difficult for them to convince learners "that reading literacy matters both in and out of school" (2010, p. xiii). Perhaps by encouraging the parents to take their children to join the local libraries Teachers A and D are trying to encourage 'out of school' reading literacy practices.

4.3.4 The assessment of reading literacy

In the four classrooms there is an apparent disjuncture between the teaching materials and reading literacy instruction that happens in the classroom and the texts used for assessment. Teachers A, C and D do not keep formative assessment records as they 'just know' how the learners are performing. The teachers appear to gain insight into the decoding ability of learners by listening to learners reading aloud. The view of the reader as decoder has also influenced the teachers' choice of assessment texts as learners are, with very few exceptions, expected to merely decode text as opposed to make meaning from text. Teachers 'scratched around' for texts that could be used in the assessments which were decontextualised and did not form part of an integrated learning programme. Airasian and Abrams (as cited by Kanjee, 2009) argue that good classroom assessment is characterized by learners being

assessed on content they were taught and the application of assessment questions based on stated curriculum objectives. The teachers' entrenched constitution of the reading literate subject as merely a decoder of text has restricted the implementation of aspects of the new curriculum. There appears to be an abdication of responsibility for identifying and teaching explicitly stated reading skills and strategies.

Each reading literacy assessment, with the exception of the first assessment for Teacher B, formed part of a Language assessment, in other words it formed a component of a larger test. The inclusion of the reading literacy into a larger language assessment has the effect of minimizing the pivotal role that reading for meaning plays in grade 4.

The genre, length and level of texts selected for the assessment of reading literacy by the teachers appeared to be arbitrary as opposed to being selected in a purposeful manner. Teacher A made use of one information and one imaginative text, Teachers B and C only made use of information texts and Teacher D only used imaginative texts. The curricula for English as Home and First Additional Language require a wide variety of genres which is not provided in the summative assessments used by these teachers. Learners need to become familiar with both narrative and expository texts, to progress from concrete to more abstract ideas (Harp & Brewer, 2005).

There was no consistency between the length/number of words in the texts selected for the 'straight to English' assessments; the difference between the number of words for the four assessments ranged from 110 to 133 (Teacher A) and 309 to 333 (Teacher B) in the first and second assessments respectively. There was also no correlation between the length/number of words in the texts selected for the 'switch to English' assessments; the difference between the number of words for the four assessments ranged from 51 to 261 (Teacher C) and 130 to 179 (Teacher D) in the first and second assessments respectively. There does not appear to be an expectation by the teachers that grade 4 learners read at identified levels of text in terms of length of text or grade

appropriateness. The policy documents acknowledge that teachers are expected to have a good sense of what can reasonably be expected of learners at different ages and levels (DoE, 2003).

As illustrated by the table below, the types of questions favoured by the teachers were one sentence constructed learner responses (32), followed by multiple choice questions (7) and one question type each from one word answers and answers consisting of more than one sentence. The format of one sentence learner constructed response restricts the learners' opportunity to respond and defend the response provided, thereby restricting the learners' opportunity to engage critically with the text.

Table 4.13: Question types in case study assessments

Grade 4 Teacher Texts		Multiple choice questions	One word answers	One sentence answers	Answers consisting of more than one sentence	Other
Teacher A	Site 1, test 1 Just One Bite			5		
	Site 1, test 2 The King of Frogs			6		
Teacher B	Site 2, test 1 Tarantula	7				
	Site 2, test 2 Cape Town Minstrel Carnival		1	5	1	
Teacher C	Site 3, test 1 Me			5		
	Site 3, test 2 A Comprehension and exercise			6		
Teacher D	Site 4, test 1 Sello meets an Alien					6
	Site 4, test 2 The Whistling Turtle			5		
		7	1	32	1	6

In Department of Education policy documents there is an expectation that learners will progress and engage with higher order thinking skills (DoE, 2002a). However, as indicated in the table below, the assessment tasks all fell in the range of level one of Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) which consists of the ability to focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information and the ability to make straightforward inferences from the text. Although the teachers said that they assessed the learners' oral decoding reading skills continuously, the summative assessments given at the end of the term consisted of texts which the learners were expected to read and respond to in writing. The assessments focused on reading strategies other than oral decoding which included focusing on and retrieving explicitly stated information and making straightforward inferences from the text. Data from the interviews suggest that these skills and strategies were not taught explicitly in the classroom setting.

Table 4.14: Level of cognitive demand in case study assessments

Cognitive level according to Bloom's taxonomy		Level 1		Level 2		Total
Category of assessment tasks Grade 4 teacher data		Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information	Make straight-forward inference	Interpret and integrate ideas and informa-tion	Examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements	
Teacher A	Site 1, test 1 Just One Bite	Questions 1 and 2	Questions 3, 4 and 5	-	-	5
	Site 1, test 2 The King of Frogs	Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4	Questions 5 and 6	-	-	6
Teacher B	Site, 2 test 1 Tarantula	Questions 6, 7, 9 and 11	Questions 8, 10 and 12	-	-	7
	Site 2, test 2 Cape Town Minstrel Carnival	Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4	Questions 5 and 6	-	-	6
Teacher C	Site 3, test 1 Me	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5		-	-	5
	Site 3, test 2 A Comprehension and exercise	Questions 1, 2, 3 and 5	Question 4	-	-	5
Teacher D	Site 4, test 1 Sello meets an Alien	N/A	N/A	-	-	N/A
	Site 4, test 2 The Whistling Turtle	Questions 2, 3 and 4	Questions 1 and 5	-	-	5
Totals		26	13			39

The assessment tasks have not required learners to engage with the higher order thinking skills necessary to interpret and integrate ideas and information or to examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements expected of learners in the Learning Outcomes contained in the curriculum documents. As mentioned in section 2.3.5 Kress (1997) and Johnson (2003) state that if the

"assessment of reading continues to emphasize general, factual and dictionary type questions about written texts many of the children who score well on these assessments might know the literal meaning of the text but cannot really read" (2003, p. 10). The teaching and assessment of reading literacy in the case study classrooms does not encourage the learners to participate in the meanings of texts.

In the following chapter data from an international assessment of grade 4 reading literacy (PIRLS 2006) are presented and analyzed.

CHAPTER FIVE – PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF PIRLS 2006 ASSESSMENT AND SAMPLES AVAILABLE IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Analysis of the conceptualization and assessment of Reading Literacy in PIRLS 2006
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5.3.1 Text, mechanical reading demands
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5.4 Comparison between PIRLS 2006 texts and tasks and those used by the four local grade 4 teachers

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze the construction of reading literacy in PIRLS 2006, an international assessment of grade 4 reading literacy. This is followed by the presentation and analysis of four complete examples of the texts and tasks available in the public domain from the PIRLS 2006 assessment. The chapter concludes with a comparison of these texts and tasks with those used by the four grade 4 teachers whose teaching and assessment of reading literacy was presented and analyzed in chapter four.

5.2 Analysis of the conceptualization and assessment of Reading Literacy in PIRLS 2006

In analyzing how grade 4 reading literacy is constituted and assessed in PIRLS 2006 I make use of the following documents:

PIRLS 2006 Assessment framework specifications. Mullis, I.V.S., Kennedy, A.M., Martin, M.O., & Sainsbury, M. (2006).

PIRLS 2006 Technical report. Martin, M.O., Mullis, I.V.S., & Kennedy. A.M. (Eds.) (2006).

PIRLS 2006 International Report: IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study in Primary Schools in 40 Countries. Mullis, I.V.S, Martin. M.O., Kennedy, A.M. & Foy. P. (2007).

5.2.1 Conceptualizations of Reading Literacy

Reading literacy is conceptualized in PIRLS 2006 as "the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment" (Mullis, Kennedy, Martin & Sainsbury, 2006, p. 3).

This conceptualization is broad and reflects aspects of various understandings of reading literacy mentioned in the literature review (chapter two). Implicit in the definition is a reading literate subject who has the ability to decode text in order to "understand and use a number of written language forms" (Mullis et al., 2006, p. 3). Stanovich (1986) argues that fluent readers recognize words (and the letters with which they are constructed) automatically which frees up the processing capacity of the brain to focus on comprehension (see section 2.2.1). Reading literacy as defined by PIRLS 2006 is viewed as a constructive and interactive process, a view that is supported by researchers who conceive of

reading literacy as 'applied, practiced and situated' (e.g. Street, 1993; Heath, 1993; Hymes, 1996; Gee, 1996; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). The understanding of readers as constructors of meaning is similar to that in Freebody and Luke's (1990) four resources model in which "the reader is expected to draw on his or her life experiences to add a layer of meaning that is not explicit in the text but which forms part of the meaning of the context of the text" (1990, p. 5).

5.2.2 Selection of texts

The texts included in PIRLS 2006 serve two broad purposes: namely to assess learners' ability to read for information referred to as 'informational texts' and their ability to read for pleasure referred to as 'literary texts' (Mullis et al., 2006, p. 18). The test designers attempt to include texts that represent authentic reading experiences that participants are likely to encounter in school or in everyday life (Mullis et al., 2006).

The main genre of literary texts used in PIRLS 2006 is narrative fiction in which "events, actions and consequences ... allow the reader to experience vicariously and reflect upon situations that, although they may be fantasy, illuminate those in real life" (Mullis et al., 2006, p. 19). The texts are supported visually through illustrations, sketches, diagrams, tables and photographs which are components that researchers have found to be of use in making meaning from authentic texts (Kress, 1997; Cope & Kalantzis, 2001; Jewitt & Kress, 2003). Readers are given the opportunity to explore situations and feelings that they may not have encountered yet. These texts are accompanied by questions that address theme, plot, events, characters and setting.

In reading texts for information the reader is expected to engage with aspects of the real universe as opposed to imagined worlds. The 'informational texts' included in PIRLS tests may or may not have headings or other types of textual organizers, present ideas in chronological or logical order and need not be in the form of continuous text. The texts may include brochures, lists, diagrams,

charts and graphs (Mullis et al., 2006). These texts are accompanied by questions that are about the information contained therein.

The following guidelines have been paraphrased from the PIRLS 2006 Assessment Framework (Mullis et al., 2006, p. 42) regarding the selection of reading passages for the assessment.

1. Reading passages must be typical of those read by students in their everyday experiences.
2. The potential for cultural bias must be considered and texts used must range as widely as possible across nations and cultures. No country or nation should be over-represented in the assessment texts.
3. Texts that depend heavily on culture-specific knowledge should be excluded.
4. The topic and theme must be grade appropriate.
5. Fairness and sensitivity must be given to gender, racial, ethnic and religious considerations as well as the nature and level of linguistic features and density of information.
6. Texts will be no longer than 1 000 words.
7. The Fry Readability Index must be considered for grade appropriate level of reading. (Mullis et al., 2006, p. 42)

These guidelines make certain assumptions regarding the reading literacy practices of learners. It is assumed that learners have access to texts both in and out of school. It is also assumed that learners read extended texts (consisting of at least 1 000 words) as part of their everyday experience.

5.2.3 Assessment of reading processes

According to the PIRLS 2006 Technical Report (Martin et al., 2007 p. 3) there are four explicit processes of reading comprehension that inform the assessment, namely:

1. Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information
2. Make straightforward inferences
3. Interpret and integrate ideas and information
4. Examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements

These four processes are used in reading literary or information texts. An explanation and examples of reading tasks that would be considered appropriate in the assessment of the particular comprehension process under review are provided below (paraphrased from Mullis et al., 2006: chapter 2 *PIRLS 2006 Assessment Framework and Specifications):*

1. Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information

The successful retrieval of information involves an automatic understanding of the text and typically remains at the sentence or phrase level. Reading tasks would include:

- Identifying information that is relevant to the specific goal of reading
- Looking for specific ideas
- Searching for definitions of words or phrases
- Identifying the setting of a story (e.g. time, place)
- Finding the topic sentence or main idea (when explicitly stated)

2. Make straightforward inferences

Readers construct meaning from texts by making inferences about ideas or information not explicitly stated. The ideas may be explicitly stated but the connection between them is not. The reader would focus on more than just the sentence or phrase level of meaning. Reading tasks would include:

- Inferring that one event caused another event
- Concluding what is the main point made by a series of arguments
- Determining the referent of a pronoun
- Identifying generalizations made in the text
- Describing the relationship between two characters

3. Interpret and integrate ideas and information

Meaning is constructed through interpreting and integrating ideas and information which is likely to vary among readers depending on the experiences and knowledge they bring to the task. Reading tasks would include:

- Discerning the overall message and theme of a text
- Considering an alternative to actions of characters
- Comparing and contrasting text information
- Inferring a story's mood or tone
- Interpreting a real-world application of text information

4. Examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements

There is a shift in focus from constructing meaning to critically considering the text itself. Reading tasks would include:

- Evaluating the likelihood that the events described could really happen
- Describing how the author devised a surprise ending
- Judging the completeness or clarity of information in the text
- Determining an author's perspective on the central topic. (Paraphrased from Mullis et al., 2006, chapter 2, pp. 11-20)

These four reading processes are similar to the quadrants in the four resources model of literacy (Luke & Freebody, 1999) described in section 2.2.6. The following table illustrates the similarities.

Table 5.1: Similarities between the four reading processes assessed in PIRLS 2006 and the four roles of the reader in the four resources model

Four reading processes PIRLS 2006	Four Resources model Luke and Freebody (1999)
Readers focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information Successful retrieval requires an automatic understanding of the text	Readers break the code of text
Readers make straightforward inferences They make inferences about ideas or information not stated explicitly in the text	Readers participate in the meaning of text
Readers interpret and integrate ideas and information	Readers have functional use of texts
Readers examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements	Readers are critical users of text

5.2.4 Critique of PIRLS 2006

My decision to use PIRLS 2006 in this research was based largely on the value placed on it by highly regarded South Africa education researchers (e.g. Fleisch, 2008; Howie, 2000 and Bloch, 2009) and the widespread references to it in the media. In the following sections I raise some concerns about the assessment.

5.2.4.1 Equitable assessment practice

Whilst there is a high degree of alignment across the statements on reading literacy in the South African curriculum documents, PIRLS 2006 and the Four Resources model of Luke and Freebody (1999) the question of whether the assessment is equitable (Gee, 2003 in section 2.3.5) needs to be considered. I would argue that the majority of learners participating in PIRLS 2006 had not had equivalent experiences "in reading specific types of texts in specific sorts of

ways" (Gee, 2003, p 30). The ways in which texts are read is dependent not only on decoding skills but also on personal schema and experience of the content and genre. For example, the personal schema that different individual, families and communities have in relation to an activity as apparently simple as providing a loaf of bread, differ from context to context. Various contexts contribute to different schemas associated with providing a loaf of bread depending on who (roles and responsibilities), how (budget considerations, transport requirements), when (weekly/daily, morning/lunch/supper) and what (home baked/bought from bakery/store) is involved. The schema would include 'sensual memories' such as whether the bread was warm and smelled a certain way, the texture of the bread and the amount of bread available for consumption.

The reference to a 'hallway' in one of the PIRLS texts (PIRLS 4, *An Unbelievable Night)* would require some knowledge or experience of homes built with a 'hallway' or 'landing'. The opportunity to have knowledge or experience about a hallway would not be equitable across all participants taking the PIRLS, 2006 assessment.

It is also unlikely that participants would have had equivalent experiences to learn in terms of 'active and critical learning' as the approaches to reading literacy are varied across South Africa as well as in the 40 participating countries.

Equivalent experiences to learn in specific social languages such as the language of scientific experiments, social letters, business letters and expository writing are unlikely to have been achieved across South Africa.

It could also be argued that participants would not have had the same opportunities to learn embodied experiences in given semiotic domains and thus not have had the opportunity to situate meanings for words and phrases in that domain. For example a learner who reads the text *Antarctica: Land of Ice*

(PIRLS 1) *or Searching for Food* (PIRLS 2) who has had experience in reading such texts or having had experiences related to 'wood lice', 'wormeries' and the conditions of Antarctica, compared to the learner who reads the same text without having had similar experience has not had an equivalent opportunity to situate meanings.

In an attempt to be culturally fair or neutral the various texts selected in the samples for inclusion in PIRLS, 2006 (that are available in the public domain) are comparable both in length and in readability as discussed in section 5.3.1. However, there are examples of what is arguably culturally biased knowledge (Shohamy, 2004) in references like 'hallway', 'telephone stand', 'frozen to the spot' and 'wide as saucers' in the text *An Unbelievable Night* (artefact PIRLS, 4).

The inclusion of 'literary' and 'information' texts in PIRLS 2006 places value on both kinds of text which the test designers believe are valued in all communities. However, research conducted by Heath (1993), in the Roadville and Trackton communities of the Piedmont Carolinas revealed that genres of oral and print texts are valued very differently in different communities. Where a community has little regard for a particular text type, which is then included in an assessment, learners are unlikely to have an equitable opportunity to learn.

It is not possible to 'read texts in general' (Gee, 2003) and it follows that it is also not possible to answer questions about texts 'in general'. Allowances should be made in assessments for readers to articulate how they have made meaning from both the text and their practices as they relate to the text. In this way new ways of making meaning can be enhanced through the assimilation of new knowledge gained from the text and the authentic social and cultural experience and practice of the reader.

5.2.4.2 The fourth grade slump

The 'fourth grade slump' described by Chall (1967) and Gee (2003) (see section 2.3.5), is an internationally recognized phenomenon which raises questions about the selection of grade 4 as the optimal time to assess reading literacy. Learners who struggle in grade 4 are often poor readers who are "[being described as]...poor comprehenders, irrespective of their decoding skills' (Pretorius, 2000, p. 34). If the first three years of school are largely devoted to teaching learners how to read and then from the fourth grade onwards learners begin the transition to reading to learn one must ask whether grade 5, 6 or 7 might not be more appropriate than grade 4 for assessing learners' reading to learn skills.

As stated in section 3.2, South Africa has a unique language policy which allows schools to follow individual policies regarding the LOLT. This translates into a variety of applications of LOLT scenarios by the time a learner reaches grade 4. One scenario is where learners are taught in English as Home Language from Grade 1 onwards and their home language is English. Another scenario is where learners are taught in isiXhosa as LOLT from grade 1 to grade 3 and their home language is isiXhosa and from grade 4 onwards the LOLT is English. Another scenario is where learners are taught in isiXhosa as LOLT from grade 1 to grade 3 and their home language is not isiXhosa but perhaps isiZulu and from grade 4 onwards the LOLT is English. Hence learners who wrote the PIRLS 2006 assessment may have had a wide variety of language experiences. Thus South African learners participating in PIRLS 2006 face not only the internationally recognized phenomenon of the fourth grade slump but also unequal experiences with print resulting from the enacted language policy.

5.2.5 PIRLS 2006 Assessment Design

The PIRLS 2006 assessment consisted of ten texts in total; five were texts for the purpose of literary experience (L1-L5) and five for the purpose of acquiring and using information (I1- I5). Thirteen variations of student booklets were prepared, each consisting of two texts, one literary and one information, with accompanying tasks. The assessment used a matrix sampling technique, in other words materials that assess reading for literary experience and reading to acquire and use information were given equal weight. The reason provided in the PIRLS 2006 Assessment Framework and Specifications is that "both types of reading are important at this age" (Mullis, 2006, p. 17).

5.2.6 Reading Comprehension Tasks

The PIRLS 2006 assessment consisted of two question formats namely, multiple choice and constructed response. The weighting of the answers required were different for each format. The answers to the multiple choice questions were allocated one mark each whereas, depending on the level of complexity, the answers to the constructed response questions were allocated one, two or three marks. The questions were designed so that up to half were multiple choice whereas the rest were of the constructed response type.

In all assessment tasks an attempt was made to design developmentally appropriate questions for students in their fourth year of formal schooling. The assessment designers state that they tried to write clearly and concisely to minimize the reading load of the question.

5.2.6.1 Multiple choice questions

The multiple choice questions consisted of two parts namely, the stem, which presents a specific problem to the test taker, and a list of typical solutions one of which is correct and the others distractors. In the case of PIRLS 2006 the test

takers were presented with three distractors per question and one correct option per question. Mullis et al. (2006) note that a limitation of this form of question is that it does not allow the test taker an opportunity to explain or provide supporting statements for their choice of answer.

5.2.6.2 Constructed response questions

These questions were designed to provide the test taker with an opportunity to support answers and/or explanations. This question technique is consistent with the conceptualization of reading literacy which underpins the PIRLS framework because it assesses the test taker's ability to construct meaning "through an interaction between the reader, the text, and the context of the reading task" (Mullis et al., 2006, p. 43).

5.2.6.3 Design and proportion of multiple choice and constructed response questions

In the PIRLS 2006 assessment up to half the total number of marks were allocated to answers of multiple choice questions. The decision to make use of a multiple choice type of question or a constructed response type question was based on the reading skill/process being assessed. Each test consisted of an average of 15 marks; about half from multiple choice questions which assessed the first level of cognitive demand, and the rest of the marks from constructed response questions which assessed the second level of cognitive demand. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development (discussed in section 3.4.4) questions from the first two levels of Bloom's Taxonomy would be appropriate as grade 4 learners would be considered to operate at the 'concrete operational stage' of development and would typically start to make the transition to the formal operational stage (the development of abstract thought) during adolescence.

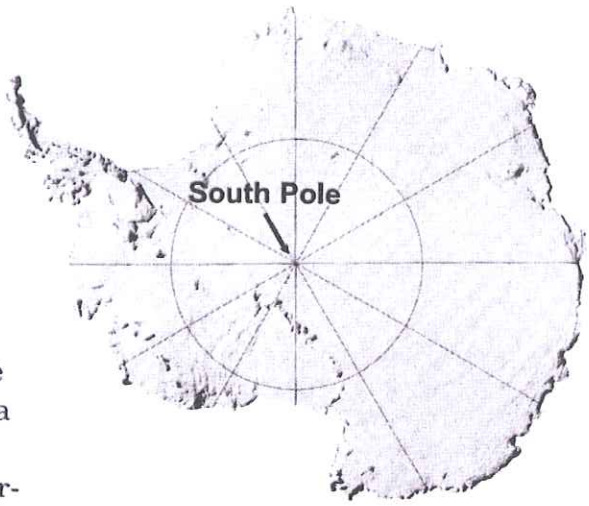
Regarding the design of the PIRLS 2006 assessment, Mullis et al. (2006, p. 44) state that in compiling thirteen tests each containing a different combination of a literary and information text, the aim was to produce at least 15 marks in total per text, consisting of approximately seven multiple choice items (1 mark each) and two or three short constructed response items (1 or 2 marks each), and one extended constructed response item (3 marks).

5.3 Presentation and Analysis of PIRLS 2006 data

There are four complete samples of texts and tasks used in the PIRLS 2006 assessment that are available in the public domain: two are fiction texts and two are information texts. They are presented in the following order: two information texts, *Antarctica: Land of Ice* (PIRLS 1) and *Searching for Food* (PIRLS 2) and two literary texts, *Little Lump of Clay* (PIRLS 3) and *An Unbelievable Night* (PIRLS 4). The presentation of the four texts and tasks is followed by an analysis of the test design and layout and of the mechanical reading demands of the four tests.

Antarctica: Land of Ice

Introducing Antarctica



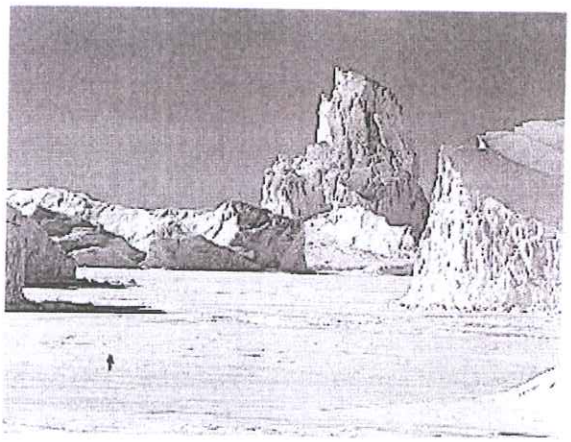
A Map of Antarctica

What is Antarctica?

Antarctica is a continent that is right at the south of the planet. (If you try to find it on a globe, you will see that it is at the bottom.)

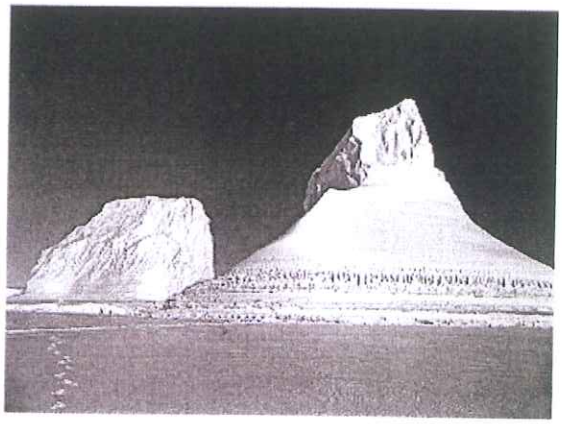
It takes up one-tenth of the Earth's surface and is covered with a blanket of ice that can be as thick as 1,500 metres or more. The South Pole is right in the middle of Antarctica.

Antarctica is the coldest continent, as well as the driest, the highest and the windiest. Very few people live there all year round. Scientists stay there for short periods, living in specially built research stations.



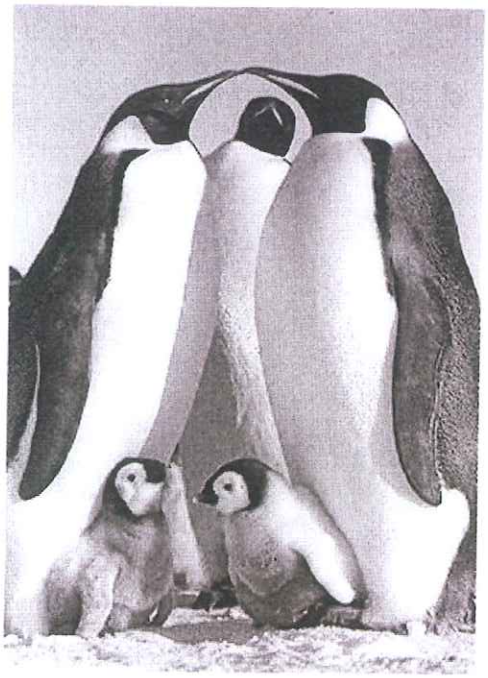
Summer in Antarctica is between October and March. During this time there is non-stop daylight. In winter, April to September, the opposite happens and Antarctica is plunged into six months of constant darkness.

PIRLS 16



In Antarctica, it is colder than you can possibly imagine, even in the summer! The South Pole is the coldest part of Antarctica. The average temperature for January, the middle of the summer, is minus 28 degrees Celsius (written as -28°C). Minus means colder than the freezing point, which is 0°C.

In the winter, April to September, the average temperature at the South Pole can be as cold as -89°C. When it is that cold, a mug of boiling water thrown in the air would freeze before it hit the ice. Sometimes the scientists have to use fridges to keep their samples warm!



Penguins in Antarctica

There are more penguins in the Antarctic than any other bird.

They cannot fly but use their short wings as swimming flippers. They are superb swimmers. On land, they waddle upright or move in short hops.

Penguins have many feathers that overlap each other. These, together with woolly down feathers and a thick layer of fat, keep out the cold air, wind and water. For extra warmth, penguins huddle together in groups.

A Letter from Antarctica

Sara Wheeler is one of the scientists working in Antarctica. By reading her letter to her nephew Daniel, you can learn more about her Antarctic experience.



Antarctica

Friday, 9 December

Dear Daniel,

Here is the letter I promised to write to you from Antarctica, and a photograph. Imagine how excited I am to be here at last, following in the footsteps of so many famous explorers. It is very different from the world I am used to.

There is nothing fresh down here—and no supermarkets—so we have to eat a lot of dried, tinned or frozen food (it doesn't have to be put in the freezer—you can just leave it outside). We cook on small gas stoves, which take much longer than cookers at home. Yesterday I made noodles with tomato paste and vegetables out of a tin, followed by dried strawberries that tasted like cardboard.

I miss fresh apples and oranges—I wish you could send me some!

Love from Sara

PIRLS d

Questions Antarctica: Land of Ice

1. Where can you find Antarctica on a globe?



_____

2. Antarctica is the coldest place on Earth. What other records does it hold?

(A) driest and cloudiest

* (B) wettest and windiest

(C) windiest and driest

(D) cloudiest and highest

3. What is the coldest part of Antarctica?



_____

* Correct answer

PIRLS 1e

4. Think about what the article says about Antarctica. Give **two** reasons why most people who visit Antarctica choose **not** to go there between April and September.

1 1. _____

_____

1 2. _____

_____

5. Why does the article tell you that 'a mug of boiling water thrown in the air would freeze before it hit the ice'?

(A) to tell you how hot the water is in Antarctica

(B) to show you what they drink in Antarctica

(C) to tell you about scientists' jobs in Antarctica

* (D) to show you how cold it is in Antarctica

6. According to the article, what do penguins use their wings for?

(A) flying

* (B) swimming

(C) keeping chicks warm

(D) walking upright

* **Correct answer**

PIRLS If

7. Give **three** ways penguins are able to keep warm in Antarctica.



1. _____



2. _____



3. _____

8. What are **two** things you learn about food in Antarctica from Sara's letter?



1. _____

_____



2. _____

_____

PIRLS 1 g

9. Think about whether you would like to visit Antarctica. Use what you have read in both *Introducing Antarctica* and *A Letter from Antarctica* to explain why you would or would not like to visit.

2

10. Which section of the article tells you how thick the ice is in Antarctica?

* (A) What is Antarctica?
(B) The Weather in Antarctica
(C) Penguins in Antarctica
(D) A Letter from Antarctica

* Correct answer

PIRLS 1h

11. In this article, there are two different ways of finding out about Antarctica:

- *Introducing Antarctica*
- *A Letter from Antarctica*

Which of these kinds of information do you find more interesting, and why?

1

_____

_____

The letter from Sara Wheeler is adapted from *Letters from Antarctica*, by Sara Wheeler, 1997. Reproduced by permission of Hodder and Stoughton Ltd. Photographs © Guillaume Dargaud

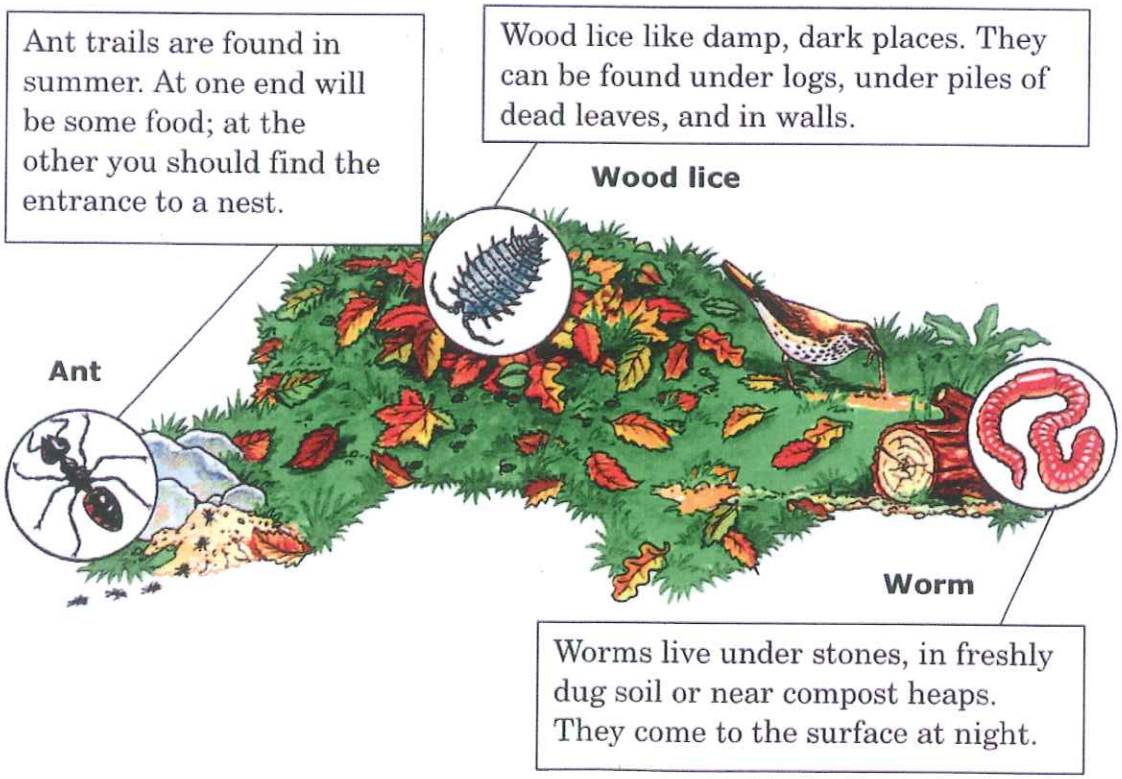
PIRLS 2a

Searching for Food

Here are three projects about the things small creatures eat and the ways they search for food. First you need to find actual ants, wood lice, and worms. Treat them carefully and make sure you put them back where you found them after you have finished studying them.

- Follow an Ant Trail
- Study Wood Lice
- Make a Wormery

Where to find ants, wood lice, and worms





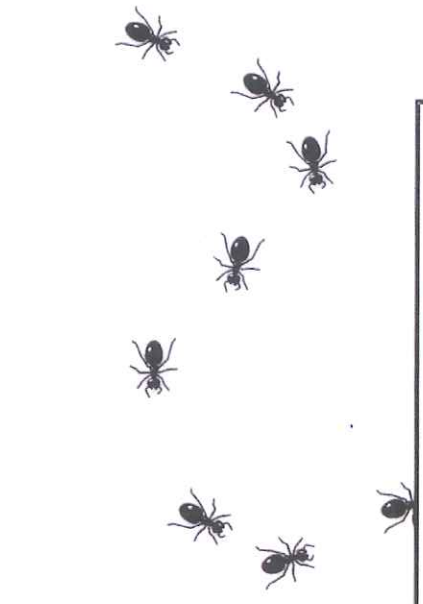
Follow an Ant Trail

Ants live together in nests. When an ant finds some food it makes a trail for others to follow. To do this experiment you will need to find an ants' nest. You will also need the following materials: a sheet of paper, a small piece of apple, a handful of soil.

1. Put the piece of apple on the sheet of paper and lay the paper close to an ants' nest. Wait for some ants to find the apple. They should all follow the same trail.

2. Move the apple. Do the ants go straight to it?

3. Now sprinkle soil on the paper to cover the trail.The ants should scurry around for a while. Do they make a new trail?



What happens?

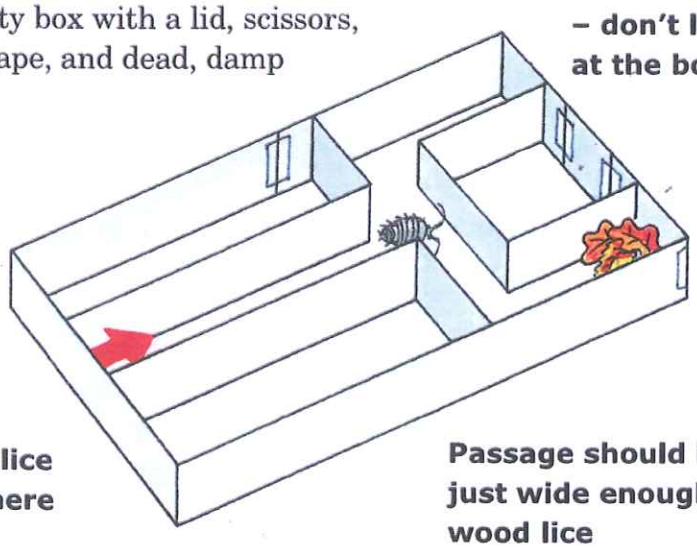
Even after the food has moved, the ants still follow the old trail until a new one is laid.

Why?

Once an ant has found some food, it produces special chemicals that leave a scent trail. Other ants from the nest use their antennae, or feelers, to sense this scent.

Study Wood Lice

Wood lice have sensitive antennae. Make this box, then collect six wood lice in a container. Watch how they find their way when you put them in a box. You will need: a small empty box with a lid, scissors, adhesive tape, and dead, damp leaves.



1. Use the lid to make three long strips for making the passages in the picture.

2. Let your wood lice walk along the passage one at a time. When they reach the end of the passage, some will turn left and some will turn right.

3. Put damp leaves in the right hand side of the box. Now let the wood lice walk through the box again. Which way do they go?

What happens?

The wood lice will turn to the right toward the food.

Why?

The wood lice can sense the food with their antennae. They use them to find the leaves.

Make a Wormery

Worms are hard to study because they don't like the light. As soon as they sense it, they wriggle away, trying to find a dark place again. To see how worms live and feed, make a wormery like the one shown here. Then find two or three worms to put in it. It is important to remember not to pull on the worms or you may hurt them. They are covered with bristles that grip the soil tightly.

You will need

- Shoe box
- Adhesive tape
- Pen
- Scissors
- Large plastic bottle
- 1 mug of sand
- 3 mugs of damp, crumbly soil
- Small cubes of onion and potato

1. Tape one side of the shoe box lid to the box, so that it opens like a door. Poke holes in the top of the box with the pen to let air and light into the wormery.

2. Cut the top off the bottle. Then fill it with loosely packed layers of soil and sand. Scatter potato and onion on the surface.

3. Gently drop in your worms and stand the bottle in the box and close the door. Leave it outside in a cool, dry place for four days.

4. After four days, go back and look at the bottle. What is different about the sand and soil?

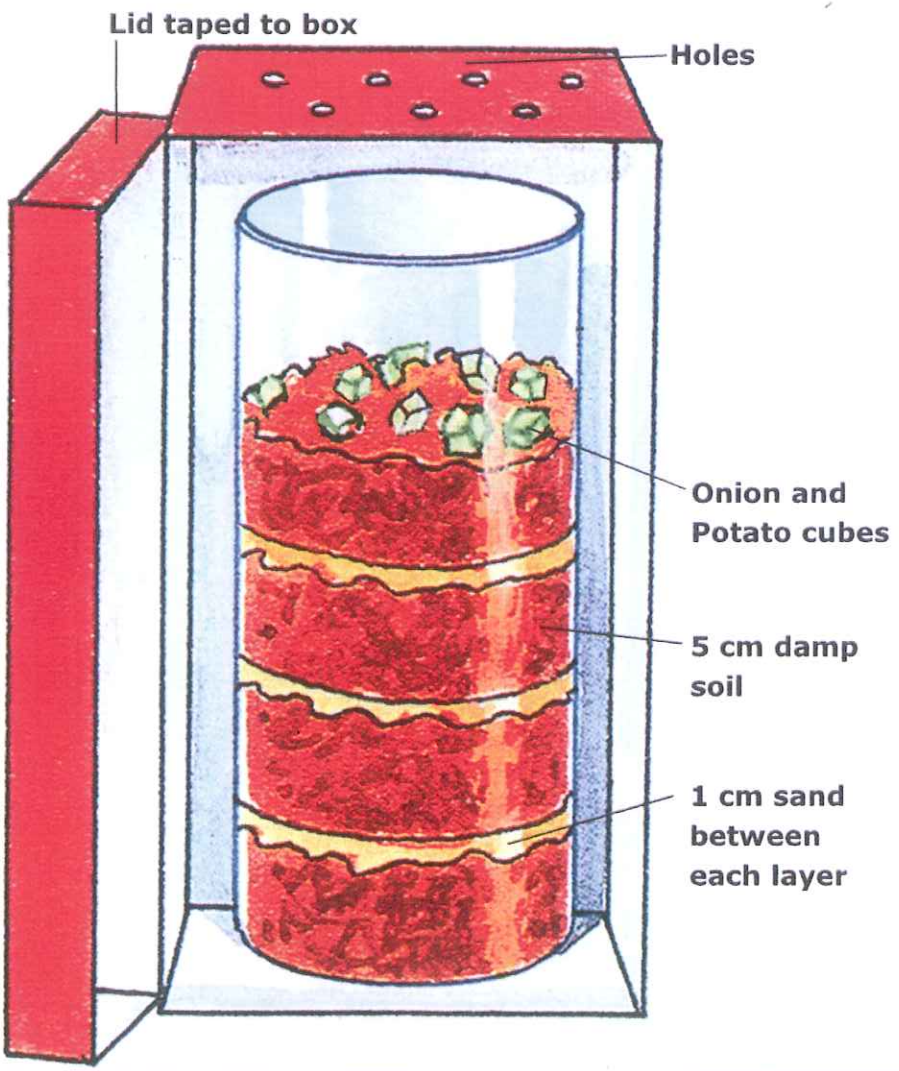
Donít forget: when you've finished with this project, put the worms back where you found them.

What happens?

After four days, the layers of sand and soil will have been mixed together.

Why?

The worms mix the sand and soil by coming to the surface to eat the food and then tunnelling underground to get away from the light.



From *Animal watching in the Usborne Big Book of Experiments* published in 1996 by Usborne Publishing Ltd., London. An effort has been made to obtain copyright permission.

PIRLS 2f

Questions: Searching for Food

1. What is the main purpose of the article?

   * (A) to describe different projects you can do
   (B) to give information about ant trails
   (C) to show what small creatures look like
   (D) to explain what worms eat

2. What is one thing you should do to take care of the creatures?

   (A) search for them under rocks and stones
   (B) find out all about them
   (C) collect as many as you can
   * (D) put them back where you found them

* Correct answer

PIRLS 2q

Questions 3-5 are about the Ant Project

3. Why do you put the apple by the ants' nest?

   (A) to block the ants' trail

   * (B) so the ants will make a trail

   (C) to confuse the ants

   (D) so the ants will scurry around

4. Once an ant finds some food, how do the other ants from the nest find it too?

   (A) They watch the first ant and follow it.

   (B) They run around until they find the food.

   * (C) They sense the scent left by the first ant.

   (D) They smell the food on the piece of paper.

5. Why do the ants scurry around after you've sprinkled the soil?

   (1) _____

   _____

* Correct answer

PIRLS 2h

6. How do pill bugs find the food?

(A) They walk down the passage.

★ (B) They sense food with their antennae.

(C) They follow the scent trail.

(D) They see the food in the dark.

7. Look at the picture for Study Pill Bugs. How does the picture help you to know what to do in the experiment?

2

_____

_____

_____

_____

★ Correct answer

PIRLS 21

8. Why do you need to let your pill bugs walk along the passage before putting the leaves in the box?

   (A) To see if they can learn the maze.

* (B) To see what they do when there is no food.

   (C) To see if the box is put together correctly.

   (D) To see which ones turn which way.

9. In Step 3 of the pill bugs project, what do you think will happen if you move the damp leaves to the left corner of the box?

1 _____

_____

10. What is similar in the way ants and pill bugs find their food?

1 _____

_____

* Correct answer

PIRLS 2j

11. Number the steps in the order you would follow to make a wormery. The first one has been done for you.

_____ put the bottle in the shoebox

__1__ poke holes in the top of the shoebox

_____ drop in the worms

_____ add potato and onion

_____ fill the bottle with soil and sand

12. Explain why it is important to put layers of soil and sand in the bottle.



_____

_____

PIRLS 2k

13. Explain why putting the onion and potato on the surface of the soil is important to the wormery project.

2

14. Each project has *What happens* and *Why* in a separate box. What is the purpose of these boxes?

(A) to explain the steps of the project

(B) to tell you what you need for the project

(C) to tell you what to do when you have finished

* (D) to explain what you have seen

15. Which of the three projects did you find the most interesting? Use information from the text to explain your answer.

2

* Correct answer

PIRLS 3a

The Little Lump of Clay

by Diana Engel

Way up high, in an old tower, there was a workshop. It was a pottery workshop, filled with barrels of colourful glazes, potter's wheels, kilns and, of course, clay. Near the window stood a big wooden bin with a heavy lid. There the clay was kept. Way at the bottom, squashed into the corner, was the oldest lump of clay. He barely remembered the last time he had been handled, a long time ago. Every day the heavy lid would open. Hands reached in, quickly grabbing bags or balls of clay. The little lump of clay could hear the cheerful sounds of people busy at their work.

"When will it be my turn?" he wondered. As each day passed in the darkness of the bin, the little lump of clay lost hope.

One day a large group of children came into the workshop with their teacher. Many hands reached into the bin. The little lump of clay was the last to be chosen, but he was out!

"Here's my big chance!" he thought, squinting in the light.

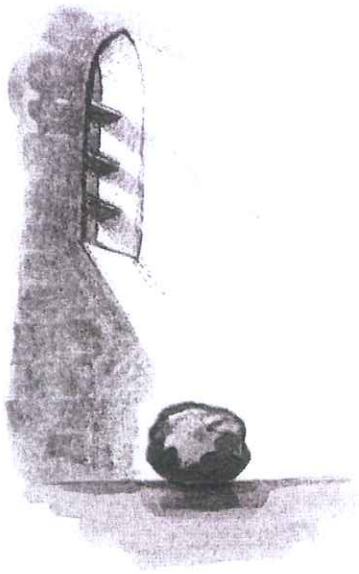
A boy put the clay on the potter's wheel, spinning it as fast as he could. "This is fun!" thought the little lump of clay. The boy tried pulling the clay up as the wheel went around. The little lump of clay felt the excitement of becoming *something*! After trying to make a bowl, the boy gave up. He pushed and pounded the clay into a neat ball.

"Time to clean up," said the teacher. The workshop was filled with the sounds of children sponging and wiping and washing and drying. Water dripped everywhere.

The boy plopped the lump of clay near the window and rushed to join his friends. After a while, the workshop emptied. The room was quiet and dark. The little lump of clay was terrified. Not only did he miss the moistness of the bin, he knew he was in danger.

"It's all over," he thought. "I'll just sit here and dry out until I'm as hard as a rock."

PIRLS 3b



He sat by the open window, unable to move, feeling the moisture seep out of him. The sunlight beat down, the night breezes blew in, until he was rock hard. He was so hard he could hardly think. He only knew that he was filled with hopelessness.

But somewhere deep inside the little lump of clay, a tiny drop of moisture was left, and he refused to let it go.

"Rain," he thought.

"Water," he sighed.

"Please," he finally squeezed out of his dry hopeless self.

A passing cloud took pity on the little lump of clay, and a wonderful thing happened. Huge raindrops hammered through the open window, falling on the little lump of clay. All night it rained, and by morning he was as soft as his old self.

Voices drifted into the workshop.

"Oh no," said a woman. She was a potter who often used the workshop. "Someone has left the window open all weekend! We've got a mess to clean up. You can work with some clay while I find the towels," she said to her daughter.

The little girl saw the lump of clay sitting at the window.

"This looks like a perfect lump for me," she said.

Soon she was pressing and kneading the clay into pleasing shapes. To the little lump of clay, her fingers felt heavenly.

The girl thought as she worked, and her hands moved with purpose. The little lump of clay felt himself being gently pushed into a rounded, hollow shape. A few pinches, and he had a handle.



PIRLS 3c

"Mommy, Mommy," called the girl, "I made a cup!"

"It's wonderful!" said her mother. "Put it on the shelf and it will be fired in the kiln. Then you can glaze it any colour you like."

Soon the little cup was ready to be taken to his new home. Now he lives on a shelf in the kitchen, next to the other cups and saucers and mugs. They are all very different and some are very beautiful.

"Breakfast!" calls the mother, setting the new cup on the table and filling him with hot chocolate.

The little girl holds him gently. How happy he feels with the smooth lines of his new shape. How well he does his job!

The little cup sits proudly. "At last—at last I am something."



PIRLS 3d

Questions The Little Lump of Clay

1. Number the sentences below in the order the events happened in the story. Number 1 has been done for you.

___ The rain made the lump of clay moist and soft.

___ A boy tried to make the lump of clay into a bowl.

___ A girl made the lump of clay into a cup.

___ The lump of clay dried out.

1 ___ The lump of clay was in the bin.

2. Why was the lump of clay in the bin for such a long time?

1 _____

_____

3. At the beginning of the story, what did the lump of clay wish for?

1 _____

_____

PIRLS 3e

4. Why was the clay eventually taken out of the bin?

* (A) All the other lumps of clay were used.

(B) It was on top of the other lumps of clay.

(C) The boy chose that lump because he especially liked it.

(D) The teacher told the boy to use that lump.

5. What did the boy do that was careless?

(A) He left the clay on the potter's wheel.

(B) He was spinning the wheel as fast as he could.

* (C) He put the clay near the window.

(D) He pushed and pounded the clay.

6. The boy left the lump of clay in danger. What was the danger?

1 _____

_____

* Correct answer

PIRLS 3F

7. How did the lump of clay feel right after the boy left the pottery workshop?

* (A) satisfied

(B) scared

(C) angry

(D) proud

8. What wonderful thing happened after the lump of clay had been lying by the window for a long time? Why was this so wonderful for the lump of clay?

2

_____

_____

_____

_____

* Correct answer

PIRLS 3g

9. Which words in the story show that the little girl knew what she wanted to make?

(A) 'her fingers felt heavenly.'

(B) 'The little girl saw the lump of clay.'

★ (C) 'The little girl holds him gently.'

(D) 'her hands moved with purpose.'

10. Describe the different feelings the clay had at the beginning and the end of the story. Explain why his feelings changed.

3

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

★ **Correct answer**

PIRLS 3h

11. The little girl is an important person in this story. Explain why she was important to what happened.



_____

_____

_____

_____

12. The author of the story writes about the lump of clay as if it were a person. What is the author trying to make you imagine?

(A) what it is like in the rain

* (B) how a lump of clay might feel

(C) what it is like to work with clay

(D) how it feels to make something

13. What is the **main** message of this story?

(A) People are easy to knead and shape like clay.

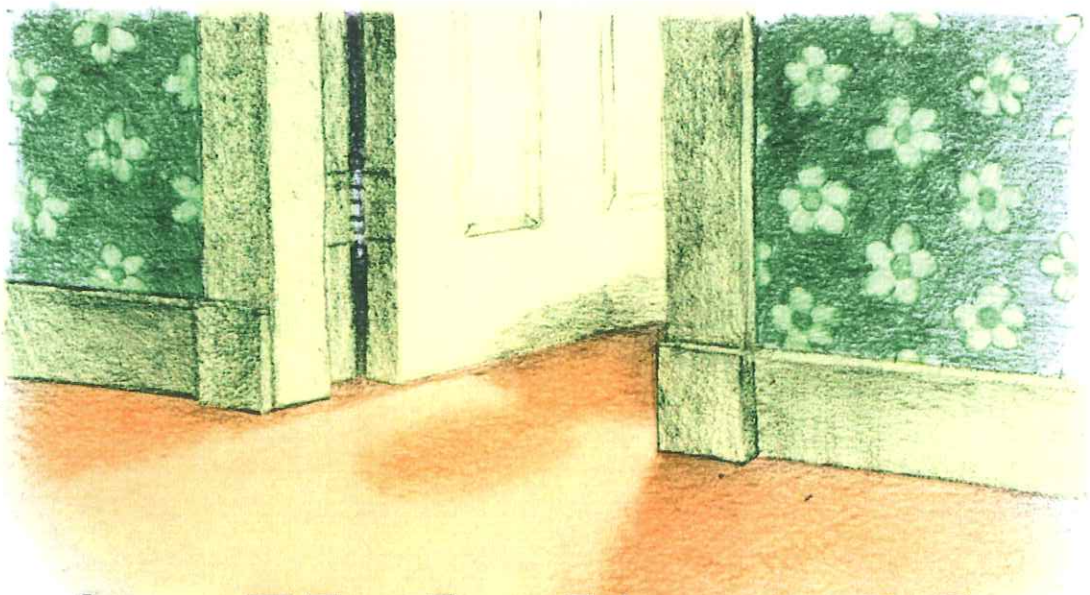
(B) There is a great deal of unhappiness in the world.

* (C) Everything is happiest when it finds a purpose.

(D) Pottery is the best way to do good in the world.

* **Correct answer**

PIRLS 4 9



An Unbelievable Night

by Franz Hohler

Anina was ten years old, so even half asleep she could find her way from her room to the bathroom. The door to her room was usually open just a little, and the night-light in the hallway made it light enough to get to the bathroom past the telephone stand.

One night, as she passed the telephone stand on her way to the bathroom, Anina heard something that sounded like a quiet hissing. But, because she was half asleep, she didn't really pay any attention to it. Anyway, it came from pretty far away. Not until she was on her way back to her room did she see where it came from. Under the telephone stand there was a large pile of old newspapers and magazines, and this pile now began to move. That was where the noise was coming from. All of a sudden the pile started to fall over – right, left, forwards, backwards – then there were newspapers and magazines all

over the floor. Anina could not believe her eyes as she watched a grunting and snorting crocodile come out from under the telephone stand.

Anina was frozen to the spot. Her eyes wide as saucers, she watched the crocodile crawl completely out of the newspapers and slowly look around the apartment. It seemed to have just come out of the water because its whole body was dripping wet. Wherever the crocodile stepped, the carpet under it became drenched.



PIRLS 4C

The crocodile moved its head back and forth letting out a loud hissing sound. Anina swallowed hard, looking at the crocodile's snout with its terribly long row of teeth. It swung its tail slowly back and forth. Anina had read about that in "Animal Magazine"– how the crocodile whips the water with its tail to chase away or attack its enemies.

Her gaze fell on the last issue of "Animal Magazine", which had fallen from the pile and was lying at her feet. She got another shock. The cover of the magazine used to have a picture of a big crocodile on a river bank. The river bank was now empty!

Anina bent down and picked up the magazine. At that moment the crocodile whipped his tail so hard that he cracked the big vase of sunflowers on the floor and the sunflowers scattered everywhere. With a quick jump Anina was in her bedroom. She slammed the door shut, grabbed her bed and pushed it up against the door. She had built a barricade that would keep her safe from the crocodile. Relieved, she let her breath out.

But then she hesitated. What if the beast was simply hungry? Maybe to make the crocodile go away you had to give it something to eat?

Anina looked again at the animal magazine. If the crocodile could crawl out of a picture then perhaps other animals could too. Anina hastily flipped through the magazine and stopped at a flock of flamingos in a jungle swamp. Just right, she thought. They look like a birthday cake for crocodiles.

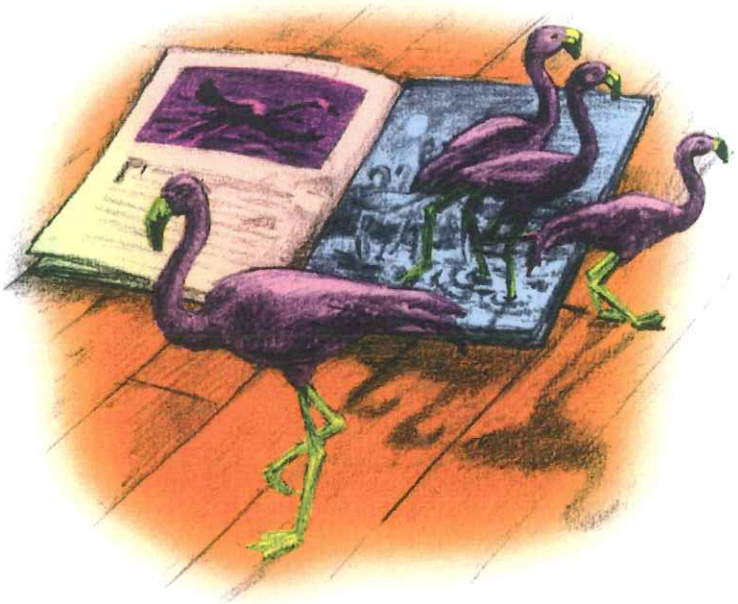
Suddenly there was a loud crack and the tip of the crocodile's tail pushed through the splintered door.

Quickly, Anina held the picture of the flamingos up to the hole in the door and called as loud as she could, "Get out of the swamp! Shoo! Shoo!" Then she threw the magazine through the hole into the hallway, clapped her hands and yelled and screamed.

PIRLS 4 d

She could hardly believe what happened next. The entire hallway was suddenly filled with screeching flamingos wildly flapping their wings and running around all over the place on their long, skinny legs. Anina saw one bird with a sunflower in its beak and another grabbing her mother's hat from its hook. She also saw a flamingo disappear into the crocodile's mouth. With two quick bites he swallowed the flamingo and quickly followed it with another, the one with the sunflower in its beak.

After two portions of flamingo the crocodile seemed to have had enough and lay down contentedly in the middle of the hallway. When he had closed his eyes and no longer moved, Anina quietly opened her door and slipped through it into the hallway. She placed the empty magazine cover in front of the crocodile's nose. "Please," she whispered, "please go back home." She crept back into the bedroom and looked through the hole in the door. She saw the crocodile back on the cover of the magazine.



She now went cautiously into the living room where the flamingos were crowded around the sofa and standing on the television. Anina opened the magazine to the page with the empty picture. "Thank you," she said, "thank you very much. You may now go

back to your swamp."

In the morning, it was very difficult for her to explain the giant wet spot on the floor and the broken door to her parents. They weren't convinced about the crocodile even though her mother's hat was nowhere to be found.



Adapted from *Eine Wilde Nacht* in *Der Große Zwerg und Andere Geschichten* by Franz Hohler. Published in 2003 by Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, Munchen, Germany. Illustrations copyright © 2003, IEA. An effort has been made to obtain copyright permission.

PIRLS 4 f

1. What was the **first** sign that something unusual was happening?

   (A) A pile of newspapers began to move.

   (B) Anina saw the magazine cover.

   (C) The door to her room was broken.

   ★ (D) Anina heard a hissing sound.

2. Where did the crocodile come from?

   (A) the bathroom

   ★ (B) a magazine cover

   (C) under the bed

   (D) a nearby river

3. Which words tell you that Anina was frightened?

   ★ (A) "frozen to the spot"

   (B) "could not believe her eyes"

   (C) "let her breath out"

   (D) "sounded like a quiet hissing"

★ **Correct answer**

PIRLS 4g

4. Why did Anina think the crocodile was going to attack?

(A) It showed its long row of teeth.

(B) It let out a loud hissing sound.

(C) It started grunting and snorting.

* (D) It swung its tail back and forth.

5. Put the following sentences in the order in which they happened in the story.

The first one has been done for you.

___ Anina saw the crocodile.

___ The crocodile ate two flamingos.

___ Anina tried to explain the broken door to her parents.

1 Anina started to walk to the bathroom.

___ Anina ran to the bedroom and slammed the door.

6. Why did Anina call the flamingos?

1 _____

_____

* **Correct answer**

PIRLS 4h

7. How did the bedroom door get broken?

* (A) The crocodile's tail pushed through it.

(B) The big vase cracked against it.

(C) The flamingo's sharp beak crashed into it.

(D) The bed smashed against it.

8. How did the magazine help Anina? Write **two** ways.

1. 1. _____

_____

2. 2. _____

_____

9. At the end of the story, how did Anina feel toward the flamingos?

(A) guilty

(B) cautious

* (C) grateful

(D) annoyed

* **Correct answer**

PIRLS 4 i

10. Name **one** thing Anina had difficulty explaining to her parents.

1

_____

_____

_____

11. You learn what Anina was like from the things she did.
Describe what she was like and give **two** examples of what she did that show this.

3

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

PIRLS 4j

12. The author does not tell us whether Anina's adventure was all a dream.

Give **one** piece of evidence that it **may** have been a dream.

1 _____

_____

_____

Give **one** piece of evidence that it **may not** have been a dream.

1 _____

_____

_____

5.3.1 Text, mechanical reading demands

An overview of the mechanical reading demands of the four PIRLS 2006 tests in the previous pages is presented in the table below.

Table 5.2: PIRLS 2006 mechanical reading demand

PIRLS Text		Number of words	Average number of characters per word	Average number of syllables per word	Average number of characters (without spaces)	Number of sentences	Average number of words per sentence	Fry's Read-ability Index[27]
Infor-mation text	PIRLS 1 Antarctica: Land of Ice	496	4.45	1.48	2,205	35	14.17	4
	PIRLS 2 Searching for Food	787	3.97	1.26	3,127	67	11.75	3
	Average	642				51		
Lite-rary text	PIRLS 3 Little Lump of Clay	746	4.10	1.32	3,061	73	10.22	4
	PIRLS 4 An Unbelievable Night	837	4.45	1.48	3,726	58	14.43	6
	Average	792				66		

The average number of words in the texts for information is 642 with an average number of 51 sentences. The average number of words and sentences respectively for the literary texts is 792 and 66. The length of each text suggests that the reader would be required to use the automatic 'working memory' (Stanovich, 1986; Wolf, 2007) to decode letters and words, as well as the 'executive system' where attention is needed to make meaning of the text (as discussed in section 2.2.1).

[27] Readability Indexes were discussed in chapter 3.

According to Fry's Readability Index, the texts generally fall within the level of text that a learner reading in his or her home (main) language in the fourth year of formal education would be expected to read. As explained in section 3.4.2 Fry's Readability Index is calculated mathematically by taking into account the number of words, sentences and syllable counts in texts. *Searching for Food* may be easier to read than the other texts however the layout of the visual elements in the text may make the text more challenging. According to the index in all four examples there is a general correlation between the expected reading grade and the texts provided. There is a difference between the reading grade level in the literary texts *Little Lump of Clay* (grade 4) and *An Unbelievable Night* (grade 6) as well as between the texts for information *Antarctica: Land of Ice* (grade 4) and *Searching for Food* (grade 3). As these texts formed part of a matrix sampling technique where five different literary and five different information texts were matched into thirteen different combinations one would expect that there would be a balance between the easy and more difficult texts administered in particular test sets.

5.3.2 Text, design and layout

The texts chosen for the four samples are authentic pieces, in other words they have not been written for the inculcation of specific turns of phrase, spelling or any other such linguistic device (Harp & Brewer, 2005). The use of authentic texts is supported by the opponents of the basal reading approach to literacy instruction and include among others those who support the Integrated Anthology, Language Experience, Literature Based, Whole Language and Balanced approaches to literacy instruction (see section 2.2.1). It would seem from the choice of texts for PIRLS 2006 that the reading literate subject is constituted as engaging in literary practices that "people do repeatedly in everyday life, in their homes, at work and at school" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p. 9). In other words authentic texts are read for purposes other than the transmission of discrete literacy skills.

5.3.2.1 Information Texts

PIRLS 1, *Antarctica: Land of Ice*

This is a multimodal text where "written-linguistic modes ... interface with visual ... patterns of meaning" (Cope, 2006, p. 23). According to Fry's Readability Index the level of the text is appropriate for grade 4 readers. This text consists of three pages of 'visual' information as well as print. The text is introduced with a clear, large, bolded heading *Antarctica: Land of Ice* which is followed by a smaller bolded subheading *Introducing Antarctica* and another smaller bolded sub heading *What is Antarctica?* The layout of the text has presented the reader with a choice as to the order in which to engage with and make meaning from the information (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). As there are distinct sections to the text, the reader can decide in which order to read the letter or the section about penguins for example. This text does not have to be 'read' from left to right or from the beginning to the end. The reader is assisted to make meaning from the text through the placement and size of the bolded heading, subheadings and the title of the map.

Antarctica: Land of Ice

Introducing Antarctica

What is Antarctica?

On the top right of the page there is a graphic representation of the South Pole with a bolded arrow and text labelling a point as 'South Pole'. It also has a clearly bolded heading '**A Map of Antarctica'**. In the same section and on the same page as the map (bottom left of the page), there is a photograph of a scene depicting a solitary person walking on snow and dwarfed by the size of the surrounding ice formation. The reader can use both the visual and the written 'clues' when making meaning from the text.

The second page has two photographs interspersed between the text. The top right photograph shows floating icebergs, the bottom left photograph shows three adult penguins and two young penguins. Neither photograph is accompanied by a heading or a label. A larger bolded heading *Penguins in Antarctica* half way down on the right divides the page. The photographs provide a visual perspective of the size of the icebergs that the reader may not understand from the text.

The third page contains a large bolded heading: *A Letter from Antarctica, a* photograph of a head shot of a woman dressed in warm clothing accompanied by an explanation of who she is, and a 'boxed' section with a letter. The placement of the heading, photograph and text assist the reader to make meaning.

Questions 1-8 follow the same sequence as the paragraphs and images of the text. In other words the answers to the questions can be found in simple sequential order. Question 9 requires the reader to conduct an intra-text search for information to make a comparison, thus making meaning of the whole text as opposed to a sentence or paragraph. Question 10 requires the reader to search for information from the four sections of the text and to identify the section in which the information is located, thus cueing the reader to make use of the headings and subheadings in the whole text.

PIRLS 2, *Searching for Food*

This text consists of five pages of multimodal text with colour illustrations. According to Fry's Readability Index the level of the text is slightly easier than the previous text but still appropriate for grade 4 readers. The layout makes use of different sized bolded headings and subheadings. The first page uses bulleted headings to introduce the reader to the ant, wood louse and worm which serve as examples of creatures that search for food. On the first page texts in text boxes are used to explain the illustration of the three small

creatures that search for food. A line connects the text box to the illustration of the relevant creature in a circle. Although there is a general introduction to three creatures on the first page, there is no instruction to engage in a vicarious experience of conducting experiments to observe these creatures searching for food. Neither is there an instruction to compare findings. Thus this text may be confusing to some readers.

The second page consists of text about ants as well as three bullet points about how to conduct an experiment to observe ants searching for food. There is a text box in which two bolded cue questions are asked and repeated on the third and fifth pages. The cue questions are *What happens?* followed by a short explanation of what was supposed to happen and *Why?* followed by an explanation of why what was supposed to happen, happened. There is a graphic of a single trail of ants. The reader could scan the page and decide to read the text in the text box first as this provides a summary of how ants find food. After having read the summary the reader could choose to read the rest of the text for additional information.

Page three consists of an introductory paragraph about setting up an experiment to observe wood lice searching for food. Three numbered points instruct the reader how to execute the experiment. A text box with two cue questions as described above is also included on this page. As is the case with page two the reader can decide in which pieces of information and in which order he or she wants to read the text.

Page four follows a similar layout to the previous page, but the object of study is wood lice. The study that describes how worms search for food is presented over two consecutive pages. The first page contains a bolded heading, an introductory paragraph, a bulleted four point description of how to conduct the experiment and a grey shaded text box with bulleted items that would be needed for the experiment. The last page contains a text box with the two cue questions and answers as provided for the two previous experiments.

The information texts are possibly similar in layout and language use to information texts in various subjects at grade 4 level, for example texts from social and natural sciences.

Questions 1-4 follow the sequence of the paragraphs and images in the text. Question 5 requires the reader to find the answers in two different areas on the same page i.e. in the text box and in step three of the experiment instructions. Questions 6-10 make reference to 'pill bugs' which are not mentioned in the text. It is assumed that this error was brought to the attention of the test takers when the test was administered[28]. If one assumes that the questions refer to the wood lice experiment the questions follow the order of the paragraphs and images in the text. Question 10 requires the reader to compare information from the ant experiment with that of the wood lice experiment and this requires an intra-textual search. Where question 11 requires the reader to sequence an order of events found directly in the text, question 12 requires the reader to infer an answer from the visual and written information provided.

5.3.2.2 Literary Texts

PIRLS 3, *The Little Lump of Clay*

This text consists of three pages of black and white narrative text and includes three sketches that illustrate the development of the plot. The sequence of the sketches matches the sequence of the story. The first sketch shows a lump of clay on a window-sill with sun rays coming through the window. The second sketch shows a pair of hands working with the clay and the third sketch is of a girl drinking from a mug. According to Fry's Readability Index the level of text is appropriate for grade 4 readers. The text makes extensive use of the conventions of reported speech. The story requires the reader to suspend disbelief and to engage with the personifying of an inanimate object, in this case a lump of clay.

[28] To date no mention has been made of this error in the PIRLS reports available in the public domain.

The first question requires the reader to interact with the text as a whole and to sequence events in order to demonstrate an understanding of the story line. Questions 2-9 follow the sequence of the paragraphs and images in the text but question 10 directs the reader to find information at the beginning and at the end of the text. The last three questions (11, 12 and 13) require the reader to make sense of the text as a whole and to infer answers not stated directly in the text.

PIRLS 4, *An Unbelievable Night*

This is an example of another story which requires readers to use their imagination and respond to it. The text consists of five pages of narrative text interspersed with four colour illustrations. The first illustration, on page one, shows a half open door with a shadow of a person coming out of the room and there is green wallpaper with white flowers on the walls. The second illustration, on page two, shows a different perspective of the door (now closed) and the same green wallpaper with white flowers in a hallway with a telephone on a table and a crocodile and print media under the table and a vase with sunflowers on the floor. The third illustration, on page four, shows pink flamingoes that appear to be walking over a book and the final one on page five is of a single pink flamingo. The illustrations provide visual clues in sequence that could help the reader to interpret the text. According to Fry's Readability Index the level of text is slightly more challenging than the other texts but still appropriate for grade 4 readers. This is a fantasy piece in a 'Eurocentric' setting which can be inferred from the use of vocabulary such as 'hallway' and 'telephone stand' which may not be part of the experience of all readers. Whether this text is as 'culturally neutral' as the test designers are aiming for (see section 5.2.2) is questionable.

The questions generally follow the sequence of the paragraphs and images in the text however question 5 requires the reader to engage with the whole text to

place events in sequence. Questions 11 and 12 require the reader to infer the answers by making meaning from the whole text.

5.3.3 Assessment tasks, question type

In this section the question types in each of the tests are presented and analyzed. Each test consisted of a text (between 3 and 5 pages in length) accompanied by a question booklet (between 5 and 6 pages in length). As explained in section 3.4.3 the tasks have been analyzed according to the question types used. The table below shows the distribution of question types used in the four PIRLS 2006 samples available in the public domain.

Table 5.3: PIRLS 2006 question types

PIRLS Text	Multiple choice questions	One word answers	One sentence answers	Answers consisting of more than one sentence	Other	Total number of questions
PIRLS 1 Antarctica: Land of Ice	4		4	3		11
PIRLS 2 Searching for Food	7		4	3	1	15
PIRLS 3 Little Lump of Clay	6		4	2	1	13
PIRLS 4 An Unbelievable Night	6		2	3	1	12
Total	23	0	14	11	3	51

The number of tasks per text varied from eleven to fifteen with the average being thirteen. The most frequently used question type was multiple choice (23) followed by one sentence constructed responses (14) and, least frequently, the constructed responses requiring more than one sentence (11). In the category of 'other' the tasks involved numbering sentences in sequential order. No one word responses were required and the remaining tasks involved written

responses of one sentence or more. The questions were not grouped according to type, in other words the order of the questions in the booklets varied; multiple choice questions were placed between short and longer learner constructed responses.

5.3.4 Questions, cognitive demands

As discussed in section 3.4.4, the categories constructed for presentation and analyses to show the level of cognitive demand of the questions are drawn from the work of Bloom et al. (1956). In table 5.4 the various categories of questions asked in the tasks according to progressive levels of cognitive demand are presented.

Table 5.4: PIRLS 2006 level of cognitive demand

Cognitive level according to Bloom's Taxonomy	**Level 1**		**Level 2**		**Total number of questions**
Category of assessment tasks in PIRLS 2006 data	Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information	Make straight-forward inference	Interpret and integrate ideas and information	Examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements	
PIRLS 1 Antarctica: Land of Ice	Questions 1, 2, 3, 6, 8 and 10	Questions 5 and 7	Questions 4 and 9	Question 11	11
PIRLS 2 Searching for Food	Questions 1, 2, 4 and 6	Questions 3, 8, 11 and 14	Questions 5, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15	Question 7	15
PIRLS 3 Little Lump of Clay	Questions 1, 4, 7 and 10	Questions 2, 3, 5, 6 and 9	Questions 8, 11 and 13	Question 12	13
PIRLS 4 An Unbelievable Night	Questions 1, 4, 7 and 10	Questions 2, 3, 5, 6 and 9	Questions 8 and 11	Question 12	12
Total number	18	16	13	4	51

The assessment was designed to accommodate various reading comprehension competencies of grade 4 learners. The majority of questions (34 out of 51) require learners to demonstrate their ability to use lower order thinking and comprehension skills/strategies namely, to focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information and to make straightforward inferences from texts. They are also expected to be able to interpret and integrate ideas and information and to examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements (17 out of 51). As explained in section 5.2.5.3 the questions were allocated weighted scores according to the level of cognitive demand required. The assessment score was evenly weighted between the two levels of cognitive complexity. The reading literate subject in PIRLS 2006 was expected to have gained competency in both.

5.4 Comparison between PIRLS 2006 texts and tasks and those used by the four local grade 4 teachers

There is an increasing demand for citizens to be educated and to keep abreast of new technology for future successes both at local and international levels (Chisholm, 2004). Possibly as a mechanism to achieve success the South African Minister of Education announced in March 2008 as part of the Foundation for Learning campaign that she has introduced "new national tests for little ones" which will be conducted every year from grade 1 to grade 6 (Gower, 2008, p. 7). Although there is no universal consensus on the nature of the education objectives to be assessed and that there is recognition that curricula vary across systems, there is general agreement that one of the basic functions of an education system is to "make pupils able to read, write and count" (Postlethwaite, 2004, p. 130). The texts and tasks of PIRLS and those used by the grade 4 teachers show how the literate subject is constituted and, by implication, how the progress being made places the learner on the road to local and international success.

In making this comparison I compare the texts and tasks of texts in terms of: texts chosen, the mechanical demands of texts, the types of assessment questions used and the cognitive demands of the questions.

Texts

The texts used by the four case study teachers in the case study were a maximum length of one page. In comparison, the texts used in PIRLS 2006 were substantially longer, between 3 and 5 pages in length. Only one short text was used for each summative assessment by the case study teachers. The texts, with one exception, did not provide the test taker with examples of both information and literary texts. During the interviews three of the teachers referred to 'scratching around' for texts to use for assessment purposes. There was no evidence in either their teaching or assessment practices that they considered texts as located in a variety of genres. PIRLS 2006 provided two texts per assessment, one information and one literary.

Text, mechanical reading demands

For comparative purposes I have combined data from previous tables from the case study and PIRLS 2006 assessments in the following three tables.

As shown in table 5.5 the texts used in PIRLS 2006 were substantially longer than those used by the case study teachers. It appears that the learners in the case study lack exposure to extended texts. According to the readability index the texts used in the case study assessments are too easy or too difficult for grade 4 learners, hence the learners in the case study lacked exposure to the appropriate length and level of texts in the assessments.

Table 5.5: Comparative data of the mechanical reading demands of PIRLS 2006 and Case Study texts

PIRLS Text		Number of words	Average number of characters per word	Average number of syllables per word	Average number of characters (without spaces)	Number of sentences	Average number of words per sentence	Fry's Read-ability Index[29]
Infor-mation text	PIRLS 1 Antarctica: Land of Ice	496	4.45	1.48	2,205	35	14.17	4
	PIRLS 2 Searching for Food	787	3.97	1.26	3,127	67	11.75	3
	Average	642	4.21	1.37	2,666	51	12.96	3.5
Lite-rary text	PIRLS 3 Little Lump of Clay	746	4.10	1.32	3,061	73	10.22	4
	PIRLS 4 An Unbelievable Night	837	4.45	1.48	3,726	58	14.43	6
	Average PIRLS	792	4.28	1.40	3.393	66	12.33	5
Case Study Texts								
Site 1, test 1	Just One Bite	110	4.94	1.67	543	8	13.75	8
Site 1, test 2	The King of Frogs	135	3.84	1.22	518	9	15	4
Site 2, test 1	Term One Tarantula	309	4.58	1.48	1.415	24	12.88	7
Site 2, test 2	Term Two Cape Town Minstrel Carnival	333	5.29	1.75	1.763	15	16.69	Colleg e
Site 3, test 1	Term One Me	51	3.31	1.25	169	10	5.10	1
Site 3, test 2	Term Two A compre-hension and exercise	261	4.38	1.47	1.142	15	17.40	6
Site 4, test 1	Term One Sello meets an Alien	130	3.94	1.33	512	12	10.83	3
Site 4, test 2	Term Two The Whistling Turtle	179	4.02	1.32	720	12	14.92	4
Average Grade 4 teachers		189	4.29	1.28	308,29	13	13.32	4.7

[29] Readability Indexes were discussed in chapter 3.

Text tasks, question type

The PIRLS 2006 assessments questions were produced on 5-6 pages in which there was sufficient space for test takers to respond. In the case study assessments the questions generally appeared on the same page as the text and little room was provided for written responses. Whilst the case study assessments have more constructed response type questions they required mainly short or one word responses.

Table 5.6: Comparative data by question type in PIRLS 2006 and Case Study Reading assessments

PIRLS Text	Multiple choice questions	One word answers	One sentence answers	Answers consisting of more than one sentence	Other	Total number of questions
PIRLS 1 Antarctica: Land of Ice	4		4	3		11
PIRLS 2 Searching for Food	7		4	3	1	15
PIRLS 3 Little Lump of Clay	6		4	2	1	13
PIRLS 4 An Unbelievable Night	6		2	3	1	12
Total	**23**	**0**	**14**	**11**	**3**	
Site 1, test 1 Just One Bite			5			5
Site 1, test 2 The King of Frogs			6			6
Site 2, test 1 Tarantula	7					7
Site 2, test 2 Cape Town Minstrel Carnival		1	5	1		7
Site 3, test 1 Me			5			5
Site 3, test 2 A Comprehension and exercise			6			6
Site 4, test 1 Sello meets an Alien					6	6
Site 4, test 2 The Whistling Turtle			5			5
Total	**7**	**1**	**32**	**1**	**6**	

Assessment tasks, cognitive demands

PIRLS 2006 assesses reading literacy at two levels of cognitive demand (Bloom et al., 1956). In comparison Table 5.7 shows that in the case study assessments there were no questions that required learners to operate beyond the first level of cognitive demand. In other words, in the case study learners were only required to demonstrate competency at the level of lower order thinking and comprehension skills/strategies namely, the ability to focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information and to make straightforward inferences from text.

Table 5.7: Comparative data of the level of cognitive demand of PIRLS 2006 and Case Study assessments

Cognitive level according to Bloom's taxonomy		**Level 1**		**Level 2**	
Category of assessment tasks Grade 4 teacher data		Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information	Make straight-forward inference	Interpret and integrate Ideas and information	Examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements
Teacher A	Site 1, test 1 Just One Bite	Questions 1 and 2	Questions 3, 4 and 5	-	-
	Site 1, test 2 The King of Frogs	Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4	Questions 5 and 6	-	-
Teacher B	Site 2, test 1 Tarantula	Questions 6, 7, 9 and 11	Questions 8, 10 and 12	-	-
	Site 2, test 2 Cape Town Minstrel Carnival	Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4	Questions 5 and 6	-	-
Teacher C	Site 3, test 1 Me	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5		-	-
	Site 3, test 2 A Comprehension and exercise	Questions 1, 2, 3 and 5	Question 4	-	-
Teacher D	Site 4, test 1 Sello meets an Alien	N/A	N/A	-	-
	Site 4, test 2 The Whistling Turtle	Questions 2, 3 and 4	Questions 1 and 5	-	-
Category of assessment tasks PIRLS data					
PIRLS 1	Antarctica: Land of Ice	Questions 1, 2, 3, 6, 8 and 10	Questions 5 and 7	Questions 4 and 9	Question 11
PIRLS 2	Searching for Food	Questions 1, 2, 4 and 6	Questions 3, 8, 11 and 14	Questions 5, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15	Question 7
PIRLS 3	Little Lump of Clay	Questions 1, 4, 7 and 10	Questions 2, 3, 5, 6 and 9	Questions 8, 11 and 13	Question 12
PIRLS 4	An Unbelievable Night	Questions 1, 4, 7 and 10	Questions 2, 3, 5, 6 and 9	Questions 8 and 11	Question 12

It should be noted that the traditional psychometric approach to assessment is that learning is considered to be linear and sequential and can be measured as such (Gipps, 1994). However, as argued by Taylor (1989) and Weaver (1990) (see section 2.2.1), the cognitive learning processes of children proceed in idiosyncratic ways, not typically one skill at a time. Given the idiosyncratic nature of learning it is important to include a range of both question type and cognitive demand to assess learner progress.

The inclusion of a variety of question types with varying levels of cognitive demand, as demonstrated in the PIRLS 2006 samples, encourages learners to engage the text in 'meaning making' ways. White and Entwistle (cited in Gipps, 1994) describe deep and shallow learning. Shallow learning takes place when learners succeed in tests without necessarily understanding what they have read. Resnick and Shepard (cited in Gipps, 1994) argue that teachers encourage shallow learning with assessments that favour simple one word answer type questions. Entwistle argues that deep learning demands a different approach to teaching and assessing which include the following techniques:

1. An intention to understand material for oneself
2. Interacting vigorously and critically with content
3. Relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience
4. Using organizing principles to integrate ideas
5. Relating evidence to conclusions
6. Examining the logic of argument. (Entwistle, cited by Gipps, 1994, p. 25)

By requiring learners to engage with longer constructed response type questions at various levels of cognitive demand, the PIRLS 2006 assessment has encouraged higher order and problem solving skills which are often omitted in assessments.

Gipps (1994) argues that different forms of assessment questions and cognitive demand encourage, through their effect on teaching, different styles of learning. If the intention is to foster higher order skills (beyond decoding) including

application of knowledge, analyzing, reasoning and interpretation for all learners, then the assessment items need to reflect this. Davies (1990) argues for the positive leadership role that testing (and language testing in particular) can play and suggests that there is a positive influence that can be enhanced through the 'washback' effect of testing.

Ferreira (2006) supports the inclusion of open-ended questions to encourage the process of negotiated meaning as well as the use of unseen texts to help develop a repertoire of reading strategies. Ferreira also cautions against the use of multimodal texts in 'old ways'.

In the next chapter I present the conclusions and recommendations that have been gained from the research.

CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction
6.2 Findings
6.3 Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This study has aimed to contribute to the informed conversations about teaching and learning of reading literacy advocated by Fleisch (2008). In this final chapter I return to the title of the dissertation to reflect on the matches and mismatches between the international, national and local assessments of reading literacy in grade 4 and conclude with some suggestions for some interventions aimed at improving the teaching and assessment of reading.

6.2 Findings

Analysis of the PIRLS 2006 documents and South African NCS with regard to how reading literacy is conceptualized from grade 4 onwards indicates that reading literacy is understood in both documents to involve much more than acquiring decoding skills. A reader whether learning in the Home or in an Additional Language, needs to understand the written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual (Mullis et al., 2006) and to be able to read and view for information and enjoyment as well as to respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts (DoE, 2002a).

There is a match between the purposes of the PIRLS 2006 reading assessment and the Assessment Standards for reading in grade 4 outlined in the National Curriculum Statement (DoE, 2000a) for Home and First Additional Language. Findings from this study's analysis of the samples of the PIRLS 2006 assessment and of the assessment standards in the National Curriculum

Statement accord with the findings of Howie et al. (2008): for the most part the texts and reading skills and strategies assessed in PIRLS 2006 are similar to those listed in the Curriculum Statements for Home and First Additional Language.

The NCS considers the Intermediate Phase as a three year period in which learners are expected to gain skills, values, attitudes and knowledge stated in the various learning outcomes and assessment standards. Perhaps the expectation with regard to 'reading to learn' in grade four may be ambitious given the uneven manner in which the varying implementations of the Language in Education Policy have given rise to substantially different language experiences by the time learners enter the fourth grade. The following are some of the scenarios experienced by learners entering the fourth grade:

- learners who would have received instruction in English as LOLT which would have matched their home language. In this scenario learners continue in English as LOLT for the rest of their schooling. This was not the case in any of the four schools in this study.
- learners who would have received instruction in the first three years of school in English as Home Language LOLT which would not have matched their home language (straight for English). This was the case in School A in this study. In the case of School B the school had a straight for English policy where the LOLT was English as First Additional Language.
- learners who would have received instruction in the first three years of school in one of the Home Languages as LOLT which would have matched the home language. From grade four onward there would be a switch to English as LOLT. This was the case for the majority of learners in Schools C and D in this study.
- learners who would have received instruction in the first three years of school in one of the Home Languages as LOLT which would not have matched their home language. From grade four onward there would be a switch to English as LOLT. This was the case for a minority of learners in Schools C and D.

I would argue that there is a mismatch between what is expected of many learners in South African grade four classrooms and what is expected of them in the PIRLS 2006 assessment.

The texts that the National Curriculum Statement expects teachers to use and the texts used in PIRLS 2006 are similar in many respects. They include a wide variety of genres and incorporate authentic texts that are assumed to form part of everyday, in and out of school, reading practices (DoE, 2002 b and c). Authentic texts include diagrams, charts, graphs, letters, diaries, maps, photographs, notices, expository and narrative texts. However, PIRLS 2006 assesses reading literacy on extended texts which seldom form part of summative assessments in any phase of the South African curriculum including the final National School Certificate written at the end of twelve years of schooling. There is a considerable mismatch between the length and variety of texts that learners are expected to engage with, in the PIRLS assessments and used for assessment in the case study classrooms.

The activities to be assessed in order to comply with the grade 4 reading literacy assessment standards (DoE, 2002 b and c), match the kind of reading activities that are expected of learners in the PIRLS 2006 assessment. The PIRLS 2006 assessments and the assessment standards in the National Curriculum Statement aim to promote the teaching of deep learning and higher order thinking skills (see section 2.4.2). The designers of PIRLS 2006 have chosen texts and designed questions that address the two levels of cognitive thinking appropriate for grade 4 learners (see section 3.4.4). Given that grade four is the first year in which learners are explicitly taught reading strategies required for reading for meaning (DoE, 2002a., DoE, 2002b), one might question whether learners have had sufficient time in the first year of a three year phase to have gained sufficient mastery to participate in such an assessment.

There are disconcerting mismatches between the conceptualization of reading literacy in the NCS and the reading literacy teaching and assessment practices

of the four case study teachers. The case study is too small to make generalizations, but the teachers' practices may provide some possible insights into why South African learners performed so poorly on PIRLS 2006.

Statements made in the interviews with teachers suggest that they regard reading literacy as the ability to read aloud and to answer questions that require limited thinking skills. The teachers did not appear to have knowledge of what readers are required to know and be able to do in order to become competent readers. Grade Four teachers of English are expected to assist learners with the transition from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'. All the teachers in the case study were additional language English speakers who have a limited personal understanding of the complexity and use of the English language itself. These teachers also showed only a rudimentary understanding of the 'mechanics' of reading and were not in a position to assist the learners to master skills involved in decoding and interpreting text.

The summative reading literacy assessments of the case study teachers focus mainly on information texts and they ask questions that require simple factual recall. The PIRLS 2006 assessment includes both fiction stories and information texts. In the fiction texts learners are expected to engage with the setting, characters' actions and feelings, events and ideas. The information passages focus on natural phenomena and content in learning areas appropriate for grade 4 curricula. Data from the analysis of interviews and artefacts shows that the case study teachers do not teach or assess reading strategies that would support deep learning or assist learners to develop higher order thinking skills that are required for learning across the curriculum. This may be explained by the finding that the Grade Four teachers had little experience of reading programmes or children's books in general and had extremely limited access to books that could be used in their classrooms.

The teachers have not responded to the expectation in the policy documents of a conscious switch to 'reading to learn' in the intermediate phase. Their responses to several of the interview questions suggest that these teachers are

satisfied with their 'teaching' (even though this mainly consists of assessment and does not assist grade 4 learners to learn how to read for meaning). They are favourably disposed towards the new curriculum although they are critical of the limited support and resources available to them for its implementation.

Some of the mismatches between PIRLS 2006 and the teachers' summative assessments are understandable. For example, PIRLS 2006 has a single focus on reading literacy. The usual summative assessment practice in South African classrooms is to make reading literacy one section of a language paper. This is also the case with the final school National Senior Certificate assessment. Secondly, the extended texts used in PIRLS 2006 would be too expensive for schools with scarce resources to produce for regular assessment purposes.

In PIRLS 2006, the Russian Federation, Hong Kong SAR, and Singapore were the top performing countries at grade 4 level (Howie et al., 2008). However, Singapore and Hong Kong both participated in PIRLS 2001 and instituted systemic reforms in their respective reading curricula, instructional materials and teacher education and were amongst the countries that made the greatest gains between PIRLS 2001 and PIRLS 2006 (Howie et al., 2008). However, data from the interviews and the teachers' tests suggests that there had not been any such 'washback' effect on their teaching. The Foundations for Learning campaign, launched by the Department of Education (2008), may be an example of the systemic reforms described by Howie et al. (2008) which are aimed to improve learners' reading levels. The launch of this campaign may assist in addressing the mismatch between what teachers claim to do and their actual practice.

6.3 Recommendations

Grade Four teachers are expected to teach learners to master the skills and strategies to read for meaning at the level of text book English to enable learners to learn across a number of subjects (Macdonald & Burroughs, 1991). Considering that learners have had a variety of language experiences prior to

grade 4 as described in section 6.2, and that the teachers are themselves additional language speakers of English, some careful thought needs to be given to the nature of support required for teachers to make a meaningful contribution to reading literacy.

While the National Curriculum Statement requires teachers to have a good understanding of what can reasonably be expected of learners at different levels (DoE, 2003), sustained teacher development did not form part of the implementation of the new curriculum (Potenza & Monyokolo, 1999). As discussed in the cross case analysis, the teachers in this study have a 'shallow understanding' of the new curriculum. Each of them had attended only very brief 'training' workshops. None of them had a copy of the NCS. However, even if they had a copy, the document does not offer guidance for pedagogy. Christie noted in regard to the first version of Curriculum 2005 that "a major problem was that the curriculum documents provided outcome statements, but no specified content or pedagogy ... gave no guidance on what to teach or how" (Christie, 2008, p. 199). This issue was not addressed in the NCS.

Clearly teachers, who are expected to teach reading in new ways, with limited resources to learners who in some cases do not have sufficient mastery of the skills and knowledge needed to decode text (Pretorius, 2000), need sustained professional development opportunities in order to provide lessons of high quality.

One recommendation based on this study is that teacher development interventions should involve teachers learning how to understand and do things differently. Gallagher (2003) suggests some building blocks that could assist teachers in raising the levels of reading competencies of learners:

1. Students need access to high-interest reading materials.
2. Students must have a time to read and a place to read
3. Teachers must model the value of reading
4. Teachers must provide structure to a reading programme

(Gallagher, 2003, pp 5-12)

Access to classroom reading resources is essential if any reading intervention is going to be successful. McQuillan (1998) refers to the phrase 'book flood' coined by Warwick Elley when he puts forward his formula for reading success as being: more books = more reading = better reading. One recommendation would be the provision of sufficient reading resources to 'flood' classrooms and provide learners with a variety of texts. Given the different language experiences and levels of reading literacy mastery in a class, reading materials supplied for classroom reading need to be varied in complexity and genre and provide both sufficient 'stretch' and sufficient simplicity.

A recommendation that would support the second building block suggested above is to support teachers to use DEAR (drop everything and read) time instituted by the Foundations for Learning campaign to promote and hone the reading skills and strategies of learners.

In communities where the situated practice (Gee, 1996) does not include a print rich environment, it is important that teachers model the value of reading. Teachers could benefit from professional development opportunities which focus on devising strategies that promote successful reading.

Teachers may also benefit from professional development which focuses on providing structure to reading programmes. It is not enough that reading materials are made available in classrooms or that dedicated time is provided for the reading of these materials. Teachers also require a deep understanding of how learners learn to read as well as strategies to assist learners to master the skills and knowledge involved in reading for meaning. This could include assistance for teachers on how to teach explicit reading strategies as an alternative to the practice of reading out loud to the class or the learner reading out loud to the teacher.

With reference to assessment, Kanjee (2009) argues that for classroom assessment to be effective it is vital that teachers have sufficient subject

knowledge, have relevant assessment skills and have access to quality teaching resources. The case study data suggest that the four teachers would benefit from assistance in each of these areas.

To support professional development, consideration should be given to the reintroduction of high quality text books that would assist teachers to use texts at appropriate levels and introduce various reading strategies and questions that encourage the development of more complex cognitive levels of reasoning. For example, the information texts in PIRLS 2006 are similar in format to textbooks for natural sciences for grade 4 learners. The lack of access to this kind of textbook may have been a contributing factor to the South African learners' poor performance in PIRLS 2006. An additional recommendation is that schools be supplied with fiction and non-fiction books of good quality which they and their teachers can use for extended reading.

The research began with the aim of understanding how reading literacy and the reading literate subject are constituted in order to inform the kind of teacher development interventions that funding organizations can implement to improve learner competence in reading literacy in grade 4[30]. Having gained some insights in to how reading is 'taught' and assessed, I argue that future teacher interventions should include the supply of a variety of appropriate texts for use in classrooms, combined with professional development opportunities for teachers in the area of reading pedagogy. Funding organizations that embark on such interventions should take cognizance of the fact that such projects will be expensive and long term in nature.

[30] For learning and teaching in English Home Language and First Additional Language.

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Appendix A

A copy of the full statement of assessment standards for reading and viewing for English Home Language and First Additional Language

A copy of the full statement of the recommended texts for reading and viewing for English Home Language and First Additional Language

Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools)

Languages

English - First Additional Language

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Grade 4

Recommended Texts Continued

Written/Visual:

- Books (fiction and non-fiction)
- Simple children's poems
- Instructions
- Notices
- Book reports
- Recipes
- Timetables
- Diagrams
- Graphs and charts
- Simple maps and plans
- Photographs
- Cartoons
- Comics
- Pictures
- Word puzzles
- Dictionaries

Multimedia:

- Children's television programmes
- Television advertisements
- Children's films and videos (where available)
- CD-ROMs and Internet (where available)

Grade 4

Learning Outcome 3

READING AND VIEWING

The learner will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts.

Assessment Standards

We know this when the learner:

- Understands in a simple way some elements of stories:
  - title (e.g. chooses the best title from alternatives and gives reasons);
  - characters (e.g. thinks of appropriate names for unnamed characters);
  - notices how characters and plots are constructed to represent a particular view of the world (e.g. What roles do girls and boys play in the story? Are they stereotyped, or do boys and girls have the same possibilities?);
  - notices the role that pictures play in the construction of meaning (e.g. How are boys and girls depicted in the pictures?).

- Understands, in a very simple way, some elements of poetry:
  - rhyme (e.g. ring, sing);
  - words which begin with the same sound (e.g. 'Naughty Nomsa never listens.');
  - words which imitate their sound (e.g. swish, swish);
  - differences in the way languages represent these sounds (e.g. 'cluck cluck' and 'kri kri').

Grade 4

Learning Outcome 3 Continued

READING AND VIEWING

The learner will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts.

Assessment Standards

We know this when the learner:

- Reads for information:
  - reads simple maps and plans (e.g. follows a route);
  - reads and follows texts involving procedures (e.g. a recipe);
  - reads and follows timetables;
  - reads diagrams, graphs and charts (e.g. a family tree);
  - summarises a paragraph with support (e.g. fills in missing words in written summary);
  - reads texts across the curriculum (e.g. textbooks in other Learning Areas).

- Reads media texts:
  - understands the layout and design of a poster or public notice.

Grade 4

Learning Outcome 3 Continued

READING AND VIEWING

The learner will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts.

Assessment Standards

We know this when the learner:

- Reads for pleasure and information:
  - reads fiction and non-fiction books at an appropriate reading and language level;
  - evaluates books in a book report;
  - reads and solves puzzles (e.g. a crossword puzzle).

- Uses reference books and develops vocabulary:
  - uses a dictionary;
  - demonstrates a reading vocabulary of between 1000 and 2500 common words. Learners who will study other Learning Areas through their additional language should aim for 2500 words.

Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools)

Languages

English - Home Language

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Grade 4

Recommended Texts

Oral:

- Conversations
- Speeches
- Poems
- Choral verses
- Narratives (e.g. fables, legends, stories)
- Reports of events
- Jokes, riddles and limericks
- Weather reports
- Interviews
- Short talks
- Songs
- Word games
- Instructions (e.g. for a game)
- Directions

Written/Visual:

- Poems
- Stories
- Reports (e.g. science, weather, accident, sports)
- Narratives (e.g. fables, legends, stories)
- Procedures (e.g. recipes, instructions)
- Comics/cartoon strips
- Letters
- Diaries
- Reference books (e.g. dictionaries, encyclopaedias)
- Textbooks (from different Learning Areas)
- Drawings
- Collages
- Bar graphs
- Charts (e.g. flow charts)
- Mind maps
- Maps

Grade 4

Recommended Texts

Continued

Multimedia:

- Children's television dramas
- Television cartoons
- Television advertisements
- Computers or CD-ROMs (where available)
- Live performances
- Advertisements

Grade 5

Recommended Texts

Oral:

- Speeches
- Radio shows
- Oral poems (e.g. praise poems, ballads)
- Narratives (e.g. stories, fables, myths, legends)
- Instructions
- Directions
- News
- Reports (e.g. weather, sports)
- Choral chants
- Talks/short lectures
- Debates
- Plays
- Jokes, humorous anecdotes

Grade 4

Learning Outcome 3

READING AND VIEWING

The learner will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts.

Assessment Standards

We know this when the learner:

- Reads a variety of South African and international fiction and non-fiction texts for different purposes (e.g. poems, stories, myths, brochures, reference books and text-books):
  - reads independently using a variety of reading and comprehension strategies appropriate for different purposes;
  - skims for general idea;
  - scans for specific details;
  - surveys content page, headings, index for overview;
  - makes predictions, uses contextual clues to determine meaning, and makes inferences;
  - reads aloud clearly and with expression.

- Views and comments on various visual and multimedia texts for different purposes (e.g. pictures, posters, cartoons and, where available, computers and CD-ROMs):
  - interprets message;
  - identifies and discusses graphical techniques such as colour, design, choice of images, etc., and how they affect the message conveyed.

- Describes feelings about the text (factual or literary, visual or multimedia), giving reasons.

Grade 4

Learning Outcome 3 Continued

READING AND VIEWING

The learner will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts.

Assessment Standards

We know this when the learner:

- Discusses how the choice of language and graphical features influence the reader.
- Shows understanding and identifies and discusses aspects such as central idea, characters, setting and plot in fiction texts.
- Infers reasons for actions in the story.
- Understands the vocabulary and discusses the choice of words, imagery and sound effects in poems, stories and multimedia texts (e.g. rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, word pictures, humour).
- Recognises the different structures, language use, purposes and audiences of different kinds of texts:
  - identifies the different purposes of texts (e.g. speeches, stories, poems, advertisements);
  - identifies the way texts are organised;
  - identifies how language and register (degree of formality) differ according to purpose and audience;
  - identifies the language used in different kinds of texts (e.g. direct speech in fables, sequence words in procedures, passive speech in reports).

Grade 4



Learning Outcome 3 Continued

READING AND VIEWING

The learner will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts.



Assessment Standards

We know this when the learner:

- Identifies and discusses values in texts in relation to cultural, social, environmental and moral issues (e.g. moral of the story and its validity in different contexts, issues of fairness and equity in relation to different situations and characters).

- Understands and responds appropriately to information texts:
  - identifies main and supporting ideas;
  - scans for specific details in texts (e.g. weather reports, bus timetables, maps);
  - follows short printed instructions and directions.

- Interprets simple visual texts (tables, charts, posters, graphs, maps) and can change text from one form to another (e.g. graph to explanatory paragraph).

- Selects relevant texts for own information needs (e.g. dictionaries, children's encyclopaedias and reference books).

Appendix B

Permission from ethics committee of the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand

Permission from the Gauteng Department of Education

Permission from school principal letter

Teacher information letter

Teacher consent form

Permission to use field notes

Teacher Preliminary Biographical Questionnaire

Semi structured interview questions

Wits School of Education

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa
Tel: +27 11 717-3007 • Fax: +27 11 717-3009 • E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za • Website: www.wits.ac.za

STUDENT NUMBER: 297118
Protocol: 2008ECE 97

26 August 2008

Ms. Janet Marx
P O Box 287
PINEGOWRIE
2123

Dear Ms. Marx

Application for Ethics Clearance: Master of Education

I have a pleasure in advising you that the Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate has agreed to approve your application for ethics clearance submitted for your proposal entitled:

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

Recommendation:

Ethics clearance is granted

Yours sincerely

Matsie Mabeta
Wits School of Education

Cc Supervisor: Ms. Y Reed (via email)

UMnyango WezeMfundo
Department of Education

Lefapha la Thuto
Departement van Onderwys

Enquiries : Shadrack Phele MIRMSA

Tel. no. : [+2711] 355 0285

Monday, 04 October 2010

Mrs Marx Janet E
PO Box 287
PINEGOWRIE
2123

Dear Mrs Marx Janet E

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: PROJECT

The Gauteng Department of Education hereby grants permission to conduct research in its institutions as per application.

Topic of research	: "International, national and local assessment of reading literacy in Grade 4: matches or mismatched?"
Nature of project	: Masters in English Language
Name of university	: University of the Witwatersrand

Upon completion of the research project the researcher is obliged to furnish the Department with copy of the research report (electronic or hard copy).

The Department wishes you success in your academic pursuit.

Yours in Tirisano,

p.p. Shadrack Phele [MIRMSA]
TOM WASPE
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER
Gauteng Department of Education

Office of the DDG: IS & KM (CIO)
Room 1807, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001 P.O.Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000
Tel: (011) 355-1514/1507 Fax: (011) 355-0734/0833 E-mail: tomw@gpg.gov.za or elridar@gpg.gov.za

Permission from school principal

P O Box 287
Pinegowrie
Johannesburg
2123
May 2008

The Principal

Dear Madam/Sir

My name is Janet Marx and I am registered at the University of the Witwatersrand (student number 297118) for a Master's degree in English Language Education. It would be appreciated if you would allow me to use your school as one the sites for my research.

The aim of my research project is to investigate how Grade 4 teachers implement the reading assessment component of the curriculum. I am particularly interested in Grade 4 as this is the point at which the curriculum assumes the purpose of reading to be that of reading to learn.

Should you agree to allow me to use your school as a research site, the Grade 4 English teacher who is invited to participate will be asked to complete a questionnaire giving background information regarding their qualifications and experience as a language teacher. I will request permission to audio-tape an interview regarding his/her formal reading assessment practices. I will also request permission to copy examples of texts used for formal reading assessment as well as copies of any written tasks or tests that are used for formal reading assessment.

The school and teacher are assured of anonymity in the final research report and will be invited to proofread drafts of the report to ensure that details are accurately recorded and reported. Should you have any concerns or questions regarding this request you may contact me at 011 481 7826 during business hours.

Yours sincerely

Janet Marx

Teacher information letter

P O Box 287
Pinegowrie
Johannesburg
2123
May 2008

Dear Grade 4 English Educator

My name is Janet Marx and I am registered at the University of the Witwatersrand (student number 297118) for a Master's degree in English Language Education. I have chosen to undertake research into reading assessment practices in Grade 4 classes. More specifically, the aim of this research is to investigate what texts, tasks and tests teachers use to formally assess learners' reading in Grade 4. I am interested in investigating how these practices vary between schools in which the Grade 4 learners have been exposed to a 'straight for English' curriculum and schools where the Grade 4 learners have been exposed to a 'switch to English' curriculum.

I will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What texts are being used for teaching reading and for formal reading assessments?
2. What tasks and/or tests are being used for formal reading assessments?

Please complete the attached consent forms if you are willing to assist me with this research which would require the following:

1. Completing a biographical questionnaire regarding your qualifications and experience as a language teacher
2. Participating in an interview (no longer than an hour) at a time that is mutually convenient
3. Allowing the interview to be audio-recorded for later transcription and use in the research report
4. Allowing me to make copies of samples of the texts, tasks and tests used for formal reading assessment.

Yours sincerely

Janet Marx

Teacher consent form

Teacher Informed Consent Form

I _____ (teacher's name) hereby give my consent to participate in a research project being conducted by Janet Marx (student number 297118) for the purpose of completing a Master's Degree in English Language Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I understand that my anonymity is guaranteed in the final report.

1. I agree to complete a written questionnaire regarding my biographical details in terms of my qualifications and experience as an English teacher which will assist with the construction of specific interview questions as well as for data collection purposes.

2. I hereby give my consent to participate in an interview with Janet Marx. I understand that she will be enquiring about my classroom practice regarding the formal assessment of reading in Grade 4.

3. I hereby give my permission for audio-recording of the interview by Janet Marx as part of the process of her data collection for the research report that she will be writing for the completion of her Master's degree. I understand that the transcripts will be made of the interview and that extracts from these may be used in the final report. I have been assured that my school and myself have anonymity in the final report.

4. I hereby give permission for Janet Marx to make copies of artefacts used by me for the purpose of formal assessment which may include samples of reading texts, tasks and tests. I understand that these artefacts may be used in the research report.

I understand that:

- Participation in this research project is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed:_____

Date: _____

Permission to use field notes

September 2008

Permission to use field notes

Dear Grade 4 teacher

I would like to thank you for allowing me to interview you and to take artefacts from your classroom as part of my research into Grade 4 reading and assessment practice. You will remember that I took field notes prior to our audio recorded interview. I have typed these notes and request your permission to make reference to these notes in my research report.

I _____ hereby give permission for Janet Marx to make reference to the typed field notes taken prior to the audio recorded interview.

I understand that no information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed:_____

Date: _____

Teacher Preliminary Biographical Questionnaire

Teacher Preliminary Biographical Questionnaire

This research aims to investigate what texts, tasks and tests teachers use to formally assess learners' reading in Grade 4. I am interested in finding out how these practices vary between schools in which the Grade 4 learners have been exposed to a 'straight for English' curriculum and in schools where the Grade 4 learners have been exposed to a 'switch to English' curriculum.

Teachers who agree to participate in this research report are guaranteed complete anonymity in the final report. This questionnaire has been designed to provide me, as researcher, with some background information in preparation for an interview to be scheduled at a convenient time for the teachers concerned.

Questionnaire

1. Post presently held _____
2. Gender_____
3. Age_____
4. Qualifications

Diploma/Degree	Main Subject	Institution	Year Completed

5. General Teaching experience

Primary/Secondary School	Position held	Std/Grade taught	Subject/s	No of years

6. English Teaching experience

Grades and levels at which you have taught English	English as First Additional Language grade and years	English as Home Language grade and years

5. In service teacher training and professional development activities attended during the past five years: short courses/workshops attended that assisted you with the formal assessment of reading

Date (approximate)	Length of course/talk/workshop	Topic	Offered by

Semi structured interview questions

Thank you for agreeing to this interview.

Please be assured that:

- Your participation in this interview is voluntary
- You may refuse to answer any questions should you choose to
- You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time
- No information that will reveal your identity will be included in this research
- Your responses will remain confidential.

I would like to remind you that the interview is being audio recorded.

Feel free to ask for clarification should you not understand any of the questions.

Questions for teacher interview

1. What is your perception of the reading abilities/levels of your learners?
2. Tell me about the resources available for reading in your school?
3. What reading materials do you use in your class?
4. What do you consider to be the most successful aspects of your teaching of reading?
5. What kinds of reading tasks do you give your learners?
6. How often do you formally assess reading?
7. How do you assess reading?
8. Which reading skills do you assess?
9. How often do you give reading homework to learners?
10. How do you assess reading homework?