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A Case Study of Foundation Phase Teachers' Experiences of Literacy Coaching in the GPLMS Programme

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Abstract

This research aimed to understand the coaching experiences in the Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategy of 4 Foundation Phase teachers in 1 state school in Gauteng. It is a qualitative case study in an educational setting. The participants included 3 teachers, the Head of Department of the Foundation Phase, the coach and the coach's supervisor. Interviews and observations of teachers' lessons and of feedback sessions were the primary research instruments. The data was analysed using a model proposed by Ehrich, Hansford & Tennent (2001). The research found that the personal attributes and performance of the coach are important features in a successful coaching relationship. It also found that coaching appears to be making a positive contribution to these teachers' understanding and interpretation of curriculum documents, as well as adding to their content knowledge and methodology. The study suggests that a focus on enhancing teachers' reflective capacity, especially in relation to their pedagogy, may be a beneficial addition to current coaching practice.

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

Lesley Masterson

15th day of February 2013

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Key agents in the success of any schooling system are the professional teachers who work in it. . . The commitment, competence and quality of the teachers in any schooling system are necessary ingredients in its success. Morrow (2007, p. 29)

1.1 Background to the project: Literacy in South Africa

There cannot be many South Africans who would disagree with the fact that education is a crucial factor in building a prosperous country. Reading is an essential skill for all citizens who wish to participate appropriately and meaningfully in our 'new' democratic society and in the modern world. If one considers the numerous education policies that have been introduced since 1994, one could reasonably conclude that those in authority are committed to sound education for all South African citizens. Nevertheless, despite the beliefs of people, and despite the efforts of the South African government, South African literacy education is in a state of crisis.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) provided the first baseline data in all 11 official languages with international comparative data and benchmarks (Howie, Venter, Van Staden, Zimmerman, Long, Du Toit, Sherman & Archer, 2006). This data was gathered just over a decade after the transition to a new government. South Africa's average achievement in reading literacy at the grade 4 and 5 levels was lower than that of any other country in the study. Moreover, evidence of literacy achievements gathered by the Gauteng Department of Education showed similarly concerning results (GDE, 2010). The grade 6 Intermediate Phase Systemic Evaluation of 2005 showed that only 28% of all Grade 6 learners in the sample were reading at levels that were required by the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). Almost two thirds of all children were measured at "not achieved" on the standardised test. The existing studies, done both locally and internationally, have produced consistent results over time (GDE, 2010) which suggests that the measurement instruments are not at fault. Hence it appears that it is weaknesses in policies and programmes, or possibly their implementation, that need to be addressed. Findings from the 2011 PIRLS, discussed in chapter 2, show similarly concerning results (Howie, Van Staden, Tshele, Dowse, & Zimmerman (2012).

The successful development of a literacy programme is a complex process, impacted by many factors (Fleisch, 2008). Some of these are located within the child (the language s/he hears and speaks at home; learning abilities); some within his or her community, particularly the family, (the kinds of literacy practices found within the home; the ways in which literacy is valued within the home; the presence of libraries within the community; contexts of poverty; access to resources); and others are located within the school. Key among these school factors are the teachers. There needs to be a competent teacher in the classroom – one who knows and can speak, read and write the target language and who knows how to teach it. In addition there need to be appropriate resources for teaching literacy – readers, exercise books, posters, charts and more. The first three to four years of schooling lay the foundation for all the learning that will follow. Fundamental to children's ongoing successful learning is their ability to read – that is, to decode and make meaning from written text. These early years of schooling are often the most vital of their educational lives.

1.2 Teacher Training

Skills development for teachers in poorly-performing schools is foregrounded in this case study research. Such up-skilling has been necessitated by the impact of the apartheid government's education policy prior to 1994.

> For the black population . . . very few students successfully [completed] basic education, and even fewer successfully [completed] secondary schooling . . . [and] the curriculum within the secondary school system was usually limited to humanities subjects such as history and religious studies (Sayed, 2004 p. 248)

It is generally true to say that South African schools for populations other than whites suffered under a legacy of inadequate provision at every level. Legislation designed to enforce the physical separation of the different population groups resulted in a proliferation of teacher training institutions, with highly variable standards (Sayed, 2004). There was no coherent national plan – except the plan of racially segregated teacher education – a highly fragmented affair, with the least money being spent on the education of black teachers. Yet teacher training was a means of access to tertiary education, and so many members of the black population went to these institutions as a means of furthering their education, and

then, because so few jobs were open to them, and because of the limitations of the secondary school curriculum, went into either preaching or teaching (Sayed, 2004).

Researchers have recognised that what teachers know is one of the most important factors that influence school classrooms and learner performance. Studies of teachers' content and pedagogic knowledge show cause for concern (Fleisch, 2008). Makalala (2012) conducted a reading intervention at a remote rural school in Limpopo. He concludes that results from this intervention point to the long-lasting effects of the deficiencies of teacher education of the past, particularly insufficient theoretical grounding in teaching practices to develop literacy in either African languages or English. More of this will be discussed in Chapter 2.

1.3 Language

Today South African legislation recognises eleven official languages. More are spoken, and in addition, all of the eleven languages have more than one dialect. The language in which children receive their education has been a contested issue in this country. Most parents, whatever their home language, desire their children to be literate in English, which is seen as the language of access – to education, information, employment and power (Granville, Janks, Mphahlele, Reed, Watson, Joseph & Ramani, 2010). Such a desire is not in line with some researchers' writings which point to the Home Language together with early access to another language (additive bilingualism) being the better choice for literacy development in the initial years of schooling (Heugh, 2000). The multiplicity of languages spoken to various degrees of proficiency by learners and teachers in the same classroom, and in all classrooms across the country makes literacy teaching a complex matter. In Gauteng, for instance, the most commonly spoken African languages are isiZulu and Sesotho. However, these languages are spoken by only 19.8% and 11.6% of the population respectively (Census 2010 figures). English and Afrikaans speakers account for less than 26% of the population: most of the rest of the people speak one of the other African languages. In addition, Gauteng has numbers of immigrants from other African countries and this adds to the number of languages spoken in the schools. The number of languages spoken in schools in Gauteng adds substantially to the challenges that teachers of literacy are faced with.

1.4 The Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategy

The vision and mission of the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) is that "By the end of primary school all Gauteng learners can read and write fluently for purpose and enjoyment" *(GDE, 2010, p.5).* The Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS)[1] has been devised as a means of achieving this vision, and of addressing the weaknesses in previous policies and programmes. The GPLMS adopts an approach to teaching literacy in which both decoding and comprehension are seen as important. However, rather than imposing the Strategy on all the schools within the province (the approach taken in the past whenever any new policy was introduced) a total of 832 schools in the province have been targeted as needing support. According to the policy document, the main means of improving teaching and learning in the GPLMS are the aligned curriculum policy guidelines and the literacy materials – well designed text books, work books, readers and teacher guides. Together with these resources, the Department has implemented a programme of teacher training which includes the deployment of coaches to guide teachers as they learn and implement specific teaching practices (GDE, 2010).This is a novel development; mentoring of teachers has not been an element of teacher training in South Africa in the past.

1.5 Rationale

My interest in the GPLS is primarily in the coaching of Foundation Phase teachers and how the participating teachers feel about the coaching they are receiving. Secondly I wanted to try to discover whether the classroom practices of the participating teachers are changing as a result of the GPLS, and, if so, whether the teachers believe that the coaching that they have been experiencing has been instrumental in bringing this about. The literature on changing instructional practices of teachers all seems to suggest that such change happens either very slowly or with great difficulty – possibly not at all.

Teachers and their teaching are only elements in the web that is South African education. However, because they are the ones directly entrusted with the hugely responsible task of teaching children who are entering the system to learn to read, I believe they are the most

[1] The original name (2011) was The Gauteng Primary Literacy Strategy. Mathematics was added in 2012. This research study investigates the literacy component only.

vital element. It is essential that they are equipped to be knowledgeable and strategic – in other words, competent for the task. It is important to find out whether mentoring is contributing to this outcome, and if so, how. Valuable time and resources have been invested in the GPLMS, and research that sheds light on the effectiveness of this Strategy can set the appropriate course for future teacher development programmes.

I was trained as a teacher and have many years of experience in language teaching – Afrikaans as additional language and English as home language - in high schools in both KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng. My teaching spanned the transition to a democratic government, and it was in particular the challenge of teaching English as HL to learners whose primary language was not English that led me to embark on a post-graduate degree in Applied English Language Studies. Then, having decided to take a break from teaching in high school, I was offered the opportunity of teaching Language studies to Foundation Phase and Intersen teachers registered for the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) at Wits from 2008 - 2010.

These semester-long courses were designed to equip the teachers to teach reading and writing, as well as to promote a reflective perspective on their pedagogy in multilingual, multicultural South African classrooms. These were teachers who had experienced numerous changes in curricula, had been issued with a plethora of policy documents and had attended regular and frequent training sessions run by the GDE, designed specifically to equip the teachers to implement the various policies. Nevertheless, as we interacted with the teachers on the ACE courses, it seemed to the team of us who were teaching them that changes in teachers' approaches and pedagogy in response to the new curricula had been mostly negligible. In many instances it was plain that the combined effect of the policies, curricula and training sessions had produced in them a rigorous attention to the form of these without any real insight into the meaning. Moreover, one of the concerns experienced and expressed by the group teaching the ACE course was the lack of opportunity to observe whether the teachers were internalising and implementing what they were learning, or at least being encouraged to try, in their classrooms. The team who taught the teachers only saw them on the university campus, and were only able to assess their learning through discussions in the groups, formal oral assessments, and formal and informal written

responses, including examinations. In other words – we had no means of holding them accountable for the actual implementation of what they said they were learning.

Then, for 5 days in January 2011 I was an assistant to one of the coaches employed by Ace Training[2] (a Johannesburg-based educational training and development company) to train teachers to implement the GPLMS. The differences between the ACE programme and the GPLMS interested me sufficiently to cause me to want to undertake this research. It seems to me that teachers are more likely to change well-established classroom practices if there is sustained encouragement to do so – and there are several elements to the GPLMS, particularly regular support by a coach, which may provide such encouragement. The teachers' responses after a week of training seemed to reflect that for most of them the way of teaching literacy which they had been taught over the space of five days was one that they believed they could implement, and one that would help them to improve reading skills in their learners. Their largely enthusiastic response to the training was all the more remarkable as it was a complete about turn from their attitude at the start of the week. It would not be overstating it to say that their initial attitude towards yet another training programme was resentful and hostile. In front of my own eyes, I saw a change in a large group of teachers. I wanted to know whether having a coach go into the schools to visit and support and train them would bring about change in their practices. A major impetus for wanting to conduct this research, therefore, was to discover whether this Strategy for improving teachers' literacy teaching, and learners' literacy learning was being effective.

Because mentoring has not been a feature of South African teacher training and professional development, it is important to find out to what extent there is genuine engagement on the part of teachers and coaches with this process. If these participants are merely going through the motions, paying lip service to a programme until it ends, there is unlikely to be meaningful and effective change in teachers' praxis or in learners' literacy achievements. If however, there is genuine engagement and if there are signs that teachers' practices are changing as a result of the coaching, then there is the possibility of concluding that mentoring is a useful tool in teachers' professional development. This is a case study and therefore has limited application. However the details of these participants' experiences may uncover issues and raise questions that need to be addressed, and may

[2] This is a pseudonym.

prove useful for ongoing research in this area, especially because teacher change is such a complex issue.

1.6 Research Questions

My research questions, therefore, focus on the areas of

- teachers and coaching;
- teachers and literacy teaching;
- coach and supervisor and their assessment of teachers in the GPLMS.

There are three levels within the coaching programme as it is implemented in the GPLMS:

- the training company that trains the coaches to deliver the GPLMS to the schools;
- the coaches who go into the schools weekly to train the teachers;
- the teachers who are the recipients of the training.

The following questions have set the direction for my research:

1.1 What do three Foundation Phase teachers think about the role of the coach in the GPLMS programme?

1.2 Did it make a difference to these teachers, in their opinion and experience, to have a coach?

2.1 What is the coach's view of her[3] role in the GPLMS programme?

2.2 How does she think each teacher is responding to her training/coaching?

3.1 What is the supervisor's view of how coach and teachers have responded to the coaching aspect of the GPLMS?

1.7 Conclusion

The following chapter will discuss the background to this research study in more detail and review the literature about literacy and mentoring.

[3] All the participants in this study are female. References to them will always use feminine pronouns.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

At a conceptual level, it is understood that reading and mathematics are not singular easily definable competencies that teachers produce in schoolchildren but things that are formed in multiple overlapping spaces, with diverse forces determining their achievement and meaning. (Fleisch, 2008, p. viii)

Given that effective teachers are key determinants of successful pupil learning, it is not surprising that government initiatives have been directed at the management of teachers' performance and at supporting them in their professional development. (Rhodes & Beneicke, 2006 p.298)

2.1 Introduction

How to ensure that quality learning and teaching takes place in schools has long been a concern for teachers and researchers within the education sector. This has never been more true for South Africans involved in and affected by education policy and practices than in the years since 1994. It is impossible to be unaware of the articles, commentary, praise, criticism, reports and talk shows on this topic that regularly fill the pages and the air waves of the media in this country.

In this chapter I will consider the broad context of South African education, with some reflection on literacy and literacy teaching. I consider what the GPLMS sets out to achieve, and use a critical lens to uncover what some of the problems may be. I review research and writings about mentoring, and discuss a theoretical framework for the analysis of my data.

2.2 South African Education in Context

Numerous policies and curricula have dominated the South African schooling system since the transition to democratic rule in 1994. It was the vision of the new government that whereas the old curriculum had been used to divide the races and to imprison them in dominant or subordinate positions in society, the new one would unite them and free them to participate as equals in a democratic and prosperous South Africa (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). Introduced and hailed as the solution to unequal racially-determined education, the succeeding curricula and policies have failed the very people they were designed to help. This is perhaps not surprising if one accepts the critique that the first Curriculum, C2005,

was a political, not a pedagogical project (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). However, with hindsight it seems clear that no policy or curriculum could compensate for the lack of provision for black education - at all levels - under an apartheid government. The consequences of apartheid were being experienced in many levels of South African life and the stresses and strains in education were a part of a far broader scenario.

According to Fleisch (2008), it is possible to identify a bimodal system of education in South Africa. One system consists mainly of former white, Indian and independent schools, is well-resourced and produces the majority of university graduates. The other consists of the majority of black and working class children and is not well-resourced. The children who leave this system exit with limited knowledge and skills. He speaks of a "devastating story of unequal learning" (2008, p.2). This bleak picture is borne out by South Africa's scores in National and International benchmark tests of literacy achievement (see section 2.2.5)

An attempt to standardise teaching and learning in a unitary system would be a serious challenge for any government. However, the bimodal system of education is one part of a matrix of social issues in South African society. Fleisch (2008) identifies the issues of poverty, health, literacy practices in the home, the home language of learners in relation to the language of the school, and teacher training and competence. I use these categories to frame some of the discussion.

2.2.1 School Achievement and Poverty

Poverty results in poor nutrition in children which affects their health which in turn affects learners' attendance at school. The death of (a) parent(s), or financially strained circumstances can result in the child being sent to live with a relative – resulting in a change of location, and sometimes a change in the LoLT at the new school, with further disruption in school attendance and in learning. We do teachers a grave disservice if we do not keep these circumstances in mind, especially when we consider educational policy and children's learning. Teachers are at the interface where the child - the product of his/her social background and personal circumstances - and the education system meet. The teachers are the ones who are required to translate policy into educational praxis that works for each child. No teacher, however competent, will necessarily be able to do this for each child in her class (Fleisch, 2008; Bloch, 2009).

2.2.2 School Achievement and Home Literacy Practices

Heath's (1983) landmark ethnographic study highlighted the differences between the home and school literacy practices of three different communities of people in Carolina, USA. A study by Pretorius and Ribbens (2005) in the greater Pretoria area suggests that it is not merely the presence or absence of reading material in the home that impacts on young people's reading practices, but how the adults interact with them around these materials. A study of a Griqua community in the Free State shows how the reading practices of the parents result in restricted learning possibilities for their children (Naude, Pretorius & Viljoen, 2003). In almost every country that participated in PIRLS (2011) there was a strong link between reading achievement and home environments (Howie et al, 2012); specifically between parents' high regard for reading and learners' results, and children's own enjoyment, confidence and motivation around reading.

However, and in addition to the above, it would be wrong to assume that literacy and being literate must always be defined as reading and writing as decoding practices– most especially in South Africa. Nor does a lack of school literacy necessarily always define or circumscribe a person's ability to operate within situations where competence in reading and writing are the norm. Such a view would be too limiting and potentially dismissive of the literacy practices that many people display. This is illustrated by Kell's (2003) example of Winnie Tsotso. She views herself as illiterate, and it is true that she cannot decode text, yet she was highly involved in literacy practices, particularly through her role as an advice office worker, helping people with pension cards, welfare grants and identification document applications.

2.2.3 School Achievement and Teacher Competence

In 1994, the new government inherited eighteen education departments responsible for teacher education, with thirty-two autonomous universities and technikons, and about one hundred and five colleges of education scattered throughout the apartheid/homelands system (Sayed, 2004). One of its first tasks was to address unequal provisioning of teacher training. Sayed argues that the reconfiguration of teacher education in the mid-1990s is 'one of the most significant policy changes in post-apartheid education' (2004, p.252). It chose to put teacher education firmly within the higher education sphere so that universities became

the main providers of both primary and secondary teacher education. This shift signalled a belief that 'what is required in teacher education in South Africa is a strong focus on first, "subject/learning area content knowledge" and second, a research culture which universities rather than colleges are seen to provide' (Sayed, 2004, p.256). The vision was that teachers would make a key contribution to providing quality education for all. This has not yet come about.

While acknowledging that the evidence base is still at a formative stage, Fleisch suggests that 'disadvantaged schoolchildren are typically exposed to inappropriate teaching caused by a combination of a misinterpretation of the new curriculum, a lack of and an underutilisation of textbooks and readers, poor subject and pedagogical knowledge and ineffective methods.' (2008, p.138). Bloch (2009) states that it is essential for the 400 000 and more teachers in South Africa to come on board and to play a role in fixing the problems with its schools.

> Getting teachers right is priority number one if schools are going to work. It will require a mixture of support and laying down the line, an acknowledgement of the complexity of teaching and the many difficulties faced by teachers, alongside a set of demands laying out exactly what is expected of the teachers in our classrooms. (Bloch, 2009, p. 22)

This approach sounds pleasingly decisive, reasonable and achievable. I have already suggested, however, that because of a matrix of complex factors, this is less easy to translate into the desired outcomes than it appears to be. What Bloch (2009) does acknowledge, however, is that education is not only the responsibility of the teachers: it will also need to be a broad societal concern.

Jansen (2001), in a paper on teachers' identities pre-and post-apartheid, outlines how the multiple stresses and pressures teachers experience impact on their capacity to handle the emotional demands made on them by a new policy. This resonates with my own experience in a State Secondary School between 1995 and 2008, and with the behaviour of my colleagues in other State schools, both primary and secondary. As in-service teachers we were required to attend training and information sessions, sometimes for a week at a time, in various components of policy and curriculum change. These sessions caused resentment

and a deeply ambivalent response[4]: the former because such training took place in school holidays; and the latter because it was run by colleagues from other schools who had been 'persuaded' by the Gauteng Education Department to be trainers. This top-down approach did little or nothing to change deeply ingrained classroom practices, but rather had the effect of causing many teachers, myself included, either to pay lip service to the course, or to contest in a hostile fashion what we were being told. What my colleagues and I seldom did was engage thoughtfully, creatively and productively with the materials or the new curriculum. Jansen's recommendation seems particularly pertinent in this context: that "the strategic task is to create dialogues of meaning . . . between policy, politics and practice in transforming education in developing countries" (Jansen, 2001, p. 246).

Johnson, Hodges & Mork (2000) also consider the implications of changing teacher practices. In their discussion of professional development for Science teachers in post-apartheid South Africa, they argue against northern/western ideas about teacher change and development. In their analysis they point out that those managing in-service programmes do not often realise to what extent the environment in which the historically disadvantaged work limits their ability to draw on the kinds of behaviours modelled for them. They conclude that current practices need to be researched more thoroughly and that change may need to be facilitated through more modest steps. I suggest that the rapid rate of change, teacher stress (Jansen, 2001) and the current state of many South African schools suggests that the more modest steps may be an appropriate strategy.

2.2.4 School Achievement and Language of Learning and Teaching

The language of learning and teaching (LoLT) is a much debated topic among researchers and teacher educators in South Africa (Alexander, 2000; Heugh, 2000; Makalala, 2012) For many parents, English is the language of choice for their children's education. It is seen as giving access to further education, employment opportunities and social status. Yet most South African children grow up in homes where English is not their spoken language. There is some agreement that a difference between the LoLT and the learner's home language impacts in noticeable ways on learning (Alidou, Boly, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh, & Wolff, 2006; Alexander, 2000; Dixon & Peake, 2008). Heugh (2000) reflects a common view in the

[4] The ambivalence arose because the trainer often identified with the teachers' objections or frustrations with the new policy, while simultaneously supporting the official line.

literature on language in education, suggesting that for many children additive bilingual education, where all the initial teaching is conducted in the home language and the second language (probably English) is systematically added, is the way to proceed . She states that "the less use made of the mother tongue in education, the less likely the student is to perform well across the curriculum and in English". She continues: "If the mother tongue is replaced, the second language will not be adequately learnt and linguistic proficiency in both languages will be compromised" (Heugh, 2000, p.7).

Certain investigations in South Africa seem to suggest that speakers of African languages who make considerable progress in learning English sometimes have the advantage of attending well-resourced schools, have access to competent English-speaking teachers and themselves hear and speak considerable English (Fleisch, 2008). The challenge is to make such resources available to more children. Urban township children are unlikely to hear or to speak sufficient English for them to develop even Basic Interpersonal Communicative skills (BICS) (Cummins, 1984), and therefore, for them, learning in English is likely to be a barrier. And for children living in informal settlements and deep rural areas, English is likely to be more like a foreign language, and an almost insurmountable barrier to learning (Fleisch, 2008).

2.2.5 School Achievement and PIRLS

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2011 was the second PIRLS in which South Africa took part. It was the "largest, most ambitious and complex national design within an international comparative study yet undertaken" (Howie et al, 2012, p.XI). A total of 15 744 Grade 4 learners in 341 schools were tested in eleven languages, and 3 515 grade 5 learners in 92 schools were tested in English and Afrikaans. Howie et al (2012)'s analysis reported the following:

- South African grade 4 learners wrote an easier assessment, but achieved well below the international centre point and performed at a low level overall compared to their counterparts internationally.
- Grade 4 learners tested in English and Afrikaans performed relatively well – above the international centre point.

- Those tested in all African languages achieved very low outcomes, especially those tested in Sepedi and Tshivenda.
- Grade 5 learners were performing at below the centre point, and in addition, forty-three per cent were unable to reach the Low International benchmark.

The results of both the PIRLS assessments and other standardised tests indicate that literacy learning in South Africa is lagging far behind even moderate international standards, and that there is still a cause for concern.

2.3. Approaches to Literacy Teaching

Ideas and theories about literacy have undergone many changes since the start of the twentieth century. How children learn as well as the idea of 'readiness' for reading have been part of this debate (Gillen & Hall, 2003). World War II brought with it a need for a wider variety of skills than ever before, a need which highlighted the effect of low levels of literacy in the adult population. However, it was Frank Smith's book, *Understanding Reading* (1971) that applied the thinking and writing of the time to children's literacy. His views were hotly contested, but had the effect of broadening reading-related research which began to consider children as agents in their own learning of literacy, and reading as a far more complex activity, one that involved both cognitive and strategic processes (Gillen and Hall, 2003). In the late 70s and early 80s as the result of numerous studies of literacy in younger children, a new field of study – emergent literacy (Clay, 1972) – arose and with it, a redefinition of literacy, such that 'literacy began to be viewed as a much broader set of print-related behaviours than those conventionally experienced in education' (Gillen & Hall, 2003, p.6). Social constructivist views of language and early literacy – through the emergent literacy theory - have theorised that learning is a socially mediated process that begins within a particular social context (Razfar & Guiterrez, 2003). According to Strickland (2010), there is now substantial agreement among educators and policymakers that a strong foundation in early literacy is critical for success in school. This is yet another factor that needs to be considered when assessing teachers and the teaching of literacy in the Foundation Phase of formal schooling. The foundations for literacy learning are laid – or not - long before the child and the teacher meet. I suggest that this fact, together with the

effects of literacy practices in the home, makes the teaching of literacy a highly challenging one for the teachers in South African schools.

Turbill (2002) suggests four ages of reading philosophy and pedagogy: reading as decoding; reading as meaning making; reading-writing connections; and reading for social purpose. He then goes on to suggest that we have now moved into a fifth age – that of multiliteracies. Historically the teaching of literacy has taken one of three approaches: a technical approach in which decoding has been the dominant concern; a whole language approach in which meaning-making has been the focus; and an integrated/balanced approach which has combined both decoding and meaning-making. I would also argue that teachers who have not been exposed to reading and discussion about the historical background and changes in literacy teaching, as well as the research which motivated these changes, may, understandably, have low levels of motivation to change their own practices.

What emerges from this very brief background is that literacy is a complex skill, impacted on in the South African context, by a multitude of factors, and so too is the teaching of it.

2.3.1 The Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS)

The GPLMS (GDE, 2010) is the GDE's response to the literacy crisis in underperforming schools. The department identified - initially 792 and now - 832 of its schools as underperforming, and devised a Strategy to improve teaching and learning in these schools. This is a departure from previous programmes in that it targeted only those institutions where it is most needed. The Strategy has two key goals: to promote the learning of new practices by teachers in order to transform classroom practice; and to improve learner achievement. These two components are seen as strongly interlinked, with the teacher practices largely determining learner outcomes. The Strategy includes provision for Annual National Assessments (ANAs) as a means of monitoring student achievement and as a means of feedback for teachers on what has been accomplished.

Coaching is the means of improving teacher practice and the training of coaches was outsourced to NGOs. The Strategy states:

> Teachers will undergo direct training, but instead of a top-down approach in large numbers, individual and small groups of teachers will work closely with expert mentors and coaches around new teaching practices (GDE, 2010, p.19)

Training for the coaches commenced in December 2010 and the first training session for teachers was held in January 2011. Teachers are trained by the coaches in all aspects of teaching reading, and training is ongoing with meetings of teachers within a school and across school groups for training in new aspects of the curriculum. These coaches also visit the teachers in their schools and observe them at work in their classrooms. Pre- and post-observation discussions are a part of each visit, and the role of the coach is unambiguous: to support the teacher. Confidentiality is a fundamental principle in the process: no reports are given to principals or HODs or anyone else, except the organisation that trains the coaches.

As part of the Strategy, the Department has set the goal of increasing the pass rate of learners doing reading evaluation to at least 60% by 2014 (GDE, 2010, p.11). The approach to the teaching of literacy is specified: the Simple Literacy approach which integrates decoding and comprehension. The policy specifies that almost half of the teaching time must be allocated to literacy. One of the desired outcomes is that learners must be able to read 'real' books, and write for 'real' purposes (Howie et al, 2007).

The policy reflects a holistic approach in stating that it is necessary for the parents to be involved in their children's acquisition of literacy and that library facilities in the school and the community are also needed (GDE, 2010).

Finally, the policy also states that internal and external monitoring and evaluation will be implemented to 'test the extent to which goals and specific targets are achieved' (GDE, 2010, p.12) The ANAs are a part of this, as are regular class assessments.

All the teaching content is aligned with the CAPS document. In addition, detailed lesson plan outlines have been provided to the teachers.

Some stakeholders, both within and outside the schools have criticised these plans, saying that they are disempowering teachers. However, Fleisch (2012) points out that prescriptive lesson plans (Lesson Plan Outlines, or LPO's)were a direct response to teachers' demands, and as these LPO's operationalised CAPS, they were a key to the teachers' learning of both

new instructional practices and the provisions of the CAPS, a lengthy document that many teachers are unlikely to read. In this instance the more prescriptive nature of this approach is set up as a means to empower teachers.

2.4 Systemic Reform

Systemic reform is not unique to South Africa. In the first decade of this century, governments around the world focused on educational policy as a means of ensuring that its children become literate. *No child left behind* (United States of America), *National Literacy Strategy* (United Kingdom), and *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (Ireland) are three such initiatives (Kennedy, 2010). It is apparent, therefore, that literacy learning is an educational concern that is global. While we in South Africa have particular challenges arising from our historical and political past, we are not alone in trying to cope with the challenges of literacy learning in a multilingual society.

2.4.1 The National Literacy Strategy, England

Governments around the world have been concerned about low levels of literacy in schoolchildren. The response of the government in England because of major concerns about pupil attainment, teaching approaches and the professional development of teachers, was to design and implement a National Literacy Strategy (NLS). Many of the principles and features of the GPLS have been based on the NLS. There has been an opportunity to evaluate the NLS as it has been in operation for ten years. A report by Beard states:

> The effect of the NLS appears to have been a substantial increase in pupil attainment in primary school children, as measured in the results from national tests that are administered annually to 11-year-olds (2011, p.63).

Although the GPLMS has only been in operation for two years, the results of the ANAs for 2012 have been published and appear to show a similar trend. According to the online report -

The results indicate that learner performance in the Foundation Phase (Grade 1, 2 and 3) is pleasing. As compared to the 35% in 2011, the average learner performance in Literacy in Grade 3 stands at 52%, registering an improvement of 17% from 2011. Speaking during the

2012 ANA release, the MEC, Barbara Creecy said that the Annual National Assessments was not only about the results, but also to provide guidance for all who are involved in improving the quality education to provide the necessary support where needed.

Beard (2011) sounded a cautionary note in some of his evaluation stating that the NLS has made substantial demands on teachers by introducing new teaching approaches and making considerable demands on their subject knowledge. He also argues that the significance of three key issues in literacy teaching is at risk of being overlooked and undervalued in schools. These issues are reading to the class, learners' own independent reading and extended writing.

A further evaluation of the NLS – the HMI report – proposed "that teachers now needed to develop a more questioning and reflective approach" to the next stage of implementation (Beard, 2011, p.73).

2.5 Changing Teachers' Practices

The need for teachers to question and reflect on their own practice is implicit in Dixon's (2011) observations on the classroom practices of student teachers. The learning practices they experienced as children are deeply ingrained in them. As a result, when they go into classrooms, they teach the way they were taught. This is despite their being exposed to a variety of methodological approaches in their professional training. 'The new ways of doing have not replaced the old ways of knowing' (2011, p.169). Perhaps this is unsurprising: student teachers are learning the theory in lecture theatres and tutorial rooms, places far removed from the classrooms where they must apply the theory. This review will consider what the literature shows about the effects of mentoring on teacher practice.

2.6 Teacher Development and Mentoring

Unlike many other professions, there is no gradual assumption of responsibilities for a beginner teacher. S/he has to fulfil all the roles and responsibilities that an experienced teacher is expected to assume – but without the necessary experience and practice. Even well-prepared beginning teachers are still novices and have much to learn (Bartell, 2005), and mentoring is the tool often used for this.

The substantial body of literature available on mentoring is situated in two main fields: business and education. This review will focus on the literature that pertains to teacher education. Research into teacher mentoring has been conducted in Australia (Ehrich, Hansford & Tennent, 2004); in the United States (Bartell, 2005), Darling-Hammond, 2008; Joyce and Showers, 2002; Feiman-Nemser, 1990); in the United Kingdom (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006) and in Holland (Veenman, 1998). However there is little research into mentoring in the South African context. Dixon, Excell, Linington, Mathews, Mdluli & Motilal have written a paper on Strengthening Foundation Phase Teacher Education through Mentoring (2012). An intervention by the Academic Literacy Research Unit (ALRU) at Unisa (UNISA, 2012) has investigated embedded literacy coaching in one school in the greater Pretoria area. It is my hope that this case study will add to the discourse on mentoring and suggest possible future lines of enquiry into this approach to teacher development.

2.6.1 Defining Mentoring

Two terms, *mentor* and *coach* are used regularly for the mentor function in organisations. *Mentee* and recently *coachee* are terms used for those who receive mentoring or coaching. Many of the definitions of these terms use the one to explain the other. For instance, Bartell (2005) defines a *mentor* as 'a critical friend, buddy, *coach***,** teacher-adviser, consultant, team-mate and support-provider' (p.73).

Harrison et al (2006) review the definitions of coaching and suggest that within teacher education, *coaching* is usually thought of as a type of *mentoring* which focuses on particular tasks, skills or capabilities and is related to performance. They state that coaching is usually differentiated from mentoring in that it does not by definition generally include aspects of counselling, friendship and socialisation between mentor and mentee. A definition which makes the individual components of the coaching process specific is the definition of peer-coaching offered by Robbins (1995) cited in Rhodes & Beneicke (2001) as:

> A confidential process through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect upon current practices; expand, refine and build new skill; share ideas; conduct action research; teach one another or problem solve within the workplace.

This appears to be an ideal definition of what peer-coaching can be. However, I did not observe all these elements in coaching as I heard it described and saw it in action in this study. The way it is being practised in the school I visited is more in line with Clutterbuck's (1992) definition of a mentor as 'a more experienced individual, willing to share his or her knowledge with someone less experienced in a relationship of mutual trust' (cited in Harrison, Dymoke and Pell, 2006, p.1056).

The goal or outcome of the mentor-mentee/coach/coachee relationship is learning: in the first instance, learning for the mentee, although learning for the mentor is not excluded. Mentoring has both a relational function (what Kram (1985) calls the psychosocial function) and a skills-based function.

The focus of this research is the coaching and coaches in the GPLMS programme. The GPLMS document uses the terms coach and coaching when it describes the teacher development process. However much of the literature in this area of research uses the term mentor to describe what coaches do, and the lines of distinction between these terms are not clearly and unanimously defined. In this report, therefore, I have chosen to use the terms interchangeably, on the basis that mentoring includes coaching and coaching is a kind of mentoring.

2.6.2 Mentoring Models

The literature reveals different ways or models of implementing mentoring in organisations. One model of mentoring has persons coming in from outside the school to mentor teachers within the school (GPLMS, 2010). Another has teachers within a school pursuing both a full timetable of their own classroom teaching and, in addition, mentoring one or more of their colleagues. A third model is a compromise between the two, such as the programme discussed by Zimpher and Rieger (2001) of teachers who remained within schools with some ongoing teaching responsibilities, but who were also freed in order to mentor other novice teachers. According to them, the following elements are critical in this type of mentoring programme:

- equipping mentors for their role, allowing time for mentors and inductees to work together, juxtaposing mentors and inductees in team teaching

> opportunities, encouraging them to engage in collaborative classroom enquiry, and reinforcing wherever possible the human dimensions of this dyadic relationship - (2001, p.181).

Yet another model of mentor-mentee pairing is that of Zwart, Wubbel, Bergen & Bolhuis (2009) where 28 teachers in a secondary school were placed in 14 dyads in reciprocal peer-coaching relationships. In this context, 'reciprocal means that the teachers take turns being the coach and the individual being coached . . . equally supporting and learning from each other' (Zwart et al, 2009, p.244).

All the models described thus far have a single mentor paired with a single or multiple mentees. Other research on mentoring, however, considers social networks theory as a means of conceptualizing the proposition that individuals rely upon not one but multiple individuals for professional development and support in their careers. Kram (1985) called this 'relationship constellations'. Researchers argue that they have brought a new lens through which to view mentorship with theory and methods from social network research which proposes that mentoring is a multiple developmental relationship phenomenon. While I do not underestimate the significance of this approach, the research focus of this case study is located within the traditional framework of mentoring – where developmental assistance is given to a junior, less experienced worker by a senior more experienced person, with greater expertise and skills in the field in which the mentoring is taking place.

It is worth considering the variety of ways in which mentoring has been implemented in organisations, as it does not seem likely that the GPLMS method will continue indefinitely in the schools. Should this programme end, and should the mentoring be deemed to have been useful for teacher development and literacy achievement, it may be necessary to consider a different way forward in South African schools.

In the following section I shall discuss what the literature reveals about the benefits of coaching. I have divided this into two sub-divisions: benefits for teachers and benefits for learners. I shall also discuss what the literature says about the impact on the mentees of the processes that are at work in the mentoring relationship.

2.6.3. Benefits of Mentoring for Teachers

Higgins and Kram, in reviewing traditional mentoring theory, list five potential benefits of mentoring relationships. They are "enhanced career development . . . career progress . . . higher rates of promotion and total compensation . . . career satisfaction . . . and clarity of professional identity and sense of competence." (2001, p. 265) The primary focus of this research is on the potential and actual benefit on the teachers' professional identity and sense of competence, with a possible link to career satisfaction. This research project did not set out to investigate career development and promotion issues, although it is not impossible that the teachers' own reflections may establish a potential link between their training and enhanced career development.

An education faculty publication from the University of Nebraska, Omaha discusses multiple benefits for beginning teacher mentees who receive mentorship from experienced teachers (Fluckiger, McGlamery & Edick, 2006). These writers interviewed mentors and mentees in their search for insight into what types of support mentors provided that resulted in teacher growth and development. I have summarised the findings reported in this publication in the following table. The first two items in the table represent psycho-social aspects of growth (Higgins & Kram, 2001) and the next three items represent job-specific functions (Finn, 1993; Kram, 1995, cited in Harrison et al, 2004).

Table 2.1 Teacher Growth as a Function of Mentor Support

Teacher growth	Mentor Support
Avoided being overwhelmed Gained perspective Were encouraged	Heard stories from mentor's experiences Invited mentee to team teach with him/her Demonstrated lessons in mentee's classroom
Lost sense of being isolated	Discussed mentee's challenges Made suggestions
Developed better management and organisational skills	Discussions and questioning promoting reflection of part of the mentee
Implemented positive instructional improvements faster Used a wider range of teaching strategies	Provided curriculum resources Modelled effective instruction Asked reflective questions

2.6.4 Mentor Strategies

A variety of strategies for mentors are discussed and noted in various studies. A literacy coaching intervention by Neuman & Wright (2010) emphasized co-teaching through modelling and demonstration. Coaches were encouraged to 'establish rapport, build trust and provide useful suggestions rather than evaluate or judge teachers' performances' (p. 70). Coaches received training in the core syllabus but were encouraged to tailor the specific techniques to meet the teachers' individual needs. In their two days of orientation and training at a coaching institute, coaches were reminded that they were 'neither a friend nor a supervisor, but a professional mentor in the setting' (p. 71). This intervention was a short-term project and providing 3 hours of coaching daily over a period of 10 weeks. I argue that it is appropriate and possible for a coach who will be in a classroom for 10 weeks to relate to the teacher(s) in a purely professional manner. However, it is unlikely that a coach who interacts with a teacher over a period of four years will be able to keep some form of friendship out of the relationship entirely.

According to Zwart et al (2009) the core coaching activities of teachers in a reciprocal coaching relationship should include regular discussions of their efforts to support student learning; experimentation with instructional methods; and taking turns in being a teacher coach and a coached teacher. While experimentation is not excluded from the GPLMS programme, it is not actively promoted. This is likely to mean that teachers will try the strategies and approaches in which they are being coached, rather than pursuing independent strategies based on their own research. This may in fact be a limitation of the GPLMS in the long term, although not in the short term while the up-skilling process is developing.

Bartell (2005) too identifies rich dialogue and discussion as a key component of a teacher coaching programme. She adds another strategy: critical and thoughtful discussions of teaching practice. Critical and thoughtful discussions are not necessarily a strategy in mentoring relationships. For instance the findings of a study by Feiman-Nemser, Parker and Zeichner (1990) suggest that coaches may focus on teaching performance/methods at the expense of the ideas behind those methods. In other words, not all coaching relationships

explore the 'why' of praxis or pedagogy; the focus remains on the 'how'. This too may be one of the gaps in the GPLMS.

Bean et al (2010) investigated the work of 20 Reading First coaches to determine how they distribute their time and the rationale they give for their work. They found that coaches worked with teachers in groups and discussed a range of issues from a review of the teacher's goals, to a discussion of data from assessments as well as of effective assessment in general and finally instructional strategies. The largest proportion of their time, however was spent in conferring with individual teachers. Observation ranked second (after group and individual meetings) in the distribution of their activities, followed by modelling and co-teaching. Although there were regular meetings between coach and teacher, very few of the coaches – 4 out of 20 - in this study held *post-observation* conferences with their teachers.

During the general and individual conferences, teachers were free to raise their concerns with the coaches. Some of these concerns included discussion about individual students. They were not always about problems: sometimes teachers were eager to report on the success of their students. This study by Bean et al (2010) explored the rationale the coaches gave for their work. They report that there was very little emphasis on coaching as a means of promoting teacher reflection or professional growth. Any change in teacher practice appeared to be a side effect of the main focus of the coaches: student learning and achievement.

Bean et al (2010) conclude that this focus on the students rather than the teachers may be an important key to changing/improving teacher classroom practices. They argue that a focus on student learning and achievement, rather than on the teacher's classroom praxis, puts coach and teacher in collegial problem-solving roles as together, they bring their respective areas of expertise to bear on helping struggling learners learn. This focus on students, they suggest, may facilitate teacher learning in that it creates the atmosphere, attitude and *need* (my italics) for changes in beliefs and practice. I suggest that this changed focus within the coaching relationship may also be an effective means of changing some teachers' perceptions of the superior-subordinate role of coach-coachee that is often implicit in the relationship. A sense of collegiality between teacher and coach may in the

long term promote in the teacher greater self-confidence, esteem and the motivation to learn new strategies and to improve their praxis.

Time spent with a colleague as a benefit of the mentoring/coaching relationship may be particularly important for teachers because one of the adverse conditions of teaching is little time for collegial interaction or observation. (Darling-Hammond, 1984 in Zimpher & Rieger, 2001). Studies suggest that collegiality and interaction during the course of professional practice are an important element in effective schools (Purkey & Smith, 1983 in Zimpher & Rieger, 2001).

Finally, both Bean et al (2010) and Ehrich et al (2001) argue that the any mentoring programme needs to be fully supported by the managers in the organisation. The GPLMS is the initiative of the GDE, and therefore fully supported by the department. What has to be assessed is the extent to which the support of the principal and school management team affects the effectiveness of the coaching programme. This is an important issue as both principals and coaches may need to be flexible in response to the arrangements of both the school programme as well as the mentoring programme.

2.6.5 Benefits for Literacy Learning

This study was undertaken on the basis that the purpose of the coaching programme of the GPLMS is to improve teacher learning *in order to improve literacy learning.* I have already discussed the crisis in literacy learning in South African schools. While the primary focus is on the coaching relationship and coaching as experienced by the teachers in one school, the secondary issue is whether any positive correlation can be seen between coaching and teacher learning and literacy learning.

Data from several quantitative and qualitative research studies over ten years, from 1995-2005 led Fluckiger et al (2006) to conclude that their overall teacher induction programme promoted teacher retention and teacher quality. This is a benefit to the school, and promotes stability for the students within it. In the study conducted by Bean et al (2010) coaching brought benefits for the students: a significantly greater percentage of students

scored at proficiency and a significantly smaller percentage of students scored at risk in schools where coaches spent more time working with teachers.

Similar results for students were found by Kennedy (2010) in her on-site professional development intervention with the teachers of four first grade classes in a high poverty school in Ireland. Kennedy's programme of professional development for the teachers had a dual focus: to enhance teachers' content knowledge in essential literacy skills; and to equip teachers with pedagogical strategies that would promote motivation and engagement in the students and build meta-cognitive awareness – that is, to adopt a meaning-oriented approach to instruction. By the end of the intervention, the participating students had significantly higher achievement in reading, writing and spelling, based on their pre-test scores. Moreover, evidence from teachers, parents, classroom observations and interviews with the students indicated these students were more motivated, engaged and strategic in their approach to literacy. The theme of collaboration and collegiality resulting in the strengthening of teacher practice emerges again as a strand/theme in this study, for while the researcher (Kennedy, 2010) did mentor the teachers, the mentoring focus was more on collaboration than on a hierarchical relationship.

Neuman & Wright (2010)'s coaching intervention with early childhood educators was, like Kennedy's (2010), also located in low-income communities. They assigned the participating teachers to one of three groups – one which received coursework only, one which received coaching and a control group which received neither coursework nor coaching. They wanted to better understand the independent contribution of coaching as the sole mechanism for improving teacher practice and child outcomes in early language and literacy development. The results showed differential benefits for the participating teachers, as reported by them. The coursework-only group were unable to translate their learning into classroom practices. The coaching-only group found their training eminently practical – as it was individualised, on-site and context-specific.

The researchers concluded that "coaching appears to improve a number of quality practices in language and literacy development for early childhood educators. It reaches teachers where they are, demonstrating that quantitative changes in language and literacy development in the short term are possible when professional development is targeted,

individualized and applicable to audience" (Neuman & Wright, 2010, p. 84). These elements of professional development are in the design of the GPLMS – in that it is targeted at a specific group of teachers in underperforming schools, and also at literacy teaching – methodology and content; each coach works with the teachers individually, as well as in groups; and the coaching takes place in the classrooms of the teachers with the appropriate materials and resources.

Motivation may be an important component in bringing about change in teachers' practices. Zwart et al (2009) found that teachers learn

- when they are intrinsically motivated to take part in professional development programmes;
- when they feel a certain pressure toward experimenting with new instructional methods;
- when they are able to discuss their experiences within a safe, constructive and trustworthy reciprocal peer coaching environment.

The teachers in Zwart et al's (2009) study chose to be part of it – so it is reasonable to assume that they were already motivated to develop themselves professionally. The teachers in the GPLMS did not choose to be part of the Strategy, and therefore it is worth asking whether this has affected their motivation and thus their response to the coaching. The study by Zwart et al (2009) arose in response to an educational reform initiative in Holland. This initiative meant that teachers required not only different knowledge and skills, but also different beliefs about learning and teaching. An additional finding from this study was that teachers reported learning more when they perceived their coaches to be good coaches. I would argue that this may be a key factor because of the teacher's perception of herself as a qualified professional in her own space. She is unlikely to want to give up that position to someone who she does not perceive to be a 'good' coach.

One South African study has minor relevance here. The Academic Literacy Unit (ALRU) at UNISA (UNISA, 2010) set up school libraries in various primary schools in Patogeng as part of a longitudinal reading and literacy study. In the course of their initiative, the ALRU team found that the teachers needed a lot of support before they changed their ways of teaching reading and incorporating literacy practices in their classrooms. They therefore

implemented a further intervention. They appointed an experienced and successful Foundation Phase teacher as a literacy coach to work fulltime in a particular school. Her responsibilities included functioning as a mentor and coach in a professional and supportive way, as well as helping the teachers with lesson planning, use of resources, assessment and record keeping. The coach also offered advice to parents and caregivers about how they could enrich their children's literacy development. No data have yet been published from this research initiative[5], but one of the outcomes for the teachers was that they found it relatively easy to adapt to the GPLMS, whereas teachers at surrounding schools found it more challenging.

2.6.6 Barriers to Successful Coaching

A sense of disempowerment is sometimes the consequence of large-scale systemic reform efforts, such as those mentioned in the introduction, primarily because of their prescriptive nature (Kennedy, 2010). In order to mitigate this potential barrier to successful mentoring, Kennedy (2010) and the teachers worked together in a collegial manner to discover solutions.

The empowerment of teachers is also discussed by Harrison et al (2006). These researchers refer to two scenarios laid out by Vonk (1993) in relation to the ongoing professional development of teachers in general. He called these two approaches the *bureaucratic-managerial* approach and the *participant-involved approach*: in the former, teachers are expected to comply with and implement decisions made by others (usually an external body that determines the curriculum and managers within a school) about their work, including personal and professional development and learners' needs; and in the latter teachers are involved in the decision-making in the school and are expected to contribute to improving the quality of education through their participation. The former approach sometimes has the effect of disempowering teachers; the latter of empowering them.

If Fleisch is correct, then the request by the teachers in the GPLMS for detailed lesson plans for both literacy and mathematics teaching shows an ironic ambiguity. On the one hand, they exercised a level of initiative in asking for them; on the other they surrendered their professional initiative to implement the curriculum by means of their own lesson planning.

[5] February 2013 – no further data available online

It would be an interesting line of enquiry to attempt to discover how the empowerment/disempowerment issue is being represented in this response.

The duration of the coaching relationship may also be a factor affecting teacher change and therefore student learning. Zwart et al (2009) claim that teacher-learning is often a short-term, ad hoc, and highly situated endeavour. Their study suggests that the more haphazard learning of teachers can be systematically influenced by such a programme as the reciprocal peer-coaching programme. However, they concede that participation in a professional development programme for a period of one school year may be too short a period to establish systematic changes of behaviour, and reference the work of Murray et al (2008).

In the same study of reciprocal peer-coaching by Zwart et al (2009), it transpired that not all the teachers felt comfortable or confident within their relationships. Differences in age and years of experience within the pairs were factors that inhibited some of the teachers from assuming the role of coach. Zwart et al (2009) conclude that appropriate pairing becomes a crucially important element in the programme in order to facilitate fruitful working together.

Neuman and Wright (2010) draw attention to the dynamic nature of the mentoring-coaching relationship. 'High-quality professional development is a dynamic process that requires teachers to be both reflective and open to new practices with the overriding goal of improving instruction for young children' (2010, p.65). They also point out that the ongoing nature of the interaction between coach and teacher make it effective as a tool for bringing about change for mid-career teachers. I would argue that for teachers in the GPLMS who may be mid-career teachers (and common sense suggests that many of them may be) the duration of the coaching component of the Strategy may be a significant factor in promoting teacher change.

2.7 A Theoretical Model for Mentoring-Coaching

One of the criticisms levelled at the mentoring literature is that there is a lack of grounding in appropriate theory (Ehrich, Hansford & Tennent, 2001). Ehrich et al (2001) analysed over 300 pieces of empirical research in mentoring – some in Business, some in Education. Within the 159 studies in education, Ehrich et al (2001) identified 7 theoretical categories,

encompassing 23 individual theories. Those categories that have relevance to the coaching as this researcher saw it in practice are Learning Theory and Coaching/Skill Development models. One theoretical framework, in particular, can be applied to the manner in which coaching happens in the GPLS. It is the training model for skills development (Joyce & Showers, 1980) which includes discussions between the mentor and mentee in regard to observations, reflections and analysis of practice.

At the conclusion of their analysis, these researchers put forward a model of mentoring which attempts to close the gap between the theory and practice of mentoring. Their model comprises three elements: *initiation*, *processes* and *outcomes*. Initiation refers to the qualities necessary for establishing and maintaining a mentoring relationship. Processes are those understandings and conceptions of mentoring held by mentor and mentee that define it and shape its course. Outcomes are the benefits and problems for mentors, mentees and organisations as a result of the professional mentoring relationship.

I intend to use this model as a frame for the analysis of the data from the interviews and lesson observations with the participants in this study (see Chapter 3). The research questions focused on the teachers' feelings about the coaching relationship and about the teachers' and the students' learning. This model allows me to explore these areas in a way that will bring shape and coherence to data that may otherwise appear fragmented.

2.8 Conclusion

It is impossible to separate children's learning from teacher's teaching, especially in the first few critically important years of school, years in which foundations are laid in literacy and numeracy. This chapter has explicated some of the background to the literacy crisis in South Africa and the place and role of the GPLMS as a response to that crisis. The chapter also places the South African literacy challenge in the broader context of global systemic literacy reform initiatives. Finally, and most significantly for this study, it has reviewed research in the field of mentoring for teachers, finishing with a discussion of theoretical model for mentoring. The next chapter will consider the research methodology for this project.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The data collection for this case study took place during August and September, 2012. It involved one research site and six adult participants. The site was a Gauteng Education Department primary school and the adult participants were four Foundation Phase teachers from this school, the coach who mentors them and the coach's supervisor. All of them, as stated in the Introduction chapter, are female. Interviews were the main research instrument and classroom observations the secondary instrument. To these I added observations of feedback sessions between coach and teachers. The bulk of my data comes from my interviews with five of the six research participants. This is qualitative research and it is framed as an evaluative case study (Bassey, 1999). I analysed the data using a model proposed by Ehrich et al (2001), one which serves as a framework for the analysis of mentoring within educational settings.

The rest of the chapter explains the research process in greater detail.

3.2 Coaching in the GPLMS

In order for a reader to understand the basis of my research design, I will explain how the coaches and supervisors work in the schools with the teachers that they visit.

The coach visits each school on average once a month for three to five days, depending on how many teachers she needs to see. During this visit the coach meets with the teacher for a few minutes prior to the lesson (a pre-observation meeting); observes each teacher teaching a literacy and a mathematics lesson; and thereafter engages in a feedback discussion with the teacher (a post-observation meeting). This latter discussion has a dual purpose: firstly, to address any concerns or queries that the teacher has, and secondly, to provide feedback to the teacher about her lesson. At the end of the school day, the coach may choose to meet with some or all the teachers in the school in order to discuss areas of

general relevance, usually arising from the lessons she has observed that day (school-based workshops). The institution that trains the coaches sets out these steps for them to follow. While I only interviewed one coach and observed and listened to her at work in one school, it is worth noting that all the coaches trained by Ace Training are required to follow the same procedures. The coach has one further responsibility: whenever there is new work to cover or new information to impart, she is required to gather together all the teachers from all the schools she visits and conduct a combined workshop. I did not observe either a combined workshop or a school-based workshop in the course of my research.

The supervisors are employed by the NGO, Ace Training, which trains the coaches, and each supervisor works closely with a number of coaches. The supervisor I interviewed has nineteen coaches for whom she is responsible. Her task is to be the main liaison person between Ace Training and these coaches. She is in regular contact with the coaches, and she is the one who communicates information, documents and instructions for particular tasks to them. She is also the person to whom they submit their monthly reports. In addition, she is required, as part of her duties, to accompany each coach on a school visit and observe her at work.

3.3 Research Site

The research site was a Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) primary school in Laudium, an area some fifty kilometres northwest of Johannesburg. The school, which I shall call Mohammed Malik, began by catering for the Indian children of the area. Now however it has become a school with a student population which is drawn from the former townships. Almost all of the children are transported to the school and travel long distances to get there. Several factors have an impact on the literacy education of the children entering school. In the first instance, their home language is not the language of instruction of the school, which is English; and in the second instance, the distances the children travel usually prevent them from remaining at school in the afternoons for homework supervision. Travelling long distances each day also makes the younger children tired, which affects their ability to concentrate during lessons.

This particular site was chosen in consultation with the supervisor. In the first instance, the school had to be one which was participating in the GPLMS. In addition it needed to meet the following criteria:

- to be a school where the principal was willing to allow the research to take place
- to have on the staff at least two, preferably three teachers who were willing to be interviewed and to have their classroom practice observed
- to be situated within reasonable proximity to the researcher's residence

The particular school in Laudium where this research was carried out met all these criteria.

3.4 Research Design

This research is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature. Intrinsic to its being qualitative research is the notion that the experiences, ideas and responses of individuals to an aspect of their work make a valuable contribution to knowledge in the field (Freebody, 2003). What makes it qualitative is that it is close observation resulting in systematic description. Or, to explicate further, according to Silverman (1993, 1999 cited in Freebody, 2003), qualitative research is descriptive in two senses: it gives theoretically adequate descriptions of observable everyday practices, descriptions that can be theoretically productive and generative of new practices; it aims to study the ways in which people talk about their everyday educational experiences. It is qualitative too because it will yield data that will not be analysed by counting or measuring, but by reflection and interpretation (Allwright & Bailey, 1991).

In this research project, I am interested in the ways in which five participants in a programme of professional development for teachers talk about their everyday experiences of the mentoring process, either as mentor or mentee. Mentoring is framed in the GPLMS as the means of transferring the curriculum – content and methodology - into effective practice in the classroom. The teachers, or mentees, stand at the interface where theory becomes practice. The mentees have had no choice in this process: it has been imposed on them by the GDE. It is when mentees are given the opportunity to 'tell their stories' of being

mentored, to put into words and make explicit what they are thinking, feeling and experiencing, that those who are invested in this process are better able to assess its worth

This research is an educational case study, of the evaluative type, in line with Bassey's (1999, p. 58) categorisation. It is educational because it is 'critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action' (Bassey, 1999 p. 59). It is evaluative because it seeks to determine the worth of a programme or project, as judged by analysis. It is a case study because it involves the examination of a particular experience, in a specific place, at a specific time, in order to be able to represent the story of that experience, by means of systematic description, and from it to draw insights that may inform both practice and policy (Bassey, 1999; Freebody, 2003).

This study is a case study because it explores the particular responses of four educators in one particular school. Thousands of educators in 832 schools are participating in the GPLMS, but this project has just these three, together with their coach and supervisor, in focus. The data was collected towards the end of their second year in the Strategy – a Strategy which will continue for a further two years. This project is a critical enquiry into the worth of this educational mentoring programme. It is the researcher's hope that the data will make a meaningful contribution to the overall assessment of the mentoring component of the GPLMS, and so guide future action in this regard.

3.5 Research Participants

I intended originally to interview three teachers. However, an additional teacher, the Head of Department, expressed a willingness to be a part of the research, so the number increased to four. There was one teacher from each Grade as well as the HOD of the Foundation Phase who taught a Grade 2 class. When liaising with the principal of the school for permission to conduct this research there, I asked for teachers with different profiles: one from each of the first three grades; one with little experience, as well as one with many years of experience. In addition, I asked for a teacher whose HL was not English and one whose HL was English. I wanted to discover whether variables in the teacher profiles

resulted in different responses to the GPLMS. There is a substantial body of literature on mentoring novice teachers (Bartell, 2005; Fluckiger et al, 2006) and I wanted to have a base for comparison between the response of an experienced FP teacher and one with little experience. In addition it seemed appropriate to compare the response of a teacher who is fluent and confident in the use of the LoLT with one who might be less confident and fluent. This was a deliberate part of my research design. The teachers in the sample thus have a range of abilities, experiences and training.

The profile of these participants is represented in the table below:

Table 3.1 Background information of the teachers

Teachers	Anusha - HOD	Celia	Fatima	Salima
Age	30-39	40-49	30-39	20-29
Highest Qualification	B.Ed (Hons) Special Needs	Diploma in Education	B. Ed (Hons) Special Needs	B.Ed (Hons) Management
Years of teaching experience	16 years	11 years	14 years	2 years
Mentoring experience prior to GPLS	One experience	None	Sakina Maths Coaching	None
Race	Asian	Black	Asian	Asian
Home Language	English	Sepedi	English	English

In addition, I interviewed the coach who mentors the teachers and also the supervisor from the organisation that trains the coach. The coach, Lerato, has nine years' experience in teaching, four of them in grades 3 and 4 and five years in grade 8. She has a teachers' diploma, an Advanced Certificate in Education and is currently pursuing studies towards an Honours Degree in Education at the University of the Northwest. She is married with two young children. The supervisor, Helen, has thirty years' experience teaching languages – English and French – in secondary school, and four years' experience tutoring student teachers at the Wits School of Education (WSoE). She was the co-designer of the Language module of the Advanced Certificate in Education for Foundation Phase and Intersen teachers, also at the WSoE, and taught this module for four years. She has an MA in English Education.

Their profiles are represented in the table below.

Table 3.2 Background information of the coach and supervisor

	Lerato (coach)	Helen (supervisor)
Age	30-39	50+
Highest Qualification	Diploma in Education	MA in English Education
Years of teaching experience	9 years	34 years
Mentoring experience prior to GPLS	None	None
Race	Black	White
Home Language	Xhosa	English

3.6 Research Instruments

3.6.1 Interviews

The main purpose of this research was to gather data from a few of the teachers in the GPLMS about their experience of being mentored, and to discover what they were learning and experiencing, and what their attitudes were to the mentoring and coaching process. Interviews were therefore my main research instrument. I constructed a semi-structured interview schedule. Interviews, says Bassey (1999) 'inevitably have a sense of formality' which can cause the person being interviewed to feel 'pleased to contribute, or frightened, or irritated because of the time taken' (1999, p. 81). In order to make sure that the interviewees were put at their ease as much as possible, I began with the prepared questions and departed from them when their responses stimulated further more detailed questioning, or even another line of questioning. This was deliberate, and designed for two purposes: the first, to allow the interview to be as authentic and genuine a conversation as possible, and to compensate for the inhibiting effects of formality. The second is in line with Freebody's description – that semi-structured interviews aim at 'establishing a core of issues to be covered, but at the same time leaving the sequence and the relevances of the interviewee free to vary around and out from that core' (2003, p. 133). It was necessary to allow the participants to respond with some degree of flexibility to the planned questions in order to hear their own voices.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to pilot these Interview schedules with a teacher prior to undertaking this research. The teacher would have had to be teaching in a GDE school, and one that was participating in the GPLMS. Initial, informal enquiries about researching a component of the GPLMS revealed what appeared to be fairly strict prohibitions on undertaking such research without formal permission. By the time all the requisite forms had been located and submitted and the necessary permissions had been formally obtained, there was insufficient time for me to do this. I wish to add, however, that I had a rapid and efficient response to my final, formal request.

The questions focused on two main areas: teaching literacy and coaching. It is my opinion that questions about coaching and about the content of literacy teaching in the GPLMS were necessary, as these teachers are being coached *in order to teach literacy*. In other words, the coaching is purposeful and specific – not generalised coaching for all the teaching that takes place in Foundation Phase.

Each teacher was interviewed once. This interview took place at the end of the school day, after the learners had been dismissed, in the teacher's classroom. The interview was recorded and later transcribed in full by me, and it is the data drawn from these interviews that form the substance of this report (see Appendix A).

The interviews with the coach and the supervisor took place at their respective homes after the teacher interviews had been completed, again using a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendices B and C).

3.6.2 Classroom Observation

Together with the coach, I observed one lesson taught by each of the four teacher participants, and one feedback session from the coach to each teacher, based on this lesson. The lesson that was observed and the feedback sessions between teacher and coach were not recorded, but detailed field notes were taken during both.

One of my questions was – What difference has the coach made to the teachers and their literacy teaching? I did not want to rely only on what the teachers and coach told me, but wanted also to observe for myself what the teachers were doing in their actual literacy lessons. This was a means of balancing the self-report gained from the teachers, and the information from the coach. As an observer, outside the process, I believed my own perspective would be a useful one. It was for the same reason that I observed the feedback session between coach and each teacher.

Each feedback session was a brief one. The teacher never has any free time between lessons, so feedback has to be given either with the children present, getting ready for the next lesson, or during the school break. In one instance there was a lag of several hours between the lesson and the feedback session as the teacher had a break duty and the coach went to observe a different teacher. In this instance, the feedback took place at the end of the school day and was slightly less rushed than the other sessions, although it only lasted a few minutes longer than the others. I listened attentively to how the coach and teacher interacted and made field notes of what was discussed.

I had hoped to observe two lessons taught by each teacher, as I believed this would give me richer data about how literacy was being taught, but this could not be arranged in the time available. The GDE does not allow research to continue during the fourth term of the school year, and this is when the second lesson observation would have had to take place.

3.7 Data Analysis

After recording the interviews I transcribed them myself. This has resulted in fifty-two pages of data. I then embarked on a thematic content analysis, using the model proposed by Ehrich, Hansford & Tennent (2001), described in Chapter Two and further explicated here.

3.7.1 IPO Model

Ehrich et al's (2001) model is an orderly and clear framework which was drawn up based on research into mentoring in educational settings, and enabled me to collate the data from

this study in a way that I hope will be accessible to the reader. The model comprises three elements: *initiation*, *processes* and *outcomes* (what I shall call the IPO model). Initiation refers to the qualities necessary for establishing and maintaining a mentoring relationship. Processes are those understandings and conceptions of mentoring held by mentor and mentee that define it and shape its course. Outcomes are the benefits and problems for mentors and mentees as a result of their professional mentoring relationship.

3.7.2 Initiation

Initiation in Ehrich's (2001) model is essentially access to mentoring. I searched for what the participants said about the affordances and the constraints they experienced in the GPLMS mentoring programme, first in relation to the sub-categories set out by these researchers, and thereafter for any sub-categories not named by them. I followed the identical process for each of the three main categories. In this first category, the sub-categories included the ease of access to the programme, the freedom to initiate visits or assistance/support, and whether personal qualities such as gender or race acted as a barrier.

3.7.3 Processes

The elements that Ehrich et al (2001) suggest are influential in maintaining the coaching relationship are the conception of mentoring held by the mentor and mentee; the nature of the relationship that develops between them (considering particularly fear, motivation and trust); the organisational context and attitude of the principal and school management team (SMT); as well as the social and political context and the degree to which these contexts impact on the ability of the teachers to implement the Strategy.[6]

3.7.4 Outcomes

Outcomes in Ehrich's (2001) model are the affordances and the constraints associated with mentoring for the mentor, the mentee and the organisation. In this study, there are three organisations: the school, the GDE, and within the GDE, the GPLMS programme. I examined the data, again searching for the common themes. The ones proposed by Ehrich et al (2001) included, for the mentor - collegiality, networking, personal satisfaction and professional

[6] Capitalized Strategy refers to the GPLMS. Lower case strategy refers to any strategy used as a pedagogical tool by a teacher.

development. For the mentor the researchers suggested professional affordances such as help with teaching strategies, sharing ideas, and feedback, as well as psychosocial affordances such as counselling encouragement and increased self-confidence.

3.7.5 Triangulation

I had initially planned to examine and code the interviews with the teachers only, and to do the same with the coach and supervisor after I had completed the teacher interview analysis. However, as I worked with the teachers' interviews, I realised it was preferable to work with the interview data from both the coach and the supervisor simultaneously with the teacher data. It was part of the research design for this study to interview three 'categories' of participants, each of whom was connected directly to the coaching experience, but each of whom viewed it from a different perspective, in order to meet the need for triangulation. Triangulation, as defined by Wiersma (1995, p. 264) in Freebody (2003, p. 77) is 'a search for convergence of the information on a common finding or concept'. I therefore worked with the data in this manner, looking for the convergence or the divergence in each of the categories among the teachers, coach and supervisor. I used three different instruments - interviews, observations and note-taking - for the same reason – as a means of triangulating the data.

3. 8 Ethical Considerations

I approached the Gauteng Department of Education for permission to conduct this research in one of their schools. I also applied for and received the necessary approval from the Wits Ethics Committee. Once that permission had been granted, I approached the supervisor who put me in touch with one of her coaches. After the coach had indicated her willingness to participate in this study, I went with her to visit the school in Laudium where she coaches. I took with me the permission letter from the GDE, and explained to the principal what I hoped to do. She agreed that I could conduct this research at the school, after which I approached the teachers who also agreed to participate. I explained what I would need from each of them, and together we set dates for my visits to the school.

I distributed and then collected all the necessary permission letters from parents, children and the adult participants in the study. I received informed consent from the participants.

I have given pseudonyms to the school as well as each of the participants in order to protect their identity and to ensure confidentiality.

The following chapter reports and discusses the findings.

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Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The central aim of this research project was to investigate the mentoring experiences of Foundation Phase (FP) teachers in the GPLMS programme. From my analysis of the data, I will report on the reflections of these teachers on their lived experiences of being mentored. I will argue that there are affordances within this coaching model as it is being implemented in the GPLMS. I will also argue that there are some constraints that need to be addressed for the strengthening of teacher mentoring practices in future programmes. I will report what the teachers have taken up from the mentoring process in relation to their teaching of literacy. I focus primarily on the interviews with the individual teachers supplemented by my observations of their teaching. I also refer to and comment on the interviews with the coach and the supervisor – mostly in relation to the content from the teachers' interviews. Finally I report on some of the supervisor's evaluation and analysis of the overall impact of coaching within the schools she visits. I have included this deliberately because, while this is a case study of four teachers in one school, there are another 831 schools where the GPLMS is being implemented.

I have given the participants in this case study their own voices by quoting directly from the transcripts of my interviews with them. I do this for two reasons: first, to provide as full and as accurate an account as possible of the particular ways in which each of these participants has experienced coaching; and second, to reflect the uniqueness of each individual's experience that is the distinguishing feature of the case study (Freebody, 2003).

4.2 The IPO Model

The model I have used in order to analyse and present findings from the data is that proposed by Ehrich et al (2001) which is outlined and discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Their model considers mentoring in terms of *initiation, processes and outcomes,* what I shall call the IPO model. I have sub-divided each of these categories further.

4.2.1 Initiation

The first category of Ehrich et al's (2001) model is the initiation phase of the programme and is about who gets access to mentoring. I have divided the findings about access in this study into three sub-categories: initial access, ongoing access and regular, sustained access.

Initial Access to Mentoring

Barriers to initial access to mentoring are more likely to be experienced within informal rather than formal mentoring situations. In the former, gender and race can be barriers to access (Ehrlich et al, 2001, p.10). In the IPO model in an informal mentoring situation, female black employees would often be overlooked or excluded from mentoring relationships. However, the GPLMS is a formal and systematized programme of mentorship and so access was automatic for all Foundation Phase teachers within the 832 participating schools, regardless of gender, race or socio-economic status. Interestingly, there is a

structural barrier to mentoring for some teachers in Gauteng province, because only teachers in schools that have been identified as underperforming qualify for the mentorship programme.

Ongoing Access to Mentoring

Because of the formal nature of the GPLMS, initial access was not a constraint for the teachers in this study. Moreover, ongoing access to coaching and mentoring that meets the teachers' needs is also freely available for them because they are able to initiate contact with their coach. This is a part of their feeling empowered. I asked the teachers who initiates the meetings between mentor and mentee. All of them stated that while it was usually Lerato, the coach, they were equally at liberty to initiate the contact. According to Celia, 'If we have something that we don't understand, maybe we discuss with (our HOD) - they call her [coach Lerato] - she comes.' Fatima responded as follows:

> Lerato usually sms's us to say when she's coming. But if we have a problem at any time we sms her or we phone and she's always accommodating. Like for instance the assessment we were doing – we wanted to ask her - can we use it as an assessment task - and if she didn't come today we would have phoned and she would probably

> have given us a directive. It does help to have a coach because working with the Department of Education there's no assistance. The person you phone will say 'I'll get back to you,' and nothing comes. So it's good having people around. If you need help, it's given the same time: it's not prolonged. The problem doesn't get any bigger.

Fatima's response is interesting, indicating as it does a contrast between her experience of the support provided by the coach in the GPLMS and that provided by departmental officials. She also pinpoints a practical advantage to her of such an immediate response from her coach – the problem she is faced with in her teaching is resolved. This construction of the 'uncaring' department as contrasted to the caring, supportive coach is an interesting irony because the GPLMS, and therefore the coach, is being funded by the government. Lerato confirmed this issue of the teachers initiating contact with her when she told me, 'This year they are the ones who initiate and say, "I think maybe you should come and see me for this"'.

What was difficult to evaluate however, was the nature of the help that the teacher sought from the coach. The examples the teachers gave me were of asking for help with clarification of individual teaching points in the curriculum, or of how to interpret a point in a document, or of what to use for an assessment. None of the teachers spoke about calling Lerato to discuss pedagogy, or the theoretical background to some of the teaching approaches they are learning. Dole (2003) argues that teachers' active involvement in the learning process has been shown repeatedly to be crucial to effective professional development. In addition, she argues that they need theoretical understandings about learning and instruction for changes in their pedagogy to be sustained, and for instructional strategies to be used effectively or reliably.

Regular, Sustained Access to Mentoring

Measures of accountability are built into the GPLMS. Lerato has to submit a monthly work plan to her supervisor. This allows Ace Training to check that the coaches are doing their work. Helen, the supervisor, summarises the reports from all her coaches and submits them to Ace Training. Ace Training in turn submits regular reports to the GDE. These measures are a means of holding all the employees of the GPLMS accountable for their work.

Lerato, Helen and the teachers were all in agreement that Lerato visits the school once a month for a week or part thereof. In that week she sees all the FP teachers once. Her visits include classroom observations and feedback sessions with individual teachers, as well as afternoon sessions (called a school-based workshop) - either for all the teachers or for particular groups of teachers. In addition, when Ace Training wishes to introduce new content or to instruct and train the teachers in some particular aspect of the curriculum, Lerato has a combined meeting with all the teachers from all her schools. This is called a Professional Learning Group (PLG). These methods are similar to the methods employed by the coaches in the study by Bean et al (2010).

The choice of time for the training is another area in which the teachers have exercised choice. The teachers, supported by their teacher unions, particularly SADTU, objected to being required to attend workshops during school holidays, so these were stopped and replaced by afternoon training during school terms. “The teachers all said they would prefer to do it in the afternoons after school – so that’s what we do,” said Helen. The ability of the coachees to influence when the coaching programme is run is an indicator that they are neither powerless nor are they passive about access to coaching. They had no choice in being part of the GPLMS but they do have choice - and exercise it – in how aspects of the programme are run.

Another way in which accountability is built into the Strategy is by the supervisor, Helen, visiting the schools in order to observe the coaches at work; in her words, ‘to see how they manage their coaching; to see how they discuss things with teachers; notes they make . . .’ In addition, each of Helen’s nineteen coaches writes a monthly report which she submits to Helen. In the first six months of 2012, these reports summed up the good things happening in the classroom, and set out any problems the coach had picked up. They also listed the afternoon school-based workshops they had given. The content changed in the second six months of 2012: the reports had to list the dates of both the school-based workshops and the PLGs, and to indicate what coaching they had delivered in these workshops.

While the sustained access to teacher support through the coaching function is an affordance in the implementation of the GPLMS and a strategy for improving literacy teaching in the participating schools, I argue that the way it is being closely monitored may

also be a constraint. While there are freedoms within the relationship between coach and coachee, there is nevertheless tight control over the entire breadth of the Strategy that may inhibit and constrain greater empowerment of teachers in the long term.

4.2.2 Processes

The IPO model recognises that mentoring is a process that exists within a relationship, and within the overall Process, many processes can either inhibit or facilitate the ongoing relationship (Ehrich et al, 2001). In this first part of processes I shall analyse and discuss the following dynamic processes that are at work in the professional relationship between coach and teacher, namely: a common concept of mentoring; the personality of the coach; the competence or expertise of the coach; trust; and fear/stress.

A Common Concept of Mentoring

For the mentoring relationship to succeed, there needs to be a commonly held concept of mentoring – by the mentor and mentee. There was not immediately an accurate perception by the teachers of the coach's role and purpose. Salima, the most recently qualified and least experienced of the teachers, said:

> I was a new teacher last year and for me it was like – O God - I am back on campus - the lecturers are coming to crit me! For me it was like that with Lerato. You can ask my HOD. I was down their throats when they said, 'Ok, now we are having this lady from the department coming in to crit/watch our lessons. I was like – 'No, this can't be happening! I thought I'll be rid of all this!'

This perception of the coach as a critic, looking for faults and mistakes, is one that was also held by Celia. She said, 'I feel like we must show off ourselves to her and she must see if we are able or we are unable to deliver.' Fatima spoke about teachers at other schools being threatened by the coach because 'They feel the coaches are there to check what they're doing and make sure they're doing their job.' However, Fatima believes that the teachers at their school do not view the coach like this. After expressing their initial perception of the coach as judge, Salima and Celia both went on to say that they discovered that a coach does not come into the classroom to be a fault-finder or critic – to seek out mistakes or to point out what is lacking in the teacher's practice. Lerato agrees that the teachers' perceptions

have altered. She explained the progression in their understanding of her role in these words:

> Actually, now [almost two years into the programme] I think they are starting to really understand it. Because initially they didn't really get it, I think mainly because they were used to District Officials. They couldn't tell the difference. So you can understand - they are coming from the background of dealing with District Officials who are more there to monitor – to emphasise on policy and to monitor. Slowly but surely when they started seeing me and seeing how I act and how I am helping them, that's when they were able to tell the difference.

As time has passed, a clear alignment between how the coaches are being trained and instructed and what these teachers are experiencing has developed. This is confirmed by Helen who told me that the coaches have been going in to the schools 'with a brief not to go in like an inspector or a district official.'

These data show that prior experiences of classroom visits have largely been negative ones. It has taken time and repeated positive experiences to change teachers' negative perceptions, and to replace them with a view of the coach and of classroom observations that is supportive of them, rather than critical.

Personality of the coach

The personality of the coach and how she relates to the coachees are important elements in the coaching relationship. Some of the literature on coaching and mentoring highlights the importance of compatibility between them (Zimpher & Rieger, 2001). The manner in which the coach relates to her coachees plays a significant role in whether the relationship is successful (Neuman & Wright, 2010).

Celia was warmly appreciative of Lerato. She described her relationship with Lerato as 'like a sister relationship'. She highlighted some particular characteristics that she values: she is 'friendly', 'dependable', 'approachable', and helpful. This helpfulness extended as far as anticipating Celia's needs. For instance, she noticed that Celia did not have a particular wall chart and offered to get one for her.

When I asked Fatima about her relationship with Lerato, she responded at some length, explicating several facets of the mentor/mentee relationship between herself and Lerato as she sees it. She stated that Lerato is a very 'comfortable' person to deal with. She believes that Lerato is a successful coach and mentor, and ascribed this success as a coach to her flexibility, her accommodating nature and her sense of humour. She is neither too rigid nor too serious. The degree of ease Fatima feels with Lerato is confirmed by the fact that she engaged with Lerato about the sequencing of the phonics teaching as well as what she perceived as a misalignment of the teaching programme and the content of the readers. Both Fatima's experience and her own confidence contributed to this exchange, as did Lerato's own confidence. Fatima demonstrated self-confidence in her interactions with me. I noted the same self-confidence between Fatima and Lerato when I observed them interacting after Lerato had observed one of Fatima's lessons.

Fatima expressed appreciation for the clear guidance Lerato gave her when she returned from leave, having missed out on the GPLMS training. She expressed the opinion that having a person as a resource was far better than having a manual: with a manual you are not able to clarify areas of uncertainty. However, Fatima recognised the potential for (a) teacher(s) to feel threatened by a coach. In her opinion, the coach and the teachers and the GPLMS are there to serve the children, and a teacher who recognises that will see the coaching, particularly, in perspective.

I found this comment of Fatima a particularly significant one in the light of the argument (Dole, 2003; Zwart et al, 2010) that a focus on the learners rather than a focus on the teachers is critical to professional development. Fatima, an experienced and confident teacher, appears to understand this. Celia, the teacher who told me that language is her problem, and that she feels very nervous when Lerato comes to observe her teach, is more focused on herself and on how her teaching is being evaluated and assessed, rather than on how the children are progressing.

Teacher Salima's response to Lerato was equally positive. She stated enthusiastically that Lerato is a wonderful coach, always available when needed, and always willing to assist. Salima had felt very apprehensive and nervous when she heard that she would be observed

while teaching. However, she was greatly encouraged when she discovered that Lerato had not come to find fault with her, but to encourage her. And encouragement is what she received. However, this does not indicate that Lerato provided only positive responses. On the contrary, Lerato gave Salima honest feedback about the weak points of her teaching as well as her strengths. Salima values Lerato's flexibility too. According to her, Lerato's not a 'demanding' person. When I asked Salima what she meant by demanding, she explained that Lerato does not put pressure on them, the teachers, or insist that things be 'perfectly done'. She is reasonable about deadlines too – allowing an extra day or two if necessary. In Salima's opinion, she can afford to be flexible like this because she knows that she will get whatever she asks for. 'She's very soft and sweet,' Salima concluded.

What is interesting from these teachers' responses is their perception of Lerato as someone who supports and encourages them; someone who is on their side, like a sister would be; someone who listens and is reasonable. It is these qualities in Lerato that allow the coaching and mentoring function to proceed unhindered. My observation of the feedback sessions between Lerato and the teachers enabled me to see that they communicate easily and in a relaxed manner. This finding supports the literature on best practice on coaching, that it involves establishing rapport, building trust and providing useful suggestions rather than evaluating or judging teachers' performances (Neuman & Wright, 2010).

Competence/Expertise of the Coach

Expertise differences between coach and coachee can lead to problems in the mentoring relationship (Ehrich et al, 2001). Lerato's competence and the respect she has won from the teachers appear to be in part attributable to her competence. Her supervisor reflected on the thorough and professional training the coaches receive. She said:

> I think the management is very invested and makes a great effort to make the programme run as smoothly as possible. They go all out to provide their coaches with training and methodology. They train them in how to deliver the material (like lesson plans) to the teachers. They are doing their best.

Those who became coaches in 2011 received initial training both in mentoring/coaching and in literacy teaching in Foundation Phase. The mentoring course was spread over a week, and

was conducted before the GPLMS programme began. So was the training in literacy teaching which included content and methodology. Both Helen and Lerato commented on the thoroughness, breadth and professionalism of the ongoing training that has been implemented. For instance, only when Ace Training has had employees with the necessary expertise have they used them for the training. In all other instances they have brought in experts from outside the organisation to train the coaches and supervisors. Overall, Helen concluded, 'Being a worker in the GPLMS means you're constantly being trained and you're learning all the time.' According to all the teachers I interviewed, Lerato knows what she is doing.

Trust

Trust is a critically important aspect of the relationship between the coach and the teachers. Trust is built by, among other things, confidentiality. This element of confidentiality is built into the Strategy. According to Lerato,

> I think the security that [the teachers] have got is that I don't write reports for the principal and the SMT. So I think that's how we also got their confidence. Whatever I discuss with them remains between them and me. And then we work on what needs working on. I don't go reporting on individual people. . . For instance, I will just go and say 'Hi' to the principal so she knows I am there, but after I'm done there is not even a need for me to go and sit with her.

If principals and SMTs were receiving reports from coaches, much of the freedom for teachers to interact with their coaches would be lost. The teachers were unambiguous and clear in how they feel about visits from the GDE: they are there to monitor and enforce, and the teachers feel threatened by this. While such confidentiality works very well for the teachers, it has the potential to place the coaches in an awkward position ethically if they were to come across a serious problem with a teacher.

Trust in the relationship is also built by the *respect* Lerato shows the teachers. Fatima took some pleasure in the fact that there is a reciprocal relationship between the teachers at the school and Lerato: she said the teachers in the classroom are doing 'practically' what Lerato

'has on paper' and that because of this, the teachers are able to give her useful information on how theory actually works in practice. This response emphasises the empowerment that she experiences: Fatima does not feel as if she is only there to learn from Lerato. As an experienced teacher, she also has things to offer within the mentoring relationship.

Trust is built in the relationship by how Lerato offers feedback, especially when it is criticism or correction. As I observed the interaction in the feedback sessions between Lerato and each teacher, I could see that Fatima's description of Lerato as neither too rigid nor too serious was accurate. There was discussion between them, and at no point did Lerato take a heavy-handed or authoritarian approach to any of the teachers. When she wanted to correct something they had done, she asked them a question and then guided them through their answers to the insights or knowledge or approach that she (i.e. the GPLMS) was promoting. Each feedback session that I observed began with Lerato asking the teacher 'How did you feel about that lesson?' This open-ended question elicited an honest and self-reflective response from the teacher. In the feedback session I observed between Lerato and Fatima, the latter explained that she had not been fully prepared for the theme of the lesson she had taught on the theme of birthdays. She said she ought to have brought some resources into the classroom – pictures, candles, a cake – and perhaps have actually celebrated one of the children's birthdays as part of the lesson. Lerato merely listened and nodded. After complimenting Fatima on how she had taught the new words, she asked her why she had not used flash cards. After a brief discussion, Fatima agreed that she would make flash cards for the future. Lerato also looked at Fatima's mark book and asked her to bring it up to date by recording the marks for the assessments that had been completed.

Particularly noteworthy in this session was Lerato's concern for two children who had been placed in the front of the class, near the teacher's desk, and who, because of their position up against the wall, had not participated in the lesson at all. She and Fatima discussed the behavioural and learning problems that had necessitated removing the two children from the rest of the class, and Lerato asked Fatima not to forget to include them when teaching the whole class. It was evident from the conversation that they had talked about these learners before, and were trying a variety of approaches to managing and teaching them.

When I asked Lerato how she saw her role, she replied:

> My role is to be a friend – a critical friend - to the teachers and to support them as much as possible, and to make sure that they feel confident to do their work every day; and if they can't, then they know that there's someone else who will be able to assist them. So that's basically my job. Not judgemental at all -– they can just be themselves. That's where I take it from.

Having one teacher telling another teacher how to teach is a situation that is potentially fraught with possibilities for stress – and possibly resentment. Yet I detected no stress, resentment, or any other hostile emotion in either Fatima's or Salima's interactions with Lerato. On the contrary, they were professional and friendly. There was some stress and lack of confidence in Celia (see section 4.2.2.5 for a detailed description and analysis of this) but this was situated more in herself than in the interactions between her and the coach. Therefore it seems as though Lerato has embraced her role as coach competently. Helen confirms this. She spoke highly of Lerato, calling her confident and 'smart', saying that she knows her material, and conveys to her listeners that she knows what she's talking about. Moreover, she said, Lerato can observe a teacher and see quickly and accurately where the teacher's problems are.

Fear/Stress

- **Celia's Case**

Fear and high levels of stress are processes that can be part of the mentoring and coaching relationship. Celia spoke freely to me about the high levels of stress she experiences and how these affect her behaviour in the classroom. In her case the effect is severe and destructive. She forgets things; she rushes but she does not finish the work she is supposed to finish; she becomes fearful that her coach does not realise that it is impossible for the learners to complete the work in the time allocated; and finally, she is afraid that her coach does not realise just how much her anxiety affects her lesson delivery. She expressed it as follows,

> Sometimes it's difficult now. You tend to forget everything. Now with me you tend to forget lessons.

This comment was followed by a long pause as she searched for the words to explain her situation. I asked her whether it makes her nervous. She replied,

> Nervous ja. You panic the whole week. They will say Lerato is coming next week and the whole of next week you panic. Lerato is coming! Lerato is coming. She's coming to my class after break. She's coming in and she's coming to sit and listen to everything. You see - my point is everything man, it's going . . . you tend to forget the stuff, things to do. And then you rush. My problem again with the coaches – the work - with their file – we had to go according to the file. And then with the pace of the learners again in class also - sometimes you find yourself fall behind.

I asked Celia whether Lerato gives her feedback after the lessons. She told me, first, that Lerato encourages her when she says she thinks she did not do well. Then she continued,

> I think maybe she can feel – or maybe we are – I don't know – she can sense some tension from us. Now, when I am with her, I can feel that Lerato is sensing something from me. She will say, 'Celia, you didn't prepare today.' I said, 'Ja, I did not prepare.' She will say, 'You were not ready for me.' I will say, 'I was ready yesterday but today . . .' And she will laugh . . .No, she is stressing sometimes if you don't . . . Lerato is coming in class again. And next week again for Maths. Maybe Friday will be good. Monday she is coming for Maths. I say 'Whooo.'

I cannot say with utter certainty what Celia meant here – but I think that she finds class visits stressful and that Lerato can sense this. I am not sure whether Celia *was not actually prepared* for the lesson, or whether, because she gets so nervous, Lerato *thinks* she is not prepared. Either way, this is a stressful experience. Moreover, Celia has to endure observation for Maths as well as English – which adds to her stress. My own observations of the lesson suggested to me that Celia was not fully prepared for it. The students did shared reading. They were very subdued, and hardly responded to Celia's prompts and questions. In the feedback session with Lerato, Celia expressed the opinion that the learners said little because they knew all the answers. My impression as an observer was that they either did not understand the question, or did not know how to express the answer in English. Their story was about a teddy bear, and the children told her you find a bear in a zoo. Celia did not explain the difference between a wild animal and a toy teddy. There was no discussion

of bears at all. The rest of the children were extremely restless. They had been given an exercise to do from their GDE workbooks. I walked around the classroom and looked at what the learners were doing. A few managed to answer the questions, but many of them had written nothing, or wrong answers.

In my interview with Celia, she spoke about the daily lesson plans which she is required to follow. Because she cannot get through these lesson plans in the required time, she 'feeds' the children – by this I understood her to be saying that she provides them with the answers, rather than waiting for them to actively engage with the material, and so learn and discover for themselves. Such 'learning' is reminiscent of the rote learning in disadvantaged schools prior to 1994, and so fiercely and appropriately criticised. My observation of her class in this one lesson suggested that this class is not making meaning from the English texts with which they are working.

I believe that such high levels of stress are likely to be a threat to Celia being able to maximise the learning opportunity that this coaching is offering her. Certainly she does not show signs of being free to focus on the learners and how best to help them. Her struggle to express herself in English was apparent not only in the interview, but also when she gave instructions to the class. She knows she is not fluent in English. She told me, 'My problem is the language'. Together, these challenges seem at times to overwhelm her and this robs her of self-esteem and confidence.

My experience in Celia's class led me to conclude that had she and the children been able to speak in their home language(s), and had the children been learning to read and to write in their home language(s), I would have seen and experienced a far more lively, interactive lesson. Instead, there was constraint, hesitation and struggle. It seems to me that it is simply not possible to implement constructivist principles of teaching and learning under the constraints that the LoLT imposes on both teachers and learners. (This argument is linked also to 4.2.2.7 – HL and LoLT).

- **Salima's Case**

Salima also spoke freely about her stress levels when Lerato began observing her teaching. However, unlike Celia, she appears to have overcome her initial anxiety. Certainly when I

observed her lesson and the feedback session between her and Lerato, she came across as confident and poised. Salima has benefited personally from the coaching experience (see Section 4.3 Outcomes).

Mentoring does not 'happen in a vacuum . . . but is situated within a wider organisational, political and social context' (Ehrich et al, 2001, p.11.) That is true for the coach and teachers in this study. I move now to an analysis and discussion of these contexts as they affect the coaching in the GPLMS.

The Organisational Context

Two organisations impact directly on the coaching programme. These are the school and the GPLMS programme as it is implemented in the school by the NGO, Ace Training that trains the coaches.

Organisation One: The School

Lerato reported that the principal and SMT are supportive and allow her freedom and flexibility to operate within the school timetable. She also explained to me that the support of the HOD is crucial. It is the HOD who is the bridge between Lerato and the other teachers, and the one can, through her attitude and actions, either facilitate or impede Lerato's work. She has the full support of Anusha in Mohammed Malik school. This was made immediately apparent to me on my first visit to meet the teachers when Anusha volunteered to be interviewed in addition to the other three teachers.

Lack of time is sometimes a constraint or threat to the effectiveness of the feedback sessions from coach to teacher after a lesson observation. This is because teachers in the FP seldom have free time after a lesson. In her discussions with coaches and teachers, Helen hears that multiple factors make it difficult for sufficient time to be allocated to feedback sessions. FP teachers teach all the periods in a day. During breaks, teachers have playground duty, or they want to eat and drink. After school there may be scholar patrol duty or meetings, or some kind of after school supervision. Lerato told me she tries to overcome this constraint by talking to the teacher in the last five or ten minutes of the lesson while the children are busy with an activity. I saw exactly this in the lesson observations at the school. Feedback sessions were brief, and there was no time for in-depth discussion of pedagogy or

practice. Helen's comment on this was that ten minutes of feedback and discussion is probably sufficient when the teacher needs only minor assistance or guidance, but when more substantial help is needed – 'when the coach really needs to work with the teacher' - ten minutes is not sufficient time.

It is difficult to see how to avoid this. One possibility, perhaps, is to enlist the support of the SMT and to set aside one afternoon (during the week that the coach visits the school) for feedback sessions between the coach and her teachers. If such a meeting time were to be scheduled and adhered to by all the stakeholders, it may help to enable an improved quality of feedback. It would certainly be possible at the school where this research was carried out, as the learners leave between 13h00 and 14h00 and the teachers are all expected to remain at school until 15h00. If this were to happen some of the theoretical underpinnings that were discussed under point 4.2.1.2 may be able to be explored.

Organisation Two: ACE Training

This is a case study, of three teachers in one particular school, and their coach and that coach's supervisor. Despite the fact that there were and still are some inequalities among the teachers in content knowledge, skills and classroom management, which make the GPLMS necessary in the school, Lerato called Mohammed Malik school a 'functioning' school. She said it had good systems in place when she began visiting it. 'Honestly', she stated, 'I don't really think that most of them need coaching. There was teaching and learning taking place.' What they did need, she conceded, was to standardise their approach; some teachers were working independently and differently from others. Lerato has succeeded in establishing a working relationship with these teachers and is busy with strengthening and developing the teachers in the Foundation Phase in the school.

The GPLMS is a four-year strategy and at the end of 2012 the programme reached the halfway mark. However, the programme may be impacted by staffing changes. Helen was the last person I interviewed. In the course of our discussion about Lerato and her coaching, she told me that she had recommended Lerato for 'promotion' to the position of supervisor, which had fallen vacant due to the resignation of one of the supervisors. If Lerato is offered the position and accepts it, it will affect the teachers she was coaching. It will take her out of the classroom and out of coaching and away from them. A different coach will be appointed

to their school and the staff there will have to form a relationship with him/her. This is a possible constraint in the GPLMS if it slows down the learning of the teachers. It may very well do this if the teachers are focused on developing a relationship with a new coach rather than on the next stage of the Strategy.

The Political Context

Teacher Training

Helen, who goes into many of the schools visited by her 19 coaches, says of the teachers she sees, 'Theoretically these teachers are qualified but they got a terrible training. They weren't taught [how to teach reading and writing] in their training.' Some of her comments about the teachers in the GPLMS are a reminder of the political context in which the teachers lived and under which they were trained.

> Some of the Indian teachers at Mohammed Malik school were taught by the House of Delegates' Education Department. So the Indian teachers got superior training to the black teachers. And some of the Coloured teachers at (another school in the programme) are fantastic. They had excellent training. I learnt a lot from them.

The GPLMS is necessary, in part, because of the unequal racially-determined training provided to South African teachers (Sayed, 2004; Fleisch, 2007; Bloch, 2009). Lerato commented on the difference in the standards of teaching and learning in the schools she visits. The teachers I interviewed are aware of these differences too.

I argue that there are benefits to the process of Lerato bringing her various schools together for training. Fatima's comments below show that there is a kind of peer coaching developing, probably because of the supportive environment within which this is happening. Fatima is implying that her abilities, and those of the other teachers at Mohammed Malik school are needed; they have mastery where the other teachers do not. They have resources where the other school does not. And Fatima seems pleased that they can offer to help. I report her conversation with me below.

> On the other hand we are working with a school called P---- and P---- is a very, very poor school. It's like - I think it's one of the poorest schools I've seen in my life and

> when we went there - there's no paving, there's no grass, the walls are not painted. Our school is like a 5-star school compared to them! It's a bit unnerving as well. But with us working together with Lerato . . . They come to our school. They come and see our charts. If they need help we help them. We have a very good working relationship with the coach and the other school, which is very good. In a way we are assisting them - Lerato's assisting us - so we are all improving at the same time. The standard is improving and to be honest, I feel that if the kids can benefit from it, then why not? They are the reason we're here – we're trying all these new things for them. So if working like that with a coach like Lerato and with a school *like that* where they paired us - a high-flying school with a school that's very financially challenged - it's good. It's actually quite good.

This issue of resources is critically important for education. The results of ongoing research about the availability of books and libraries facilitating learning to read show this (UNISA, 2010). Fatima did not mention these particularly, but her description of the condition of the school implies it.

Home Language and Language of Learning and Teaching

Some factors do not fit easily into the organisational or political or social categorisation, but spread across two or all of these categories. One of these is language. One of the constraints for the teachers – and therefore also for the effectiveness of the GPLMS – is the Home Language (HL) of the learners who attend the school (Alexander, 2000; Heugh, 2000; Makalala, 2012). The school teaches English as Home Language, but English is not the Home Language of the overwhelming majority of the learners who attend the school. In Celia's class of 40 learners, only 3 speak English at home. The rest speak a variety of African languages. The population of the school has changed since it was first established. Prior to 1994, it was the Indian English-speaking children who lived in the area who attended the school. Now these children are sent to other schools, further away and the learners are transported to the school from the townships. A teacher like Celia, for instance, who does not have English as her HL, and who is teaching children who do not have English as their HL either, finds this a particular challenge. *My problem is the language,* she says. The other

teachers also spoke to me with concern about the negative impact of the Home language of the learners on literacy teaching and learning.

The Social Context

Parental Involvement

The need for parents to be involved is one of the explicitly stated outcomes of the GPLMS. However, to the teachers I interviewed, engaging the parents seems to be an elusive, if not impossible goal. There are many reasons for this. They include

- Physical distance of learners and families from the school – which affects 1) the attendance of parents/caregivers at information meetings; 2) the learners' attendance at homework classes after school
- The home language of the parents/caregivers – which affects their confidence in helping children with homework
- The non-standard working hours of many parents/caregivers which often prevents them from being available at appropriate times to assist their children.

The distance the parents and their children have to travel to get to school is a threat. The school is situated in Laudium, but the children live in Atteridgeville, Soshanguve, Hammanskraal and Pretoria. According to Fatima, the circumstances of the children make learning more difficult because they have to get up very early in the morning and then travel for such a long time in order to reach the school.

> I think our kids also experience a lot of problems . . . Even the way they come to school .They must get up at 6 o'clock, climb in a bus, drive for one and a half hours, come to school - it's hectic.... where would you expect a 5-year-old to climb on a bus alone with a bus ticket? And these are some of the realities. And then we expect them to concentrate . . . . How can you expect that? It's a lot.

In addition, many of the parents do not attend parents' meetings. This is true, whether the meetings are held in the evenings or on Saturday mornings. The teachers believe that without parental involvement – even such relatively minimal involvement as attendance at

information meetings, the children's education - especially their literacy learning – is very unlikely to progress as it needs to.

Because the children are being educated in English at Home Language level, but speak a variety of other African languages at home, many of them need a lot of support in mastering the basics of English. Once Mohammed Malik school had identified that there was a problem with homework – it was often not being done – the school began offering classes after school where the learners could be assisted with completing their homework. However most of these children leave straight after school to get their transport home. Therefore the extra classes that have been organised for them do not succeed in drawing all the children who need them the most.

Some of the parents who are willing to assist their children with homework are not able to do so. Celia reported:

> Some parents - as I said - some parents - most of our parents – if you can remember - they cannot read, they cannot write. You can see with their sentences that you say - Who helped you? If you go through the sentences and you say, Who helped you? and they say my mother. AY! Mama! You will ask where is mama working. They will say somewhere in town doing washing. Shoprite. You can see public works - oh you can see - if you value *[I think she means evaluate]* those three books you will see - oh this one - there is a problem at home. Even the sisters, the brothers. You ask - Is there no brother that's at school now? If there is a brother you will say - What grade? Grade 8. Even the grade 8s they cannot read; they cannot do their sentences correctly; that's the problem with homework also now.

The inability of the parents of these children to read and write is a potential threat to the success of the Strategy. Such parents cannot assist their children with their homework. Fatima made it clear to me that if the children do not do their homework, their progress is far slower than it ought to be. The HOD at the school told me the same story. She linked the lack of parental support in doing homework with their children to the children's lack of progress in learning to read. She emphasised that if the children do not go home and learn their words, and practise reading, their reading does not improve. The teaching that takes place in the classroom is not the sole determinant of a child's reading ability. Like Celia, she

drew attention to the fact that many of the parents of the children at Mohammed Malik school cannot read and write English. As I did not interview the parents, I am not able to confirm or to refute these observations of the teachers about the parents' proficiency in English. What emerged from the teachers' narratives at the ACE training workshop I conducted in 2010, and from my own experience of teaching, is that many parents work long hours, and are not always available in the afternoons to hear and check on their children's homework. So even where the parents are proficient in English and willing to assist their children with their schoolwork, their working hours prevent them from doing so. While some of these issues and the findings from my interviews seem to be in line with the findings of Fleisch (2008) and PIRLS 2011 (Howie et al, 2012) on parents' levels of literacy affecting the achievements of the children, it must also be noted that many students are not negatively impacted by such social factors, and achieve the same levels of literacy as English HL speakers.

Summary of Processes

Mentoring is a process that happens within a dynamic professional, interpersonal relationship between coach and coachee, or mentor and mentee. The teachers appreciate the coaching they receive, but their conversations with me reflect their belief that being coached, and improving their knowledge about literacy teaching, and their skills in teaching literacy in the classroom, while valuable, are not enough to ensure that the learners become literate. Support from home is essential, and socio-political factors such as those outlined above do have a negative impact on the GPLMS.

4.3 Outcomes

Finally, the IPO model considers positive outcomes and problems associated with mentoring for 1) the mentor; 2) the mentee; 3) the organisation.

4.3.1 Outcomes for the Mentor

In the research studies examined by Ehrich et al (2001) collegiality and networking, reflection, professional development, personal satisfaction and interpersonal skill

development were the most commonly reported outcomes for mentors. Lerato told me about an experience she had, and it was obvious that she derived a sense of personal satisfaction from it.

Collegiality and Personal Satisfaction

One of the teachers at Mohammed Malik school had not been speaking English to the learners in her class. Instead she had been using her home language to teach them. The principal called Lerato in and asked her if she would 'deal with' this sensitive issue with the teacher concerned. Lerato believes she received this request for assistance because 'she knows if I handle it I'll get the message across better because it's less threatening to the teacher than when she [the principal] calls her in.' Lerato then added that it was particularly encouraging to her that Helen was with her on that day and heard this. Her description of how she dealt with the teacher pointed to the use of those interpersonal skills that the mentoring literature says mentors need. She concluded, 'It gave me confidence 'cos she was the one who said – Lerato, will you please handle it for me.' It was this incident that caused her to believe that the principal now understood her role – that it was to support and encourage the teachers. Moreover it encouraged Lerato to know that the principal believed she would handle it in this manner.

Motivation of Mentees as a Mentor Problem

I found myself wondering whether some degree of professional up-skilling or changed teaching practice on the part of the mentees may be sacrificed because a friendship develops between the mentor and mentee. I wish to tread delicately when I make this observation because I can see the need for the coach to be a friend rather than a judge. However, Fatima's use of the word 'comfortable' to describe Lerato, and Salima's description of Lerato as 'soft and sweet' led me to consider to what degree feeling comfortable with her coach is or could be a motivating factor for the teacher to change and improve her practice. I am inclined to think a very comfortable relationship will not necessarily always be a motivating one.

There is a perception, one perpetuated through the South Africa's media, that some teachers in South African schools are not conscientious about their work and do not see

themselves as accountable for their teaching. It is possible that a coach who is perceived as a friend will be able to motivate such teachers to work diligently and to make themselves accountable for their learners' progress. However it is equally possible that a lack of behavioural change may be the outcome of the coach being seen as the teachers' friend - even a critical friend. Too much fear and too much comfort may have the unintended same consequence: little change in classroom practice. Of course, this conclusion assumes that it is coaching that will lead to changed practices by teachers.

For the teachers in the GPLMS, the coaching is an extrinsic factor – with the coach designated as the more knowledgeable and more experienced professional who comes in to help the less knowledgeable, less experienced one. In addition, the coach is in the school by the authority of the teachers' employer. These two factors might reasonably be expected to motivate the teachers to learn and to change. But, as I have suggested, factors intrinsic to the teachers may make such change unlikely. Moreover the teachers in the GPLMS have been offered neither career enhancement nor additional remuneration for completing the GPLMS. Thus potentially motivating factors – intrinsic to individual teachers – are also missing and may ultimately lead to a lack of change.

What, therefore, could motivate teachers in the GPLMS? The same question could be asked about the coach. Helen said that if there was one constraint in Lerato's practice, it was that she tends to try to finish all her work by 13h00. One possible reason for this is a personal one: she is the mother of two young children, one under the age of two, and another who is in primary school. Because she tries to finish her work by 13h00, it seems that she keeps the afternoon school-based workshops she conducts to a minimum. She and all the other coaches send reports to Helen and these reports include the dates of the workshops they have conducted. Lerato explained that Helen has to trust that Lerato is where she says she is. Because Helen has 19 other coaches to supervise, she is not able to check on each one more than once a month at most. She stated 'My job requires someone with a lot of passion. If you would get someone who's in it maybe for the money, that might be a problem. Cos there's little monitoring of us in GPLMS'.

4.3.2 Outcomes for the Mentee

Help with Teaching Strategies for Literacy

Salima was the most articulate and detailed about the help she had received with teaching strategies. She explained that before she began with the GPLMS training she only did reading with the entire class. Now, however, she does group guided reading which is stipulated in the CAPS document (DoE, 2011). She has internalised the thinking behind such a strategy, and is able to explain why she believes it is better than teaching reading to the whole class at once: because learners should be able to develop at their own pace; because slower learners should not hold quicker learners back and quicker learners should not force the pace for slower learners; and because each individual child needs attention, something that is only possible when learners are with the teacher in small groups. This explanation from Salima is one that shows the closest alignment with Dole's (2003) assertion that teachers need theoretical understandings about learning and instruction for instructional strategies to be used effectively or reliably. Salima is able to demonstrate knowledge of the reasons why group guided reading is stipulated. In order to allow all the learners in a school to have the maximum opportunity to learn a language and then use that language to learn, teachers need to be armed with, not only strategies, but the reasons for their use.

Individual Attention

When training is conducted for teachers by the GDE, it has in the past been conducted in large groups. What is different about the GPLMS is that the coaching is individual as well as in small groups. As such, it can be tailored to meet the needs of each teacher. Lerato told me that Celia has improved substantially since she, Lerato, began coaching her. She attributes this to the fact that she has been able to receive help specifically designed for her. Lerato believes this is important because, she says, each member of a team is affected by each other member of the team. If there is one teacher who is struggling, or whose content knowledge and skills are not on a par with the rest, it has a ripple effect on them, as well as on the learners. The effects on the learners are then transferred upwards into succeeding grades as the learners move through the system. Lerato expressed it this way:

> It's because of those individuals – at the end of the day they count towards the bigger picture. Because if you've got five teachers out of nine and five are good ones but you've got these four that really need coaching, the four will ultimately affect the others – even though you have the good five teachers.

Development of Co-operation and Teamwork

There is an implication about the importance of teamwork in this evaluation by Lerato, one which was made even more explicit by Fatima who told me what happened when a meeting was held for the parents of Grade 2 learners who were struggling. In the course of that meeting reference was made to a flip file that the learners had been given and to important worksheets with the phonics and sight words for each week in those files. Some of the parents reported that their children did not have the worksheets. She said:

> Then it came to our attention that the grade 2 teachers were working separately . . . The one teacher felt if she's typing out worksheets, why should she share them with the other two teachers that didn't want to type out . . . Because of that, now the other two . . . teachers are typing out work sheets because if they don't type out their workload, then the worksheets won't come to everyone. So in a way it does work In the grade 2s now – ALL the classes are working at the same pace ; they all have the same work sheets; they all work together; it's not your class is ahead, my class is behind like previously. It makes a difference.

Sequencing and pacing of learning are key strategies in effective literacy teaching. It's necessary for all the teachers in a school to understand this and work together to achieve the same outcomes. This is one strategy to improve literacy learning in underperforming schools.

Celia too has noticed a change in the approach to work since the start of the GPLMS. Prior to this, she said, she felt that each teacher tried to impress the HOD or other teachers by producing, for instance, her own original worksheets. She called this, euphemistically, the need to be 'creative'. Since the GPLMS began, 'almost all' of the teachers are working together and sharing their resources which Celia says benefits everyone.

There are several benefits to spreading the responsibility for creating resources among all those who teach a grade. First, the workload is shared more equitably among the teachers. Such sharing also benefits the children, who all have access to the same resources; no class is left out. In the long term, this ought to raise the standard of literacy teaching in the school.

Fatima believes that having a coach has introduced accountability where it has been lacking. The fact that Lerato goes into classrooms to observe how teachers are teaching, and asks to see the mark books where the assessments have been recorded, has meant that those teachers who were neglecting their teaching, and/or their preparation of resources, and/or their assessment and/or their record-keeping - are now having to change their ways. While it is perhaps an indirect benefit, these levels of accountability to one another among the teachers would not necessarily have taken place had there been no coach present in the school.

Help with Classroom Management/Discipline

Lerato cited another instance where her mentoring made a difference to one particular teacher. This particular teacher is not one of the three I interviewed, but she is someone who teaches at the same school. She could not control her class, and as a result, according to Lerato, no learning was taking place. The situation had become so trying to the teachers around her that she had been moved to a classroom set away from the rest. Initially, when discussing her teaching with Lerato, she was defensive and denied there was a problem. Through skilful questioning Lerato ascertained from her that 'more quiet' would be helpful in the classroom. After admitting that she did not know to achieve this, Lerato offered to help her by modelling a way of gaining the class's cooperation. At every stage of the process, Lerato involved this teacher in the learning. The end result was that after Lerato had worked with her for a year, her discipline had improved so substantially that the school moved her back to a room located alongside the other teachers in the same phase.

One of the significant benefits of the coaching/mentoring component of the GPLMS is there is now a system of classroom visits in place (Fleisch, 2012). What Lerato observed in the instance cited above is the fact that before this teacher could begin to implement any of the teaching of the GPLMS, she needed to gain control of her class. Lerato sees her role as coach

as assisting with this – demonstrating to and empowering a teacher to establish order in her classroom and to discipline the children so they can begin to pay attention and learn. While the school's response had not addressed the core of the problem, Lerato had helped the teacher solve her own problem. Lerato concluded her narrative by saying:

> So I think she's also starting to get excited about coming to work. She told me "I used to get home and just die. It's exhausting." You get exhausted just watching her . . . And now she's not labelled anymore as the one who can't discipline - because her kids are in class, they're sitting down, they're doing the work now, which is nice for her.

While I did not interview this teacher, and therefore could not ask her how she felt about her changed classroom management, Lerato told me that this teacher reported to Lerato with delight that she was returning to teach alongside her colleagues. This incident appears to support the finding that increased self-confidence and also the acquisition of new and useful strategies are an outcome of the mentoring process for mentees.

4.3.3 Outcomes for the Organisation

Benefits

It is not only the individuals within the mentoring programme who benefit. The school benefits too. I asked Helen what sort of take-up of the GPLMS there had been among the teachers. This was her response. It is general and summarised, but I believe that it gives a useful broad background context to the particulars of this coaching/mentoring case study.

> They've taken up that you must have a routine. That it's better for you and better for the children. They are teaching in a more structured way, so their pacing is better. Whereas before they could not complete the programme they were weeks behind – not so now. They have taken up some of the content. So they realise that in order to teach a child to read you've got to teach phonics and you've also got to take the whole language approach. They are beginning to learn that writing tasks have to be scaffolded – you've got to have a model on the board and you've got to take them

> through it. There are some writing lessons that are written in such a way that they are enacting a shared writing. Left to themselves, it's unlikely they would do that. So if they have a few years of working with these detailed lessons, they'll imbibe all of this. And then when we all go away they should still follow this routine. They would have a bank of resources. They know the methodology - how to teach letter formation. They've got hundreds of listening and speaking lessons – they don't have to think them up themselves and they're all the kinds of things that CAPS is asking them to do. They've got loads of writing lessons. When CAPS says, for example, that learners must edit and present two paragraphs of their own writing – that's a CAPS guideline – they have a lesson for that. Why do they need to sit and figure it out themselves? It's here – and with the assessment guidelines. They are recording their assessments. They never had a mark book before. We've taught them how to make a mark book. They're recording their assessment. And each assessment task has to be recorded on the appropriate date. It's all more professional.

In addition to what Helen says, I could see that the teachers I interviewed and observed were teaching reading according to the methods laid down in the GPLMS. Where the Foundation Phase teachers in a school are working together in this manner, using the approach of the GPLMS to teach reading and writing, and drawing on the support of the coach, not only the individual teachers but also the school must benefit. This data was collected when the GPLMS was coming to the end of its second year of implementation. The Strategy still has two more years to run. Some coaching and literacy learning studies suggest that long term support leads to more lasting change (Neuman & Wright, 2010). Therefore one hopes that what Helen says about the teachers still following the routine and using the resources once the coaches have gone away, would be true.

Challenges

There are still challenges that face teachers and schools. One such challenge is the environment. The dirty, untidy classrooms and lack of suitable posters and charts on the walls are a concern to Helen. According to some of the teachers she visits, there are justifiable reasons for this. Certain schools are used by community leaders in the evenings. Because there is poor supervision and a lack of security at these meetings, teachers often

arrive in class the following day to discover that their rooms have been stripped of resources they have put there. When they complain, they discover that the school management team is either unable or unwilling to do anything about it. So the teachers sometimes settle for doing nothing about the appearance of their classrooms.

The lack of resources – books and qualified teachers is another challenge to certain schools and also to successful achievement in literacy. Helen reported that at one of the schools she visits there is only one teacher who is able to teach Sepedi. So she teaches Sepedi to Grades 1, 2 and 3. However, when she is teaching the Grade 2 and Grade 3 classes, her class of Grade 1 learners is unsupervised. She says she tries to give them something to do, but this is not successful. Moreover, neither the Grade 2 nor the Grade 3 class receives the full time allocation for Home Language. The result of this allocation is that she has an unusually heavy load of preparation to do. The school is small, as it is situated in an area where mostly old people now live. What should probably happen is that isiZulu only should be taught as HL. However, the school will not do that as it would mean losing the Sepedi-speaking children, and losing children would mean they will lose more staff members. So this unsatisfactory situation persists.

What this data suggests is that many aspects of the coaching in the GPLMS are being well implemented and managed. The high quality of the training that is being provided to the coaches by Ace Training is commendable, certainly as evidenced by the way the coach in this study is working. The teachers are engaged in the process of learning and teaching, and show signs of gradually changing their teaching practices. They express explicit confidence in and appreciation of Lerato and what she offers them. These things, plus the sense of empowerment that these teachers feel, appear to have eliminated the sense that the GPLMS has been unfairly imposed on them.

There are still challenges, particularly those that arise from the historical context of South African education – the legacy of apartheid, poverty, literacy practices in the children's homes and language issues. These challenges are felt at both the personal and the organisational level. While the teachers praise Lerato and the training they receive from her, they do not express appreciation of the GDE, and appear to be unaware that it is the GDE that has planned, funded and arranged for the implementation of the GPLMS.

Another challenge that arose in some of the interview data was the regular framing of problems and challenges in education in South Africa in a racialised way. While it may be true that some black South African families whose HL is not English do experience this as a limitation, there are many who do not. While Celia expressed the belief that her lack of fluency in English was a challenge for her in the classroom, Lerato was not at all challenged by working in English. The matter of language as a contributing factor to many issues faced in South African education continues to be a perplexing one.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed and discussed the data gathered in this study using the Initiation – Processes – Outcomes model proposed by Ehrich et al (2001). I have considered how access to coaching in the GPLMS programme - initial, ongoing and sustained access - provides certain affordances for the participants in this study. I have described and reflected on the processes, interpersonal as well as contextual, that sustain or threaten the success of the coaching programme. Finally, I have outlined the outcomes, positive and negative for the mentor, mentee and the organisation that is a part of this programme.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This research study set out to investigate what four teachers in one school think about the role of the coach in the GPLMS programme. It also aimed to find out what difference the contribution of the coaching made to their literacy teaching. This chapter will summarise and discuss the main findings from the research. It will analyse both the affordances of this coaching approach as well as the constraints. It will do this with respect to coaching as well as to literacy teaching and learning. Finally it will include some critical reflection on the design of this research as well as recommendations for further research.

5.1.1 General Observations

Teacher mentoring/coaching in the GPLMS has one clear advantage over the crash-course training that has so often been a feature of training teachers since 1997 and the introduction of C2005: it allows time for this particular group of teachers to engage with content and practices, spread over four years and allows for teachers in the different grades to engage in sharing and learning together. The individual nature of the coaching is a strength: it meets the specific needs of each teacher. It also contributes to a sense of teamwork among the teachers in a Phase. For the first time in decades it has made classroom visits both possible and routine, which has opened up the classroom as a learning space for teachers.

5.2 Coach - Personal attributes and Performance

5.2.1 General response

These teachers were unanimous in their approval of Lerato. They liked her, the person. This is in line with the research that says the personality of the coach and the pairing of mentor and mentee is significant (Zimpher & Rieger, 2001). They found it possible to talk with her and to accept critique on their teaching from her. Some of the particular characteristics the teachers appreciated were Lerato's approachability, flexibility, dependability, friendliness,

helpfulness and sense of humour. These qualities and attitudes in Lerato have promoted the development of a relationship with these teachers that is favourable to ongoing communication and interaction between them.

Lerato is astute and strategic in her own response to her work. She has cultivated a good relationship with the HOD, Anusha, because, as she told me, she recognises that she can only do her work with the support of the HOD.

5.2.2. Trust, Confidentiality and Mutual Respect

There are particular features in the coaching relationship that enhance its success. Trust and confidentiality are important (Zwart et al, 2010). The teachers in this research study, for the most part, are not fearful about being observed in their classrooms. Both they and the principal know that Lerato is not there for surveillance. Everything that happens between them stays between them. The principal understands this and the teachers feel confident as a result of this. Whether this is the choice of the GDE or Ace Training, I am not sure. However, from my observation of the communication and interactions between Lerato and the teachers, as well as the teachers' freedom to answer my questions, I conclude that this is a strength of the design of the GPLMS.

Mutual respect is fostered by Lerato when she begins each feedback session with the question – 'How did you think it went?' The fact that she takes feedback from the teachers to Ace Training, and that this feedback brings about changes in the programme is pleasing and empowering to the teachers. I believe that this kind of flexibility and adaptability from Ace Training and the GDE may be even more critical in the long term process of bringing about teacher change. Fatima's belief that the Department has the theory but they the teachers have to apply the theory in the classroom is feedback that needs to be taken seriously. However, this assessment needs to be balanced with the comments about reflection by teachers in section 5.4.1

5.2.3 Collegiality

Teachers appreciate it when their mentor acts like a colleague, and is willing to listen to their suggestions and feedback, and even to learn from them. This is empowering to the teachers and affirms their roles as qualified and experienced professionals. Teachers who

feel like this are more likely to receive guidance and even instructions from their coach. They are also more likely to continue to interact and engage with such a coach, and the engagement is likely to operate to the benefit of their ongoing professional development, as well as to how they teach their learners. Harrison et al (2006, p.1055) argue that 'best practice for developmental mentoring involves elements of challenge and risk-taking within supportive school environments with clear induction systems in place and a strong school ethos in relation to professional development'.

5.2.4 Fear in the Teacher

The trust and confidentiality that exists between the teachers does not preclude the possibility of fear and anxiety in an individual teacher. This was the case with Celia. There are certain pre-disposing factors for her anxiety. She is required to teach English as HL when it is not her HL *and* she is required to teach it to learners when it is not their HL either (Alexander, 2000; Heugh, 2000; Makalala, 2012). These language issues impact substantially on her confidence in her abilities. They cause her to perform at less than her best. This was discussed at length in Chapter 4. As an experienced educator myself, and one who has worked in multilingual classroom settings for many years, but at secondary level, it was painful to listen to these young children struggling to express themselves in English. Their constraint in speaking, their halting reading and their difficulty in making meaning from writing was an obvious limitation when compared to the freedom of expression of English HL speakers, heard and experienced by me during observation of student teaching in FP classes. It was equally difficult to watch Celia trying hard to teach her learners English literacy, and to listen to her struggle to answer my questions in English. While I believe Lerato's assertion that coaching has brought about an improvement in her teaching practice, I am not sure it can compensate for the language barrier that she faces daily. This goes back to Fleisch's (2008) argument made in the introductory chapter. It is an issue that possibly needs to be addressed more substantively as the GPLMS continues.

5.2.5 Accountability, Teamwork and Co-operation

Accountability for teaching and learning among these teachers (and among all the FP teachers in the school where this research took place) is being promoted because the coach is visiting each teacher in her classroom. This means that no teacher is able to insist on

working independently, nor is a teacher able to evade the responsibility of learning the new content and implementing the new strategies prescribed by the GPLMS. In addition, because the coach is visiting each class, other challenges for teachers – such as difficulty in managing the discipline within the classroom – become apparent and available for scrutiny. This is the first time in decades that classroom visits are taking place (Fleisch, 2012). This opening up of classrooms has the potential to consolidate the teaching and to standardise it within a phase, to the benefit of literacy learning for all the learners in that grade. This is what is happening, according to the teachers in this research study.

All the teachers in this case study reported that they are working together in the FP in order to support one another, especially by sharing resources. This did not happen with all the teachers prior to the GPLMS. This lightens the workload for everyone, and is also a means of standardising what is taught: all the classes do the same work. These are some positive outcomes of implementing coaching in schools and would appear to be contributing to the explicitly stated goals of the GPLMS for improvements in teacher practices and learners' literacy learning.

5.3 Specific coaching functions

5.3.1 Curriculum Documents

The coach makes an active and vital contribution to the teachers' knowledge of and confidence in implementing policy and teaching practices correctly. One teacher put into words explicitly, and the other teachers' responses were implicit in communicating that:

- Making sense of new policy, especially when it arrives in the form of a lengthy policy document, is difficult.
- Departmental officials are often unavailable or unreachable when someone from a school tries to contact them.
- It is so much better to have a person available, willing and able to answer questions and to clarify issues than to wrestle with the above.
- The coach in the GPLMS fulfils this function.

We can assume that the Education Department wants teachers to implement policy precisely and appropriately. One of the immediate advantages of having a coach working

with the teachers is that she has a working knowledge of the policy documents, and she is available to the teachers at all times. Every one of the teachers in this school, including the HOD, agreed and commented on this availability as a highly valued attribute of their coach. The coach is able to interpret and explain policy and thus raise the likelihood that teachers will implement it correctly, to the advantage of the learners.

However, I wish to sound a note of caution in relation to this response of the teachers. Being able to call on a more knowledgeable other to interpret and explain a policy may be acceptable in the short term. However, what is it about teachers in South African schools that dis-incline them, quite strongly, it seems to me, from accepting the challenge of trying to make sense of policy and curriculum documents themselves? It may be the pressures they feel – managing and disciplining large groups of learners in limited physical spaces; pressure from the Department to be accountable for learner performance; an erosion of their own sense of authority and competence because of having to take on a new pedagogy (Jansen, 2001). I also believe it demonstrates that these teachers' sense of their own professionalism, as well as pride in their professional competence has been so seriously eroded that they no longer want to attempt such things. This sense of professional pride needs to be recovered for the long term benefit of education in this country.

5.3.2. Resources and Literacy Strategies

The teachers engaged with Lerato about resources such as charts. They asked for clarification about dates for and details of assessments. They opened their mark books for Lerato's scrutiny and accepted her gentle rebuke for not having recorded all the assessments. Two of them also accepted her criticism for failing to provide flash cards for the reading lesson. The more confident teacher of the three, Fatima, engaged with Lerato critically about aspects of the teaching of phonics and what she believes is a misalignment between the phonics programme and the readers. This was one of the instances of critical thinking about the literacy teaching that I encountered.

In the teachers' opinion, Lerato is a competent coach. I observed her in feedback sessions with them and my opinion is that she is all that the teachers say she is. I believe more firmness from her about the lack of flash cards for two of the lessons she and I observed, *together with a reminder of why their use is so important in literacy learning,* would have

been appropriate. However, my presence may have been an inhibiting factor on her usual interaction with the teachers. What was disappointing to me was that the teachers did not explicate their learning about the teaching of literacy in any detail, even though I asked them several specific questions and tried to draw them out. I am not therefore able to conclude much about the specific learning of these teachers in the domain of literacy teaching. This reflection and critique is linked to the gap in my research design **which I discuss below** and the construction of my data collection instrument.

5.4 Teacher Development: A Way Forward

5.4.1 Reflective Practice

Thoughtful reflection on their learning did not feature in the responses of the teachers during their interviews. Harrison et al (2006) speculate that critical reflection on practice will only improve when forms of enquiry into teaching and/or critical thought about professional work can be linked with a *whole school culture of professional development***.** They also emphasize that 'an understanding of the purpose and place of those skills that coaches are teaching' is necessary for coachees (Harrison et al, 2006, p.1056). Dole (2003) argues that teachers' active involvement in the learning process has been shown repeatedly to be crucial to effective professional development. In addition, she argues that they need theoretical understandings about learning and instruction for changes in their pedagogy to be sustained, and for instructional strategies to be used effectively or reliably.

In the course of my interviews with them I asked each of the teachers whether she kept a reflective journal – one in which she wrote about what she was learning through the GPLMS. In each instance the answer was a straightforward and definite 'No'. Moreover, none of the four teachers I interviewed offered an opinion or critique which suggested they had been reflecting on the broader impact of the Strategy. An evaluation of the National Literacy Strategy in England (HM1) proposed that the next stage for teachers is that they develop a more questioning and reflective approach to what they are teaching and why (Beard, 2011). Similarly, it may be beneficial to the overall quality of teaching in the GPLMS schools for South African teachers to be encouraged to do likewise. It may be that teachers do not reflect to any depth on a teaching programme when they are provided with a curriculum, lesson plans, readers and other teaching materials, and then trained on how to

teach with these resources. Such a prescriptive approach may communicate to the teachers that their own ideas and beliefs are superfluous.

It is worth considering Kolb's argument at this point. He states that 'Teachers must never stop learning if teacher education is to be a dynamic process. The learning process for teachers must be *about* their practice, must be built on experiences derived *from* their practice and, therefore, the learning cycle of *experience* followed by *reflection, learning* and *experimentation* (Kolb, 1994) is applicable as much to a teacher, as learner, as to a pupil.' Do teachers in the GPLMS see themselves as learners? This is a question that needs to be probed in further research on the impact of the GPLMS.

5.4.2 Time

The length of time that coaches spend with teachers has been shown to improve children's literacy learning (Bean et al, 2010). The GPLMS has been designed to run for four years. We are halfway through this period of time. The teachers in this research study have been willing to open up their classrooms and teaching practices to scrutiny. They have begun to both ask for help and offer help. These steps are signs of progress. The fact is that there is time to consolidate and extend the gains of the past two years. More thoughtful reflection and a greater focus on student learning on the part of teachers may add significantly to what has been achieved so far.

5.5 Gap in Research Design and Instrument

I did not plan to observe one of Lerato's school-based workshops, nor one of her Professional Learning Group (PLG) sessions. In retrospect, I believe that is a gap in my research design. There was also a gap in my interview schedule. I did not ask any of the participants in this research study for details about the content of the school-based workshops or the PLGs. As a result of this omission, I am unable to comment as specifically as I would like on the strategies and techniques, on the content and methodological training that this particular coach offers her teachers. I was alerted to this by the studies I read (Neuman & Wright, 2010; Harrison et al, 2006; Zwart et al (2010) – all of which discussed the lack of detailed empirical research on these issues in coaching practice. While this project would not have added quantitatively to knowledge in this field, I believe it would

have been possible and useful to have been able to make a contribution to the discussion. As already noted, the feedback sessions between coach and teacher were very brief, and there was no time for discussion and reflection between my observation of one lesson and the next. These factors too played a role in constraining my awareness of what more I, as the researcher, needed to observe and ask.

I found it difficult in this research project to find for myself an appropriate balance between the focus on literacy and the focus on coaching. I was very clear in my own mind that I wanted to investigate coaching, but it is not possible to ignore the precise purpose of the coaching. However I have found it challenging to do justice to both in what is a research report, and not a dissertation.

5.6 Future Research

There is one main area of research which I believe may yield useful data in future investigation into coaching in the GPLMS. It is research into the specific strategies that coaches use in their interactions with teachers. There is a gap in the literature in this area (Neuman & Wright, 2010; Bean et al, 2009; Zwart et al, 2009; Harrison et al, 2006). Ace Training know what they have trained the coaches to do, but it is only by going into the classroom and studying what strategies the coaches are using, that researchers can discover what they are actually doing. Despite the fact that it is challenging to make direct and causal links between teaching strategies and learning, I believe that even small gains in understanding and insight, especially if they can be linked to constructive changes in teacher practice and increased literacy learning in students, are worth pursuing.

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M.A. RESEARCH REPORT

APPENDIX A: Interview questions to teachers

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project.

I understand that you are giving your opinion. So I will not repeat "in your opinion" for every question, but that is what I expect to hear – your opinion. I may ask you to explain and justify these opinions.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

- Please will you complete the brief questionnaire about your training and classroom experience.

TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Before you embarked on the GPLS programme, how did you teach reading?
2. Is this programme (the GPL(M)S) equipping you to teach reading differently ? If so, how? [Probes: In your answer, please comment on the teaching of phonics, letter formation, reading (look and say), reading comprehension and writing.]
3. Before you embarked on the GPLS training, what resources were available to you for teaching your learners to read? (Teacher work books, learners' work books, readers – number, variety, level, charts, posters, etc.)
4. Have you been given new reading resources to be used with the GPLS programme?
5. Please describe these resources.
6. How have your learners responded to these resources?
7. Do you think these resources have made any difference in the learning experiences of your students? Why/Why not?
8. What is your opinion of the materials that you have been given to use with the GPLS?
   8.1 How have they worked in the classroom – for your learners?
   8.2 How have they worked for you as a teacher?
9. Think about your GPLS skills training:
   4.1 Which skills from your training are you incorporating into your lessons?
   4.2 How often do you incorporate (each one) into your lessons?
   4.3 Are there any aspects of the training that you are not incorporating into your lessons? If not, why not?

APPLICATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Reflecting on the past 18 months:

1. What effect has your teaching approach had on the learners' (1) ability to read? (2) attitude towards learning to read?

2. Have you been aware of any change(s), either in yourself, your learners, the general atmosphere in the classroom? Other? (e.g. your relationship with your colleagues; relationship with your learners' parents; others)
3. Have you ever kept a reflective journal during your teaching career?

COACHING

1. How would you describe your relationship with your coach?
2. Has having a coach been of any benefit to you? If your answer is 'Yes', please explain what the benefit has been?
3. Has having a coach been a challenge to you? If your answer is 'Yes', please explain what the challenge(s) has (have) been.
4. How often do you have contact with your coach?
5. Who initiates the contact – you or the coach?
6. What sorts of things do you discuss with the coach?
7. Do you think your coach is available often enough and for long enough to assist you (assuming you draw on the coach for assistance)?

TEACHERS' RELATIONSHIPS & INTERACTION WITH COLLEAGUES

1. What were your relationships like with other FP teachers before the GPLS began?
2. Has working with the GPLS affected your relationships with your colleagues?
3. If it has, explain how.
4. What do you think accounts for this?

GENERAL

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about any aspect of your teaching, or of the GPL(M)S that you and I have not discussed so far?

M A RESEARCH REPORT

APPENDIX B: Interview questions to coach

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project.

A. Please complete the questionnaire about your training and experience.

B: Interview

1. What have you learned from your mentoring/coaching experience over the past year? Think about i) the content you have been teaching; ii) the relationship with the teachers here that you mentor; iii) the teaching of literacy in this school.
2. How do you see your role as a coach for the teachers in your group?
3. What do you see as your key responsibilities?
4. Do you think your teachers have the same understanding of your role and responsibilities? Please explain.
5. What sort of take-up of the training and coaching can you see in your teachers?
6. Can you see a difference between their take-up last year, the 1st year of their training, and this year? If your answer is yes, please explain what the difference is.
7. Can you think of any incident(s) or event(s) that have been significant for either you or your teachers in your interactions with one another? If so, please describe the incident(s) and explain what made it/them significant.
8. What do you think the strengths of this coaching model are for teacher development?
9. What do you think the weaknesses of this coaching model are for teacher development?
10. Would you like to add anything else about your experience with this strategy?

M A RESEARCH REPORT

APPENDIX C: Interview questions to trainer

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project.

B. Please complete the questionnaire about your training and experience.

B: Interview

*Many of the questions that follow will be 1) about your training experiences **in general** and 2) about your training of the **specific** coach in this research project.*

11. Describe your experience of working with the training company that employs you.
12. How would you evaluate the training course materials that you are working with?
13. What have you learned from your training experiences over the past year? Think about i) the content you have been teaching; ii) the relationship with the coaches that you train; iii) the relationship with the particular coach involved in this project.
14. How do you see your role as a trainer for the coaches in your group?
15. What do you see as your key responsibilities?
16. Do you think your coaches have the same understanding of your role and responsibilities? Please explain.
17. What sort of take-up of the training and coaching can you see in your coaches?
18. Can you see a difference between their take-up last year, the 1st year of their training, and this year? If your answer is yes, please explain what the difference is.
19. Can you think of any incident(s) or event(s) that have been significant for either you or your coaches in your interactions with one another? If so, please describe the incident(s) and explain what made it/them significant.
    7.1 What about with this particular coach?
20. What do you think the strengths of this training model are for teacher development?
21. What do you think the weaknesses of this training model are for teacher development?
22. Would you like to add anything else about your experience with the GPLS strategy; with your employer; with the coaches?