

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT OF READING COMPREHENSION: HOW ARE PRESERVICE FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS BEING PREPARED?

Carisma Nel
North West University

A number of assessment studies in recent years have shown that the educational achievement of learners in South African schools is unacceptably poor. The Department of Education's systemic evaluations, conducted in Grade 3 (first cycle in 2001, second cycle in 2007) show very low levels of literacy among learners. Reading comprehension and writing scores averaged 39% for the first and 36% for the second cycle. Research indicates that less attention has been given to children's reading comprehension skills compared to decoding skills. Teacher preparation programmes should provide candidates with a rigorous, research-based curriculum and opportunities to practise a range of predefined skills and knowledge. The demands of competent literacy instruction and assessment, and the training experiences necessary to learn it, have been seriously underestimated by universities. Teacher education programmes should ensure that teachers, amongst other crucial aspects, know how to assess the progress of every student and change instruction when it is not working and also know how to communicate results of assessments to various stakeholders, especially parents. The purpose of this article is to report on the training that pre-service teachers receive, related to reading comprehension assessment practices, within a BEd foundation phase teacher preparation programme.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teacher training programmes play a significant role in the preparation of a highly qualified teaching work force, which is necessary to support the development of a complex 21st century society. Teachers must be prepared to effectively handle the challenges of a growing diverse population of students with a variety of multicultural, multilingual, and multiability needs (Young, Grant, Montbriand & Therriault, 2001). In the USA, the *Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998) made the recommendation that teacher education curricula incorporate a knowledge base that includes procedures for ongoing in-class assessment of students' reading abilities, as well as information on how to interpret results from assessments and modify instruction according to assessment outcomes. According to the International Reading Association (2003) position statement, *Investment in Teacher Preparation in the United States*, teacher education programmes should ensure that teachers, amongst other crucial aspects, '[K]now how to assess the progress of every student and change instruction when it is not working; know how to communicate results of assessments to various stakeholders,

especially parents'. The Department of Basic Education (2010: 5) states that two of the purposes of the Annual National Assessments (ANA) are to,

...provide teachers with essential data about the baseline Literacy/Language and Numeracy/Mathematics capabilities of learners at the beginning of each grade and thereby help them make informed decisions when planning the year's programme; provide parents with a better picture of the levels of learner performance in the school so that parents are better informed when they become involved in efforts to improve performance, for instance through decision making in the school governing body and support to learners in the home.

In addition, the Department of Basic Education (2010: 12) states that, '[d]ecisions and plans on what, when and how to teach must be informed by the evidence that comes out of the assessments, both school-based and ANA assessments'. These statements indicate that training preservice foundation phase teachers to more effectively and efficiently collect and use assessment data to make teaching and learning decisions for their learners and classes should be a core component of any teacher preparation programme. Snow, Griffin and Burns (2005: 179) state that, '[a]n understanding of the principles and uses of assessment is essential for all teachers and in particular for teachers of reading'.

Good reading comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading instruction at all grade levels (Spear-Swerling, 2006). Accurate assessment of reading comprehension is necessary to know if this goal is being met; to identify children who need support; and to help plan future instruction. Pretorius and Machet (2004: 47) state that, '[t]he little local research that is available indicates that there is a strong reliance on the teaching of the more technical decoding skills of reading, with far less attention given to reading for comprehension'. According to Snow et al. (2005: 181), skills such as phonological awareness are regularly assessed in primary classrooms and a relatively rich array of well-designed, valid and reliable assessments are available to assess the skills associated with word-reading instructional tasks. However, general assessments of reading comprehension are widely acknowledged to be unsatisfactory (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Spear-Swerling, 2006; Zimmerman, 2010). Concerns include that tests:

- Are not based on current understandings of comprehension and inadequately represent the complexity of comprehension;
- Confuse/combine comprehension with other student capabilities (vocabulary, word-reading ability, writing ability);
- Rely too heavily on one response type;
- Rely too heavily on students' background knowledge;
- Are focused on inappropriate developmental levels.

Nonetheless, teachers do need to monitor students' comprehension. Monitoring of student progress should also be conducted on a regular basis to determine specific areas in which students are or are not making progress and whether instructional approaches are effective or should be modified or changed (Kame'enui, 2004).

Broad-scale assessment at international and national level is potentially valuable, and classroom assessment, too, has the potential to influence priorities assigned to reading instruction in schools and classrooms (Hempenstall, 2001). Classroom assessment should play a central role in describing and supporting learners' reading development (Afflerbach & Cho, 2011). Research focusing on classroom practices of effective teachers has found that formal and informal assessments are important aspects of these classrooms because they allow teachers to better meet the individual needs of the child (Pressley, 2001, 2002; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block & Morrow, 2001). However, Stiggins (2002: 761) states that, '[f]ew teachers are prepared to face the challenges of classroom assessment because they have not been given the opportunity to learn to do so'. In a study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council, Kanjee (2009) mentions that there is a large range of differences in schools in terms of teacher experience and expertise in assessment. Teachers are the primary agents, not passive consumers, of assessment information. It is their ongoing, formative assessments that primarily influence students' learning (National Council of Teachers of English, 1998-2011). This responsibility demands considerable expertise. Because of the need for this level of expertise and because the quality of formative assessment has a strong effect on the quality of instruction, improving teachers' assessment expertise requires a critical look at the assessment training of preservice teachers, specifically with regard to reading comprehension within foundation phase teacher training programmes.

The aim of the study reported on in this article was to determine what (knowledge and skills) and how preservice teachers are taught with regard to reading comprehension assessment within a BEd Foundation Phase programme.

2. READING COMPREHENSION ASSESSMENT IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE CLASSROOM

Snow et al. (2005: 195) state that there are a number of things that lecturers at the preservice level can do to ensure that their students enter the profession with the background knowledge they need to meet the curricular demands they are sure to face. These include: a thorough orientation to basic principles of assessment; familiarity with various types of assessment for reading and opportunities to administer a selection of them; knowledge about and practice using information from assessments in instructional decision making; and practice in communicating assessment results. These aspects are also emphasised by the Department of Basic Education (2010).

2.1 Basic principles relevant to reading comprehension assessment

Teachers should be able to differentiate between well-constructed and poorly constructed reading comprehension tests. Assessments need to be evaluated for their technical adequacy, which includes validity, reliability, appropriateness, freedom from bias, and utility (Snow et al., 2005; Spear-Swerling, 2006; Moloji, 2008). Snow et al. (2005: 180) state that, '[e]ven informal assessments must follow certain principles if they are to generate usable results'. Fletcher (2006: 326) mentions the nature of the text and response format as additional aspects to be considered for the assessment of reading comprehension.

2.1.1 Technical adequacy

A key feature of assessments designed for monitoring progress is that alternate forms must be as equivalent as possible to allow meaningful interpretation of student performance data across time (Alonzo, Liu & Tindal, 2007: 3). Without such cross-form equivalence, changes in scores from one testing session to the next are difficult to attribute to changes in student skill or knowledge. Improvements in student scores may, in fact, be an artifact of the second form of assessment being easier than the form that was administered first. According to Alonzo et al. (2007), the following aspects are important when considering the technical adequacy of reading comprehension tests: grade-level appropriateness, bias in language or story elements and formatting (e.g., inconsistency in using bold or normal typeface, fonts used, etc.) (cf. Appendix A for a list of criteria). According to Mloi (2008: 9), '[t]he development of assessment tools in the respective languages is imperative as it prevents distortion that comes from translations'.

2.1.2 Nature of the text

Research indicates that the material the participant is asked to read is a major determinant of the inference that is made about the quality of comprehension (Pretorius, 2000; Foorman, Francis, Davidson, Harm & Griffin, 2004; Deane, Sheehan, Sabatini, Futagi & Kostin, 2006; Francis, Snow, August, Carlson, Miller & Iglesias, 2006; Rayner, Chace, Slattery & Ashby, 2006). Primary grade children mostly read narratives. Snow et al (2005: 36) state that, '[r]ecently, concerns have been raised about this narrative bias – or expository gap – in lessons intended to improve comprehension in the early grades', Studies indicate that the absence of expository text in the primary grade is neither necessary nor desirable (Duke, 2000; Yopp & Yopp, 2000; Tower, 2002).

When students are not prepared to read and comprehend nonfiction from an early age, there can be devastating long-term consequences. Hoyt (1999) affirms that expository text presents problems for students. According to Ciborowski (1992: 11), in her book *Textbooks and the Students Who Can't Read Them*, this challenge in reading comprehension stems from a lack of nonfiction in the classroom:

Children are fed a steady diet of once-upon-a-time stories during the infant, toddler and learning-to-read years, and so become increasingly familiar with the format and structures of narrative text. Familiarity with story text format makes comprehension easier. On the other hand, expository text is less familiar to the child in both content and format. Expository text structures differ dramatically from narrative text ... [a]t the same time that content of the expository text is filled with many words and concepts the child has never seen before. When textbooks are introduced in third and fourth grades, many children are caught by surprise, unprepared to make the transition from learning-to-read from stories to reading-to-learn from textbooks.

By beginning expository text instruction and assessment at an early age, teachers can help children to become more familiar with the structure of informational books, which positively affects their ability to read for meaning.

2.1.3 Response format

Research also indicates the importance of considering the format by which reading comprehension is assessed. Three response formats are especially common in primary classrooms: cloze technique, question-answering, and retellings. Cloze format tests present sentences or passages with blanks in them (e.g., The fish were swimming in the ____); the child is expected to read the text and provide an appropriate word to go in the blank (e.g., a word such as *water*, *lake* or *pond*) (McAndrews, 2008). In tests with a question-answering format, the child reads passages and answers questions about them; the questions may involve multiple-choice or open-ended items and may be answered orally or in writing (Norbury & Bishop, 2002; Nesi, Levorato, Roch & Cacciari, 2006). Retellings require a child to read a text and then orally tell the teacher about what was just read, usually with some sort of coding system for scoring the quality of the retelling (Young, 2005).

Each of these tests requires different skills to respond to them and often have very different stimuli controlling responding. Some of the skills most commonly discussed in the literature are working memory; incorporation of background knowledge; attention to context cues; vocabulary knowledge; the knowledge and use of story structure; and the generation of inferences (Norbury & Bishop, 2002; Jenkins & Fuchs, 2003; Nation & Snowling, 2004; O'Conner & Klein, 2004; Nation & Norbury, 2005). However, it is clear that all of these skills are not included in all measures of reading comprehension. For example, making inferences and using the context cues present in the assessment may be relevant in the multiple-choice test, but not relevant in the recall test. Performance on the recall test requires skills in working memory and response productions (i.e., vocal speech or writing letters and words). Further, the maze and cloze passages require skills in vocabulary knowledge, working memory, and using context cues from the passage, but do not necessarily require the student to make inferences from the text.

In addition to the skills used to perform the assessment, each assessment often requires a different response. For example, some measures may require the child to write a response where another may ask the child to vocally produce a story. Deficits in the skills needed to respond can also affect the teacher's ability to infer comprehension. Furthermore, the stimulus conditions across measures for reading comprehension are not uniform. Some of the tests contain written cues for responding, such as multiple-choice and cloze, and others provide no written or spoken cues for the information, like in the recall test (Jenkins & Fuchs, 2003; Young, 2005).

Unfortunately, most studies in reading comprehension continue to use only one measure and one response format despite the fact that many studies warn of the limitations in just using one test to assess reading comprehension (Pearson & Hamm, 2005; Young, 2005; Cutting & Scarborough, 2006; Fletcher, 2006; Francis et al., 2006). Fletcher (2006: 324) reiterates the point by saying that 'a one-dimensional attempt to assess reading comprehension is inherently imperfect'.

2.2 Familiarity with a wide range of assessment tools and practices

The choice of test by the teacher will depend on the purpose or objective for assessment. According to Torgesen (2006: 1), assessment in the early elementary grades has four objectives or purposes:

- To *identify* students at the beginning of the year who are ‘at risk’ for reading difficulties and who may need extra instruction or intensive interventions if they are to progress toward grade-level standards in reading by the end of the year.
- To *monitor* students’ progress during the year to determine whether ‘at risk’ students are making adequate progress in critical reading skills and to identify any students who may be falling behind.
- To *collect* information about students that will be helpful in planning instruction to meet their most critical learning needs.
- To *assess* whether the instruction provided by classroom teachers is sufficiently powerful to help all students achieve grade-level reading standards.

Teachers create or control the majority of reading comprehension assessments used in classrooms (Paris, Paris & Carpenter, 2002; Stiggins, 2001). These assessments fall into two large categories: informal and formal assessments. Informal assessments do not have prescribed rules for scoring and administration and have not undergone scrutiny for reliability and validity. They include teacher-developed assessments and authentic or performance-based assessments developed from the classroom instruction. Some informal assessments may be published in journals and adopted by a classroom teacher. Formal assessments have a set format for administration and provide standardised scores, allowing comparison of the assessed students with a sample group of students who have already taken the assessment (Castillo, 2006). A distinction of the latter category is that they are controlled by the teacher and embedded in the curriculum, unlike the traditional standardised assessments that are administered on a schedule controlled by administrators or policymakers (Paris et al., 2002).

Teachers and schools can consider many types of informal and formal classroom-based assessment tools. Formal assessment serves the purpose of accountability for what students have learned over the course of a school year. This type of assessment is aimed toward objectively measuring a student’s skills and knowledge, the results of which are often reported for grade completion. While formal assessment serves specific purposes that are crucial to the success of schools, this type of assessment should not be relied upon for guiding instructional techniques in the classroom. In contrast, informal assessment is used by teachers to evaluate students’ progress and modify instructional techniques as necessary. Teachers should use multiple assessment strategies on a consistent basis in order to fully evaluate a child’s progress over time (Paris & Hoffman, 2004). Teacher-developed informal assessments can include anecdotal records, observations, portfolios, checklists, holistic rubrics, informal reading inventories, running records, work samples, journals, written summaries, conferences, and oral and written retellings (Bauer, 1999; Paris et al., 2002; Paris & Hoffman, 2004; Roe & Ross, 2006; McAndrews, 2008; Department of Basic Education, 2011).

2.3 Using and interpreting data for instructional decision making

At a time when teachers and administrators are pressed to demonstrate learners' literacy growth, collecting, organising and using data for instructional improvement is a new way of working for many teachers. As a kindergarten teacher, Calderon notes, in a study by Reilly (2007: 770):

One of my weaknesses has always been documenting a student's progress, because I always found it such an overwhelming task. I would assess students, hand in the scores to an administrator, and then file them away. I literally would assess here and there, never use the results, and concentrate on whole-group instruction. Individual needs based on assessment were never taken into consideration.

Although teachers spend significant amounts of time collecting assessment data, they do not take time or perhaps know how to organise and use data consistently and efficiently in instructional decision making (Mokhtari, Rosemary & Edwards, 2010). When asked, most teachers, like Calderon, often admit that documentation of student reading comprehension progress is one of their weaknesses because it can be an overwhelming and time-consuming task (Mokhtari et al., 2010).

In the past, teacher training generally did not include data analysis skills or data-driven decision-making processes (Choppin, 2002). Without data skills, teachers are ill prepared to use data effectively to provide instruction that matches students' needs (US Department of Education, 2011). Current efforts to improve school performance are calling on teachers to base their instructional decisions on data. More and more, teachers are expected to assess students frequently and to use a wide variety of assessment data in making decisions about their teaching (Department of Basic Education, 2010; Hamilton et al., 2009).

In many schools, teachers continue to teach the content of the curriculum to all the students regardless of the information that they gain about the child's needs from assessments. In a study of teachers' approaches to assessment, Gipps (1994) describes these teachers as evidence gatherers. In other words, they collected information from students' classroom work, which they reflected on and used primarily to inform summative evaluative situations such as the writing of report cards rather than using the information for daily reflection on instruction. The teachers in these studies seem to continue to work from a model that has instruction and assessment acting as separate functions in the classroom, rather than from the more integrated model of effective teachers put forth by the International Reading Association (Pressley, 2002; Stiggins, 2001). In a study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council, Kanjee (2009) mentions that classroom assessment is seen as a relatively formal process for recording marks for class work or some other summative indicator of performance in the classroom; the broader meaning of classroom assessment seems not to have been adopted.

2.4 Communicating assessment results

Santa et al. (2000) describe excellent teachers as ones who share discussions about children's learning with children in a self-evaluation process increasing the child's cognitive awareness and motivating the child. This self-evaluative interaction is one of the primary assets of

classroom-based or formative assessment to improve achievement in the classroom (Stiggins, 1991, 2001). Using classroom assessments supports the concept of a collaborative learning community with many opportunities for the child to reach the goals of the assessments, unlike the more traditional view of assessment as a one-time evaluation at the end of a unit of instruction (Stiggins, 1991, 2001).

Teachers who engage in regular classroom assessment can talk authoritatively about each student's strengths and weaknesses. They can provide parents with detailed evidence of their child's progress or lack of progress and also give recommendations in terms of how parents can support their children (Santa et al., 2000; Snow et al., 2005; Department of Basic Education, 2010).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because the methodology best allowed the collection of data to answer the research question, namely *What (knowledge and skills) and how are preservice teachers taught with regard to reading comprehension assessment within a BEd Foundation Phase programme?* A case study was used for this research project. Yin (2003: 1) states that 'case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context'. This descriptive and interpretive study took place within a bounded context; it focused on one teacher preparation programme at the NWU.

3.2 Participants

According to Creswell (2007: 74), purposeful sampling shows different perspectives on the problem therefore it is imperative that persons participating in a study are knowledgeable about the topic. This particular study focused on a Foundation Phase teacher training programme. The Baccalaureus Educationis (Foundation Phase) degree is offered over four years and trains students to teach from Grade R to Grade 3. The three lecturers responsible for teaching the literacy modules in English, Afrikaans and Setswana home language participated in this study. All the fourth-year students (N = 12) in the 2011-group, ten Hon BEd students who completed their training in 2009 and 2010, as well as five foundation phase teachers teaching Setswana mother tongue participated in the study.

3.3 Data collection methods

The data collection methods included semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews, and the collection and examination of documents and artefacts.

3.3.1 Individual interviews

In qualitative research, semi-structured interviewing is used because it is open-ended and more flexible, allowing the researcher to probe in order to obtain in-depth data. In this type of

interview, specific information is required from all the respondents, which means sections of the interviews have to be structured. The interview is guided by a list of questions to be explored (cf. Appendix B). This allows the researchers to respond to the situation at hand, to emerging views of the respondent and to new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 2001). Interviews were conducted with the lecturers as with the Hons BEd students. The interviews were scheduled and took place in the researcher's office or within the lecturer's office. All interviews were audio taped (with the permission of the participants) to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data. Notes were taken during the interviews to record any aspects that might not be captured on audiotape.

3.3.2 Focus group interview

In this study, focus group interviews were conducted with the fourth-year students and with the Setswana teachers. According to Krueger and Casey (2009) define a focus group interview as an interview on a topic with a group of people who have knowledge on the topic. Merriam (2009) suggests that a constructivist perspective underlies this data collection procedure, because the data is obtained from the interaction of a socially constructed group. The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their views in the context of the views of others (Patton, 2002: 386). The focus group interview took place in a scheduled fourth-year class period (Thursday, 10:10-11:00), and the focus group with the Setswana teachers took place in one of the teacher's classrooms.

3.3.3 Documents

Document analysis refers broadly to various procedures involved in analysing data generated by the examination of documents and records relevant to a particular study (Schwandt, 1997). For this study, the variety of documents were studied, namely study guides, reading compendiums, assignments, and examination papers. Documents corroborate interviews and thus make findings more trustworthy. Beyond corroboration, they may raise questions about your hunches and thereby shape new directions for interviews (Glesne, 1999: 58).

3.4 Credibility and Consistency

In order to ensure the credibility and consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the qualitative data in this study, the researcher employed triangulation of data collection methods; member checks (asking lecturers, students and teachers to verify analysis and interpretation of their comments); the use of rich, thick descriptions; and peer review. One staff member in the Foundation Phase programme who was not involved in the interviews or focus groups checked the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations.

3.5 Methods of Analysis

Data analysis is the process by which a researcher draws out 'meaning' from the collected data. Drawing out meaning involves summarising, interpreting, comparing, and categorising what the participants in the study have said and how they have acted in a particular context (Merriam, 2001). Constant comparative analysis was chosen to deal with the data because this method aids in identifying patterns, coding data, and categorising findings (Anfara,

Brown & Mangione, 2002). The cycle proposed by Burns (1999) was used for the data analysis. This consists of a 5-step process: the data collected from different sources were assembled and time was devoted to exploring and examining the collected data, starting with developing codes to identify patterns about the different issues implicit in the study. This process of coding information helped to reduce the collected data and to identify specific categories of concepts or themes. Comparisons could be made to see whether themes or patterns were repeated or developed across different data gathering methods. In this part of the process it was necessary to triangulate all the information collected as a way to test the trustworthiness of the data and ensure ongoing reflections (Burns, 1999). According to Burns (p. 272), '[...] triangulation is a way of arguing that if different methods of investigation produce the same result then data are likely to be valid'. When the process of categorising and comparing was completed, the researcher started interpreting and making sense of the meaning of the data in step four. Finally, in step five, it was possible to begin to present an account of the research findings.

4. RESULTS

The results are presented according to the two aspects focused on in the research question, namely **what** and **how** are preservice teachers taught with regard to reading comprehension assessment within a BEd Foundation Phase programme?

4.1 What is taught?

Principles relevant to reading comprehension assessment

The Foundation Phase students are required to take four literacy modules in their BEd programme; one module each year. In year one and year two, the students are not exposed to any content related to reading. In year three they have one study unit, within the LITH 423 module, on theories of reading, and in year four they have four study units related to reading, but only one section on reading comprehension. Within this module there is also one study unit on assessment. An analysis of the literacy home language (Afrikaans and English) study guides and accompanying reading compendiums indicate that it is only in the fourth year in the second semester that the students are required to take the LITH 422 (Afrikaans)/LITH 423 (English) module which focuses specifically on reading and aspects related to literacy assessment. Three of the module outcomes refer to assessment (cf. Appendix C). In study unit two, the students are required to compare the assessment standards of grade one to grade three (cf. Appendix C). From 2012, with the implementation of the CAPS document, this will no longer be relevant for teachers. Study unit three, section 3.3 focuses on reading comprehension. Students are required to formulate questions linked to four levels of comprehension, namely literal, interpretive, evaluation and appreciation. The only texts students are introduced to are narratives (e.g., *The Princess and the Pea* and a comic strip – *Bollie*) (Reading compendium). Students are also introduced to a number of 'test paper techniques' such as false sentences, multiple-choice questions, question and answer (who, what, when, where, why, how), vocabulary questions and the cloze technique (cf. Appendix C). In study unit 4, students are required to write their own texts and then determine the readability levels of the texts using the Gunning Fog, Flesch-Kincaid (English), and Misindeks (Afrikaans) readability indices (cf. Appendix C). An analysis of the 2010

examination papers indicated that only one question related to reading comprehension assessment was asked:

‘There isn’t just one way to draw up questions on a text.’ Evaluate this statement. Use Addendum 2 to identify and design four (4) techniques for formulating questions. (10)

The Setswana home language programme is currently only offered up to third-year level. The content for these study guides has been translated from English to Setswana. An analysis of the study guides, assignments and examination papers indicated that the students are not required to demonstrate any knowledge or skills relating to basic principles relevant to reading comprehension assessment.

An analysis of the interviews with the three literacy lecturers corroborated the findings made from the document analysis. Very few of the aspects mentioned in section 2.1 and in Appendix A are covered in the literacy modules from year one to year four. One lecturer stated that:

We focus more on the instruction of reading comprehension than the assessment thereof. We also do it mainly in the fourth year. We show the students how to draw up comprehension questions and use readability formulas.

Another lecturer commented that:

The education modules the students are required to take focus on assessment in general. The focus is on basic terminology such as the differentiation between summative and formative assessment. Also different types of techniques such as checklists, rubrics and portfolios are discussed.

The Setswana lecturer stated that:

We do not focus specifically on reading comprehension assessment.

The individual interviews with the Hons BEd students, the focus group interviews with the fourth-year students and the Setswana foundation phase teachers indicated that they felt that they had limited knowledge and skill with regard to basic principles related to reading comprehension assessment. They could read and follow directions in test manuals, but they were not taught to focus on technical details such as the validity of tests. When asked what they considered when drawing up reading comprehension tests (cf. Appendix B), the students and teachers only mentioned the different types of questions they could ask and the levels of comprehension which they sometime take into consideration:

I don’t always take levels of comprehension into consideration because my learners are such poor readers. I only ask literal questions.

We give the children some practice with reading comprehension tests, but we focus more on phonics and word reading.

The results of this section indicate that teacher candidates have limited knowledge and skills with regard to basic principles relevant to reading comprehension assessment. In addition, their use of literal questions, primarily, may be an indication of why our learners are not capable of answering higher order questions on international tests such as the PIRLS.

Variety of reading comprehension assessment tools and practices

An analysis of the documents indicated that the lecturers use formative assessments primarily for summative purposes. The students are informed in the study guide that one way in which they will be assessed is by means of formative assessment. However, the formative assessment (continuous assignments, class exercises, lesson presentations and role playing) contributes to the students obtaining a summative mark which serves as a compulsory participation mark for the examination (cf. Appendix C). Within the LITH 422/LITH 423 module in study unit 5, the students learn to differentiate between the assessment of reading comprehension during reading aloud, using informal prose reading tests and the assessment of reading comprehension during silent reading using the cloze technique (cf. Appendix C). The students also learn to compare the content of standardised and general assessment tests (cf. Appendix C). The standardised tests the students are required to study and use are relevant for assessing learners' decoding and oral reading fluency ability (i.e., *One Minute Word Reading Test*, *The Schonell Reading Test* and the *UK-Gegradueerde Toets*) and are not applicable to reading comprehension.

The interviews and focus groups supported the findings from the document analysis. The students commented that they knew and could use diagnostic tests such as the One Minute Word Reading Test, but did not know of any standardised tests for reading comprehension. With regard to progress monitoring tests, the students mentioned:

I guess we should just give them reading comprehension tests regularly.

They did not know what an informal reading inventory was or how to administer one. They mentioned that they did not feel prepared to use any assessment instrument other than those mentioned above or the checklists that are given as examples in the Foundations for Learning Assessment documents. The Setswana teachers mentioned that they only used question-and-answer reading comprehension tests:

We try to make reading comprehension tests that are like the national systemic evaluation tests.

The results of this section indicate that the preservice teachers did not have either the knowledge or the skills to administer a variety of reading comprehension assessment tools.

Using data to interpret and inform the decision-making process

An analysis of the documents indicated that students were required to interpret the data of the standardised One Minute Word Reading test and the Schonell Reading test, using the norms provided by the lecturer. These tests are, however, not reading comprehension tests. There was no evidence, beyond that mentioned above, that students were required to interpret data in order to help them make instructional decisions or to adjust their classroom teaching practice or to determine what assistance learners need with regard to reading comprehension.

An analysis of the interviews and focus groups supported the document findings. The students stated that:

I can work out the mean for my class when they write a reading comprehension test, and I know who did well and who did not. I don't know what conclusions to draw except that they don't comprehend well.

Another student stated:

I don't know how to write a summary of the students' problems as related to reading comprehension.

An analysis of the scenario given to the students and Setswana teachers in the focus group revealed the following (cf. Appendix B):

The students indicated that they would look at the class tests to inform their instruction (question 1):

We don't need to look at the provincial test results because it is only relevant to the provincial administrators, and maybe the principal.

The results indicate that the preservice teachers lacked knowledge of the value of multiple measures of assessment data. Their comments also indicated a lack of awareness and/or communication about what the purpose is of provincial tests or how to use the results, if at all:

We don't get to see the results so why must we use them and for what purpose.

None of the teachers commented on the fact that the provincial tests would have stronger technical quality (reliability), but may not match the current content being covered in the classroom. The time aspect (classroom test completed more recently) was also not mentioned.

With regard to question 2, the students and teachers stated that:

We'll look at who is *performing poorly* [equated with failing a reading comprehension test or answering oral reading comprehension questions with less than 50% accuracy] on all the skills and they should come for extra class.

The students did not mention looking at performance on the skills separately, and then deciding what to emphasise with each group and within each group. They were not able to articulate a coherent, data-informed rule for grouping (i.e., includes test data but data need not be the sole criterion).

Their response to question 3 indicated:

We will look at the reading comprehension scores the learners got in the first semester.

The responses did not reveal any necessity for consulting the learners' scores on other reading components or even asking the Grade 2 teachers for their input.

A general response to question 4 indicated:

We'll group the learners according to their class test for reading comprehension and then we could give the different groups different graded readers.

The responses did not indicate the necessity for looking at the learners' individual score profiles.

With regard to questions 5 and 6, the participants indicated:

We'll put Denny in one of the weaker groups because he only got 6 for his reading comprehension.

We'll tell them that Denny needs more reading comprehension practice, and that he should read more.

Their responses did not take the discrepancy between Denny's high scores on the provincial test and his below-average scores on the classroom test of reading comprehension into consideration, nor did they indicate a desire to have more detailed information about Denny's performance in particular test items, text structure or response formats. When communicating with the parents, they mentioned they would try to encourage Denny's parents to let him read more or that they should take him to the library.

The results of this section indicate that the preservice teachers did not know how to use and analyse data in order to make it part of their daily decision-making activities. They also indicated a lack of ability with regard to using data to communicate effectively with parents with regard to their children's strengths and weaknesses. They were merely able to show the parents some evidence of the learner's work, but did not know how to communicate what the evidence meant, except that performance was good, at grade level or that the child's performance was a cause for concern.

Communicate assessment results to all stakeholders

An analysis of the documents, as well as the interviews and focus groups, indicated that this aspect was sadly neglected in teacher training at the NWU. One student stated that:

I wouldn't know what to say to the parents. Maybe something like: Mr and Mrs Peters, Mary is not doing as well as she should. Her reading comprehension is not up to standard. You should try to get her to read more.

The Setswana teachers stated that very few parents attend parent meetings and if they did they merely told them that their child was not doing well or that he/she was coping. The majority of the conversation usually focused on children's behaviour and their dislike of reading in general (cf. Appendix C).

4.2 How are reading comprehension assessment skills inculcated?

An analysis of how knowledge and skills related to reading comprehension assessment were inculcated within the teacher training programme indicated that it occurred through contact sessions, assignments, and the examination (cf. Appendix C). During work-integrated learning sessions, preservice teachers merely present a lesson to lecturers who come to evaluate them during practice teaching sessions. Not one of the students mentioned that assessment ever formed an integral part of their planning or decision making during the presentation of the practice teaching sessions. Reading comprehension tests usually formed part of a classroom activity which was used for summative assessment purposes. During work-integrated learning sessions, there was no opportunity or any requirement to practice what is taught in the lecture halls, except how to plan and present lessons.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the BEd Foundation Phase teacher training programme under review should accept accountability and provide candidates with a rigorous, research-based curriculum and opportunities to practise a range of predefined skills and knowledge in reading comprehension assessment. The results seem to support Stiggins' (2001) sentiment that teacher preparation programmes have contributed to our dismal state of classroom assessment affairs. An analysis of what and how preservice foundation phase teachers are taught with regard to reading comprehension indicates that the potential of formative classroom assessment to improve student learning, which is evident from research, is not reflected in the teacher training programme (i.e., assessment data are not used to make instructional decisions). 'Grading' continues to be the main focus in assessment, rather than assessing for the sake of improvement. It follows that this practice is then reflected in many South African classrooms (Vandeyar & Killen, 2007).

While students need explicit instruction in ways to read and comprehend text, one of the most important ways for teachers to assist students with comprehension is through assessment. By using formal and informal assessment techniques, teachers can identify progress and problems proactively so that students can receive support. According to Hoyt, Mooney and Parkes (2003: 153), '[i]t is responsive and responsible teaching, with the teacher in a monitoring and assessment mode from the moment she begins to plan the first lesson of the year through the last lesson'. Assessment should be an integral part of reading comprehension. Only through using multiple assessment strategies, keeping record of progress, and collaboration among students, parents, and colleagues, can teachers fully meet the needs of all students and provide the most beneficial literacy environment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This publication is based on work sponsored by the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Department of Basic Education through the European Union Primary Education Sector Policy Support Programme. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the sponsors. Finally, thanks are also due to the anonymous reviewers who provided helpful comments on the article.

REFERENCES

- AFFLERBACH, P & B CHO. 2011. The classroom assessment of reading. In Kamil, ML, PD Pearson, EB Moje & PP Afflerbach. *Handbook of reading research*. New York: Routledge.
- ALONZO, J, K LIU & G TINDAL. 2007. *Examining the technical adequacy of reading comprehension measures in a progress monitoring assessment system (Technical Report # 41)*. Eugene, OR: Behavioral Research and Teaching.
- ANFARA, VA, KM BROWN & TL MANGION. 2002. Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational Researcher*, 31(7):28-38.
- BAUER, EB. 1999. The promise of alternative literacy assessments in the classroom: A review of empirical studies. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 38(2):153- 168.
- BURNS, A. 1999. *Collaborative action research for English language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- CASTILLO, JM. 2006. *Accountability: A practical guide to assessment for evaluating student performance* [Online]. Available: http://www.charterschools.usf.edu/pdf_files/AssessmentDocument.pdf [April 16, 2011].
- CHOPPIN, J. 2002. Data use in practice: Examples from the school level. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, La.
- CIBOROWSKI, J. 1992. *Textbooks and the students who can't read them*. Cambridge: Brookline Books.
- CRESWELL, JW. 2007. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. California: SAGE.
- CUTTING, LE & HS SCARBOROUGH. 2006. Predictions of reading comprehension: Relative contribution of word recognition, language proficiency, and other cognitive skills can depend on how comprehension is measured. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 10(3):277-299.
- DEANE, P, KM SHEEHAN, J SABATINI, Y FUTAGI & I KOSTIN. 2006. Differences in text structure and its implications for assessment of struggling readers. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 10:257-275.
- DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION. 2010. *Annual national assessments 2011. A guideline for the interpretation and use of ANA results*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.
- DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION. 2011. *Curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS). Foundation Phase. Home Language. Grades R-3*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- DUKE, NK. 2000. 3.6 minutes per day: The scarcity of informational texts in first grade. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35:202-224.
- FLETCHER, JM. 2006. Measuring reading comprehension. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 10(3):323-330.

- FOORMAN, BR, DJ FRANCIS, KC DAVIDSON, MW HARM & J GRIFFIN. 2004. Variability in text features in six grade- 1 basal reading programs. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 8:167-197.
- FRANCIS, DJ, CE SNOW, D AUGUST, CD CARLSON, J MILLER & A IGLESIAS. 2006. Measures of reading comprehension: A latent variable analysis of the diagnostic assessment of reading comprehension. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 10(3):301- 322.
- GIPPS, CV. 1994. *Quality assurance in teachers assessment*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans [Online]. Available: <http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&an=ED372086> [December 10, 2010].
- GLESNE, C. 1999. *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. New York: Longman.
- HAMILTON, L, R HALVERSON, S JACKSON, E MANDINACH, J SUPOVITZ & J WAYMAN. 2009. *Using student achievement data to support instructional decision making* (NCEE 2009-4067). Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. [Online]. Available: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides/> [January 5, 2011].
- HEMPENSTALL, K. 2001. School-based reading assessment: Looking for vital signs. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*: 26-35.
- HOYT, L. 1999. *Revisit, reflect, retell: Strategies for improving reading comprehension*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- HOYT, L, M MOONEY & B PARKES (eds). 2003. *Exploring informational texts: From theory to practice*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION. 2003. *Investment in teacher preparation in the United States. A position statement of the International Reading Association*. Newark, Delaware: IRA.
- JENKINS, JR & LS FUCHS. 2003. Sources of individual differences in reading comprehension and reading fluency. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(4):719-729.
- KAME'ENUI, EJ. 2004. *An analysis of the architectural integrity of reading comprehension assessment and instructional materials for struggling readers*. PowerPoint presentation, PREL Focus on Comprehension Forum, New York.
- KANJEE, A. 2009. Teacher assessment practices in South African schools. Paper presented at the IAEA annual meeting. September, Brisbane.
- KRUEGER, RA & MA CASEY. 2009. *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. 4th edition. London: SAGE.
- LINCOLN, YS & EG GUBA. 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McANDREWS, SL. 2008. *Diagnostic literacy assessments and instructional strategies*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

- MERRIAM, SB. 2001. *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. 2nd edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- MERRIAM, SB. 2009. *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: John Wiley.
- MOKHTARI, K, CA ROSEMARY & PA EDWARDS. 2010. Making instructional decisions based on data: What, how and why. In Bean, RM, N Heisey & CM Roller (eds), *Preparing reading professionals*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- MOLOI, Q. 2008. Strengthening educational interventions through effective collection and utilisation of data: Lessons from the South African Systemic Evaluations. Report on the Foundation Phase Conference. Pretoria: Department of Education & Unicef.
- NATION, K & C NORBURY. 2005. Why reading comprehension fails: Insights from developmental disorders. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 25(1):21-32.
- NATION, K & M SNOWLING. 2004. Beyond phonological skills: Broader language skills contribute to the development of reading. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 27(4):342-356.
- NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH. 1998-2011. *Standards for the assessment of reading and writing; Standard 2*. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE [Online]. Available: <http://www.ncte.org/standards/assessmentstandards/standard2> [November 12, 2010]
- NATIONAL READING PANEL. 2000. *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: reports of the subgroups*. Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.
- NESI, B, MC LEVORATO, M ROCH & C CACCIARI. 2006. To break the embarrassment: Text comprehension skills and figurative competence in skilled and less-skilled text comprehenders. *European Psychologist*, 11(2):128-136.
- NORBURY, CF & DV BISHOP. 2002. Inferential processing and story recall in children with communication problems: A comparison of specific language impairment, pragmatic language impairment and high-functioning autism. *International Journal of Language Impairment & Communication Disorders*, 37(3):227-251.
- O'CONNOR, IM & PD KLEIN. 2004. Exploration of strategies for facilitating the reading comprehension of high-functioning students with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 34(2): 115-127.
- PARIS, SG & JV HOFFMAN. 2004. Reading assessments in kindergarten through third grade: Findings from the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement. *Elementary School Journal*, 105(2):199.
- PARIS, SG, AH PARIS & RD CARPENTER. 2002. Effective practices for assessing young readers. In Taylor, B & PD Pearson (eds), *Teaching reading: Effective schools, accomplished teachers* (pp. 141-162). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- PATTON, MQ. 2002. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

- PEARSON, PD & DN HAMM. 2005. The assessment of reading comprehension: A review of practices - Past, present, and future. In SG Paris & SA Stahl (eds), *Children's reading comprehension and assessment* (pp. 13-69). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- PRESSLEY, M. 2001. *Effective beginning reading instruction*. (Executive summary and paper commissioned by the National Reading Conference). Chicago, IL: National Reading Conference.
- PRESSLEY, M, RL ALLINGTON, R WHARTON-McDONALD, CC BLOCK & LM MORROW. 2001. *Learning to read: Lessons from exemplary first-grade classrooms: Solving problems in the teaching of literacy*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- PRESSLEY, M. 2nd edition editor. 2002. *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching*. New York: Guilford Press.
- PRETORIUS, EJ. 2000. 'What they can't read will hurt them': Reading and academic achievement. *Innovation*, 21:33-41.
- PRETORIUS, EJ & MP MACHET. 2004. The socio-educational context of literacy accomplishment in disadvantaged schools: Lessons for reading in the early primary school years. *Journal for Language Teaching*, 38(1): 45-62.
- RAND Reading Study Group. 2002. *Reading for understanding: Toward an R & D program in reading comprehension*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation [Online]. Available: www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1465/ [August 12, 2010]
- RAYNER, K, KH CHACE, TJ SLATTERY & J ASHBY. 2006. Eye movements as reflections of comprehension processes in reading. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 10:241-255.
- REILLY, MA. 2007. Choice of action: Using data to make instructional decisions in kindergarten. *The Reading Teacher*, 60: 770-776.
- ROE, BD & EP ROSS. 2006. *Integrating language arts through literature and thematic units*. Boston: Pearson Education.
- SANTA, CM, CK WILLIAMS, D OGLE, AE FARSTRUP, KH AU, BM BAKER, PA EDWARDS, AF KLEIN, GM KUREK, DL LARSON, JR PARATORE, LL ROG & T SHANAHAN. 2000. Excellent reading teachers: A position statement of the International Reading Association. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 44(2):193-199.
- SCHWANDT, TA. 1997. *Qualitative inquiry: A dictionary of terms*. California: Sage.
- SNOW, CE, P GRIFFIN & MS BURNS. 2005. *Knowledge to support the teaching of reading. Preparing teachers for a changing world*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- SNOW, CE, SM BURNS & P GRIFFIN. 1998. Preventing reading difficulties in young children. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- SPEAR-SWERLING, L. 2006. *Assessment of reading comprehension* [Online]. Available: http://www.ldonline.org/spearswerling/Assessment_of_Reading_Comprehension [February 14, 2011].
- STIGGINS, RJ. 1991. Facing the challenges of a new era of educational assessment. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 4(4): 263-273.

- STIGGINS, RJ 2001. The unfulfilled promise of classroom assessment. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 20(3):5-15.
- STIGGINS, RJ. 2002. Assessment crisis: The absence of assessment for learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(10):758-765.
- TORGESEN, JK. 2006. *A Comprehensive K-3 reading assessment plan: Guidance for school leaders*. NH. RMC Research Corporation, Centre on Instruction.
- TOWER, C. 2002. 'It's a snake, guys!': The power of text characteristics in children's responses to information books. *Research in The Teaching of English*, 27(1):55-86.
- US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. OFFICE OF PLANNING, EVALUATION AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT. 2011. *Teachers' ability to use data to inform instruction: Challenges and supports*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.
- VANDEYAR, S & R KILLEN. 2007. Educators' conceptions and practice of classroom assessment in post-apartheid South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 27(1):101-115.
- YIN, RK. 2003. *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- YOPP, RH & HK YOPP. 2000. Sharing informational text with young children. *The Reading Teacher*, 53:410-423.
- YOUNG, C. 2005. *The effects of timed readings on recall and comprehension in a child with Asperger's syndrome*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of North Texas, Denton.
- YOUNG, EE, PA GRANT, C MONTBRIAND & DJ THERRIAULT. 2001. *Educating preservice teachers: The state of affairs*. Naperville, Illinois: NCREL.
- ZIMMERMAN, L. 2010. *The influence of schooling conditions and teaching practices on curriculum implementation for Grade 4 reading literacy development*, PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria [Online]. Available: <http://upetd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-05252011-133034/> [September 13, 2011].

BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Carisma Nel is a Professor in the School for Curriculum-based Studies at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). She is an Applied Linguist specialising in literacies, specifically reading literacy from the foundation phase through to the higher education sector. She is currently the project leader for two major international projects: *Quality language and reading literacy teaching and learning within diverse education environments* and *Developing scientific evidence-based knowledge and practice standards for teacher preparation programmes: A focus on literacy and numeracy in English, Setswana and Afrikaans*. E-mail address: carisma.nel@nwu.ac.za

Appendix A

Item Specifications for Multiple Choice Comprehension

1. Passage type criteria
Fiction – Text that is read for enjoyment (Realistic fiction; folktales; fables; tall tales; animal stories).
2. Content criteria
Reflect a range of multi-cultural content.
Avoid stereotyping and be free from bias.
Avoid controversial, confusing, or emotionally-charged topics.
Represent various family structures.
4. Passage quality criteria
Passages reflect good writing.
Fictional passages contain elements of good fiction and have a beginning, middle, and end.
Passages are intact, stand-alone pieces.
Passages are interesting and appropriate for the grade level.
Topics of passages are timely and not something that would quickly become dated.
Writing must show sensitivity to level of complexity needed in terms of grade level
6. Reading level criteria
Reading level must be appropriate for the grade level in terms of difficulty and the beginning and end of the grade level expectations.
Readability formulas should be used as guides only.
7. Diversity criteria
Reading passages must reflect the diversity of the world's peoples.
Some passages may be specific to the diversity of the state.
Passages must be written so that no group of students is advantaged or disadvantaged.
8. Passage length criteria
Average length of 2nd-grade passages will range from 500 – 700 words.
Average length of 3rd-5th-grade passages will range from 1300 – 1500 words.
Longer passages typically should be lower in readability level and concept load than shorter passages.
9. Passage suitability for Items
Passage content should allow a sufficient number of items.
Passage content should allow a sufficient range of item difficulty.
Passage content should accommodate measurement of factual/literal, interpretative/inferential, and critical/evaluative comprehension.
Passage content should accommodate assessment objectives (cognitive tasks).

(Alonzo, Liu & Tindal, 2007:141)

APPENDIX B: INDIVIDUAL AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Individual interviews: Lecturers

1. Please highlight the basic principles of assessment, as they relate to reading comprehension, that are covered within the BEd Foundation Phase programme.
2. What content is covered within the literacy modules that pertain specifically to reading comprehension assessment?
3. Please list the reading comprehension assessment tools and practices that students are exposed to in the BEd Foundation Phase programme?
4. In what ways are students asked to show their knowledge of different instruments for assessing reading comprehension?
5. Are students required to illustrate their ability to interpret assessment data in order to direct or guide instruction? If so, how?
6. Are students required to illustrate their ability to communicate reading comprehension assessment results with, for example, parents and students? If so, how?

Individual interviews: Students

Do you have knowledge and skill with regard to the following aspects? Explain. How prepared do you consider yourself to be with regard to these aspects:

1. Read and follow directions in test manuals, including technical data.
2. Differentiate between screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring and outcome reading comprehension assessments
3. Interpret standardised reading comprehension test scores
4. Administer a standardised reading comprehension test
5. Develop questions on different levels of comprehension
6. Informally assess a child's reading comprehension abilities
7. Administer an Informal Reading Inventory
8. Determine students' reading levels based on Informal Reading Inventory results
9. Develop checklists (e.g., retelling) and take anecdotal records
10. Make a comprehension analysis summary
11. Administer a running record
12. Interpret a cloze test
13. Synthesise reading comprehension test data and form conclusions
14. Write a summary diagnostic report
15. Determine if a student is in need of corrective instruction, using test data results

Focus group interviews/tasks: Students and Setswana teachers

1. What aspects do you consider when drawing up reading comprehension tests (e.g., validity, etc.)?
2. What reading comprehension assessment tools and practices are you familiar with and do you feel prepared to use in the classroom?

SCENARIO

Suppose that this is the third week of school (second semester) and that you're a third grade teacher planning your instruction for the remainder of this term. You have scores from the provincial grade three exams given earlier in the year and from a sight reading assessment and a reading comprehension test that you've had your students take during the first two weeks of school.

Student	Provincial test			Class Tests	
	Scale Score			Sight Reading	Text Comprehension
	Total Reading	Vocabulary	Comprehension		
Aaron	393	375	410	16	5
Anna	530	510	550	24	7
Beatrice	498	505	490	22	8
Bennie	528	515	540	26	9
Caitlin	645	660	630	28	12
Chantal	513	515	510	20	10
Crystal	573	560	585	24	10
Denny	588	566	610	20	6
Jaimie	555	550	560	25	10
Kayti	541	553	528	26	9
Mickey	410	395	425	16	5
Noah	693	678	700	30	11
Patricia	416	400	432	20	7
Robbie	563	580	545	26	8
Sofia	480	500	460	22	10
Total Possible	700	700	700	30	12
Class Average	530	527	532	23	8

1. What data would you look at as you're planning your instruction? Which data would be most important to you and why?
2. What, if anything, do these data tell you about how you might want to differentiate instruction for different students in your class?
3. Are there other kinds of information you would like to have to support your instructional planning?
4. Would you place students in different small reading groups for this instruction? If yes, how would you group students and how would your instruction vary for the different groups?
5. Which group would you put Denny into? What is your reason for that decision?
6. How would you communicate the results of these assessments to Denny's parents?

APPENDIX C: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

Reading comprehension assessment issues	Documentation of Evidence
<p>Basic principles of reading comprehension assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity • Reliability • Nature of text • Response type • Grade level appropriateness • Bias in language • Alternate forms (cf. Appendix A) 	<p>Module LITH 423 (Study guide) Upon completion of this module, you should: Demonstrate a complete and systematic knowledge of Learning Outcome 3: Reading and Viewing in the Home Language (English) as well as assessment of the Literacy classroom in the foundation phase, within the context of the learning area Languages, as contained in the National Curriculum Statement;</p> <p>Demonstrate efficient choices and application of essential procedures and techniques during reading instruction (Learning Outcome 3: Reading and Viewing) and its assessment;</p> <p>Demonstrate the ability to solve unfamiliar, concrete and abstract problems and issues regarding reading instruction (Learning Outcome 3: Reading and Viewing) and its assessment.</p> <p>Study Unit 2: The implementation of reading in practice Compare the assessment standards of Grades 0 and 1 in relation to letters and words. Explain the main differences and focus especially on progression.</p> <p>Compare the assessment standards of Grades 2 and 3 in terms of reading for information and enjoyment. Explain the main differences and focus especially on progression.</p> <p>Compare the assessment standards of Grades 1 and 2 in relation to the meaning of the written text. Explain the main differences and focus especially on progression.</p> <p>Study Unit 3: Continued reading instruction in practice Section 3.3: Reading comprehension (Contact sessions) The comprehension test entails the question-and-answer technique of texts as well as written question-and-answer techniques for texts. Discuss useful suggestions for the application of reading comprehension, as well as the basic questions the teacher must answer before attending to reading comprehension in the classroom.</p> <p>“There isn’t just one way to draw up questions on a text.” Evaluate this statement. Identify and illustrate a variety of techniques for formulating questions.</p> <p>Study unit 4: A differentiated approach to reading in practice</p>

	<p>Assignment</p> <p>Use the Gunning Fog Index, the Flesh-Kincaid Readability Test and the Abecedarian Reading Assessment and test the readability of “The fat cat” and “On the farm”. Evaluate their readability and motivate your answer.</p>
Reading comprehension assessment tools and practices	<p>FORMS OF ASSESSMENT FOR LITH 423</p> <p>Formative assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative assessment is done on a continual basis through the semester and your progress is determined by means of a variety of instruction and learning assignments, like group exercises (lesson presentation, role-playing, etc.), independent assignments and a test paper. The marks you attain in this fashion will provide you with a participation mark, which will determine whether you attain admission to the examination. • Admission to the exam is subject to a participation mark of at least 40%. <p>Study Unit 5: The assessment of learners in literacy</p> <p>Contact sessions/Examinations</p> <p>Compare the content of standardised and general assessment tests as well as justify their use.</p> <p>You must apply the standardised and general assessment tests, provided in this study unit, to identify a learner’s reading and spelling difficulties. You will not only have to conduct the relevant tests, but also complete a historicity questionnaire for a holistic view of the learner.</p> <p>Section 5.3 (Reading Compendium)</p> <p>A) The assessment of reading comprehension aloud, using informal prose reading tests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compiling of reading tests • Test conducting instruction • Error code <p>B) Assessment of reading comprehension during silent reading (Cloze technique)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compiling of reading tests • Test conducting instruction
Data interpretation linked to decision making	<p>Study Unit 5: The assessment of learners in literacy</p> <p>Assignment/Examination</p> <p>How would you assess and interpret word recognition as well as read the norm table during the One Minute Word Reading Test.</p>
Communication of	Study unit 2: The implementation of reading in practice

assessment results to various stakeholders	Contact session If you have learners in your class that dislike reading, it is important to contact the parents and try to solve the problem together. What suggestions would you make if the learner's parents approach you for assistance?
--	--