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FINDING THE EVIDENCE: COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INTERMEDIATE PHASE ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

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ABSTRACT

Addressing the well-publicised literacy crisis in the country's primary schools has rightly been identified as a national imperative. The causes of systemic underachievement have been variously attributed to teacher pedagogy and the absence of a culture of reading, among other factors. The role of language textbooks is integral to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), but is under-explored. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a key language teaching approach endorsed by CAPS. This paper analyses the realisation of CLT in a series of Intermediate Phase English Home Language textbooks by investigating a two-week teaching plan in each of the three textbooks. The philosophical paradigm of interpretivism underpins this desk study, which constitutes a specialised form of qualitative research, characterised by its exclusive use of document analysis. The study finds that CLT is only partially realised across the three textbooks. The development of communicative competence is highly uneven; there is an over-reliance on didactic texts, a paucity of opportunities for varied interaction and negotiation of meaning, and somewhat limited integration of the four language skills. The inescapable conclusion is that this series of CAPS-compliant language textbooks necessitates a more principled application of the communicative approach if it is to help address the literacy crisis.

KEYWORDS: textbooks; literacy crisis; English Home Language; CAPS; communicative competence; Communicative Language Teaching

INTRODUCTION

The literacy crisis in South African primary education over the past two decades has engendered much national soul-searching. While the relevance of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Strategy (PIRLS) assessments (2006, 2011, 2021) has rightly been questioned as a gauge of our Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners' literacy abilities (Janks, 2019; Bua-Lit, 2018, Prinsloo, 2021), there is much local evidence of low attainment, particularly in the Foundation Phase (DoE, 2013).

Within the broader context of a socially stratified education system that continues to generate reading inequality along racial and spatial lines (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019), disputes have emerged about the causes of low literacy attainment in primary schools. The spotlight has been on resourcing and school infrastructure, the home language vs school language dichotomy, the absence of a culture of reading, classroom reading pedagogy and teachers' understandings of literacy (Bua Lit, 2018), the limitations of the national Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in the teaching of reading (De Lange et al, 2020) and of writing (Dornbrack & Dixon, 2014), the relevance and quality of university-based pre-service language teacher education programmes (Ramadiro, 2022), and the quality of departmental support provided to in-service language teachers by subject advisors (Theys, 2023). The provision of school textbooks as a means 'to bridge the gap between teacher readiness, curriculum policy and classroom implementation' should be added to this list (DoE Curriculum Review Committee, 2009:13). Despite some large-scale departmental interventions, literacy gains have been modest (see Fleisch et al, 2015).

This paper reflects on the extent to which a series of CAPS-aligned English Home Language (EHL) textbooks for the Intermediate Phase (IP) may be inadvertently contributing to the malaise. The paper derives from a broader study undertaken for the first author's Master's thesis that investigated the language teaching approaches espoused by CAPS, and their realisation in IP textbooks. The textbook series in question is the Platinum series of Grades 4, 5, and 6 EHL textbooks (for learners), published by Maskew Miller Longman, a subsidiary of Pearson South Africa. A similar motive informed Fulani's (2015) comparative study of Grade 4 English and isiXhosa Home Language textbooks (pre-CAPS) – to our knowledge the only other study to have investigated IP EHL textbooks in relation to the literacy crisis. Significantly, Fulani finds that the English HL and isiXhosa HL textbooks position learners differently in ways that perpetuate racial stereotypes. The study is also methodologically relevant to this paper by being limited to textbooks and other stable, publicly available documents. Other studies have focused further upstream, noting the inherent limitations of the CAPS EHL for the IP curriculum regarding its incoherent approach to reading literacy development (De Lange et al., 2020; Theys, 2023). Since textbooks are required to embody CAPS, such policy weaknesses are likely to be reproduced in Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM), such as textbooks, further exacerbating the literacy problem.

Against this background, our specific focus is on the realisation (or otherwise) of CLT, also known as the communicative approach. The research question guiding this paper asks: To what extent do the tasks and activities in the textbooks adhere to features of the CLT approach? In our analysis, the interpretation of this question means examining the following CLT aspects as they manifest in the tasks and activities of the textbooks: 1) communicative competence, 2) text authenticity, 3) integration of language skills, and 4) classroom interaction. The paper begins with a brief explanation of the role of textbooks in the curriculum, continues with an overview of CLT and its instantiation in South Africa, and then describes the research design and discusses the findings. A concluding section provides some recommendations for the future.

THE ROLE OF TEXTBOOKS IN THE CURRICULUM

Robinson (1981) states that the practice of using textbooks is as old as writing itself. Texts constitute strong evidence for the existence of classroom discourses (Tenario, 2011). Most classroom discourses depend on the pedagogical materials available to the teacher (Cahl, 2016). Textbooks are essential for teachers tasked with scaffolding their learners' language and literacy development.

Over the past decade and longer, curriculum policy in South Africa has reverted to favouring textbook use in schools. The CAPS (DBE, 2011) endorsement of textbooks in pedagogy represents a decisive break with the constructivist classrooms envisaged by its predecessors, Curriculum 2005 and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Hoadley, 2018:93). These outcomes-based education (OBE) curricula had marginalised textbooks in the interests of a more learner-centred pedagogy, and required teachers to develop their own learning and teaching materials. The systemic failure of OBE led to a review (DoE, 2009) and resulted in the adoption of a new knowledge-based curriculum in which textbooks were centralised (CAPS) (Hoadley, 2018). A contributing factor was widespread teacher discontent with the unrealistic expectations of their becoming curriculum developers, as well as problems with the quality and provision of textbooks. The DoE curriculum review committee recognised the value of textbooks and specifically recommended the national centralisation of textbook oversight.

These insights were subsequently instantiated in CAPS. Thereafter followed a proverbial explosion of CAPS-compliant textbooks as the industry prepared to meet the needs of almost 12 million learners in the schooling system. These included textbooks at first-language or Home Language levels and at second-language or First Additional Language levels for each official language, including English. Despite criticism that the CAPS valorisation of textbooks undermines learner-centred pedagogy and Freirean principles (Chetty, 2015), their return was widely welcomed. However, the effective use of textbooks still depends on the teacher; textbooks are there to support pedagogy and not replace it (Hoadley, 2018).

In a context of vast systemic inequality in schools, analysing textbooks contributes to the endeavour to guarantee quality education for all. Textbook analysis is the thorough investigation of textbooks using consistent evaluation procedures and criteria to identify particular strengths and shortcomings in textbooks already in use (Sheldon, 1988). Given that textbooks are designed to help language learners improve their linguistic and communicative skills, analysing them is necessary for gauging their effectiveness in activating the objectives of a curriculum and for ascertaining the quality of language teaching in general (Fuyudloturromaniyyah, 2015).

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

CLT originated in the political North in the 1960s and 1970s. Also known as the communicative approach, CLT came about in response to "the artificiality and limitations in second or foreign language teaching practice" (Ridge, 1992:95). These traditional approaches focused on

developing grammatical competence as the basis for language proficiency, and emphasised learners' use of grammatically correct sentences through the repeated drilling of grammar rules (Alsaghiar, 2018). This approach is exemplified by the audiolingual method of foreign language teaching in post-World War II North America and Europe. However, the rigid focus on grammar teaching based on imitating native-speaker norms failed to develop learners' language proficiency adequately. This failure became evident, especially in classroom-based research and, together with the advent of the concept of communicative competence, prompted the communicative turn in second language and foreign language teaching (ibid.).

At its core, CLT pertains to the development of learners' *communicative competence*. Hymes (1972) suggests that communicative competence consists of four aspects: grammatical competence (knowledge of lexical items and grammar), discourse competence (understanding different types of texts), sociolinguistic competence (rules of use, i.e., appropriacy), and strategic competence (ability to use verbal and non-verbal repairs when communication breaks down). These aspects have been expanded upon by various scholars, such as Savignon (1976), Richards (2006), and Gomez-Rodriguez (2010).

Thus, the general goal of instruction in teaching additional languages has changed in response to the new emphasis on the need to achieve communication, whether written or spoken (Mickan, 2012). The focus on communication drew attention to the necessity for redefining language learning outcomes relative to communicative purposes.

Accordingly, the CLT approach considers conveying ideas as more important than the accurate or correct use of language (Scheckle, 2009). Therefore, the focus is on expressing and creating contextual meaning. The work of Stephen Krashen in the 1980s has long been regarded as synonymous with CLT. In brief, Krashen (1982) hypothesised that a second or foreign language was best learnt communicatively through comprehensible input within a low-anxiety environment, and has been as influential as it has been contested. Swain's (1985) notion of comprehensible output proved an important corrective in emphasising that languages are learnt through production and collaborative dialogue rather than reception only.

CLT in the contemporary language classroom includes other key principles. Traditionally, listening, speaking, reading and writing were taught separately; however, authors have recognised that during the teaching and learning process, more than one skill is used simultaneously (Holden & Rogers, 1997). This notion has resulted in the *integration of the language skills* as a key facet of the communicative approach. In an integrated language curriculum, reading instruction resides between writing and oral language, creating the potential for greater command of all the language skills than is possible when taught in isolation (Nazarova, 2017). Further tenets of CLT include the use of authentic texts and tasks, and varied patterns of classroom interaction to enable the negotiation of meaning.

Authentic texts are traditional CLT cornerstones. According to Little & Singleton (1988), an authentic text is created to fulfil some social purpose in the language community within which it is produced. It is potentially valuable in CLT due to its emphasis on meaningful communication and real-world texts. In its glossary of terms, CAPS (DBE, 2011:110) defines

authentic texts as those "which have a practical function and are not literary (e.g., magazine and newspaper articles, recordings from radio and television, advertisements, product labels, travel brochures, government forms, examples of real letters)". The observance of texts serving a practical function aligns with the idea that the text emerged 'from life' (Hamroyeva, 2018:1). In contrast, customised texts written for school textbooks are termed didactic texts. Like graded storybooks, such texts are valuable in isolating certain features for teaching purposes; yet, using didactic texts risks over-simplifying or blurring genre conventions, thereby confusing younger readers.

Lastly, *varied patterns of interaction* during the lesson are key to realising CLT. According to Richards and Rodgers (2007), teachers should act as facilitators and encourage learners to construct meaning through interaction. Goal-driven social interaction, such as intended by the curriculum, also makes the learning process more pleasurable. As stated in CAPS, "In the Intermediate Phase (IP), Home Language learners will use Listening and Speaking skills to interact and negotiate meaning" (DBE, 2011:9). The process of interaction as a communicative activity corresponds to the processes of negotiating meaning, intending to achieve meaningful learning.

IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES

Since its advent in the early 1970s, CLT has been widely adopted in English Second Language and Foreign Language contexts around the world. In China, CLT was introduced as early as the 1970s; in Hong Kong and India, in the 1980s; and in Bangladesh and Turkey during the 1990s (Heng, 2014). Recent studies confirm a continuing emphasis on CLT. In Turkey, Denkci-Akkas and Coker (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study on the implementation of the communicative approach in two high schools found that while both schools followed the same curriculum, one demonstrated a better implementation of CLT.

In the South African context, English teachers have been using a CLT syllabus since 1986 (Murray, 2009). The English communicative syllabus emphasised function and appropriacy in language use, and rejected traditional context-free grammar teaching. However, a 1992 paper by Ridge questioned the adequacy of the notion of communicative competence in the South African context and called for a critical appraisal of CLT and a review of the communicative syllabus. Her appeal recognised that English was more than a "second language": it was also the dominant medium of instruction from the middle of primary school, despite being a non-mother tongue for the majority of learners and their teachers (Ridge, 1992:100–101). We return to these prescient comments in our concluding remarks, below.

The prominent status of CLT is retained in CAPS for all language subjects and levels. Despite the near-incoherent definition of what constitutes a Home Language (HL) in CAPS in attempting to acknowledge the presence of non-home language speakers in HL classrooms (Janks, 2019), at least the description of the communicative approach is clear:

> A **communicative approach** suggests that when learning a language, a learner should have a great deal of exposure to the target language and many opportunities to practise

> or produce the language by communicating for social or practical purposes. Language learning should be carried over into the classroom where literacy skills of reading/viewing and writing/presenting are learned by doing a great deal of reading and [learners] learn to write by doing much writing. [DBE, 2011:14, original emphasis]

The formulation recognises the central role of working with texts, the social nature of language use as a basis for school literacy, and the experiential nature of language learning; that is, the communicative approach is fundamentally *situated*, rather than *in vacuo*. Despite its occasional clarity, CAPS has been somewhat opaque to many English teachers. It is troubling that Mulaudzi (2016), for example, finds that EFAL teachers have inadequate knowledge of CLT while being expected to implement it in accordance with CAPS. This finding serves to emphasise the point that teachers' inability to follow the communicative approach leads to an overdependence on the textbook, and, therefore, the realisation (or otherwise) of CLT principles in textbooks is a worthy subject for analysis.

RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

The philosophical paradigm for the study is interpretivism, which seeks to understand how individuals interpret the social phenomena with which they interact (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). For this study, the social phenomenon being interpreted is a publicly available document, the national curriculum (CAPS) for English Home Language (EHL) in the intermediate phase (IP). The individuals interpreting the document are the textbook writers of the CAPS-aligned EHL Grade 4, Grade 5 and Grade 6 textbooks.

Methodologically, this was a qualitative desk study of secondary data already in the public domain, and thus required no ethical clearance. The motivation for selecting the Intermediate Phase EHL policy document and textbooks pertains to the first author's familiarity with them as a (former) IP teacher. These textbooks are accompanied by teacher guides, but this study intentionally focused on the learners' books only. Textbooks are the primary LTSM available to learners (and many teachers). Learners often use these textbooks while working independently for homework, revision, or peer collaboration without teacher mediation. Therefore, the communicative approach underpinning CAPS should be explicit and evident in the textbooks themselves.

The study employed document selection and analysis as its research method. According to Bowen (2009:27), document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents; although document analysis is often used to complement other research methods, it is also a legitimate stand-alone research method. The study can be considered a specialised form of qualitative research (cf. Wild et al, 2009) insofar as it relies solely on analysing documents. This paper explores the extent to which the above-mentioned EHL textbooks adhere to the principles and tenets of CLT, termed the communicative approach by CAPS. A two-week cycle on an environmental awareness theme was selected for analysis in each of the three textbooks.

We deployed a deductive approach to qualitative data analysis, which, according to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), begins with a specific theoretical framework and organises and classifies the data according to the tenets of the given theory. We chose this approach as we had a prior sense of what we were setting out to find. The study used content analysis, an umbrella term for "methodologies that code text into categories" (Ahuvia, 2001:1), to examine the textbooks under review. The subsequent analysis paid close attention to the treatment of texts and activities that reflect aspects of the communicative approach. The aspects selected for this paper were communicative competence, text authenticity, integration of language skills, and classroom interaction. The findings shed light on a neglected aspect of the literacy crisis in schools, namely the role of language textbooks in mediating curriculum theory.

Due to its small scale and qualitative nature, the study does not claim generalisability. Instead, it seeks to present a careful examination of how one of the main language teaching approaches of the past four decades (CLT), as represented in CAPS, is interpreted by a prominent local educational publisher. Further research would have to determine the extent to which the results of the analysis are transferable to other, not dissimilar contexts (cf. Bertram & Christiansen, 2014: 193), or to other language textbooks obliged to follow CAPS precepts.

FINDINGS

In answer to the research question about the realisation of CLT in CAPS-aligned textbooks, we analysed selected two-week cycles from the Pearson Platinum Grade 4 EHL (Heese et al, 2012), Grade 5 EHL (Cator et al, 2012a), and Grade 6 EHL (Cator et al, 2012b) textbooks. The study sought to uncover evidence of the communicative approach under the following themes: communicative competence, text authenticity (origin), patterns of interaction, and skills integration.

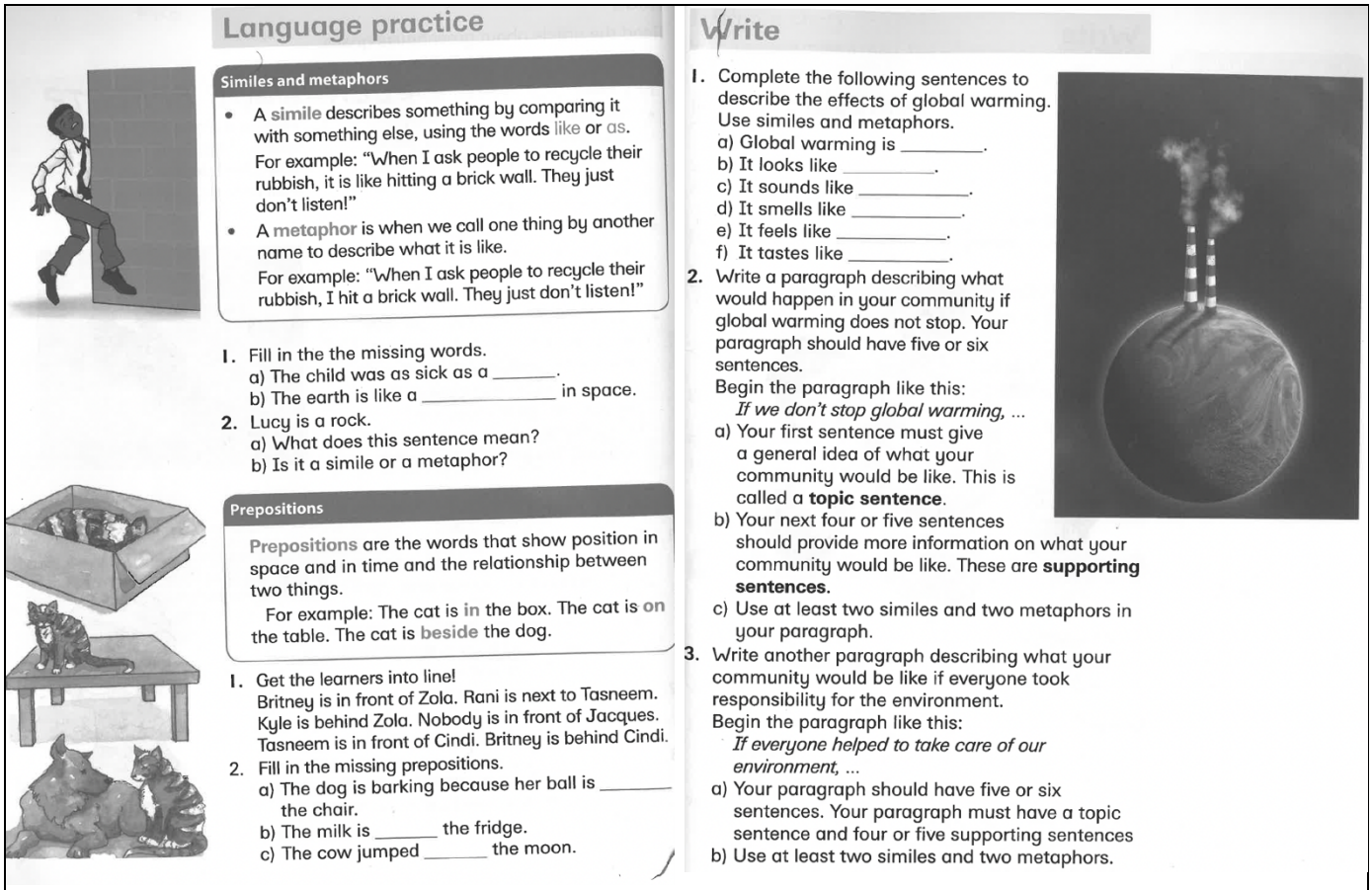
Communicative competence

In all three textbooks, the focus across the two-week cycle is mainly on developing grammatical competence and discourse competence, with sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence largely absent.

Grammatical competence

Grammatical competence refers to knowledge of lexical items and grammar. A communicative text-based approach to fostering grammatical competence, as espoused by CAPS, could be expected to (1) derive relevant grammar items (language features) from the text-type in which they occur to demonstrate their functionality, i.e., text-based; (2) be explicit about why the item was selected, rather than leaving the reader guessing; and (3) seek to relate grammar exercises to the topic or theme featured in surrounding text(s), i.e., thematically linked.

It is troubling that the three IP textbook cycles under discussion mostly do not fulfil these conditions.



Language practice

Similes and metaphors

- A **simile** describes something by comparing it with something else, using the words like or as.
  For example: "When I ask people to recycle their rubbish, it is like hitting a brick wall. They just don't listen!"
- A **metaphor** is when we call one thing by another name to describe what it is like.
  For example: "When I ask people to recycle their rubbish, I hit a brick wall. They just don't listen!"

1. Fill in the the missing words.
   a) The child was as sick as a _____.
   b) The earth is like a _____ in space.
2. Lucy is a rock.
   a) What does this sentence mean?
   b) Is it a simile or a metaphor?

Prepositions

Prepositions are the words that show position in space and in time and the relationship between two things.
For example: The cat is **in** the box. The cat is **on** the table. The cat is **beside** the dog.

1. Get the learners into line!
   Britney is in front of Zola. Rani is next to Tasneem. Kyle is behind Zola. Nobody is in front of Jacques. Tasneem is in front of Cindi. Britney is behind Cindi.
2. Fill in the missing prepositions.
   a) The dog is barking because her ball is _____ the chair.
   b) The milk is _____ the fridge.
   c) The cow jumped _____ the moon.

Write

1. Complete the following sentences to describe the effects of global warming. Use similes and metaphors.
   a) Global warming is _____.
   b) It looks like _____.
   c) It sounds like _____.
   d) It smells like _____.
   e) It feels like _____.
   f) It tastes like _____.
2. Write a paragraph describing what would happen in your community if global warming does not stop. Your paragraph should have five or six sentences.
   Begin the paragraph like this:
   If we don't stop global warming, ...
   a) Your first sentence must give a general idea of what your community would be like. This is called a **topic sentence**.
   b) Your next four or five sentences should provide more information on what your community would be like. These are **supporting sentences.**
   c) Use at least two similes and two metaphors in your paragraph.
3. Write another paragraph describing what your community would be like if everyone took responsibility for the environment.
   Begin the paragraph like this:
   If everyone helped to take care of our environment, ...
   a) Your paragraph should have five or six sentences. Your paragraph must have a topic sentence and four or five supporting sentences
   b) Use at least two similes and two metaphors.

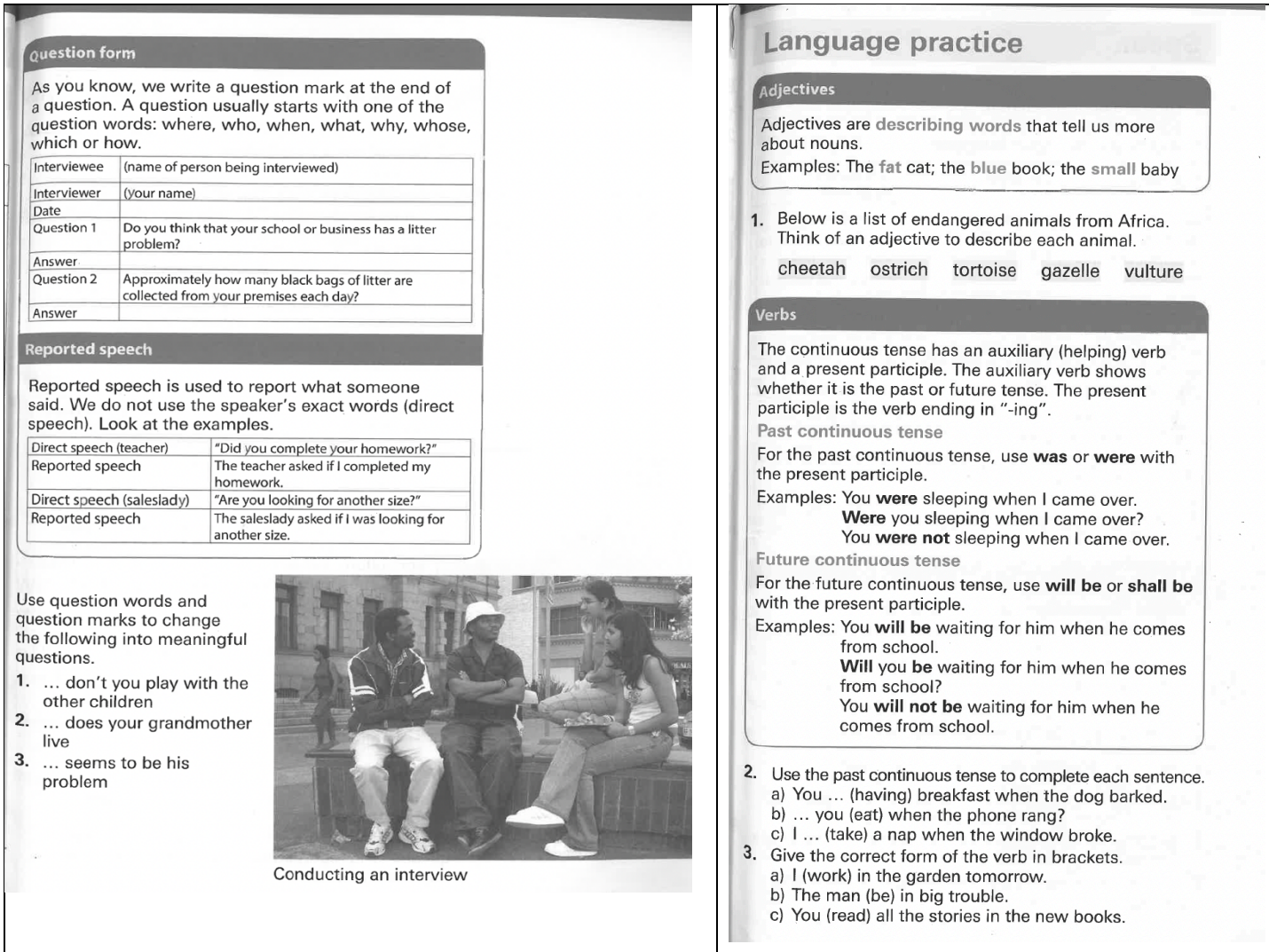
Fig. 1: Extract from the Grade 4 cycle, *Be an eco-warrior*

In the Grade 4 cycle on combating global warming, grammatical competence is cultivated in language practice activities in which learners study similes, metaphors, prepositions, conjunctions, and continuous tenses across the cycle. Despite their attractive illustrations, the language practice activities are conceptually flawed. First, the aforementioned language features do not directly link to the text type that learners need to produce. In particular, the focus on similes and metaphors (see Fig. 1) seems random. It is not made clear why comparisons more suited to literary or persuasive texts should be infused into the information texts (written paragraphs; multimodal charts) that learners are expected to generate. If the textbook is not sufficiently clear about what type of text learners are ultimately required to produce, confusion rather than learning will result. Second, the preposition examples in Fig.1 are unrelated to the eco-warrior theme, thereby diluting their potential impact.

The Grade 5 cycle features activities on language structures, such as adjectives and tenses, text connectors and direct speech, offering learners the opportunity to work with English language concepts. Some activities (termed language practice) succeed in linking language (grammar) to text type, such as the direct speech activity, which shows how question forms (words such as 'who', 'what', and 'how') contribute to the interview about a topic linked to the theme of the cycle. Other activities are thematically linked but not text-based, such as the activity (Fig.2), which requires learners to demonstrate the use of connectors in sentences that relate to the

environmental awareness theme. No justification is given for the focus on connectors, which might have been more appropriately taught in relation to a different (persuasive) genre, such as a prepared speech. Leaving the selection of grammar items implicit makes it more difficult for learners to see their functionality within the (con)text. In extreme cases, isolated grammar examples do not derive from a text and are related neither to each other nor to the theme under discussion, such as the verbs focus (cf. Fig. 2, right-hand side), an activity that ends with learners having to provide the correct verb tenses.

In the Grade 6 cycle, learners engage in activities involving dictionary skills, simple past tense and attributive adjectives. These are prescribed in the CAPS teaching plan for the fortnight, but again, no reference is made to the specific language features in the texts being discussed. In such cases, the grammar activities follow a distinctly traditional deductive approach, focusing on the rule-example-activity structure or routine, and are not used communicatively, i.e., there is no focus on meaningful communication and insufficient awareness of how the language or grammatical items contribute to overall meaning in a text.



Question form

As you know, we write a question mark at the end of a question. A question usually starts with one of the question words: where, who, when, what, why, whose, which or how.

Interviewee	(name of person being interviewed)
Interviewer	(your name)
Date	
Question 1	Do you think that your school or business has a litter problem?
Answer	
Question 2	Approximately how many black bags of litter are collected from your premises each day?
Answer	

Reported speech

Reported speech is used to report what someone said. We do not use the speaker's exact words (direct speech). Look at the examples.

Direct speech (teacher)	"Did you complete your homework?"
Reported speech	The teacher asked if I completed my homework.
Direct speech (saleslady)	"Are you looking for another size?"
Reported speech	The saleslady asked if I was looking for another size.

Use question words and question marks to change the following into meaningful questions.

1. ... don't you play with the other children
2. ... does your grandmother live
3. ... seems to be his problem

Conducting an interview

Language practice

Adjectives

Adjectives are describing words that tell us more about nouns.

Examples: The fat cat; the blue book; the small baby

1. Below is a list of endangered animals from Africa. Think of an adjective to describe each animal.

cheetah ostrich tortoise gazelle vulture

Verbs

The continuous tense has an auxiliary (helping) verb and a present participle. The auxiliary verb shows whether it is the past or future tense. The present participle is the verb ending in "-ing".

Past continuous tense

For the past continuous tense, use **was** or **were** with the present participle.

Examples: You **were** sleeping when I came over.
Were you sleeping when I came over?
You **were not** sleeping when I came over.

Future continuous tense

For the future continuous tense, use **will be** or **shall be** with the present participle.

Examples: You **will be** waiting for him when he comes from school.
Will you **be** waiting for him when he comes from school?
You **will not be** waiting for him when he comes from school.

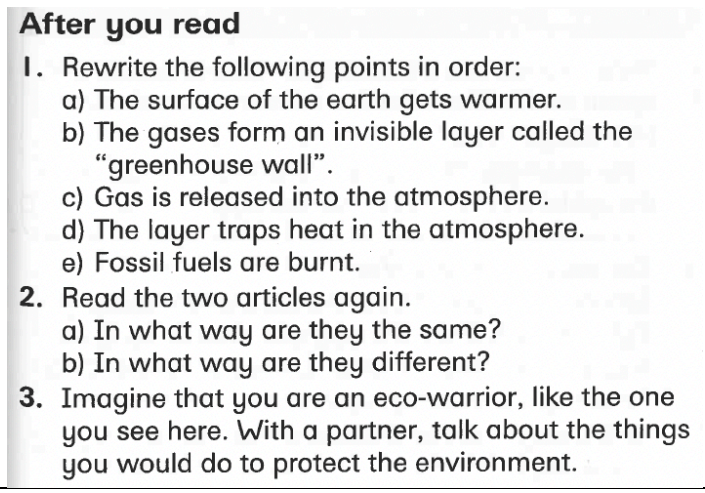
2. Use the past continuous tense to complete each sentence.
   a) You ... (having) breakfast when the dog barked.
   b) ... you (eat) when the phone rang?
   c) I ... (take) a nap when the window broke.
3. Give the correct form of the verb in brackets.
   a) I (work) in the garden tomorrow.
   b) The man (be) in big trouble.
   c) You (read) all the stories in the new books.

Fig.2: Extracts from the Grade 5 textbook cycle demonstrating a text-based approach to grammar (left) and a traditional, atomised approach (right)

Discourse competence

Discourse or textual competence refers to knowledge of organisational features of texts—whether written, spoken, visual or multimodal. It involves understanding how paragraphs are structured to make them cohesive and meaningful, and why and how one text type differs from another.

In the Grade 4 cycle, an example of the promotion of *discourse competence* is found in an activity designed to act as a scaffold to the writing of an information text.



After you read

1. Rewrite the following points in order:
   a) The surface of the earth gets warmer.
   b) The gases form an invisible layer called the "greenhouse wall".
   c) Gas is released into the atmosphere.
   d) The layer traps heat in the atmosphere.
   e) Fossil fuels are burnt.
2. Read the two articles again.
   a) In what way are they the same?
   b) In what way are they different?
3. Imagine that you are an eco-warrior, like the one you see here. With a partner, talk about the things you would do to protect the environment.

Fig. 3. Grade 4 textbook example of after-reading activity developing discourse competence

The first question requires learners to sequence jumbled-up sentences (Fig.3) taken or adapted from an information text properly. It is a type of bottom-up text-based reorganisation task intended to guide learners towards writing cohesive paragraphs, which are central to information texts. It implicitly draws attention to cohesive devices that link sentences, such as the use of elision and the definite article (thus "an invisible layer" becomes "the layer"), although these are not identified as such. The second after-reading question requires learners to weigh up the two 'articles' against each other: *In what way are they different? In what way are they the same?* The answers to this deceptively simple question pairing are far from clear, given its cryptic nature. Nevertheless, the comparison and contrast of two whole texts remains a cognitively demanding activity that begins to promote a top-down discourse competence.

Similar examples of discourse competence are readily found in the Grade 5 and Grade 6 textbooks. In the Grade 5 cycle, the focus is on the text features of information texts for which learners have to provide sub-headings, present information in graphs, design a questionnaire for an interview and write a report. These activities offer opportunities to construct meaningful texts.

The Grade 6 cycle takes a detour through an instructional/procedural text before returning to the information text genre. The treatment of the latter marks a progression in relation to previous grades, as the associated tasks require greater creativity. Learners are given instructions on how to gather information to write an information text, before having to write their own (Fig.4). Thereafter, they are expected to turn the text into a tourist brochure advertising South Africa as a holiday destination. A definition of a brochure is provided, which

serves to legitimise it as a *bona fide* type of information text. Illustrative photographs of a tri-fold brochure are also included.

The design of a brochure undoubtedly serves to foster discourse competence and provides an opportunity for learners to practise the use of the target language by producing an informational, potentially authentic text. The activity is creative and crosses genres, effectively foregrounding features of both information and persuasive texts (brochures "are used to advertise or promote something"). However, the blurred genre aspect is neither pointed out to the textbook user nor scaffolded with the appropriate meta-language. The 'sunny South Africa' stereotype that learners are expected to purvey, and the absence of any critical or alternative perspectives on tourism in the country, are also troubling.

It is therefore evident that all three cycles largely succeed in developing discourse competence, with room for improvement in relation to blurred genres and the associated meta-language. Thus, in this aspect, the communicative approach would benefit from a stronger reliance on the text-based approach.

Write

Write a short information text

Write a short information text of about nine sentences to explain why South Africa is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Include visual material such as graphs, tables, and diagrams.

Gold Reef City in Johannesburg is a popular tourist destination.

Before you write

1. Find out the facts and figures you need. Find information in newspapers, magazines, in the library and on the Internet.
2. Plan what you are going to write. Use a mind map like the one you see here to help you brainstorm your ideas.

Write

1. Write your ideas out in rough. Give your rough draft to someone else to read. Get feedback and edit your work. Remember to check your grammar, spelling and punctuation.
2. Use your information for the next writing activity – a **brochure** about South Africa.

Make a brochure

1. Fold a sheet of paper so that it looks like a brochure.

Page 2	Page 3	Page 4
(Reverse side of page 1)	(Reverse side of page 6)	(Reverse side of page 5) First fold this section.

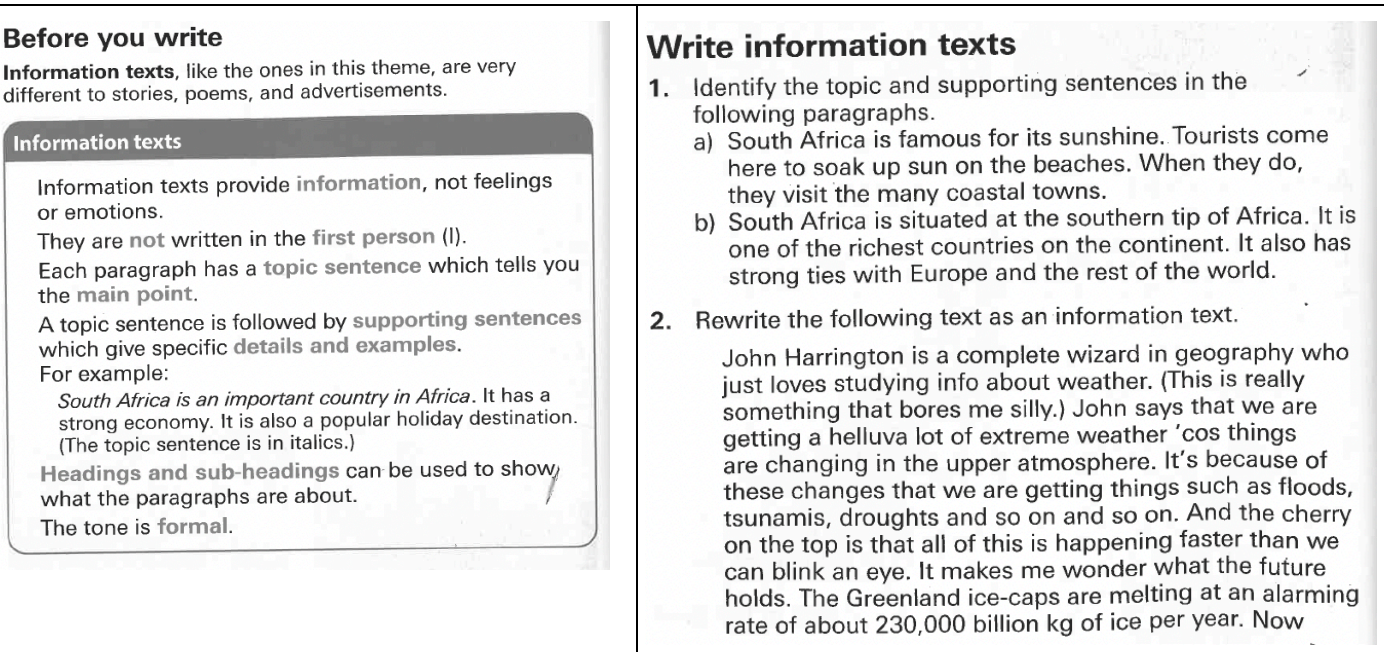
The inside of the brochure

2. **Page 1:** Write a neat, colourful heading on the cover of your brochure. Write a sentence that will introduce the topic of your brochure. Draw a picture or a map of South Africa and label it.
3. **Pages 2 – 5**: Write about three of your sentences on each side of your brochure. Include a labelled drawing on each page.
4. **Page 6**: Write down places where a visitor can find information about South Africa, for example tourist information centres, Internet sites, books, etc.

Fig.4: Grade 6 textbook cycle activity requiring learners to design a tourist brochure (discourse competence)

Sociolinguistic competence

Sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the rules of language use, is under-represented in the three cycles under discussion. The only example occurs in the Grade 6 cycle. After receiving a breakdown of information texts, learners must convert a conversational blog-like piece about climate change into an information text (see Fig. 5). The genre-crossing activity is designed to test learners' ability to produce *appropriate* written language.



Before you write

Information texts, like the ones in this theme, are very different to stories, poems, and advertisements.

Information texts

Information texts provide **information**, not feelings or emotions.

They are **not** written in the **first person** (I).

Each paragraph has a **topic sentence** which tells you the **main point**.

A topic sentence is followed by **supporting sentences** which give specific **details and examples**.

For example:

South Africa is an important country in Africa. It has a strong economy. It is also a popular holiday destination. (The topic sentence is in italics.)

Headings and sub-headings can be used to show what the paragraphs are about.

The tone is **formal**.

Write information texts

1. Identify the topic and supporting sentences in the following paragraphs.
   a) South Africa is famous for its sunshine. Tourists come here to soak up sun on the beaches. When they do, they visit the many coastal towns.
   b) South Africa is situated at the southern tip of Africa. It is one of the richest countries on the continent. It also has strong ties with Europe and the rest of the world.
2. Rewrite the following text as an information text.

John Harrington is a complete wizard in geography who just loves studying info about weather. (This is really something that bores me silly.) John says that we are getting a helluva lot of extreme weather 'cos things are changing in the upper atmosphere. It's because of these changes that we are getting things such as floods, tsunamis, droughts and so on and so on. And the cherry on the top is that all of this is happening faster than we can blink an eye. It makes me wonder what the future holds. The Greenland ice-caps are melting at an alarming rate of about 230,000 billion kg of ice per year. Now

Fig.5: Grade 6 cycle: Example of the promotion of sociolinguistic competence

Acquiring the required shift in tone would involve de-personalising the piece through a change of narrative voice (from first-person to third-person) and the adoption of a more formal register. This would mean removing all instances of 'speech on paper' (Hendricks, 2014), such as colloquialisms (e.g., a *helluva lot of* extreme weather), idiomatic expressions (And *the cherry on top* is…), personal opinions or asides (This is really something that *bores me silly*), abbreviations (*info*), grammatical contractions (*'cos; it's*), and conversation fillers (*and so on and so on*), and replacing them with formal expressions and scientific vocabulary in logically elaborated paragraphs. Accordingly, learners would have to demonstrate sufficient vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, and familiarity with the organisational and language features of information reports. Hence, sociolinguistic competence depends on both grammatical and discourse competence.

This is the point at which the textbook fails learners. The activity is constrained by the paucity of detail about the characteristics of information texts. The preparatory activity (*Before you write*) mainly lists the organisational features of information texts, notably sub-headings and structured paragraphs, and provides an illustrative example of the latter. However, the range of *language* features with associated meta-language is under-represented. Readers are informed that information texts "…are not written in the first person (I)", but are not told that they are written in the third person. The required tone "…is formal" and unemotive, yet how to achieve formality in factual writing is not explained. No mention is made of the simple present tense to convey a sense of the way things are, of compacting text by converting verbs into nouns (nominalisation), of deploying subordinate clauses to establish hierarchies of meaning within sentences, or explaining how to link sentences in factual writing. These omissions represent a missed opportunity for deepening Grade 6 learners' sociolinguistic competence.

Strategic competence

The cultivation of *strategic competence*—the language user's additional verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to overcome communication difficulties—is entirely missing from the respective two-week cycles. This omission might reflect the (mistaken) belief that strategic competence can be taken for granted in first-language speakers and does not warrant attention in a Home Language textbook. Admittedly, strategic competence is best performed and observed orally, *in situ*, where the focus is on developing the learner's fluency and intelligibility (cf. Richards, 2006). Yet, the multi-dialectal (and multilingual) diversity of many, if not most, EHL classrooms today would suggest that textbooks should reflect this fact to create valuable opportunities to cultivate strategic competence. The colloquial tone of the blog-like text (Fig. 5) lends itself to the exploration of other varieties of English spoken and written in South Africa, such as Black South African English, Indian English or Cape Flats English. The co-presence of these would create fertile ground for exploring possible misunderstandings arising from differences in lexis and phonology and devising attendant repair strategies. Further, given the availability of digital teaching resources (e.g., videos and interactive language applications [apps]), it is not unreasonable to expect HL textbooks to devise (multimodal) activities that address strategic competence.

Text authenticity

Authentic texts mediate access to the world outside the classroom. The underlying belief is that they serve to scaffold or support learning; hence, the need for learning *support* materials. Nevertheless, they should not be regarded as ends in themselves; indeed, for all their centrality to CLT, authentic texts are scarce across all three textbooks. Photographs constitute the one authentic text-type found across all three Grades, and they are successfully deployed. By way of example, the Grade 5 cycle "Greening our environment" starts with a striking colour image highlighting pollution in the natural world (Fig. 6). It is accompanied by a set of 'icebreaker' questions that focus the attention and engage learners intellectually and emotionally, drawing on their own experience and prior knowledge (see also Interactive patterns, below). The stock photograph relates to the content and activities of the (thematic) cycle.

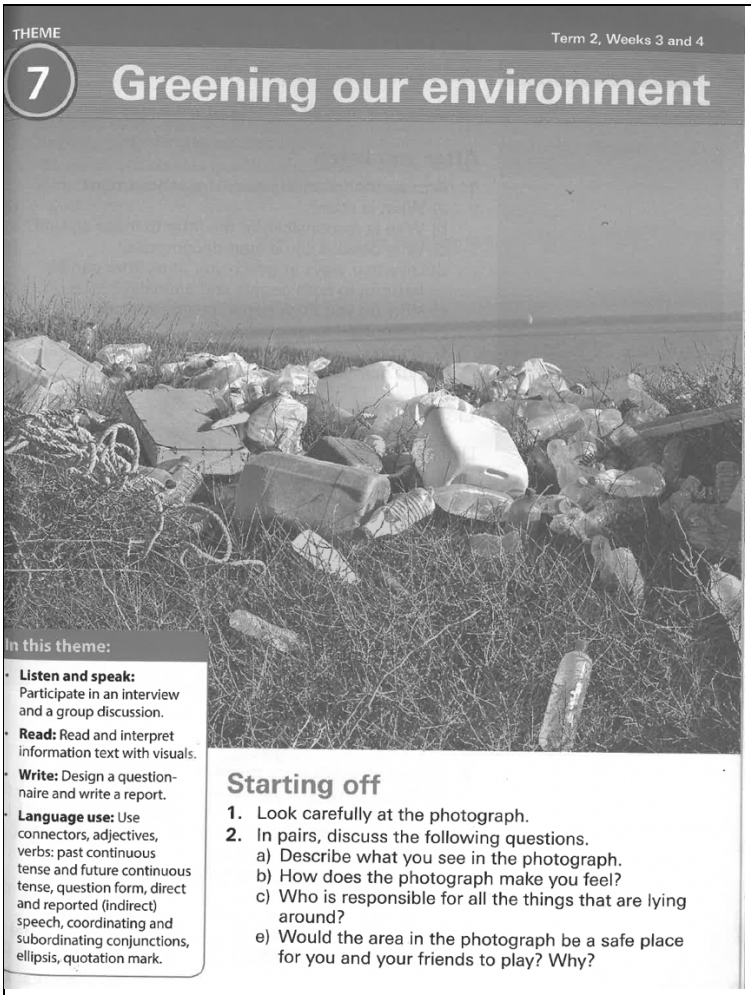


Fig. 6: Grade 5 textbook, first page of two-week cycle on environmental awareness

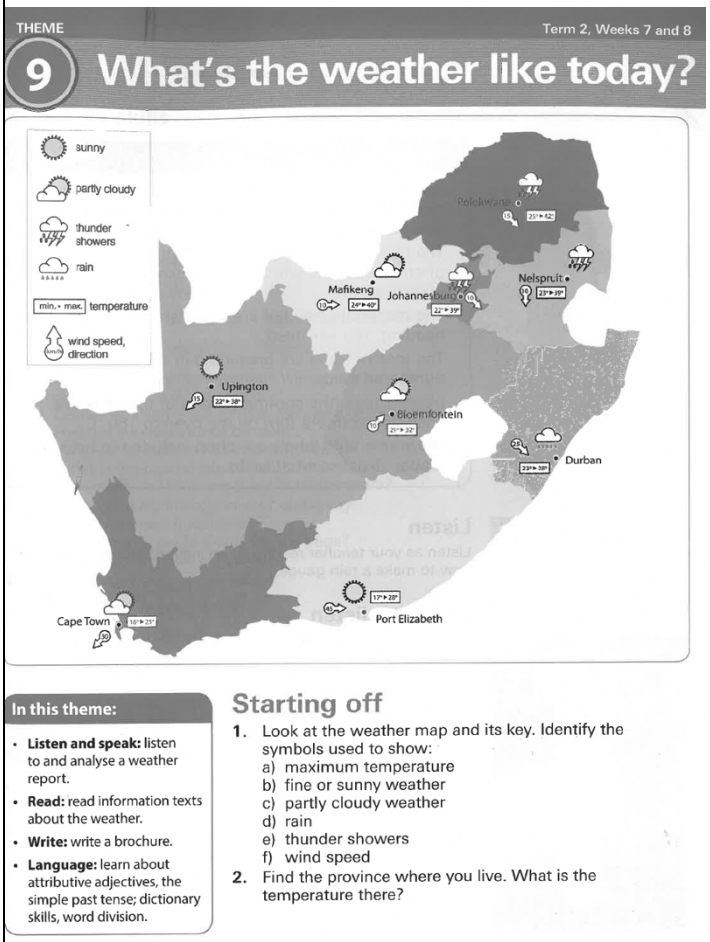


Fig. 7: Grade 6 textbook, first page of two-week cycle on the weather

By contrast, the weather map that inaugurates the two-week cycle in the Grade 6 book (Fig. 7) appears to be a didactic text written directly for the textbook. It has been simplified to illustrate basic symbols indicating temperatures, wind speed, sunshine, rain, and other weather states; yet the colour-coding of provinces on the map, while attractive, betrays its inauthentic nature. National weather maps do not conventionally highlight provincial boundaries, since weather patterns, such as high-pressure systems or cold fronts, typically affect regions or swathes of the country (and beyond), not provinces. Moreover, given the size of South Africa's provinces, it makes little sense to allocate the same temperature to a whole province. The attempt to combine the teaching of human/social geography (provincial boundaries and capitals) with weather patterns has resulted in a hybrid text of dubious quality. If a didactic text of a cross-curricular nature must be used, language specialists should consult with content subject specialists or textbooks to ensure integrity. Reliability or content validity would be a minimum requirement for didactic texts.

Most of the information texts appear to have been written with CAPS in mind, which constitutes a distinct limitation. For example, the Grade 4 textbook follows the CAPS injunction (Term 3, Weeks 3–4, Reading) that learners are to "read an information text, e.g., on social issues" (DBE, 2011, p. 6); it duly includes two articles on global warming that detail fossil fuels and the greenhouse effect. However, the texts also include elements of persuasive genres, resulting in a somewhat blurred text. Similarly, a graph and a text about water pollution (Grade 5 textbook), and the above-mentioned map with information text about weather conditions (Grade 6), all lack certain authentic details. The texts have clearly been oversimplified for pedagogic purposes and are less useful as a result.

Patterns of interaction

In the Grade 4 two-week cycle, individual work is mostly favoured; however, there are instances of various forms of interaction. In the icebreaker activity, learners are required to share information with the whole class. Learners also work in pairs during the reading comprehension activities and participate in a group writing project by creating an informative poster, which each group presents to the whole class.

In contrast, interaction patterns in the Grade 5 cycle lack variety. In the starting-off activity (Fig. 1), learners work in pairs and in the second, the teacher reads while the learners listen and individually respond to questions. Beyond this, the remaining activities tacitly imply individual work. For the interview activity, learners design a set of interview questions to determine how much litter a school, shop or factory produces; the implication is that the learner should interview someone at one of these sites, although this is not clarified. The interview activity implies interaction, but the instructions are too vague to constitute evidence that its inherent communicative potential has been fully exploited.

Similarly, interaction is somewhat limited in the Grade 6 cycle. Only one activity requires learners to work in pairs. The remaining tasks imply individual work, except for the first part of the main writing activity in which learners are instructed to give a draft of their information text to "someone else to read" (Fig. 8). It is not specified who this someone else should be, only that learners should get feedback and edit their information text, before starting on the writing and design of their brochure. The lack of opportunities for interaction is concerning, as many learners might find working with information texts challenging. A valuable act of scaffolding for developing control of the genre would be the ability to interact and make meaning together before commencing with individual work.

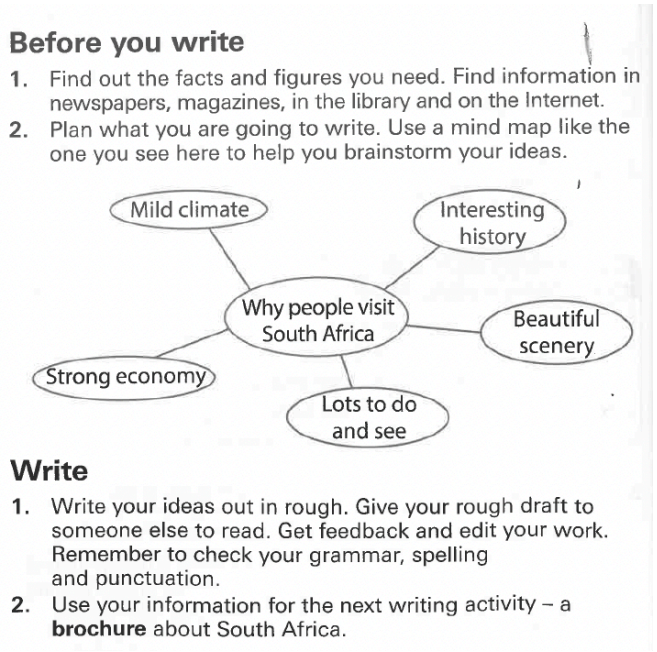


Fig. 8 Grade 6 textbook extract, in which learners are advised, "Give your rough draft to someone else to read".

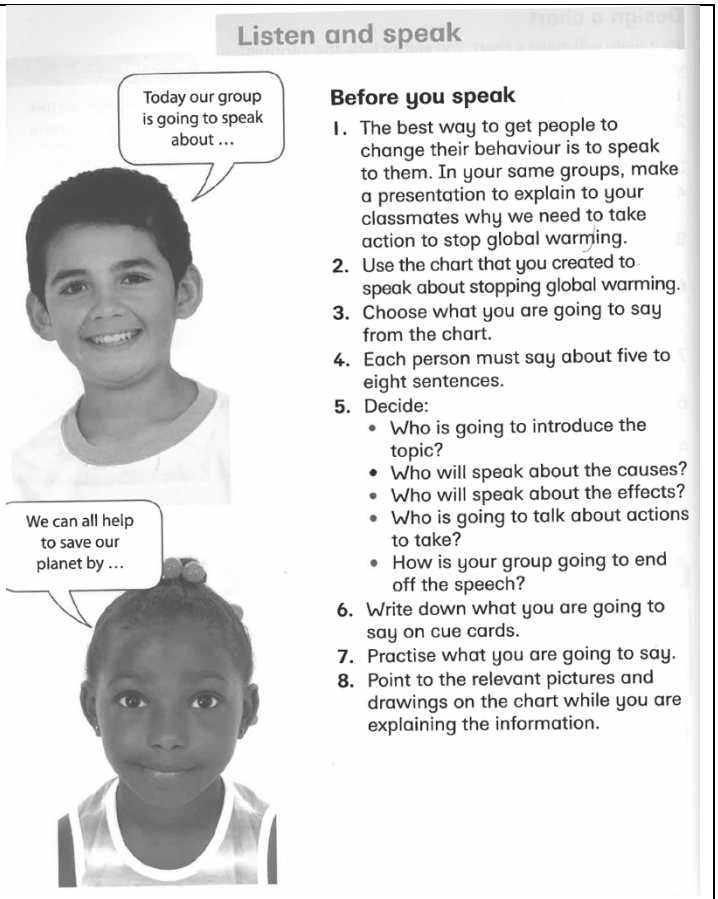


Fig. 9: Grade 4 textbook: Presenting the chart

One could argue that the paucity of interactive opportunities derives from the textbook writers' assumption that by Grade 6, Home Language learners can work independently. However, as CAPS itself acknowledges (DBE, 2011:8), not all HL learners are first-language speakers of their HL subject. And even if they were, all learners need to work on their understanding of cross-curricular topics through discussion. Interaction in small groups or with a partner, guided by the educator, encourages exploratory talk that some students might be hesitant to embark upon when the entire class is listening (Barnes, 2010). Exploratory talk refers to engaging in meaningful discussion, allowing the "new to interact" with what learners may know, in the process of developing further understanding (Barnes, 2010:8). During group or peer work, learners are presented with an opportunity to "talk their way into understanding" (Barnes, 2010:3), and this is especially important as they engage more complex text types such as information reports and explanations. Such opportunities also create greater opportunities for learners to engage in negotiating meaning as they develop their language skills.

Integration of skills

The integration of the various skills is another core belief in approaches seeking to realise CLT. In the Grade 4 textbook, the four language skills are successfully integrated across the two-week cycle. For the reading comprehension activity, learners must read for information and respond to the questions in writing. Learners also practise speaking (exploratory talk, i.e., working on understanding) when they discuss ways to protect the environment with their partners. The group writing activity allows learners to create the chart together, *en route* to independent writing. A collective project of this nature requires engagement of all four skills: listening and speaking, when discussing content and planning the chart; reading, in preparation for drafting, editing and summarising information; and writing, when recording information on the chart. As the various groups present their charts to the class, all members are involved in presentational talk (cf. Barnes 2010) while the rest of the class listens (Fig. 9). This is an aptly scaffolded group-work activity. Its only flaw is the absence of information on whether the task is for assessment purposes; learners are required to do a lot of work, and most would require the incentive of knowing the value of the. Overall, the two-week cycle is a good illustration of how to "produce[s] competent, versatile writers who will be able to use their skills to develop and present appropriate written, visual and multi-media texts for a variety of purposes" (DBE, 2011:11).

The Grade 5 cycle is somewhat less successful in this regard. Despite some integration of language skills, particularly in the design of the questionnaire and interview activity, it is not always indicated at which point learners should write after reading, or whether answers to questions should be delivered orally or in writing. It would only be possible to gauge the extent to which language skills are integrated with the content and activities of the textbook once instructions about productive (as opposed to receptive) language activities are made explicit. Similarly, there is limited integration of skills in the Grade 6 cycle. In reading comprehension, for example, it is implied but not made explicit that learners must respond to the texts in writing, save for Activity 5, where paired discussion (speaking) is also required in the response to comprehension questions.

CONCLUSION

This analysis explored the extent to which selected English Home Language Intermediate Phase textbooks adhered to CLT principles. It has zeroed in on three two-week cycles—one each in the Grade 4, Grade 5 and Grade 6 textbooks—that have the theme of environmental awareness in common.

First, the development of *communicative competence* within and across the three cycles is highly uneven. Of its four components, only the fostering of *discourse* competence comes close to following CLT principles. Several activities scaffold learners towards constructing meaningful texts. However, more could be done to incorporate a text-based approach that is explicit about different purposes and features of information texts. The development of *grammatical* competence, by contrast, is flawed across the three cycles. Some activities connect relevant grammar items (language features) to specific text-types and themes, but

others do not. To wit, an awareness of text-derived and thematically linked grammar items coexists uneasily alongside adherence to a decontextualised focus on forms approach (cf. Savignon, 2018). These textbook inconsistencies are ultimately attributable to flaws in CAPS itself and extend beyond EHL to English First Additional Language, and right throughout the curriculum. The observation by Van der Walt (2018:196) that the CAPS fortnightly lesson plans for Grade 10–12 EFAL are disjointed and ultimately underutilise language structures and conventions (grammar) is equally applicable here. The promotion of *sociolinguistic* competence is underrepresented and is compromised by the treatment of grammatical competence that undergirds it, while that of *strategic* competence is completely absent. The latter is relevant not only for developing confidence and speaking competence among additional-language learners (cf. Myers, 2023), but increasingly, also among so-called Home Language learners in multilingually diverse classrooms.

Second, there is a *paucity of authentic texts* across the three cycles; most are customised or are *didactic* texts written by the textbook authors. The over-reliance on didactic texts denies learners the opportunity to engage with real-world material they might encounter outside the classroom. More often than not, the use of didactic texts inadvertently subverts the pedagogic intent on account of their lack of fidelity. Admittedly, suitable authentic texts might not always be readily available, or might be too complex for illustrating the 'basics'; whereas attractively designed, simplified texts may well motivate and engage learners. Nonetheless, if didactic texts are to be used, more care should be taken to ensure they serve, rather than undermine, the goals of CLT and curriculum integration.

Third, too few opportunities for varied *interaction* exist. The authors acknowledge the strong bias towards reading and (individual) writing in CAPS-Intermediate Phase, which textbook developers are obliged to follow. However, learning opportunities around reading and writing need not preclude exploratory/presentational talk and the consequent negotiation of meaning in preparation for writing (cf. Barnes, 2010); indeed, the value of focused discussion in literacy development has been attested to (Scheckle, 2009; Gibbons, 2015). Hence, more (varied) rather than fewer opportunities for interaction should be created during the study of factual texts.

Fourth, *integrated* teaching of the four language skills (Savignon, 2018) is realised only in the Grade 4 cycle, which culminates in a well-structured group-work activity. The Grade 5 and Grade 6 cycles are characterised by some vagueness concerning the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This paper submits that the problem can be remedied by textbooks that provide more explicit instructions about the *productive* skills of speaking and writing, in particular.

From a CLT perspective, language teaching activities must maintain a meaningful and communicative function (Richards, 2006). Despite all three English textbooks in this study exhibiting some awareness of CLT principles in their treatment of information texts, the realisation of the communicative approach is, at best, partial. A fuller realisation would depend on a deeper reading of CLT. According to Ridge (1992), it would also depend on the extension of CLT principles to all subjects taught through the medium of English, the dominant language of learning and teaching in South Africa from Grade 4 upwards. In this regard, the Teaching

English Across the Curriculum (TEAC) strategy of the DBE (2014), featuring lesson activities that draw attention to language, reading, and writing activities and foreground the register of assessment, deserves further exploration.

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