

**“AN EXPLORATION OF FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS’
PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE (PCK) FOR TEACHING
LITERACY IN A MULTI-GRADED CLASSROOM IN RURAL
CONTEXT.”**

By

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Declaration

I, Patience Jabulile Mzimela, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work. I have produced this work under the supervision of Professor Labby Ramrathan at the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I sincerely declare that this work has never been submitted in any University or whatsoever for diploma or degree purposes or fulfilment and that all the resources used or cited have been referenced in the text.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CK	Content Knowledge
DoE	Department of Education
FAL	First Additional Language
GET	General Education and Training
HL	Home Language
KZN	KwaZulu- Natal
LiEP	Language in Education Policy
MGT	Multi-grade Teaching
MOI	Medium of Instruction
NRS	National Reading Strategy
PK	Pedagogical Knowledge
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
SASA	South African Schools' Act

Abstract

Rural schools in South Africa often face numerous challenges that are largely aggravated by low numbers of learners, low numbers of teachers and a shortage of teaching and learning resources, to mention a few. Hence, the provision of one teacher per grade is perceived as a luxury in many rural schools. Consequently, such challenges have led to many rural schools being affected by multi-grade teaching. Multi-grade classes have more than one grade in one classroom, usually those grades that are close to each other. For instance, Grade R and Grade One learners will be taught in one class by the same teacher. This research study therefore focused on teachers' pedagogical content knowledge for teaching literacy in a multi-grade foundation phase class. The teaching of reading in isiZulu Home Language was singled out as the literacy component to be investigated.

Teachers at the foundation phase need to have a distinctive body of knowledge as they have to be able to blend content in literacy and the appropriate methods of teaching each literacy component. They need to understand how to organize each component of the content and how to deliver it accurately to learners through appropriate methodologies. Moreover, it is imperative to understand that it is a complex process for teachers to intersect content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. The process becomes even more complex for teachers who teach in a multi-grade class. Reading as a literacy component was put under a particular lens as teaching and assessing this literacy component in a multi-grade context is highly challenging.

This was an exploratory case study that was embedded in a qualitative research methodology. A primary school from Ndwedwe Circuit in the KwaZulu-Natal province was purposively sampled. Empirical data for this study were collected from this rural school because it was practising multi-grade teaching in all phases. To collect the data, teachers teaching multi-grade classes were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Observations were also done during the teaching process and relevant documents were analysed. The documents that were interrogated included daily, weekly and monthly work plans, class timetables, and the school's calendar. The findings suggested that teachers relied on traditional methods of teaching as the context was complex and beyond their professional capabilities. This study was therefore aimed at contributing to the discourse of how teachers in rural contexts can be trained on multi-grade teaching in order to

provide them with appropriate pedagogical knowledge and skills that will empower them to support teaching and learning across grades.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The title of this research study is: “An exploration of foundation phase teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) for teaching literacy in a multi-grade classroom in a rural context”. A case study was conducted in a primary school situated in the Ndwedwe Circuit which falls under the Ilembe District in the KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. This school was purposively selected for data collection as teaching and learning occurred in multi-grade classes. This chapter describes the research questions that drove the study. This chapter also provides the background to the study, a background of the research site, the rationale for the study and the critical questions that guided the study. The data collection methods that were employed as well as the outline of the study are presented. Lastly, an overview of the study is provided to indicate what will be discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

1.2 Background of the study

This study was based on the pedagogical knowledge (PK) and content knowledge (CK) that teachers had for teaching reading of isiZulu Home Language in multi-grade classes. It is generally known that the education system in South Africa is characterised by constant curriculum transformations. These transformations have impacted intensely on the level of language and literacy delivery at the foundation phase. As a result, a Policy on Language in Education was legislated in 1997 (DoE, 1997). This policy states that learners at the foundation phase (FP) need to use their Home Language (HL) as the medium of instruction (MOI) for the first two years of schooling. Thereafter, a First Additional Language (FAL) can be introduced as a subject in the third grade which apparently changes to medium of instruction (MOI) in the grades to follow. The currently advocated curriculum policy, known as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), also affirms that learners in their first years of schooling should be taught using their Home Language as the medium of instruction.

Regarding the expectations of this new curriculum policy, some schools are experiencing significant and numerous challenges. These challenges include the availability of classrooms, the

availability of adequately trained teachers, the availability of teaching and learning resources, and well-grounded infrastructures to promote access to education for all. The lack of these facilities is evidently in contradiction with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which states that every child has the right to basic education and that every parent has the responsibility of ensuring that their children receive education (South African Constitution, 2006). There are instances in some schools, more particularly in those that have a low learner-enrolment and those situated in rural areas of developing countries, where teachers are compelled to combine different grades and, in some intense cases, different ages in one classroom (Aksoy, 2008; Benveniste and Mc Ewan, 2000). Adherence to curriculum policy expectations requires teachers who have an intensive knowledge of the strategies and methods for teaching reading, more especially so in multi-grade classes. However, it seems quite difficult for teachers of multi-grade classes to possess the required pedagogical knowledge because in most pre-service and in-service teacher training systems teachers are prepared to teach in mono-grade schools (Little, 2001). It was therefore argued that researching reading as a component of literacy in a multi-grade classroom would illuminate the experiences and challenges teachers in multi-grade classes face. In support of this, Singh (2009, p. 94) articulates that "...literacy is the right of every citizen; therefore teachers in the foundation phase need to be highly skilled in their teaching ability", particularly in order for learners to be well equipped with reading skills.

It is evident that schools that are engaged in multi-graded teaching are experiencing challenges which are not being experienced by those where mono-grade teaching is practised (Brown, 2009 and Ngubane, 2011). It is urgent that solutions need to be established by the National Department of Education in order to address multi-grade teaching and the challenges thereof. This study therefore afforded me the opportunity to understand how multi-grade teachers teach reading across learners of different grades. It also illuminated what knowledge teachers had for integrating pedagogical and content knowledge when teaching isiZulu Home Language reading activities.

1.3 Background of the research site

This research study was conducted in a primary school situated in the Ndwedwe Circuit which falls under the Ilembe District in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The school is situated in a deep rural area known as Ndwedwe near the village of Wartburg, Dalton, in the Kwazulu-Natal midlands. The school is situated in an area which falls under the leadership of a local Chief.

The school was established in 2002. The area is sparsely populated because most people migrated to Durban or Pietermaritzburg for employment and better housing opportunities. The members of the community who still lived in the area resorted to establishing this school as it would be closer for their children than the school they had previously attended. One of the community members donated a plot on which the school was built. The building of the school was funded by the Kwazulu-Natal Provincial Department of Education's Operation Jumpstart Project. When the school was established in 2002, only grade one was offered, with the other grades being gradually introduced in the years that followed. With the introduction of Grade R as primary schools' satellites, the school was compelled to open a Grade R class in 2004.

At the time of the study, the school offered Grade R to Grade 7. The staff component comprised four teachers; two in the foundation phase and the other two in the intermediate and senior phases. There were eighty eight (88) learners in the school, including those in Grade R. Generally the teacher-learner ratio in 2012 for primary schools in South Africa stood at 1:36. This means that one teacher was required to teach thirty six learners in one classroom. In contrast, the school under study did not enjoy the privilege of mono-grade classes. Grades R and One were combined and Grades Two and Three were also combined. The school was well established; it had a fully operational School Governing Body (SGB) and an Education Management Information System (EMIS) number. One teacher and the principal and four parents were members of the SGB. The school was classified as a Section 20 school, which meant that it was fully financed by the Department of Education and thus received Norms and Standards financing every financial year. It also had a well-established feeding scheme.

Though the school was financed by the DoE, it lacked most of the necessities for managing the school effectively. The shortage of teaching and learning resources, limited teaching space and a

shortage of teachers were perpetuated by low-learner enrolment; this led to minimal funding from the Department of Education. There was a dire shortage of school furniture such as desks for the learners because the Department of Education could not provide more desks due to low-learner enrolment. In this regard Singh (2009) comments that, in disadvantaged and poor schools that suffer from a lack of additional financial support, it is virtually impossible for teachers to make their classrooms conducive to teaching and learning.

As a result of this marginalisation, this school comprised one block of four classrooms. The first two classrooms were used for the foundation phase (grades R to 3) and the other two were used for the intermediate and senior phases, i.e., grades 4 to 7. The principal utilised the back space in one of the intermediate phase classrooms as her office for school administration and management.

1.4 Rationale

As a teacher of the foundation phase for 20 years, I worked in a school that was situated in a rural context. My experiences in this environment therefore enabled me to witness multi-grade teaching as some of the grades in my school were combined. The combination is usually done in grades that are close to each other. In my experience, grades two and three were combined in one classroom where one teacher was responsible for the teaching, learning and assessment of these learners concurrently. Other grades from the intermediate phase were also combined, though this did not affect me directly as I was a foundation phase teacher. In verification of this multi-grading in rural settings, Little (2007, p.7) states that “...multi-grading is significant in developing countries compared to developed or industrialised countries”. Schools that are situated in rural areas are largely affected by this multi-grading due to numerous reasons such as a shortage of teachers, sparsely populated areas which prevent schools from having a teacher per grade, and teacher-absenteeism due to ill-health (Aksoy, 2008; Ngubane, 2011; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004). When I engaged in this study I knew that I would be exposed to the kinds of pedagogies that multi-grade teachers used in their teaching. My purpose was therefore to inform my own practice and knowledge in this area of teaching which I could, in turn, illuminate on a broader base to support educational policy and practice in this field.

As an experienced educator I perceived the necessity for researching literacy teaching in multi-grade classrooms, particularly in the foundation phase, as I had witnessed the challenges that these teachers faced. Since I singled out reading as a component of literacy that I would research, looking at teachers' experiences in this area became paramount. Reading plays a vital role in learners' acquisition of literacy skills. Joubert, Bester and Meyer (2008, p.81) state that "...reading is more than mere decoding of signs and symbols; it is a powerful skill that learners have to acquire in order to receive ideas and information on written texts". Pretorius and Mampuru (2007, p.39) concur, stating that "...reading is used as an index of how well an education system is delivering on its mandate". Therefore, based on a rural school context with multi-grade teaching of reading, this study would provide insights on how teachers teach reading in their Home Language to meet its intended purpose. Hence I focused on teachers' pedagogical content knowledge for teaching reading in the foundation phase within a multi-grade setting as I was aware that they had not had formal training in this field of teaching.

1.5 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore foundation phase teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) for teaching isiZulu Home Language reading in a multi-grade classroom in a rural context. It was envisaged that the research findings on reading as a literacy component in a multi-grade classroom would provide in-depth insight into the experiences and challenges that teachers of multi-grade classes face.

Key Research Questions

My study was guided by the following key research questions:

1. *What literacy content do teachers teach in a foundation phase multi-grade classroom?*
2. *How do teachers teach literacy content in a foundation phase multi-grade classroom?*

1.6 Overview of the study

This study was informed by Hashweh's (2005) recommendation that research should explore teachers' body of knowledge as it informs how they think and plan. In view of the actuality that teaching is crucial as it develops the cognitive, physical and emotional skills of learners, it is imperative to know what is in teachers' minds and how they carry out their duties (Shulman, 1986). According to Morrow (2007), the fundamental duty of a teacher is to teach a child which is based on what to teach and how to teach it.

My study was further informed by Shulman's conceptual framework of teacher knowledge. Shulman (1986, p.9) states: "We have to think about the knowledge that grows in the minds of teachers". Different literatures on multi-grade teaching and teaching of reading as a literacy component also underpinned the study. Engagement with these literatures facilitated my understanding that teaching reading at the foundation phase demands that teachers have an appropriate and well-grounded body of knowledge. Such demands are being provoked by the nature of this component of literacy. Joubert, Bester and Meyer (2008, p. 81) state that "...teaching reading is more than a mere teaching of decoding of signs and symbols into sounds and words".

1.7 Research Methodology

A qualitative research study was conducted. This study was framed within an interpretive paradigm. Marshall and Rossman (2006, p.1) strongly recommend qualitative research as a genre "...that is becoming an increasingly important mode of inquiry for the social sciences and fields such as education". The interpretive paradigm approach allowed me to understand how these individual foundation phase teachers set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Furthermore, since my study was conducted from a social science perspective, qualitative research allowed me to explore and make sense of data in terms of "...the participants' definitions of situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.537).

Conducting a case study was used as the methodology for this research. The case study was centred in a rural primary school where multi-grade teaching was practised in the foundation phase. The school was situated in the Ndwedwe Circuit that fell under the Ilembe District in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The case study approach allowed me to receive rich and detailed data with regard to foundation teachers' pedagogical content knowledge for teaching reading as a literacy component. Rule and John (2011, p.7) confirm that case studies "...assist in generating an understanding of and insight into a particular instance by providing a thick, rich description of the case and illuminating its relations to its broader context". Precisely, this was an exploratory case study because it involved the grounded theory. Rule and John (2011, p. 8) describe an exploratory case study as "...an attempt to explain what happens in a particular case or why it happens". Therefore, this study explored different trends in relation to pedagogical content knowledge.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) and John and Rule (2011) mutually assure that qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering data: a) participation in the setting, b) observing directly, c) interviewing in depth, and d) analysing documents and material culture. This study thus embarked on all four these methods of data collection. The first data collection tool was the semi-structured interviews where face-to-face interaction between the researcher and the respondents occurred. The semi-structured interviews enabled me to obtain data through questions that were largely open-ended. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.236) state that a [qualitative] interview schedule should be prepared that is "...sufficiently open-ended to enable the contents to be re-ordered, digressions and expansions to be made, new avenues to be included, and further probing to be undertaken".

Data were collected from interviews with two female foundation phase teachers engaged in multi-grade teaching. Observations were also conducted during each reading lesson as a second data collection tool. Observations during teaching enabled me to receive the natural reality of multi-grade classes and the manner in which teachers conducted reading activities (Maree, 2007).

The third data collection tool was the analysis of documents. I analysed the lesson plans layout, the methods used for teaching multi-grade classes, and the content to be covered in each reading

lesson. Rule and John (2011, p.80) argue that document analysis “...assists in identifying relevance and gaps in trends”.

1.8 Brief overview of the research report

Chapter One - This chapter provides the background of the study, the background of the research site, the rationale for the study and the critical questions that guided the research. The data collection methods that were employed and the outline of the study are also illuminated. A brief overview of the methodology used in the study and the appropriateness of using the qualitative research design with a case study approach are presented.

Chapter Two - This chapter provides an overview of the relevant literature. The literature reviewed included peer reviewed articles, research reports, books, and online scholarly articles. An overview is provided of teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) discourses for teaching reading in isiZulu as a Home Language (HL). Scholarly views on multi-grade teaching are also presented. The chapter concludes with a detailed review of reading in isiZulu Home Language as a literacy component in the foundation phase.

Chapter Three – This chapter unpacks the research design that was driven by the necessity to conduct this study. The research paradigm and approach are presented while the methodology and research tools for generating and analysing data are illuminated. The process for participant sampling and the purpose for their sampling are presented. The research site and its background are discussed in detail. The different research instruments used in the study namely document analysis, observation and semi-structured interviews are explored in depth. The process of data analysis is explained and the issues of validity, reliability and trustworthiness are dealt with. Finally, the ethical considerations and the limitations of the study are outlined.

Chapter Four – This chapter presents the data related to my research questions and the analysed findings. A brief description of the school targeted for my study and the community it served is given. The chapter contains transcriptions of relevant verbatim discourses by the participants as part of the data I selected. Five major themes that emerged from the data are presented and the appropriateness of the data collection methods is discussed.

Chapter Five – The findings related to significant problems and issues that were highlighted by the research are presented. The report is concluded with recommendations to address the highlighted experiences and challenges.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of and background to the study. It presented a brief discussion on the background to the education system of rural schools in South Africa and other developing countries. The research questions that underpinned the study were presented, namely: *What literacy content do teachers teach in a foundation phase multi-grade classroom? How do teachers teach literacy content in a foundation phase multi-grade classroom?*

The purpose of the study and the rationale for undertaking this study were also discussed. A brief description of the methodology that was used was given. Finally, a brief overview of the report was provided. The next chapter will provide a review of the literature that was explored to project and enrich the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One provided the background of the study, the background of the research site, the rationale of the study and critical questions that guided this study. The data collection methods and the outline of the study were presented.

This chapter is firstly informed by literature relating to teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) discourses for teaching reading in isiZulu as a Home Language (HL). Shulman (1986, p.9) proclaims that PCK is "...the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular aspects of subject matter are organised, adapted and represented for instruction".

Secondly, it is also influenced by literature on multi-grade teaching, a school setting that is often experienced by those schools which are situated in rural contexts and/or sparsely populated areas. These schools' settings have classes that have two or more different grades and ages in one classroom. In such situations, a single teacher is responsible for teaching, learning and assessment of learners. Barone and Scheidner (2003, p.259) refer to this situation as "at risk school setting".

Lastly, it is influenced by literature on reading in isiZulu Home Language as a literacy component at the foundation phase. Singh (2011, p.118) states that when a learner enters school, "... he/she has already acquired the necessary words in his/her home language, therefore making the link between spoken and written language is important at this stage". This clearly articulates that acquiring skills for reading in the home language is the most critical aspect for learning when learners are beginners. As a result, "...reading without comprehension is of no value and is cited as a reason for literacy underachievement in most developing countries" (Pretorius and Mampuru, 2007, p.39. In this regard the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (DoE, 2011) states that since home language is the fundamental subject that must be taught at the foundation phase, this systematic division is important. Literacy is underpinned by four components, namely: listening and speaking, phonics and reading, writing and handwriting,

language use and structure. Hence, reading as a component has been singled out as a focus of this study.

Regarding these aspects, it has been imperative to review literature that is based locally and internationally as a means of exploring the challenges and opportunities pertained. The articles that were reviewed related to issues that were dealt with when similar studies were conducted elsewhere. Vithal and Jansen (2010, p.14) affirm that the review of literature “...assists in addressing the gaps, silence or weakness in the existing knowledge base, and also contributes in some way to our understanding of the world”. The literature that was reviewed included peer reviewed articles, research reports, books and online scholarly articles.

2.2 Definition of terminologies

This section highlights definitions of terminologies that relate to the study. The purpose of this section is to elaborate on different terms that relate to the phenomena referred to and the context of this study. Both local and international literature was reviewed as a technique of accentuating the significance of each term. Firstly, teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge as a distinctive body of knowledge is clarified; secondly, foundation phase schooling as the most imperative stage for laying solid foundations is highlighted; thirdly, reading as a critical component of literacy is illuminated; fourthly, multi-grade teaching is explored; and lastly, rural education schooling is elucidated.

2.2.1 Teachers’ Pedagogical Content Knowledge

According to Shulman (1986), Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) refers to the knowledge that teachers have of the teaching methods for teaching a particular subject. Hashweh (2005, p.274) describes this kind of knowledge as “...a category that encompasses all other categories of teacher knowledge and beliefs, such as knowledge of subject matter, orientations, student characteristics, aims and purposes, resources and pedagogy”. Hashweh (2005) further states that it is obvious that this kind of knowledge should be possessed by all teachers irrespective of learners’ age and/or the school’s context. It demands that teachers must have knowledge about

the curriculum materials and the methods entailed for teaching each subject. In addition to this, Shulman (1986) and Ball, Thames and Phelps (2008) also regard PCK as a critical category for teacher knowledge that assists teachers in understanding critical ways of enhancing and developing their knowledge.

Eraut (1994) articulates that professional knowledge is the knowledge that is possessed by the professionals which enables them to perform professional tasks, roles and duties with excellence. In addition to this, Eraut (1994) clarifies that for teachers to develop professionally, it is quite imperative that they acquaint themselves with knowledge that will enable them to perform their duties effectively. This includes content and pedagogical knowledge for teaching a particular content. Thus, it is evident that PCK in teaching reading as a component of literacy in the foundation phase is the most critical aspect that teachers have to acquaint themselves with because it is where the solid foundations are laid (DoE, 2008).

2.2.2 Foundation Phase Schooling

According to the South African Schools' Act (DoE, 1996), the Foundation Phase is the first phase of the General Education and Training (GET) band. It is quite imperative that solid foundations of schooling are laid at this stage. Generally, Foundation Phase schooling covers Grades R to three (3). The early years of schooling are critical for the acquisition of knowledge of concepts, skills, attitudes and values that lay the foundation for lifelong learning (DoE, 2001). Learners who are at this stage of schooling are normally between the ages of 5 years and 9 years. Exceptions are those learners who are compelled to repeat a grade or who entered school beyond the acceptable age cohort. Three subjects are taught in the Foundation Phase namely Languages, Life Skills and Mathematics. The languages are taught in dual medium, which are Home Language (HL) and First Additional Language (FAL). The languages are made up of four components: listening and speaking, reading and phonics, handwriting and writing, and language use and structure. My study focused on reading as an aspect of literacy in the Foundation Phase – i.e., Grades R to 3.

2.2.3 Reading as a critical component of literacy

Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS) established in 2001 for assessment of learners' reading achievement declares that children's reading literacy achievement provides the baseline for future studies of trends in achievement (Prinsloo, 2008). This is a well-defined indication that reading has a tremendous role as a fundamental skill that every learner should possess in order to be successful in learning. In elaboration of this, Maphumulo (2010, p.20) describes reading as "...the making of meaning from print, with an emphasis on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and comprehension". She continues that it is thus important for teachers "...to help learners acquire good reading skills through the use of different types of reading methods".

Joubert, Bester and Meyer (2008, p.82) argue that reading is "...one of the most powerful ways of receiving ideas, information and stories". As result, teachers need to have a distinctive body of knowledge for facilitating this process of helping learners to acquire powerful ways of unlocking words. Consequently, the CAPS (DoE, 2011) document states that one of its mandates is to ensure that reading is taught in context and in a holistic way. Machet and Tiemensma (2009, p.60) emphasise that "...the ability to read is an essential competency in the 21st century and learners who lack reading competency will not be able to function in an information society". Joubert, Bester and Meyer (2008) posit that reading is regarded as one of the most important aspects of language learning. As a result, teaching well-grounded skills in home language is most critical at the foundation phase because it is here where solid foundations for understanding the home language should be laid (DoE, 2011). Singh (2009, p.94) articulates that "...literacy is the right of every citizen; therefore teachers in the foundation phase need to be highly skilled in their teaching ability" in order for learners to be well equipped with reading skills. In support of this ideology, the National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008, p.4) also exposes that in developing this National Strategy for Reading, South Africa is participating in a number of United Nations development campaigns. These include the UNESCO Literacy Decade 2003-2013 and the Education for All (EFA) campaign. The latter is aiming at increasing literacy rates by 50% by the year 2015. Underpinning these campaigns is the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) project. Literacy promotion is at the heart of the MDGs (DoE, NRF, 2008) initiative.

A study by Hugo (2010) reveals that research reports seem to argue that the teaching of reading in the foundation phase is not effective, with the result that many young learners attending South African schools have a reading problem. Thus, equipping learners with knowledge that reading is dual-pronged is important (DoE, 2008). This means that there is reading for pleasure and also reading for the purpose of learning (Matchet & Tiemenma, 2009). Machet and Tiemensma (2009) continue to distinguish the two by stating that voluntary reading may be defined as reading for pleasure, for fun, for enjoyment or recreational reading where there is no pressure or award to be given, whereas reading for information or learning can at times not be voluntary but compulsory.

2.2.4 *Multi-grade teaching*

The concept “multi-grade teaching” is described in different ways. In some countries it is called “multi-groups” or “multi-class” or “combination group teaching” (Little, 2001). Birch and Lally (1995) describe multi-grade teaching as a context whereby more than one grades are taught in a single classroom by a single teacher. According to Mulryan-Kayne (2006) and Juvane (2005), multi-grade classes are comprised of more than one grade in one classroom where there is one teacher who is responsible for teaching learners who are in different grades.

Benveniste and Mc Ewan (2000) articulate that the reality that needs to be considered is that teachers are faced with multiple challenges for teaching in these multi-grade classrooms. Brown (2009, p.62) exposes that the conditions for learners “...are aggravated by the conditions that teachers have to work under; they need to teach these learners using the variety of teaching strategies as stipulated in the curriculum policy, yet there are no special adjustments that are being provided for teachers and learners who are faced with such contexts”. The Multigrade Research Group (2001, p.567) postulates that “...the multi-grade classroom poses a paradox. For children to learn effectively in a multi-grade environment, teachers need to be well trained, well-resourced and hold positive attitudes to multi-grade teaching”.

According to Ngubane (2011), teachers are lacking the knowledge for teaching the subjects’ content and the application of appropriate pedagogy for teaching in such classroom settings. Ngubane (2011) continues to reveal that these teachers also lack the knowledge for teaching

strategies that are most suitable for simultaneous teaching of learners of different grades and ages that are taught in one classroom. There are many South African teachers who are not trained during initial teacher education to teach in a multi-grade class, thus facing challenges will always be experienced (Brown, 2009). As result, Brown (2009, p.64) advises that teachers of multi-grade classes must "...understand different ways to modify the traditional single-graded curriculum and classroom practice if they are to teach effectively in multi-grade classes".

Little (2001) states that although multi-grading is two-fold, some conditions are a necessity and others are of choice; however, most multi-grade teaching is caused by the former. Aksoy (2008, p.218) argues that multi-grade schooling is "...a widespread practice, especially in the rural areas of developing countries". This generally serves to confirm that schools in rural areas are engaged in multi-grade teaching because of necessity. In support of this, Benveniste and Mc Ewan (2000, p.33) also state that "...multi-grade schools are a commonly advocated means of providing primary education to children in rural areas of the developing world". Brown (2009, p.80) affirms that evidence in South Africa, for instance, has shown that multi-grade teaching is a response to a host of reasons, including:

- unpredictable numbers in annual enrolment among new learners in some schools
- teacher shortage, which might be the result of out-migration
- redeployment/teacher rationalisation or lower entrants to teacher education programmes
- apathy among teachers to work in remote rural and sparsely populated villages
- a post-apartheid surge in demand for education.

Many schools in South Africa which are located in low density and scattered populations are experiencing multi-grade teaching (Brown, 2007.b). However, these school settings have proven to benefit learners on the extreme ends of the continuum, namely both the slow and fast learners (DoE, 2009). Another limiting factor that needs to be considered is that South Africa has a limited literature on multi-grade teaching as most literatures are euro-centric.

2.2.5 Education in rural schools

Nkambule, Balfour, Pillay and Moletsane (2011) posit that rural schools are those schools that are situated in rural areas. Nkambule, et al. (2011, p.342) state that it is well known that since the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, "...rural development and rural education have remained on the margins of progress made in improving people's lives". This marginalisation is thus compelling teachers, learners and parents to face more challenges as compared to schools situated in urban or semi-urban areas. Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane (2008) also reveal that these schools are located in areas that are usually not well developed or slowly developing. As a result of such conditions, the process of teaching and learning is mostly affected adversely.

One of the major causes behind the challenges that rural schools encounter is that, in most cases, rural areas do not have electricity, running water and/or accessible roads. All these factors have a drastic effect on the process of teaching and learning (The Rural Education Newsletter, 2009).

Gardiner (2008) explored the findings in the report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education and states that rural schools are experiencing the challenges of not being regularly visited by the department's personnel for assessment and monitoring of curriculum and the school's functioning as officials are often unprepared to travel long distances, often on gravel roads. Gardiner (2008, p.13) further elaborates that villages and rural communities are difficult to reach "...as the physical conditions in schools are inadequate and learner performance in comparison to schools elsewhere is at a lower level". In some instances, these issues compel learners to arrive late at school because of the long distances they have to walk to reach school. It also results in poor school attendance (Emerging Voices, 2005). Nkambule, Balfour, Pillay and Moletsane (2011) and Kebeje (2004) ascertain that with regards to these challenges of marginalisation, education in rural areas is facing the biggest blow.

2.3 Conditions influencing multi-grade teaching in rural schools

Little (2007) and Brown (2009) state that there are several conditions that give rise to multi-grade teaching. These include geographical conditions, political conditions, economic conditions and teacher-learner ratio.

2.3.1 Geographical conditions

It is quite evident in South Africa that multi-grade teaching is a common occurrence in rural schools (Aksoy, 2008; Brown, 2009; Ngubane, 2011; Little, 2007). Little (2007) explains that the main reason behind this is that rural areas are facing dwindling populations because their populations migrate to big cities. Brown (2009) states that during the time of mass migration to cities, parents take their children along, which impacts negatively on learner enrolment. Low learner enrolment leads to multi-grading as the sole solution to the challenge. Little (2001, p.489) affirms this by articulating that, in all countries, "...multi-grade teaching is found in rural areas and arises largely through necessity". Therefore, it is evident that in such cases it is a necessity and not a choice. It is often perceived that schools in these geographical locations are marginalised as most of them have "...inadequate learning materials and poor infrastructure" (Brown, 2009, p.65). Moreover, development in these areas is usually slow (Benveniste & Mc Ewan, 2000).

Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane (2008, p.98) stress that although there are challenges that exist in the city, "...those experienced in rural areas are intense". This intensity is normally caused by the locations that these populations are in which are characterised by "...alienation, anonymity and loneliness". As a result, Berry (2001) states that since multi-grading is associated with 'small' schools in remote rural and sparsely populated areas, staffing is usually an issue. Mulryan-Kayne (2007, p.501) concludes that multi-grade schools are "...generally found in rural areas where school enrolment figures are not perceived to justify the appointment of one teacher for each grade level". The DoE, Rural Education Newsletter (2009) labelled these schools as "forgotten schools" because it is noticeable that some roads leading to these schools are difficult to travel. Moreover, one has to consider the time that it takes to move from one school to the other.

2.3.2 Political conditions

Morrow (2007) pronounces that the separate schooling systems of the past transmitted deep and insidious messages wrapped in the naturalistic disguise in which they played an organising role in the construction of the common-sense understanding of the vast majority of South Africans.

Through these separations of schooling, education provision was more detrimental to those schools situated in rural areas; thus these political conditions became a contributing factor to multi-grade teaching (Brown, 2007b). Nkambule, *et al...* (2011, p.342) also declare that it is well known that, since the end of apartheid in 1994 in South Africa, "...rural development and rural education have remained on the margins of the progress made in improving people's lives". Consequently, schools in political conditions are also affected by political instabilities. There is a worldwide lack of interest in rural education, and South Africa is no exception (Jordan & Joubert, 2007).

Aksoy (2008, p.218) alludes that multi-grade schooling is "...aimed at providing children access to primary education in developing countries". Thus, developing countries have to bear the harshness of MTG because it is a necessity and not a pedagogical choice, unlike in developed countries (Aksoy, 2008; Little, 2007). Multi-grade teaching is often regarded as important for providing people with education irrespective of political landscapes. "This is a means of expanding access to education in poor countries" (Benveniste and Mc Ewan, 2000, p.31).

2.3.3 Teacher-Learner ratio conditions

Teacher-learner ratio is described as a notion where the number of learners to be taught in a class or grade is calculated against the number of teachers to teach (DoE, 2012). The ratio is calculated by dividing the number of learners by the number of teachers for a specific school type (for instance, public school). The teacher-learner ratio stood at 1:36 in 2012 for primary schools in South Africa. This means that one teacher would be allocated to teach thirty six learners in one classroom (DoE, 2012). The teacher-learner ratio contributes directly to the quality of schooling offered (DoE, 2002-2006). The source further states that South Africa and other developing countries are largely affected by the teacher-learner ratio system.

As a result of this system, there is a gross negative impact on those schools which are situated in rural and sparsely populated areas because they often face circumstances where teachers have to teach multi-grade classes instead of mono-grade classes in order to meet the teacher-learner ratio (Brown, 2009). In such instances, the impact is caused by low-learner enrolments which deny learners the privilege of having one teacher for one grade (Ngubane, 2011). It is evident that this

serves as one of the most perpetuating factors for multi-grading. Little (2001, p.483) concludes that in such contexts, "...multi-grade teaching is by necessity and not by choice".

2.3.4 Economic conditions

According to Nkambule et al. (2011, p.342), rural development and rural education have remained on the margins of progress made in improving people's lives since 1994. This clearly indicates that economic conditions in rural areas are leading to poverty, backwardness and powerlessness among these people (Kebeje, 2004). Gardiner (2008) indicates that migration to urban cities also plays a critical role in accelerating poor economic conditions in some rural areas. This contributes to rural areas' sparse populations (Brown, 2009). Brown (2009) argues that these poor conditions also impact on school functioning as most schools lack the resources that facilitate their functionality. Little (2001) affirms that many of the multi-grade classes and schools found in rural areas are economically poor and that the level of education of household members is low.

The Report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education (DoE, 2005) points out that in order to have meaningful discussions with people in rural communities about education matters, it is necessary to begin by looking into their main social concerns and interests before discussing schooling itself. Gardiner (2008) reveals that rural communities sometimes admit their children to school at an inappropriate age as they lack enthusiasm in schooling as such and have lost trust in the government. Ngubane (2011) articulates that this is a major challenge that results in schools having a class of two or more grades combined and being taught by one teacher because of low-learner enrolments.

2.4 Challenges for teaching in a multi-grade classroom

2.4.1 Availability of resources

Emerging Voices (2005) points out that schools situated in rural areas have a major problem in that they lack the resources (human, physical, monetary, and other) that could facilitate the

process of teaching and learning. Brown (2009, p.66) affirms the report submitted by the HSRC in 2005 by articulating that the overall situation is "...that the factors challenging multi-grade teachers are personal as well as school-based".

2.4.1.1 Teacher shortages (Human Resources)

Ngubane (2011) states that, in some schools, a shortage of teachers leads to combining two or more grades in one classroom where learners are taught by one teacher.

Little (2004, p.5) states that there can be a number of reasons for the shortage of teachers in schools situated in rural areas such as:

- Schools in which teacher absenteeism is high and supplementary teacher arrangements are ineffective or non-existent.
- Mobile schools in which one or more teacher moves with nomadic and pastoralist learners spanning a wide range of ages and grades.
- Schools in which the numbers of teachers deployed are sufficient to support mono-grade teaching but where the actual number deployed is less (for a variety of reasons).
- Schools in areas where the student and teacher numbers are declining and where previously there had been mono-grade teaching.
- Schools in areas of low population density where schools are widely scattered and inaccessible and enrolments are low. Schools may have only one or two teachers responsible for all grades.

Benveniste and Mc Ewan (2000) conclude that teaching children of diverse ages and abilities in the same classroom seems confusing and ineffective, which thus leads to most teachers' migration to other professions [or schools]. They argue that these factors are making it difficult to recruit and retain multi-grade teachers and that they undermine the commitment and motivation of teachers.

2.4.1.2 Teaching and learning resources

According to the National Curriculum Statement (DoE, 2008), teaching and learning resources are defined as those materials that facilitate the process of learning and teaching. The NCS (DoE, 2008) distinguishes that teaching resources are used by the teachers; these resources can be visual, audio-visual, and audio, whereas learning resources are those resources used by learners such as books, learning guides, and cassettes/DVDs in order to facilitate their learning. Ngubane (2011) stresses that both teaching and learning resources are highly needed for effective multi-grade teaching. Benveniste and Mc Ewan (2000) state that teachers need to have access to specialised materials, such as self-instructional textbooks, to support their presentation.

The South African Schools' Act (Act No. 84 of 1996) declares that public schools in South Africa are divided into two sections. Section 21 schools receive funding for teaching and learning materials from the Department of Education which is deposited straight into the their bank accounts, whereas Section 20 schools need to procure their teaching and learning resources from the Department of Education (DoE, 1996). Schools in rural settings are often categorised under Section 20. "This normally leads to the shortage of resources because of unviable roads to travel on for resource delivery" (Balfour, *et al.*, 2008, p.98). Singh (2009) also affirms that in disadvantaged and poor schools where there is a lack of additional financial support, it is virtually impossible for teachers to make the classroom conducive to reading. Ngubane (2011) therefore recommends that parents and the community in those contexts are to be fully involved in the provisioning of teaching and learning resources for facilitating teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms. Is this realistic in such poor communities?

2.4.1.3 Infrastructure and Support

Based on his research study conducted in the Amathole District in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, Brown (2009) reveals that there are many factors that contribute to the challenges faced by teachers in multi-grade classes as far as infrastructure and their support are concerned. Brown (2009, p.62) states that many South African teachers "...are not trained during initial teacher education to teach in a multi-grade class". This is to be regarded as the major challenge that these teachers often face as there is no training on multi-grade methodologies, curriculum adaptation

and multi-grade classroom management. Barley (2008, p.2) points out that, in comparison with urban environments, the situation in rural districts is different as they “...have varying economic levels and no special preparation for new teachers [is] made to teach in such conditions”.

Ngubane (2011) concurs and states that although many teachers work in multi-grade teaching situations, few countries have developed special teacher training curricula for pre- or in-service training. Little (2004, p.12) reports that earlier studies (e.g., UNESCO/APEID 1989; Birch and Lally, 1995) elucidate the challenges faced by teachers, most of which are related to the remoteness of the contexts in which multi-grade schools are located. Such challenges are:

- The non-filling of vacancies in multi-grade rural schools.
- The absence of teacher accountability in remote multi-grade schools.
- The inattentiveness of education officers to the needs of multi-grade teachers and schools.
- Lack of financial incentives for teachers to teach in remote multi-grade schools.
- Inadequate provision for housing, employment for spouses and children’s education.
- Absence of promotion incentives.
- Restricted opportunities for in-service training.

2.4.2 The planning and application of teaching

According to Aksoy (2008), planning for and application of teaching are more complicated and difficult in multi-grade classes. Aksoy (2008, p.222) states:

- The application of teaching in multi-grade classrooms is directed towards the village. The success of the teacher depends on how well he/she knows the village. Therefore, the teacher should examine and observe the history, geography, the economic and societal structures, traditions and customs of the village very well.

- The teacher should spare more time for lower grade learners to help them acquire reading and writing skills as well as the concept of numbers.

It is evident that teaching in these contexts is quite complex because most teachers did not receive pre-service training on teaching multi-grade classes (Brown, 2009). Little (2007, p.18) asserts that it is “...seemingly difficult for teachers to have tremendous pedagogical knowledge to teach multi-grade classes because in most pre-service and in-service teacher training systems teachers are prepared to teach in mono-grade schools”. Little (2004) emphasises that if teachers are exposed to training in multi-grade classes, it can influence their competence and positive feeling about teaching.

2.5 Teaching Reading

According to Maphumulo (2010, p.10), “...reading is an important aspect in the teaching of any language”. Singh (2009, p.93) also confirms the importance of reading by articulating that reading is “...an essential component of early childhood development”. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2006) report states that the purpose for teaching reading is two-fold. The first purpose for teaching reading is reading for experience and the second is reading to acquire and use information. In affirmation of this, The National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008) articulates that reading promotes confidence in individuals in a modern society and as members of a national and world community. Secondly, it enables us to act creatively and critically in a world which is ever-changing and competitive and lastly, it provides rapid, ready access to new information and knowledge that will help us in life-long learning.

Hugo (2010, p.134) adds that when children are developing, “...they are very interested in reading. They are keen to read whatever print they come across”. With this belief in mind, siblings, parents and teachers are to mediate the acquisition of reading skills in young children while in their budding phase (Nkosi, 2011). Since reading is used across all learning subjects at school (Maphumulo, 2010), it is thus very important that learners at school are motivated to read. The materials they should read range from reading their names to complex written texts (DoE, 2011). Singh (2009) agrees with the Language in Education Policy (DoE, LiEP, 1997) that basic

reading skills should initially be taught in the mother tongue (MT) and be transferred to a first additional language (FAL) as the learner progresses to higher grades.

The DoE acknowledges teaching of HL at the foundation phase and also stresses that it should be the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) (DoE, 2010). It also emphasises that children come to school able to speak their mother tongue fluently and that throughout their school life they use their HL in everyday conversations both in and out of school.

It is critical to consider that the reading curriculum thus far has only been addressing strategies and approaches for teaching reading in a mono-grade classroom. This hugely affects teachers as they find themselves in a “sink or swim” situation. However, Brown (2009, p.71) promises that “...with a good grasp of subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills suited to multi-grade teaching, teachers can be more adaptable and flexible in both their approach to teaching and handling discipline in multi-grade classrooms”. With this ideology, teachers’ attitude and adaptation could gradually transform. Hence, Ngubane (2011) suggests that these teachers should be given incentives by the Department of Education in order to motivate them to continue working in challenging contexts and also to adapt.

Nkosi (2011) advises that the teacher has to ensure that the classroom is conducive to learning and that it also motivates learners to want to learn to read in their home language. Hugo (2010, p.135) states that teachers also need to understand that teaching reading “...revolves around two issues, namely the decoding of the text and comprehending when reading”. In addition to this, Van Staden and Howie (2008) add that the process of comprehension refers to ways in which readers construct meaning from text. Singh (2009) states that the teacher can create a stimulating learning environment that encourages learners to read through:

- reading stories to learners
- teaching reading and also engaging learners in constant practice
- phonetic development activities
- word recognition activities
- breakthrough words that are commonly used when reading

- use of visual stimuli in the classroom where pictures, objects, three-dimensional books and drawings are used
- picture/word matching activities
- creating an interest in newspaper reading
- using children's readers and series
- creating charts that promote reading
- reading of road signs
- involving parents in reading activities.

2.5.1 Strategies for teaching reading as a literacy component

According to Hugo (2010), understanding strategies for teaching reading is dependent on the understanding that teachers have about discourse on reading. Reading is regarded as the cornerstone of both Home- and First Additional Language literacy components (DoE, 2008).

Joubert, Meyer and Bester (2008, p.81) articulate that “literacy is the key to learning”. They thus argue that teaching reading to Foundation Phase learners “...is one of the most important roles that teachers have to perform as reading gives learners more exposure to vocabulary development” (DoE, 2011). It is also significant that teachers have knowledge of different strategies that they have to engage learners in in order to encourage them to process the language and to speed up their language acquisition as well as increase in accuracy (Hugo, 2010). It is obvious that teachers tend to use a single teaching strategy which best suits them and their learners (Nkosi, 2011). Maphumulo (2010, p.22) asserts that “...teachers are unable to stimulate reading inside and outside of the classroom”. They seemingly often believe that learners have to miraculously learn on their own to read as their duty is only to ‘assist’ where learners are encountering challenges in reading activities (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007). Irrespective of the

context, foundation phase teachers have to involve learners in different reading strategies (DoE, NRS, 2008) such as:

- exposure to environmental print
- shared reading
- group-guided reading
- independent reading
- reading aloud.

It is also important to consider that there is no literature or curriculum policy so far which addresses the issue of teaching reading in a multi-grade classroom. Nor are there any guidelines pertaining to the knowledge that teachers should have for intersecting the content and pedagogy in a multi-grade context.

2.5.1.1 Exposure to environmental print

According to Hugo (2010, p.133), a young child “...is usually keen to read, especially when entering the so-called ‘big’ school”. It is at this stage where exposure to environmental print forms part of children’s emergent reading (DoE, 2008-2011). The Handbook for Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (DoE, 2008) states that environmental print is those written texts that the child sees in his everyday life. These include bill boards, advertisements, cartoons, food packaging and clothing labels. Thus, pre-conceived knowledge of spoken language forms the basis for learners’ understanding of print. The National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008) also confirms that pre-reading is incidental and takes place while learners are still in their early stage of learning literacy. Consequently, the process of incidental learning to read becomes interesting as the learner engages in ‘first time reading experiences’. Nkosi (2011) warns that this calls for careful selection of reading material that promotes the culture of reading. Hugo (2010, p.134) also affirms that pre-reading activities “...play an important role in preparing young learners for learning to read in a Grade R class”. The teacher at this stage should facilitate learners’ acquisition of reading skills through the use of signs, big books, familiar packaging and

advertisements to see if the learners can recognise brand names (DoE, 2011). Thus, this is the most important stage for emergent reading skills to develop (Hugo, 2010).

2.5.1.2 Shared Reading

Shared reading is when a teacher and the learners read a common text (DoE, Handbook on Teaching Reading in the Early Grades and National Reading Strategy, 2008). This is a whole class activity suitable for foundation phase learners where the focus is on modelling and teaching reading skills. Both teacher and learners read a book together in a relaxed teaching environment (Maphumulo, 2010). The main purpose of using this strategy is to enable learners to see the words when reading them. Thus, when the teacher is using this strategy big books, texts, charts and other reading resources that have visible fonts should be used (DoE, 2008).

In a classroom that is multi-graded, teachers prefer to use this method as all learners are engaged in the reading activity simultaneously. Hugo (2010) states that although the shared reading method allows learners to access written text that is above their reading level, teachers' assistance is imperative throughout the reading activity. However, in a multi-grade classroom it is generally perceived that if there is a lack of resources this strategy may result in failure in accomplishing the intended purposes.

Hugo (2010) posits that there are steps that the teacher has to employ before embarking on this strategy. The teacher has to:

- orientate learners to the text
- explain new vocabulary
- link prior knowledge with the new
- run a pointer under words as she reads
- pause a few times and ask questions
- re-read with learners joining in where they are able.

2.5.1.3 Group-guided Reading

In group-guided reading the teacher works with a group of same ability learners (Maphumulo, 2010). Maphumulo (2010) and Nkosi (2012) state that the teacher is supposed to help or guide learners as they read and understand a text. The teacher listens to each learner reading and checks on reading progress. Joubert, Meyer and Bester (2008) argue that group-guided reading helps learners to read fluently, to apply word attack skills, and to read with understanding.

Since group-guided reading is a teacher-directed activity, it thus compels thorough preparation from the teacher's side for its effectiveness (DoE, National Reading Strategy, 2008). Maphumulo (2010, p.32) states that group-guided reading "...gives the teacher an opportunity to observe reading behaviours, identify areas of need and allow learners to develop more independence and confidence as they practise and consolidate reading behaviours and skills".

2.5.1.4 Independent Reading

The National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008) articulates that in independent reading, time is set aside in each school for learners and teachers to "Drop All and Read" (DAR). Each classroom needs a range of authentic materials at the correct level. Learners choose their books based on their interest and ability. Time is set aside for report backs to the class or group (DoE, 2008). Joubert, Bester and Meyer (2008) suggest that for this activity to be successful, the teacher needs to:

- set up a reading corner or shelf
- have regular displays on different themes
- put up motivational posters
- have comment or suggestion sheets
- have a reading record sheet for each learner

- display work by learners.

The Handbook on Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (DoE, 2008, p.7) clearly states that teachers “...have to help learners to develop their independent reading skills by doing specific exercises that are related to independent reading”. It adds that independent reading thus creates skilful readers who use different strategies when they read and who make meaning when they read. To make meaning they need both general knowledge and knowledge of letters and letter sounds. They also need to read independently and fluently so that they do not forget the beginning of a sentence when they get to the end of it, which is the way they can make meaning of a sentence.

2.5.1.5 Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is when the teacher reads a text aloud to the learners (DoE, 2008). The text is at a higher level than the learners can read independently. For the reading aloud period to be successful, the teacher has to divide it into three stages: the pre-reading stage, during reading stage and after reading stage. Hugo (2010) articulates that reading aloud adds more value to learners’ acquisition of reading skills:

- Learners become better readers by increasing their vocabulary and developing their Home Language skills.
- This session can be used to introduce different genres or text types.
- It motivates learners to read as they listen to good stories or interesting facts, which stimulates interest.

2.6 Pedagogical Content Knowledge for teaching reading in a multi-grade class

Pedagogical Content Knowledge exists at the combination of content and pedagogy (www.tpack.org/tpck/index.php?). Shulman (1986) asserts that PCK is the transformation of content into pedagogical powerful forms. Consequently, blending of literacy contents,

components and pedagogy into understanding of how particular aspects of it are organised, adapted and represented for instruction is imperative (DoE, 2008). It further states that since reading is an essential ability for competency in the 21st century, teachers should possess the body of knowledge that will facilitate learners' acquisition of reading skills. Thus it should be generally acknowledged that teachers' knowledge of methods for teaching IsiZulu HL reading activities in a multi-grade foundation phase class is imperative. Hence, PCK for teaching reading in a multi-grade class is even more critical. Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) as critical category, situational knowledge, and literacy as informing learning will be discussed as they play a significant role in foundation phase teachers' PCK for teaching reading in a multi-grade class.

2.6.1 Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) as a critical category

According to Shulman (1986), Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) refers to the knowledge that teachers have of the teaching methods for teaching a particular subject matter. Hashweh (2005, p.274) describes this kind of knowledge as “a category that encompasses all other categories of teacher knowledge and beliefs, such as knowledge of subject matter, orientations, student characteristics, aims and purposes, resources and pedagogy”. It is obvious that this kind of knowledge should be possessed by all teachers irrespective of learners' age and/or a school's context. It also demands that teachers should have knowledge about the curriculum, teaching materials and the pedagogy required for teaching each subject.

In further elaboration on this, Shulman (1986) and Ball, Thames and Phelps (2008) mutually regard PCK as a critical category for teacher knowledge that assists teachers in understanding critical ways of enhancing and developing their knowledge. Consequently, Morrow (2007) articulates that for teachers to develop professionally, it is quite imperative that they acquaint themselves with knowledge that will enable them to perform their duties effectively. This includes knowledge of content and knowledge of methods for teaching that particular content. Morrow (2007, p.101) states that teaching is characterised by “... the practice of organising systematic learning”. Thus, pedagogical content knowledge in teaching reading as a component of literacy in a multi-grade foundation phase class is the most critical aspect that teachers should

acquaint themselves with because it is where the solid foundations for successful teaching and learning are laid (DoE, Annual National Assessment Protocol, 2008).

2.6.2 Situational Knowledge

According to Morrow (2007), teachers in South Africa teach in schools with different contexts even though they may be at the same geographical location. Morrow (2007, p.105) discloses that some teachers “...are working in suicidal environments with suicidal workloads and they also lack professional autonomy and flexibility”. It can then be generally acknowledged that situations in schools are variable. Ball, Thames and Phelps (2008) suggest that it is of vital importance for teachers to have knowledge of the situations that they are in and that they subsequently embrace learners and the situation that they find themselves in. Eraut (1994, p.2) refers to this as “...situational knowledge which is child specific and situation specific”.

Such instances are the true reflection of what rural school teachers are facing in their everyday lives. Kebeje (2004) believes that quality teaching and learning in rural schools is achievable if teachers are willing to engage themselves in knowledge-building strategies. Eraut (1996) concludes that the situational knowledge that teachers have to acquire will assist them in striving through all odds. They need to be resilient and to manoeuvre their teaching methods to suit the context.

2.6.3 Literacy as informing learning

Language is a critical tool for learning, particularly during the years of childhood where vocabulary formation is at a tender stage (Wynne, 2008). Therefore language, and more especially the Home Language, is the profound and crucial tool that assists learners to learn new concepts and new meanings (DoE, 2007). According to Singh (2011), this demands of teachers to acquaint themselves with knowledge for conveying reading skills to learners as these skills inform learning. In this regard, they have to build learners’ literacy knowledge on the skills that

learners have already acquired. In support of this, Joubert, Bester and Meyer (2008) articulate that good language teaching is characterised by scaffolding. Thus, in consideration of scaffolding, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is vital in teaching reading skills in order to inform learning; more especially so in a complex and challenging situation like a multi-grade classroom.

Joubert, Bester and Meyer (2008) also affirm that learners are sometimes disadvantaged when it comes to the classroom situation; this is often caused by lack of teachers' skills in teaching literacy. The National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008) articulates that well-grounded reading skills enable learners to promote their self-image and an understanding of the self. Moreover, it "...enables them to appreciate a language" (Joubert, Bester & Meyer, 2008, p.129). Conversely, learners develop barriers to learning if their reading skills are not proportional and this impact heavily throughout their learning journey (DoE, 2008).

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by Shulman's theoretical framework on teacher knowledge. Shulman (1986, p.9) states: "We have to think about the knowledge that grows in the minds of teachers." This study aimed at exploring teachers' body of knowledge as it informs how they think and plan. In view of the fact that teaching is crucial in developing the cognitive, physical, and emotional skills of learners, it is then important to know what is in teachers' minds and how they carry out their duties. Teachers' fundamental duty is to teach a child; to do this they need to know what to teach and how to teach it (Morrow, 2007).

Numerous expectations rest on the shoulders of teachers as they have to teach and unfold knowledge to learners. To be successful in their task, Shulman (1986) states that teachers should acquaint themselves with three kinds of knowledge: content knowledge, curriculum knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Teachers need to engage in strategies for developing the latter in order to be able to master teaching methods for each learning area in a particular context.

It is evident that teaching reading at the foundation phase demands of teachers to have appropriate and well-grounded pedagogical content knowledge. Such demands are being provoked by the nature of this component of literacy. Joubert, Bester and Meyer (2008, p.81) state that teaching reading "...is more than a mere teaching of decoding signs and symbols into sounds and words". Therefore, for foundation phase teachers to teach effectively, they need to possess high standards of knowledge on the methods to be utilized for teaching the content. Shulman (1986, p.9) states that teachers "...should demonstrate powerful forms and ways of representing and formulating the subject that will make it comprehensible to others".

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented an extensive review of the literature regarding multi-grading, rural schools, teaching of reading, and teachers' knowledge base. It is quite obvious that education in South Africa and other developing countries is characterised by frequent challenges as far as multi-grade teaching is concerned. The challenges are aggravated by circumstances that are sometimes unpreventable. Brown (2009, p.66) confirms that the factors challenging multi-grade teachers are "...personal as well as school-based". Thus, limited training and the lack of support and training from different stakeholders such as DoE personnel, institutes of higher learning, the government, local Indunas and school management teams (SMTs) are also aggravating these factors. In support of this, Ngubane (2011) raises the concern that the literature is limited in pointing out structures/processes that support multi-grade classroom practices in the South African context. The next chapter will be looking at the research methodology that was employed in this study

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research study explored foundation phase teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) for teaching reading in a multi-grade classroom in a rural context.

I perceived the necessity of researching teaching of reading in isiZulu Home Language in multi-grade classrooms, particularly at the foundation phase, as I had witnessed the challenges that teachers faced when teaching in multi-grade classes. Since reading plays a vital role in learners' acquisition of literacy, it is vital to explore teachers' PCK for teaching it. Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) assert that reading is used as an index of how well an education system is delivering on its mandate. It was thus envisaged that conducting research on reading as a component of literacy in a multi-grade classroom would elucidate both the challenges and opportunities that teachers in multi-grade classrooms experience.

3.2 Research Design

This chapter endeavours to unpack the research design that framed this study. A research design enables the researcher to understand the framework within which the study is grounded (Murray & Beglar, 2009). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) and Hart (2009) mutually affirm that most research studies are not conducted according to prepared plans. It is therefore critical to understand that the research design aims at serving the purpose of understanding the fundamental platform for the participants' and the researchers' world and their shared involvements and experiences. In this chapter the research paradigm and approach are presented and the methodology and research tools for generating and analysing the data are illuminated. The chapter also discusses the sampling method and the purpose for the sampling of participants. Validity, trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations and limitations of the study are also expounded. The theoretical framework pertaining to teacher knowledge that motivated the study is presented as a conclusion to this chapter.

3.3 Paradigmatic Orientation

Interpretive Paradigm

This research study was embedded in an interpretive paradigm where in-depth and detailed data were collected verbally and textually from foundation phase teachers teaching in a multi-grade classroom. A naturalistic method was employed. Utilising the interpretive paradigm allowed me to understand how these individual foundation phase teachers set out to understand the interpretations of the world around them (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Agger, 2006). Furthermore, since my study was projected from a social science perspective, it was important to understand what pedagogical content knowledge these teachers who were engaged in multi-grade teaching possessed for teaching reading in combined classes. In this regard it is significant to take note that Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2009, p.29) state that an interpretive paradigm is “...aimed at understanding the subjective world of human experience”. Gaining knowledge of multi-grade teachers’ philosophies, understanding and practices was therefore important in order to attach meanings to the world within which they functioned. Since people’s focus of interpretation is dependent upon their subjective experiences and how they construct their social world (Maree, 2007), it was important for me as a researcher to understand this phenomenon of multi-grade teaching in the foundation phase in rural schools.

This study was projected from a social science perspective. For this reason the qualitative research approach allowed me to draw empirical data from a pool of ideas as suggested by Ragin and Amoroso (2011) and also to “...explore and make sense of data in terms of the participants’ definition of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.537) which gave meaning to their world. By exploring the in-depth experiences of the participants in a natural manner, the eliciting of data proved to be trustworthy.

3.4 Research Approach

Qualitative Research Approach

This was a qualitative research study. According to Murray and Berglar (2011), qualitative approaches to research involve measures that do not use numerical data. McNiell and Chapman

(2005) articulate that when one has embedded the study in a qualitative research approach, data always take the form of words rather than numbers. In this study no numerical data (i.e., quantitative data) were collected. Instead, I engaged in collecting data on socially constructed meanings that foundation phase teachers had for teaching reading in isiZulu Home Language to multi-grade classes. Two female teachers teaching multi-grade classes in a foundation phase in a rural context were interviewed. They were also observed during their reading periods. Furthermore, I conducted an analysis of the relevant documents that they used in their classrooms. These methods undeniably revealed multiple interpretations that these teachers had for the context in which they functioned. My findings are corroborated by Naicker (2011) who affirms that qualitative research assumes that reality is socially constructed and that there are multiple realities or interpretations of a single event.

Marshall and Rossman (2006, p.1) recommend qualitative research as a “...genre that is becoming an increasingly important mode of inquiry for the social sciences and fields such as education”. The main purpose of this study was to gain clear and detailed accounts from foundation phase teachers about their pedagogy for teaching reading. Such accounts enabled me as the researcher to obtain in-depth understanding rather than a quantity of perceptions. Murray and Beglar (2009, p.47) also affirm that qualitative approaches are “...particularly well-suited when you are trying to generate new theories or hypotheses, achieve a deep understanding of particular issues and they also involve measures that do not use numerical data”. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) affirm this ideology by stating: “Theory generation in qualitative data emerges from the data collected”.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) add other attributes to qualitative approach which they say: a) is naturalistic b) draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of participants in the study c) focuses on the context d) is emergent and evolving e) is fundamentally interpretive. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, observations and analysis of documents I was able to understand foundation phase teachers’ interpretation of their context. In this regard Naicker (2011) believes that a crucial element in understanding a phenomenon in qualitative research is to see it from the participants’ perspective.

Since qualitative research looks at human events in a more holistic way and attempts to locate individual actions in their cultural context (Maphumulo, 2010), it is vital to create a close relationship with the participants that is based on trustworthiness and honesty. Consequently, engaging in a qualitative approach grants the researcher an opportunity of understanding human nature and the meanings they attached to their world. This creates an opportunity for mutual engagement between the researcher and the participants, which means that the participants' voices are important in presenting their natural behaviours. I therefore used three methods to obtain data. The first data collection tool was the semi-structured interviews, where face-to-face interaction occurred between the researcher and the selected participants. The semi-structured interviews enabled me to obtain data from answers based on questions that were mostly open-ended. Structured observations during and after each reading lesson were done as a second data production method. Lastly, I analysed the relevant teachers' lesson plans, the methods used for teaching multi-grade classes and also the content that was covered in each reading lesson.

3.5 Research Methodology

Case Study Research

A case study was used as a research methodology in this study. According to Yin (2003), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident. A case study of a single school situated in the Ndwedwe Circuit in the Ilembe District in KwaZulu-Natal was used for data collection. This school was purposively selected as it engaged in multi-grade teaching in the foundation phase. The case study approach allowed me to receive rich and detailed data for foundation phase teachers' pedagogical content knowledge for teaching reading as literacy component in multi-grade classes. Rule and John (2011, p.7) confirm that case studies "...assist in generating an understanding of and insight into a particular instance by providing a thick, rich description of the case and illuminating its relations to its broader context". Flyvberg (2006) considers the case study approach as most effective for generating hypotheses testing and theory building.

Rule and John (2011, p.8) state that an exploratory case study “...often examines a phenomenon that has not been investigated before; [it can then] lay the basis for further studies as it attempts to explain what happens in a particular case or why it happens”. This was an exploratory case study because it involved grounded theory of teacher knowledge. Therefore, in this study exploration of different trends was done in relation to teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge for teaching reading in IsiZulu Home Language. Moreover, by using the exploratory case study approach I gained insights about the challenges that these teachers faced in their classrooms.

Marshall and Rossman (2006, p.97) assert that qualitative researchers “...typically rely on four methods for gathering data: a) participating in the setting b) observing directly c) interviewing in depth and d) analysing documents and material culture”. This study embarked on all four these methods of data collection. The data were collected from two foundation phase teachers engaged in multi-grade teaching, observations during and after each lesson of reading, and document analysis.

Observations during teaching enabled me to receive the natural reality of multi-grade teaching and the manner in which teachers conducted reading activities. The second data collection tool, namely the semi-structured interviews, was a face-to-face interaction with the respondents. The semi-structured interviews enabled me to obtain data from answers based on questions that were mostly open-ended. For such interviews, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.236) suggest that a schedule be prepared which is “...sufficiently open-ended to enable the contents to be re-ordered, digressions and expansions to be made, new avenues to be included, and further probing to be undertaken”. The third data collection tool was the analysis of documents. I analysed the lesson plans layout, the methods used for teaching multi-grade classes and also the contents to be covered in each reading lesson. In terms of document analysis, Rule and John (2011) argue that it assists in identifying relevance and gaps in an observed trend.

According to Rule and John (2011), case study research like, other research methodologies, poses both benefits and limitations. They state that a case study is a detailed examination of one setting or one single subject; thus these examinations are providing detailed and a great deal of in-depth data. Bassy (1999) affirms that a case study can also be used for teaching purposes to illuminate broader theoretical and contextual points. However, consideration that, at times, case study research may not materialise according to perceived plans is also needed. Flyvbjerg (2006) warns that though a case study can be utilised in investigating most single cases, the case study method may sometimes allow more room for the researcher's subjective and irrational judgment. Merriam (2009) states that it is important to understand that a case study might be informed by the particular context and location of that case, which might not apply to other cases. Merriam (2009) further states that it can happen that the researcher does not devote sufficient time to that particular project which might lead to distorted data production. Though such limitations have been highlighted, I considered the case study approach as the most suitable research methodology for this study.

3.6 Research Participants

According to Ragin and Amoroso (2011), sampling is the decision that is being made by the researcher on the choice of participants to be involved in a study. When a researcher is deciding on a choice in order to achieve a certain purpose, then it is called purposive sampling. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.156) state that in this type of sampling researchers "...hand-pick the persons to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their typicality or their possession of the particular characteristics being sought". In addition to this, Davies (2007) articulates that purposeful sampling is the strategy of selecting participants that are judged to be typical of the population under investigation.

Purposive sampling was conducted where the two female foundation phase teachers who taught in multi-grade classrooms in a rural context were selected. One female teacher who was teaching the combined grades R and One classes and the second female teacher who was teaching combined grades two and three classes were purposively sampled. Murray and Berglar (2009) affirm that purposive sampling has a critical directive on receiving empirical data and avoiding

generalising results beyond the population sampled. I believed that these two teachers would be able to satisfy the requirements for this study as I regarded them as “knowledgeable people” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.156) who would contribute to the generation of valid and trustworthy data.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

Marshall and Rossman (2006) and John and Rule (2011) mutually assert that qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering data: a) participation in the setting b) observing directly c) interviewing in depth and d) analysing documents and material culture. This study thus engaged on all four these methods of data collection. Data were collected from two female foundation phase teachers engaged in multi-grade teaching. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with these teachers and they were observed during and after each reading lesson. In addition, document analysis was also conducted.

3.7.1 Interviews: Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as a research strategy. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled me to engage in face-to-face interaction between the participants and myself (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This approach also allowed the participants to participate without the fear of prejudice or judgment. Rule and John (2011) affirm that this style of interviewing allows for more flexibility during data collection and creates space for the interviewer to pursue lines of inquiry stimulated by the interview. The semi-structured interviews enabled me to obtain data from answers based on questions that were mostly open-ended.

Maree (2007) affirms that when researchers use semi-structured interviews, they need to be attentive to the responses of their participants in order to be able to identify new emerging lines of inquiry. It is recommended that the interviewer pursues specific lines of inquiry by adding questions during the interview which allow for new insights, deeper probing and clarification (Rule & John, 2011). In order to ensure that the interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer is successful, a set of questions has to be prepared to initiate discussion and further

questions can then arise from the discussion. Merriam (2009) refers these prepared questions as an “interview schedule”.

Cohen et al. (2011, p.236) state that a schedule should be prepared which is “...sufficiently open-ended to enable the contents to be re-ordered, digressions and expansions to be made, new avenues to be included, and further probing to be undertaken”. Doing this enabled me to gain a deep insight into my participants’ world and also to engage in an extensive exploration of the phenomenon of reading in a multi-grade context. (See instruments on p. 94).

3.7.2 Observation: Structured

The observation method of data collection was used in order to obtain data on how foundation phase teachers engaged in teaching reading of IsiZulu in a multi-grade classroom. An audio recording tape was used during the observations in order to ensure that the data produced would not be distorted and that the findings would therefore be valid. Merriam (2009) advises that the use of an audio recorder enables the researcher to record conversations which could then be re-played and used as much as they are needed. The observations that I conducted enabled me to understand how foundation phase teachers taught reading in isiZulu Home Language in a multi-grade environment. The observation process was structured because I used an observation schedule to record the occurrences that took place when I was in the classrooms. This afforded me the opportunity to gather ‘live’ data naturally (Cohen, et al., 2011). Moreover, it was a good idea to take notes during and as soon after the observations as possible. In this regard Babbie (2007, p.311) suggests that “...even if you pride yourself on having photographic memory, taking notes is critical”.

Observations during teaching enabled me to receive the natural reality of multi-grade classes and the manner in which teachers conducted reading activities. Marshall and Rossman (2006) elaborate that observation is “...the critical method that holds fundamental and high importance in all qualitative inquiry for discovering complex interactions in natural settings”. Since “observation is more than just looking” (Cohen et al., 2011, p.456), I ensured that the observations I conducted were systematic and related to my research questions. This systematic organisation of the observations also ensured that I would produce data that would be reliable

and trustworthy for utilisation at a later stage. In this way I conducted direct observations instead of relying on second-hand accounts (Naicker, 2011). (See instruments on p. 95).

3.7.3 Document Analysis

The third data collection tool I used was the analysis of documents. According to Naicker (2011), documents are one of the major sources of data production in qualitative research. I analysed the lesson plans layout that the teachers had prepared. I wanted to evaluate the manner in which they wrote their lesson plans and whether they involved different teaching strategies for multi-grades or whether their approach was still focused on single-grade methodologies. Secondly, I analysed the methods used for teaching reading in multi-grade classrooms. The National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2010) states that there are different kinds of strategies for teaching reading and there is no strategy that can work solely without dependence on the other. This triggered my interest in understanding how – and if - teachers applied different reading strategies when teaching reading to foundation phase learners in a multi-grade context. Lastly, I analysed the content that the teachers intended to cover in each reading lesson and whether they took cognisance of the philosophy and implications of teaching reading in the classroom. Rule and John (2011, p.80) support the analysis of documents by stating that document analysis “...assist in identifying relevance and gaps in trends”.

3.8 Data Analysis

According to Hart (2009), the analysis of data should be done systematically. In this process the key research questions play a tremendous role. In qualitative study, qualitative data analysis is applied. Maree (2007) articulates that such data analysis is the process of understanding the data collected through organising, synthesising, breaking it into manageable chunks and also searching for patterns in order to discover what is important and what is to be learned through the collected data in order to tell others.

To initiate my data analysis process, I listened to all the audio-taped voices of my participants. I also read the interview transcripts, the observation reports and the document analysis reports in

order to make sense of the data that I had collected. Using a manual cutting and pasting strategy assisted me in collating and hence understanding each participant's responses. I collated the data for each data collection tool separately at first as Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that working with the different data collection tools when analysing data facilitates the trustworthiness of collected data and their analysis. When engaging in the data analysis process, pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants in order to protect their identities in the interest of the confidentiality requirement for research. The pseudonyms were used as follows: Miss K. taught Grades R and One and Miss L. taught Grades Two and Three. These teachers had been involved in multi-grade teaching for more than a year and they each had more than ten years of teaching experience in the foundation phase. They were both female teachers who had never taught in any other context other than a school situated in rural area but both had been engaged in mono-grade teaching in previous years.

Different themes emerged from the reading of the data collected. Four themes emerged which facilitated the data analysis process. According to Merriam (2009), it is important to present the research data in themes as it allows for elimination of distorted data.

3.9 Validity and Trustworthiness

According to Cohen et al. (2011), validity in qualitative data might be addressed through honesty, depth, richness and scope of data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher. Thus, for every research study to be effective, consideration of validity and trustworthiness is significant. Cohen et al. (2011, p.179) states that validity is an important key to effective research. If a piece of research is invalid, then it is worthless. It is for this reason that I engaged in multiple methods of data collection as mentioned before (semi-structured interviews, structured observation and document analysis). Maree (2007) states that for the data collected to be trustworthy, engagement with different data collection tools is essential. Maree (2007), Cohen et al. (2011), Merriam (2009) and Rule and John (2011) refer to engagement with multiple data collection tools as 'triangulation'.

After the data had been audio-taped and transcribed, I visited the participants in order to let them read and listen to their audio-taped voices. Cohen et al. (2011) and Merriam (2009) refer to re-visits of participants as ‘member checks’. After the participants had listened to the tape recordings and read the transcripts and observation reports, they agreed that they accepted these as a true reflection of what had been said and what had happened.

3.10 Ethical Issues

Specific attention was paid to ethical considerations which were arranged by the University’s Research Office. The principal of the school and the Ndwedwe Circuit Manager were contacted in order to request their permission to conduct this research. A clear and precise outline of the research was presented and the aim of the research was disclosed to the two foundation phase teachers, the principal and the circuit manager in order to allow for autonomy. Consent from the selected participants was sought and consent forms were signed by them which indicated their voluntary agreement to participate in the study. To enrich the data that would be collected, the participants sampled would remain anonymous. Therefore pseudonyms were applied and confidentiality was thereby assured. Maree and Westhuizen (2008) warn that the protection of shared ‘secrets’ between the researcher and the participants within the boundaries of the research must be assured.

3.11 Limitations

“All proposed research projects have limitations; none is perfectly designed” (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p.42). With this ideology in mind, I conducted this research study hoping to determine the underlying challenges and limitations that I might encounter. Limitations were at times provoked by a lack of sufficient participation by the sampled participants who perceived that I was conducting this study to assess their teaching strategies. The participants confessed that they had never been involved in any research study as participants. Moreover, they had never heard of any research being conducted in nearby schools. To a certain extent, this situation also affected the validity of the data to be collected as the participants were in some instances

reluctant to disclose details about the context they were in. They were afraid that if they disclosed substantial information about their experiences, the principal might accuse them of disloyalty. However, despite all these odds I enhanced the data collected by acknowledging bias and the possible circumstances that influenced the data in one way or other. Moreover, in an attempt to address the limitations as far as data collection was concerned, triangulation was applied by using different tools for data collection; that is, document analysis, observations (during and post-teaching) and semi-structured interviews. This was in line with the suggestion by Marshall and Rossman (2006, p.202) who mutually advise that "...bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point is vital".

3.12 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented a comprehensive explanation of the research design and methodology and their appropriateness for this study. The purposive sampling method was explained and a motivation was provided for its choice in the study. A detailed description of the research site was presented, which was followed by an in-depth discussion of the research instruments used in the study. The data analysis process was discussed and issues of validity, reliability and trustworthiness were explored, explaining how they were addressed in the study. Ethical considerations which played a significant role in the production of the study were also outlined with the purpose of protecting the participants and the research site. Consideration of the ethics involved in the study was a vital aspect because the sampled participants were the 'engine' that drove this work to its accomplishment. The next chapter will present the data that were procured, analysed and interpreted using the different research instruments.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has identified and explained how the research study was designed and how data were produced using multiple data collection methods; that is, interviews, observations and document analysis. This chapter will focus on the analysis of the data produced. This study was aimed at exploring foundation phase teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) for teaching reading in isiZulu Home Language in multi-grade classrooms in rural a context. The case study of a primary school experiencing multi-grade teaching was used as a research site for data collection.

The data were collected from two foundation phase teachers engaged in multi-grade teaching. Firstly, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Secondly, observations during lesson presentation were done. The last data collection tool used was the analysis of documents namely lesson plans layout and the content and methods used for teaching multi-grade classes. The data that were produced during the interviews were coded using first open coding and later axial coding. Axial coding refers to themes which are influenced by the research questions guiding the study. These questions were: What literacy content do teachers teach in a foundation phase multi-grade classroom? How do teachers teach literacy content in a foundation phase multi-grade classroom?

Drawing on the foundation phase teachers' participation in semi-structured interviews and structured observations, the data collected were organised and are presented in this report according to five broad themes. The themes are:

- Teachers' Situational Knowledge
- Teachers' Content Knowledge
- Teachers' Curriculum Knowledge
- Reading as informing learning
- Strategies for teaching reading in a multi-grade classroom.

4.2 Teachers' Situational Knowledge

Teachers in schools in rural areas are mostly faced with the challenge of learners who are coming from poor socio-economic backgrounds. They have to address learners' basic needs before they can attempt to teach them. Eraut (1994, p.2) refers to this as "...situational knowledge which is child specific and situation specific". Most teachers in rural areas have to understand the context that they are in in order to be able to teach learners in that particular context. The situation in rural districts is different from that in urban areas. Economic levels are generally low and, as observed by Barley (2008, p.2), "...no special preparation is made for new teachers to teach in such conditions". Meanwhile, these teachers are also faced with similar curriculum expectations as those in urban areas. It is generally acknowledged that in South Africa the curriculum policies that are developed do not distinguish between contexts whatsoever. As a result, teachers have to gain special knowledge and skills to teach in rural schools.

The findings related to situational knowledge revealed that the knowledge that teachers possessed of the school situation in which they functioned needed to be adapted so that they would be more familiar with the basic needs of the learners and the school.

Miss K said: *The environment that our learners are coming from compels us to understand the situation otherwise if you try to oppose it you get frustrated. We have to improvise all the time, using resources that we buy with our own money...with our own money, really. Most of the learners here are not staying with their biological parents; their parents have migrated to big cities for job seeking and they are left with their grandparents who are weary and old.*

Miss L also agreed that they had gained knowledge of the situation that they were working in and that they had had to adapt:

We do not have basic resources that need electricity like photocopying machines or OHP's. There is communication breakdown between the parents and the teachers as they do not value education as those parents in urban areas, most of them are illiterate and think that since the teacher is there then she is the one who has to do the work. However, this is a good source of knowledge for the situation we are in...(giving a sigh).

Such utterances are a true reflection of what teachers teaching in rural areas are facing in their everyday professional lives. However, Kebeje (2004) believes that quality teaching and learning in rural schools is achievable if teachers are willing to engage themselves in knowledge-building strategies. Consequently, the knowledge that these participants had gained was personally-based as they were the only ones who could interpret the situation that they were in.

Drawing from the above statements by the teachers, it was quite evident that the situation that the learners in this school were in mattered a great deal in terms of their learning. The teachers recognised that the learners were not in a situation where they could buy or obtain learning resources due to their low economic status and a lack of direct parental involvement in their education. Hence, their teaching strategies were, of necessity, impacted by the lack of resources to promote learning. Later on in this chapter these strategies will be revealed and discussed. The main point regarding teachers having a situated knowledge of the schooling context is that this knowledge influences their planning, preparation and teaching in a rural context.

4.3 Teachers' Content Knowledge

Related to the research question pertaining to what literacy content was taught in multi-grade classes when teaching learners reading in isiZulu Home Language, both teachers revealed that they faced numerous challenges. They revealed that they did not receive any assistance from the Department of Education which resulted in a lack of content knowledge. Brown (2009) affirms that schools that are situated in rural areas do not receive adequate assistance from departmental officials. Moreover, it becomes worse if multi-grade classes have to be taught as teachers lack the knowledge to handle such a context.

Miss K said: *Yes, I do have knowledge for teaching reading, although I cannot be saying it is enough or adequate because there are some strategies of teaching reading that I fail to apply because our learners are not exposed to some other things; for instance they do not have radios or televisions at their homes sometimes you find yourself speaking about something that they do not know or have never seen or heard about. Secondly, this is a very complex situation of teaching double grades... I sometimes develop my own resources that will facilitate me to have knowledge for the content to be taught. I teach them in IsiZulu because documents that have*

been supplied to us encourage that foundation phase learners should be taught in their mother tongue. The language policy that the principal showed us is also stating that during first years of schooling, errr... mother tongue should be used as medium of instruction. When I teach them reading I teach them about phonemic awareness, how words are pronounced. This helps them in increasing their vocabulary.

From this discourse, it was clear that the teachers had sufficient content knowledge that would enable them to teach reading to learners. The challenge, however, was that the content knowledge that these teachers had was generic and not context sensitive. Adapting to the context was therefore a challenge, especially because there was no external support. Teachers needed to adapt to the situation and therefore their teaching approach was integrated, yet it was unclear if this integrated approach would lead to successful teaching as there was no external support, guidance or review (see interview extract of Miss L below) that would enable the teachers to learn from their attempts and experiences. Hence, adaptation of content knowledge into a situated context presented a challenge for these teachers. This challenge was compounded within the multi-grade classrooms as the available departmental guidelines were largely for mono-grade teaching, as indicated by Miss L (below).

In answer to the question of how they gained knowledge for teaching reading, **Miss L** had this to say:

I have also gained knowledge for teaching reading from the Department's documents although I cannot be saying they provide sufficient knowledge that I need because nobody from the Department comes to monitor whether I am on track or not. They do not come here ...mmm... they are lazy to visit our schools because they are so far from the tarred roads. The content that I teach, I know is not on a par with what should be taught in each grade, for instance Grade 2 or 3. I teach learners how to read for comprehension and also how to use punctuations.

While the teachers did have knowledge of grade specific content, teaching this content across two grades of learners in one classroom compromised the learning expectations for each of the grade levels individually. This means that the learners did not get the full benefit of the teaching content of their specific grade, resulting in learners being under par with grade competence expectations. These teachers also found it difficult to determine what content should be taught to

each grade within this multi-grade setup and therefore they resorted to reducing the teaching of reading in favour of increasing vocabulary, comprehension and punctuation, thereby limiting the teaching of appropriate content knowledge for the teaching of reading.

Miss L stated that rural schools were neglected by the Department of Education. In this regard it is quite imperative to understand that content knowledge is not only about the teacher understanding what to teach, but it is also about the content of that learning area that must be taught to learners, in this case literacy. Shulman (1986) refers to this kind of knowledge that teachers have to possess as “subject matter knowledge, as it is the knowledge that grows in the minds of teachers”. Through this knowledge, teachers are able to be innovative and to fill gaps in the content that might arise as they teach. Teachers gain knowledge of the content of each subject from books which may be prescribed or from recourses that they research on their own (Hashweh, 2005).

Regarding what the participants said when responding to this question, it was quite clear that the knowledge and structures that they used for teaching their learners were based on “codified knowledge” (Eurat, 1994). They relied mostly on knowledge that they received from books, but there was no one to “monitor” their understanding. Moreover, it was only limited resources that they relied on for gaining knowledge on the content to be taught. Ball et al. (2008) affirm that knowing the subject is not enough; knowledge of a subject requires more than knowing its facts and concepts. It is thus critical for teachers to understand what needs to be taught in isiZulu Home Language in order to teach their learners reading. In addition to this, teachers in their classrooms have to experiment with different structures in order to make their classrooms their “learning laboratories” (Shulman, 1986). In this discussion it was unmistakably clear that teachers have to engage themselves in structures that will enable them to develop and enhance their knowledge for subject-matter content to be alive and accessible in their minds.

4.4 Teachers' Curriculum Knowledge

To explore the curriculum knowledge that these teachers possessed, I had to clearly understand the terminology “curriculum knowledge”. Shulman (1986) describes curriculum knowledge as a critical category for teacher knowledge as it demands of the teacher to understand the curriculum. Ngubane (2011) states that the curriculum that teachers generally implement, even in rural areas, is intended for mono-grade classes, implying that there may be no curriculum designed specifically for multi-grade teaching. Therefore, curriculum knowledge for teaching reading in multi-grade classes posed a complex issue for the teachers in this context.

Miss L said: *I am confused... (laughing), I really do not know what to teach and what not to teach. The Department is really confusing us, it was first OBE, then RNCS, then NCS, then FFL and now CAPS is in force...mmm... I think these people should come to teach on their own, who do they talk to before changing the curriculum? They don't even care about us here in rural schools, they also don't care that we are teaching multi-grade classes. All they do is just change the curriculum, and we are at stake I am telling you. I just teach reading in whatever way, but I usually teach it the way I was also taught during my primary education years and the knowledge of teaching that I received when I trained as a teacher.*

This teacher stated that there was too much change; teachers were bewildered and she felt that rural schools were mostly at risk in this regard. She had even developed the tendency of teaching the way that best suited her. She was not concerned about the appropriateness of her teaching methods in relation to curriculum needs. For Miss L, curriculum changes at policy level were meaningless. This was because these changes were not supported by a concurrent development of the teachers in rural contexts by the Department of Education. Furthermore, she acknowledged that teachers tended to go back to their original way of teaching as they could not see any need to follow the new curriculum, especially as these policy changes were not relevant to multi-grade classrooms. Hence, while having knowledge of the new curriculum's intentions and content, these teachers paid little attention to them as they perceived that this new knowledge was not applicable in their school context.

In contrast, **Miss K** was positive about the curriculum knowledge that she possessed and speculated that the new curriculum had brought changes that capacitated teachers with the knowledge that they actually needed. She argued, however, that these changes were technical in nature and did not contribute to the conceptual nature of teaching, for example reading, to learners in multi-grade classrooms in a rural context:

The new curriculum – CAPS - is really helping me to understand what to teach when I am teaching reading to my learners. Although they are combined as they are but CAPS made me to understand time allocated for each section of reading and also the pace that I must use for teaching each concept. I have also learnt to invent ways that will facilitate my teaching method.

Miss K was clearly different from Miss L. She spoke of “inventing” new ways of teaching reading in a multi-grade classroom, adapting her long experience of teaching in mono-grade classrooms. She tried to improve her curriculum knowledge. She felt that change would eventually lead to good, though it made her lack confidence now. Miss K clearly relied on her experiences and hoped that something positive would emerge from these curriculum changes.

Miss K said: *At times I wonder why the Department of Education doesn't formulate a curriculum that is multi-grade teaching based. It is the same to all of us although teaching methods are different.*

Miss L said: *We need to adjust whatever that we teach to fit in multi-grade class. We end up not knowing the correct curriculum to be implemented.*

Curriculum knowledge involves a lot of programmes that teachers have to engage in (Ball et al., 2008) so as to gain knowledge of what they should teach. Thus, they have a critical duty where they must have the knowledge of the curriculum that they present to the learners. Shulman (1986, p.10) states that it is expected that “...a professional teacher be familiar with the curriculum materials under that subject and what his or her students are studying in other subjects”. Drawing from the data produced, it was evident that these teachers had to function in a complex context and that the DoE's intervention to assist them was doubtful. This omission therefore prevented these teachers from fully understanding and implementing the curriculum to teach reading in isiZulu Home Language. This also barred them from understanding that “teaching reading is more than mere teaching decoding signs and symbols into sounds and

words” (Joubert, Bester and Meyer, 2008, p.81). Although they engaged themselves in a number of workshops and cluster meetings, they indicated that they did not have enough curriculum knowledge as they saw themselves being marginalised and confused due to constant changes in the curriculum. Clearly, these teachers tended to rely on situation knowledge that guided their teaching of reading. Despite curriculum guidelines and cluster meetings to develop teachers’ capacity to teach the constantly evolving curriculum, these teachers tended to rely on their experiences of past practices and the reality of school context to guide their teaching of reading in multi-grade classes in a rural school context. So, while Ball et al. (2008) advocate that curriculum knowledge involves a lot of programmes that teachers need to engage in, the reality was that these teachers had very few programmes available to them due to the sparsely and remote locality of their school.

4.5 Reading as informing learning

According to National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008), reading enables learners to act creatively and critically in a world which is ever-changing and competitive. Thus, reading is a fundamental skill that every learner should possess in order to be successful in learning. In the establishment of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS) in 2001 for assessment of learners’ reading achievement, it was declared that children’s reading literacy achievement would provide the baseline for future studies of trends in achievement.

The data collected from the two female foundation phase teachers engaged in multi-grade teaching revealed that they were aware that reading plays an important role in the teaching of IsiZulu Home Language in the foundation phase of schooling. They were asked about their perspectives on reading as a critical aspect that informs learning.

Miss L said: *Yes, I believe that knowing how to read is important, but tell me how do you tell when a learner is not really reading. Just imagine in my class I have Grades 2 and 3 combined and I can’t teach them ‘imisindo’ (sounds) that they are supposed to be in, I’m always left behind. I know really that knowing to read is very important.*

Miss K said: *Really it is true; no learning can take place without reading, but what about this context. We are really trying our best. We always ensure that they are not deprived of their right to learn in spite of all these challenges.*

While the teachers acknowledged the importance of learning to read, their attempts at teaching reading were severely compromised by the context of learning. Multi-grade teaching of reading seemed to lag behind the expectations for learners should learn. Hence, despite having the knowledge of what and how to teach reading to learners in these multi-grade classes, little actual teaching and learning occurred. Furthermore, the teachers found it difficult to establish what the learners had learnt.

In light of teachers' indication that reading has a tremendous role to play in developing learners' individual skills in learning, achieving the required level of competence was a major challenge for them. In support of this, Joubert, Bester and Meyer (2008, p.82) stress that reading "...is one of the most powerful ways of receiving ideas, information and stories"; without these powerful ways of unlocking words there will be no learning. In order to improve the level of learning in South Africa, the National Reading Strategy's (DoE, 2008) main goal is to improve the reading competence and levels of all learners in the country, including those who experience barriers to learning and those who are in complex contexts.

4.6 Strategies for teaching reading in a multi-grade classroom

The Handbook on Teaching Reading in Early Grades and the National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008) state that, irrespective of context, teachers have to teach learners reading using different kinds of strategies. Minskoff (2005) also affirms that the only solution to developing good reading skills in learners is to use different methods and strategies. It is quite unfortunate though that literature on teaching reading in a multi-grade foundation phase class is not available. The strategies that are indicated in both the Handbook on Teaching Reading in Early Grades and the National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008) do not address strategies for teaching reading in multi-grade classes as the strategies are for mono-grade classes. These strategies include exposure to environmental print, shared reading, group-guided reading, independent reading and reading aloud.

4.6.1 Environmental Print

According to National Reading Strategies (DoE, 2008), environmental print comprises those written texts that the child sees in his everyday life such as bill boards, advertisements, cartoons, food packaging and clothing labels. These prints serve as an emergent stage of reading. The participants were interviewed about the knowledge they had about this strategy for teaching reading.

Miss K. said: *I first acquired knowledge for teaching reading through my engagement with learners; I developed my own ways of understanding how they learn to read and what techniques to apply when learners are behaving in a certain way. **Angikaze ngiyisebenzise lendlela oyishoyo** (I have never used this strategy you are speaking about), but what about this situation we are... multi-grading, it is really hard, our learners are very poor in reading, we do not offer them enough time for it anyway...*

This interview extract revealed that these teachers had had no formal training (initial and on-going) in the teaching of reading at the foundation phase. Compounding the situation was the lack of training (initial and on-going) in the teaching of reading in IsiZulu (the learners' mother tongue) in the foundation phase. It would therefore explain why these teachers did not have adequate knowledge of or a repertoire of skills on how to teach these learners in the foundation phase of schooling. Of necessity, they relied on methods of teaching that were based on intuition, experience and situational and not pedagogically sound principles and theories.

Rural communities are generally not exposed to massive advertisement and bill boards and even if there are some, most would be printed in English. Moreover, the products that they buy from the local stores usually have labels printed in English. Hence relying on environmental print to support and promote teaching of reading in the mother tongue in a rural community within a multi-grade class will have minimal impact as these teachers would not be able to use these resources to teach reading.

Based on his research in the Amathole District, Brown (2009) reveals that teachers in multi-grade classes often develop methods that best suit them. However, he states that if teachers can have a good grasp of their subject matter knowledge and if their pedagogical skills are suited to multi-grade teaching, they will be more adaptable and flexible in their teaching approaches. In

the process of adapting to contextual realities, these teachers do improvise and use these stimuli to the benefit of their learners.

Miss L said: *I think this is a good starting point for teaching learners how to read. They always see different brands and cartons. **Kuyathengwa ukudla okusemasakeni abhaliwe emakubo** (food in written packaging is brought into their homes).*

This is in accordance with what Senior (2005) and Singh (2011) believe in. They believe that reading is very important because it improves literacy; it also makes learners develop enjoyment and pleasure from texts.

4.6.2 Shared Reading

According to the Handbook on Teaching Reading in the Early Grades and National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008), shared reading is when a teacher and learners are reading a common text. The main purpose of using this strategy is to enable learners to see the words when reading them and at the same time hearing them. National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008) recommends that when the teacher is using this strategy, big books, texts on charts and other reading resources that have visible fonts should be used. I asked the participants about the effectiveness of this method in their classrooms and how they involved learners in this kind of strategy for teaching reading.

Miss L said: *I think it is much better to use this method of teaching because most learners here have illiterate parents and sharing the reading process helps them to understand how some other words are spelt and their meanings. **Bayayijabulela nabo lendlela** (learners are also enjoying this method).*

Miss K said: *Yes, it is easy teaching reading using this method but while helping the other group some of the learners find this to be a good time to misbehave. It is better than the other methods.*

In a classroom that is multi-graded, teachers prefer to use this method as all learners are engaged in the reading activity simultaneously. Hugo (2010) states that although the shared reading method allows learners to access written text that is above their reading level, teachers' assistance is imperative throughout the reading activity. However, in a multi-grade classroom it

is generally perceived that if there is a lack of resources this strategy may result in failure in accomplishing the intended purposes. Divided attention of the teacher across the two groups of learners in the multi-grade class will result in discipline issues amongst the learners. These teachers would now have to contend with teaching reading across two grades, disruptive learners and a lack of resources; this presents a cocktail that would certainly compromise teaching and learning. However, this seems to be the favoured method of teaching reading to learners in a multi-grade classroom context, despite its disruptive challenges.

4.6.3 Group-guided reading

In group-guided reading the teacher works with a group of same ability learners (Maphumulo, 2010). Group-guided reading demands a teacher's thorough preparation because its effectiveness is directed by the teacher.

In a multi-grade classroom this method seems to pose difficulties as the teacher is unable to concentrate on learners with the same reading abilities. This method compels the teacher to thoroughly prepare the activities to be conducted.

Miss K said: *I can't lie to you. I have never used this strategy for teaching reading; the situation is not permitting it. I can't do it really....with my Grade R's and One's I don't think it will be possible.*

Miss L said: *This is a very good method of teaching reading. I have tried it, I think last term, but it was giving me hard time. I read about it from the National Reading Policy, but in my case it didn't work like they suggested. We don't have resources...nje nesimo asivumi (conditions are not permitting).*

It was quite evident that applying this strategy for teaching reading was somewhat unmanageable because of the complex context that these teachers were in. Group-guided reading gives the teacher an opportunity to observe reading behaviours, identify areas of need and allow learners to develop more independence and confidence as they practise and consolidate reading behaviours and skills (Maphumulo, 2010). In the multi-grade classrooms under investigation this was impossible to achieve. The teachers did not have the opportunity to establish same ability

groups to facilitate this kind of pedagogy. The reasons for this were not clear. Either they had not been exposed to processes that would enable them to establish same ability groups or prior attempts had proven to be futile. Clearly, this process requires more than can be expected of teachers in multi-grade contexts. Firstly, the teacher must have a thorough knowledge to assess reading abilities. Secondly, she must have a knowledge of what texts to choose and how to choose these texts so that there would be congruence between ability levels and texts which will lead to greater competence. Thirdly, she would need to guide the reading process to promote learning of reading and this would be across two grades in one classroom. Fourthly, the availability of these resources is limited within a rural context. Where would these teachers access these learning materials from? Hence, while this method of teaching reading would be a very useful strategy for teaching reading, the planning, accessing of resources and the time needed would prevent these teachers from using this method of teaching reading to learners in the foundation phase in multi-grade classrooms in rural schools.

4.6.4 Independent Reading

Independent reading demands setting aside time that is used exclusively for reading. When reading independently, each learner reads material or a book that interests him or her individually. According to National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008), time has to be set aside in each school for learners and teachers to be engaged in “Drop All and Read” (DAR) sessions. To do this, each classroom needs a range of authentic materials at age-appropriate level for learners to enjoy their reading.

Participants were asked whether they set aside time for learners to drop everything and read and give reports to the class or group.

Miss K said: *Yes, we do have that period and learners are really trying, but the problem is with the reading resources, we don't have them here in our school.*

Miss L said: *I always try with my learners but they are still young, they need my help because we don't have resources. They end up reading one and the same books and find that others are suitable for a certain grade and not the other.*

According to The Handbook on Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (DoE, 2008), teachers have to help learners to develop their independent reading skills by doing specific exercises that are related to independent reading. The two teachers were trying their best to accomplish this even though the context was not conducive. The greatest challenge to independent reading in the school was the lack of resources and the inconstant supply of new reading materials. It is a well-known fact that rural schools have limited supplies of books. Moreover, rural learners have very little access to books in their homes. For these reasons it was difficult for these teachers to use this form of pedagogy on an on-going basis. The learners would have read most of the books that would be available to them. Repeat reading of the same text would result in boredom, disruptive behaviour amongst the learners and no growth in knowledge for the learners. Furthermore, teachers found it difficult to distribute the available books among the learners in a manner that would support learning. Distribution of limited reading material became a technical exercise merely to ensure that the learners would have something to read. This negated the need for appropriate and age-related reading material.

4.6.6 Reading Aloud

National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008) articulates that reading aloud is when the teacher reads a text aloud to the learners and the learners read after the teacher. With the reading aloud teaching strategy the text is at a higher level than the learners can read independently (Singh, 2009).

Participants showed much interest in this method as they indicated that although they were teaching in multi-grade classes, working with texts using this method was viable.

Miss K said: *I really like this method of teaching reading and my learners like it too. It is useful even to those learners who are in the other grade because they all read along. We read stories together.*

Miss L said: *This is a very good method in our situation. We all read, both grades read simultaneously. Their vocabulary increases and the way words are pronounced in their Home Language also develop.*

It was evident that, through the use of this method, even learners who were taught in a harsh context could become better readers as it increased their vocabulary and developed their Home Language skills. In support, Eraut (1996) believes that experiences that teachers accumulate about their teaching assist them in formulating the methods that are suitable for the learners they teach and also for themselves. In this respect, these teachers believed that reading aloud was shown to benefit learners in multi-grade contexts and therefore it was a favoured approach to teaching reading in a multi-grade classroom. Younger learners benefit from acquiring more vocabulary and the appropriate pronunciation of different words. Older learners also benefit from this approach as they would have had this opportunity in their previous year of schooling and the repeat process helps reinforce their learning. Furthermore, this is one opportunity for the whole class to participate in without the teacher making any differentiation in the teaching strategy or the teaching content. These teachers can then focus their energies on teaching rather than on managing the multi-grade teaching process.

4.7 Observation of teachers teaching reading in multi-grade classrooms

4.7.1 Lesson Observation 1

Teacher 1: Miss K

Research Question: How do teachers teach literacy content in a foundation phase multi-grade classroom?

Time: 10h00-11h00

Class Combination: Grades R and One

Learner Enrolment: 22 (grade R = 9 and grade One = 13)

Lesson Observed: Story Reading

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Criteria	Rate of recurrence				
	0%	1 - 25%	26 - 50%	51 – 75%	76– 100%
Teacher's introduction of lesson			√		
Activities that learners are engaged in				√	
Teacher's focus			√		
Learners' response towards activities				√	
Classroom arrangement			√		
Kinds of questions asked by the teacher				√	
Guidance to learners					√

Key: 0% = not at all; 1-25% =very little; 26-50% = sometimes; 51-75% = often; 76-100%= all the time.

4.7.1.1 Elaboration of the collected data

Miss K taught both grades simultaneously. Learners from both grades were asked to say and act the recitation “Nogwaja bengihambe ngayizolo”. This is a recitation based on what the rabbit did the previous day. Learners from both grades were expected to rhyme simultaneously. The teacher then asked learners to repeat the rhyme because they were nervous; seemingly the nervousness was created by my presence. After they had repeated the rhyme they sat down.

The teacher showed them some pictures of animals (rhino, giraffe, monkey, zebra, buffalo and a buck). She asked learners to tell her what animals they were. The introduction of this lesson was quite enthusiastic and almost the whole class worked collaboratively with the teacher. Some of the younger learners from Grade R did not know the names of all the animals. The teacher explained where these animals lived and asked whether learners had seen them. She read the story “Horns Only”. This was a story about animals who were invited to a party in the jungle. The animals that had to attend the party were only those animals with horns; however, the monkey and the zebra wore fake horns in order to be accepted at the party. After a lot of partying and dancing, the horns fell off. They were then chased away from the party.

The teacher used a big book in which the story was printed. She showed the learners the outside cover of the book and asked them to tell her what they saw on the cover. She facilitated learners’ responses through asking some questions using the picture cards she had used when introducing the lesson. She started reading from the book, pausing occasionally to ask questions. Grade Ones were more active as compared to Grade R’s. She asked learners to predict what would happen next and she encouraged them to express their thoughts on how they would feel if they were not invited to a party.

The teacher had prepared some flash cards with words and the names of animals were written next to the picture of the animal. Learners had to look at the picture and then say a word. Grade Ones read these words taking turns as groups and later Grade R’s were only picture reading. While this was happening, some learners were disruptive and the teacher had to focus her attention on disciplining them.

The lesson I observed indicated that it was going to be very interesting if it was taught in a mono-grade class. The vocabulary building exercise for Grade One was good; however, the

teacher had to attend to Grade R's too. This consumed a lot of time and adherence to the timetable and the time allocated for this lesson was ignored. The learning space was not conducive to learning because of the classroom condition. The wall was not well painted which caused some charts to fall off the wall and the floor was neither tiled nor carpeted. Some windows were broken which caused the wind to bluster into the classroom, causing some resources that the teacher had hand-prepared to be scattered through the classroom.

From the above observation it was clear that several action steps were required to teach this multi-grade class. The use of the rhyme to re-cap the previous day's work was a useful strategy used by the teacher to do two things. Firstly, it was used as a way of reminding the learners of what they had learnt the previous day. Secondly, it was used as a strategy to bring the class to order so that the new lesson could start in a disciplined manner. Other strategies that were used by the teacher to focus the learners' attention included the use of a large reading book so that the learners could see the book and its pictures clearly. Hence, the choice of the book was an important consideration in the teaching of reading in this multi-grade classroom. Word reading and picture reading was intended as a differentiation strategy between the two grades in this class and this was made possible by the use of flashcards and pictures. The flashcards with words targeted the Grade One learners while the large pictures of animals targeted Grade R learners.

Clearly the teacher struggled with discipline issues and this compromised the intended learning outcomes of the two grades in the teaching of reading. However, the teacher wisely did not pay attention to timetable considerations and this assisted her to focus on the learning content rather than on how long she should spend on this learning activity. This kind of approach to teaching clearly indicated that the PCK was a complex process of understanding the context, the knowledge of the learners, the selection of teaching and learning materials and the management of learning and teaching. It seemed that the PCK adopted by the teacher had been developed over years of teaching in such situations with lots of 'trial and error'. External inputs into teaching of reading within a multi-grade classroom in a rural school are clearly something that may not assist these teachers. One has to immerse oneself in such teaching situations and learn by experience as a way of gaining knowledge through practice.

4.7.2 Lesson Observation 2

Teacher 2: Miss L

Research Question: How do teachers teach literacy content in a foundation phase multi-grade classroom?

Time: 08h00 – 09h00

Class Combination: Grades Two and Three

Learner Enrolment: 20 (grade Two = 11 and grade Three = 9)

Lesson Observed: Phonics: “ntsh”

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Criteria	Rate of recurrence				
	0%	1 – 25%	26 – 50%	51 – 75%	76 -100%
Teacher’s introduction of the lesson				√	
Activities that learners are engaged in				√	
Teacher’s Focus			√		
Learners’ response towards activities			√		
Classroom arrangement		√			
Kinds of				√	

questions asked by the teacher					
Guidance to learners				√	

Keys: 0% = not at all; 1-25% = very little; 26-50% = sometimes; 51-75% = often; 76-100% = all the time

4.7.2.1 Elaboration of classroom observation two

Miss L taught both grades simultaneously. Learners were asked to read rhyming words from the wall chart. One learner from grade three took a pointer and read the words; the whole class followed and read the word. The teacher asked them to read these words for the second time. This was a vocabulary exercise with sounds they had already learnt.

*The teacher wrote the sound “**ntsh**” on the chalkboard and asked learners to give her words with that sound - words like ‘**amantshontho**’, ‘**intshebe**’, ‘**intshumayelo**’ were given. Learners from Grade Three learners demonstrated more knowledge of words with this sound as compared to the learners from Grade Two. The teacher wrote down all those words that the learners gave her; I noticed that there were no resources (e.g., books or word cards) which could facilitate this activity. Grade Two learners were given more attention because it was the first time they read this phonic. All those words written were read by the Grade Two learners as a vocabulary exercise and the Grade Three learners repeated the words after them.*

After several involvements with reading of the words, the teacher asked the Grade Three learners to do an exercise in groups where they had to complete sentences using those words on the board. She wrote five incomplete sentences on the chalkboard and the learners had to fill in the gaps. After each group had completed writing, they came forward and read their sentences.

*The instructions were clearly set out and learners were not confused as they refrained from writing what was supposed to be written by the other grade. In the meantime the teacher erased the “**ntsh**” sound and vowels from the words on the chalkboard and asked Grade Two learners*

to fill in the spaces in those words. They had to write these words in their exercise books which were handed out by their group monitor.

During the observation I noticed that the teacher was encountering problems as far as the discipline of learners was concerned. While attending to one group, she would constantly discipline the other group. Although each group was seated in a corner which made it easy for the teacher and observer to notice the distinctive differences between the grades, the learners constantly crossed over the 'border' and moved to and fro.

This observation revealed that it was important for the teacher to separate the learners according to grades into particular areas of the classroom. This was required both to manage the classroom discipline and to teach the content to the two groups. The lesson used one unit of learning, but the emphasis on teaching was differentiated across the two groups. The Grade Two learners were directed to word recognition while the Grade Three learners were directed to learn the usage of words in sentences. The way the teacher managed this differentiated learning was complex and required deep thought and experience. Firstly, the teacher needed to understand what competence was expected from the learners who were learning to read. Then she had to select texts that would benefit both groups and would meet the competence requirements for each of the two groups. Thirdly, she had to identify teaching strategies that would not disrupt learning across the two grades. By focusing on word recognition in the lower grade and usage of the word in a sentence by the higher grade learners, there seemed to be clear transition of learning across the two grades as the lower grade learners were also able to learn word usage from the higher grade learners. This complementary learning process seemed to be the key to the PCK of the teacher teaching reading in a multi-grade classroom in a rural school. Additional to the limitations of the situation in this classroom was the fact that exposure to word usage was limited to inside the classroom situation as home support was limited.

4.8 Document Analysis

After the observations of teachers had been completed, the documents that they used for their daily planning and teaching were analysed. The analysis of documents was one of the methods of collecting data from the two foundation phase female teachers engaged in multi-grade teaching

in a school situated in a rural area. Since documents are one of the major sources of data production in qualitative research (Naicker, 2011), I managed to identify some of the challenges that the teachers were facing. Rule and John (2011, p.80) support the analysis of documents by stating that document analysis “...assists in identifying relevance and gaps in trends”. Documents like lesson plans layout are important whether they accommodate mono- or multi-grade teaching. I realised that even though the lesson plans were written out and that time was allocated for reading, there was no clear indication of the different work to be done in the different grades and different strategies to be used for teaching reading.

I analysed the content that the teachers intended to cover in each reading lesson and I also examined the philosophy and implications of teaching reading. I realised that the teachers were not following the reading guidelines as provided by the National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008); they were only concentrating on limited strategies and outcomes for teaching reading. In most cases, the teachers were concentrating on vocabulary building rather than on independent reading for knowledge. They were also not keeping any records of reading activities or progress reports of learners’ reading. I also realised that, since they were not receiving any support from departmental officials, each teacher was using totally different strategies for teaching reading in her class, and this promoted inconsistency in both teachers’ records. It was also evident that events that promoted reading such as Readathon Week, Literacy Week, Library Week and Drop Everything and Read (READ) were not observed because teachers did not know about them.

4.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the analysed data were presented according to five themes. It is significant to highlight that both participants regarded reading as a critical aspect that informs learning. They strongly believed that no learning could take place without reading; however, the challenges that they encountered as teachers in a multi-grade context in a rural area prevented them from accomplishing this ideal. The plight of these teachers highlighted the fact that although they possessed some pedagogical and content knowledge for teaching reading, the skills they primarily possessed were for teaching mono-grade classes because that is how they were trained.

They said they believed that if they could receive proper training on multi-grade teaching, their attitude might transform.

The next chapter will deal with the findings and will conclude with some recommendations based on this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The intention of this study was to explore foundation phase teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) for teaching reading in IsiZulu Home Language in a multi-grade foundation phase situated in a rural context. This chapter aims at presenting a discussion of the findings based on an analysis of the data pertaining to the research questions. A summary of the findings highlighting the key issues that emerged from the data analysis is presented, while some recommendations will conclude this report.

5.2 Summary of the findings

This section presents an exposition of the key findings about foundation phase teachers' pedagogical content knowledge for teaching literacy in a multi-grade class situated in rural setting. At the conception of the study, reading in IsiZulu Home Language was singled out as one of the literacy components in the foundation phase that required exploration. A key finding that emerged from the data and that was supported by the literature review suggests that teachers who teach reading in multi-grade classrooms in a rural context experience challenges that compromise the teaching of reading to their learners. These challenges and their resultant impact on teaching reading are elucidated in the subsections below.

5.2.1 Contextual Challenges

According to Barley (2008), there is no special preparation of new teachers who are required to teach in rural areas. When pre-service teachers are trained, they are not engaged in special training that prepares them for teaching in rural areas. In fact, teacher training is the same across the board. Adapting to these often 'alien' rural contexts poses a serious challenge to particularly those teachers who have never been exposed to anything but urban teaching environments. Challenges that teachers encounter involved a lack of parental support, access to resources, school resources, appropriate training, and curriculum and general exposure to learning

opportunities. These wide ranging challenges are individually difficult to overcome and compounding the effects of all these challenges poses a complexity that requires a sustained and multipronged response (Barley, 2008). Some of these complex contextual challenges are presented below.

It was evident from the participants' responses that they were experiencing severe challenges in teaching in this rural school as some of the facilities were lacking when compared to those in schools in urban areas. They highlighted that the learners they were teaching travelled long distances to school which caused them to arrive late at school. This finding was corroborated by Emerging Voices (2005).

Teachers in rural areas face the challenge of learners who come from a poor socio-economic background and they are required to address learners' basic needs first before they can attempt to teach them. Eraut (1994, p.2) refers to this as "...situational knowledge which is child specific and situation specific". Most teachers in rural areas have to understand the context that they are in in order to be able to teach learners in that particular context. The situation in rural districts is different from that in urban areas as they have varying economic levels. Moreover, no special training is offered to new teachers to teach in such conditions (Barley, 2008, p.2). Meanwhile, these teachers are also faced with similar curriculum expectations as those in urban areas. It is generally acknowledged that in South Africa the curriculum policies that are developed do not distinguish between different schooling contexts. As a result, teachers in rural areas often adapt through trial and error processes.

The findings related to situational knowledge thus revealed that knowledge of the school situation and context is vital for teachers to understand and adapt to the environment in which they are required to teach.

5.2.2 Pedagogical Knowledge Challenge

According to Shulman (1986), pedagogical knowledge is the knowledge of how to teach. Discourse on teaching is actually based on teachers' philosophical beliefs, values, perspectives,

experiences and knowledge that the teacher has for teaching learners. Pedagogical knowledge is actually the art and science of teaching.

It was evident from the participants' responses that they regarded themselves as generally lacking pedagogical knowledge for teaching reading in isiZulu Home Language in their classrooms. They highlighted that the critical reason behind this was that they were required to teach multi-grade classes for which they had not been trained. They revealed that, in order to cope with the challenges, they were sometimes compelled to formulate their own methods of teaching, thus deviating from those stipulated in the curriculum policy. Since pedagogical knowledge requires teachers' understanding of learners' cognitive and social development, it is critical that the methods of teaching and learning that they use are strategised for the accomplishment of the purposes and values as anticipated (Ball, Thames and Phelps, 2008).

The findings also revealed that while teachers did possess pedagogical knowledge through their training and their experiences as professional teachers, pedagogical knowledge for teaching in multi-grade classrooms and in a rural school context was lacking. However, these teachers should be commended for the fact that they managed to adapt mono-grade and urban context pedagogical knowledge to teach their learners. They were compelled to rely on experiential and situational knowledge to assist them in the selection and adaptation of their pedagogical knowledge to inform their pedagogical content knowledge in order to teach reading to learners in multi-grade classrooms within a rural school. In short, as they lacked the necessary training and support, these teachers needed to develop their adaptation and selection skills in order to be effective in teaching reading in the deprived context in which they had to function.

The respondents also highlighted that they found it difficult to occupy learners with relevant and a sufficient variety of reading material and activities for each grade. Furthermore, it was virtually impossible to use individual learning approaches as they had to manage the time allocated for each subject to teach multi-grade groups. In support of this, Brown (2009, p.71) articulates that "...there [are] specific pedagogical knowledge and skills for multi-grade teaching as opposed to single-grade teaching". They believed that the teaching of reading strategies as postulated by the National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008) did not concern them as the guidelines are aimed at

mono-grade classes. Based on a study that was conducted in Ireland, Mulryan-Kyne (2004) found that although there were some advantages about multi-grade teaching in schools, organising the classes for instruction and ensuring the suitability of lesson content for grade levels and abilities were regarded as extremely difficult tasks by many teachers.

In this regard I recommend that teachers who are teaching multi-grade classes should change their philosophy about the appropriate teaching and learning methods to be applied and to adapt to the context that they are in. They have to understand that there is no particular pedagogy that is solely suitable for multi-grade teaching; however, the pedagogy for teaching reading in mono-grade classes is also applicable to the multi-grade classroom. The involvement of the principal, school management team (SMT) and parents is crucial in assisting teachers to understand learners' background, preconceived knowledge and the environment as such.

5.2.3 Teaching and Learning Resources Challenge

The literature reviewed revealed that there is lack of teaching and learning resources globally in most schools engaged in multi-grade teaching. In addition to this, Gardiner (2008), Singh (2009) and Benveniste and Mc Ewan (2000) posit that the shortage of teaching and learning resources is one of the factors that impose a negative impact on the delivery of education to those schools situated in rural contexts. Nevertheless, curriculum delivery is envisaged to be the same across all contexts. Mulryan-Kayne (2004) asserts that the teaching and learning resources challenge was a predominant concern that was raised by the participants in her study in Ireland. This particular setback becomes more severe in those schools practising multi-grade teaching in rural areas.

The findings of this study corroborated Mulryan-Kayne's (2004) observations, as participants highlighted the issue of a lack and shortage of teaching and learning resources as one of the factors that hindered the effective teaching of reading in IsiZulu Home Language. They revealed that most materials they used for IsiZulu reading were outdated and not grade-specific, which thus compelled them to develop handmade materials which, at times, did not achieve the intended outcomes. Such resources demand overdependence on teachers' excellent abilities to teach in such complex contexts. To strengthen their tribulation, participants had not been trained

in the application of resources in a multi-grade classroom, which thus contributed to their negative experiences related to the usage of minimal teaching and learning resources.

Rural contexts have minimal learning opportunities outside the classroom and school. Hence, while urban teachers can make references to newspapers, bill boards and advertisements, rural school teachers do not have such opportunities to reinforce or extend classroom learning. This means that these teachers, besides having a lack of adequate learning materials in their schools, are further disadvantaged by not having access to publically available teaching and learning resources. Their PCK is thus compromised by a general lack of adequate learning resources and learning opportunities. The effects thereof are two-fold: it becomes a challenge to meet the minimum expected learning outcomes for learners and the learners' ability to use incidental learning experiences to reinforce their learning is neutralised. Hence, these teachers' PCK is generally limited to a realisation of what is reasonably possible.

A positive side to being taught in a multi-grade classroom is that the learners experience double exposure to the learning content; the first occurs in their first year of being in the multi-grade classroom and this is reinforced in their second year of being in the same class. However, higher order learning in the advanced grade is minimised; however, through a dedicated teachers' experience and insights, higher order learning is possible.

I recommend that the Department of Education launch a pilot programme to train teachers in the effective use of resources in the classroom, with particular reference to multi-grade teaching. In addition to this, teachers need to be introduced to a programme on resource development. Such programmes will give teachers an opportunity to engage in collaborative teaching strategies with other teachers from different schools. Secondly, I recommend that the Department of Education adapt the Norms and Standards Funding for schools to allocate sufficient funding for schools functioning in complex and demanding contexts, irrespective of these schools' quintile. Lastly, I recommend that teachers who teach in multi-grade teaching engage in Teacher Learning

Communities (TLC) where they share ideas and possible teaching methods and resources that can be used in order to alleviate their ordeals.

5.2.4 Curriculum Challenges

Curriculum development in South Africa has been characterised by constant transformations (Morrow, 2007). These curriculum changes create challenges for teachers as they need to constantly adapt to new transformations. The findings revealed that teaching and learning hindrances due to an ever-changing curriculum were even more severe in a multi-grade teaching context. An unmistakable hindrance is that curriculum policies focus on mono-grade classes. Mulryan-Kayne (2004) refers to this kind of a curriculum as an “overloaded curriculum” (p.16). The generic literacy curriculum had to be implemented across all school contexts, irrespective of the challenges that some of the teachers may face in complex contexts. The participants suggested that the curriculum would be worthier if the Department of Education would consider certain measures that would address and accommodate multi-grade teaching. Teachers revealed that they were compelled to spend extra time to compare the contents for each grade and to attempt to close the gaps that might arise when teaching because the documents that they were using were structured for mono-grade classes. This at times compelled them to invent their own methods of teaching reading and to develop instructional plans that deviated from those stipulated by curriculum requirements. The teachers said they aimed at equipping their learners with basic skills such being able to read IsiZulu Home Language; however, there were no materials or guideline documents that assisted them in gaining knowledge of how to teach reading in a multi-grade classroom.

The literature reviewed also exposed that teachers are working under severe conditions where the curriculum needs and objectives are not addressing multi-grade teaching contexts. According to Vithanapathirana (2007, p.139), in Sri Lanka they term their kind of curriculum “competency-based curriculum” because it is concerned with learners’ competences in basic skills. He states that basic competences like writing, counting and reading are the most important skills that learners should be competent in. Ngubane (2011) articulates that curricula across the globe are not structured for multi-grade teaching which causes teachers to struggle because assistance or

guidance from departmental officials is minimal. In addition to this, Brown (2009, p.72) states that multi-grade teachers "...are unable to adjust the single-grade curriculum to a multi-grade context". This is a major cause for teachers' failure to teach successfully in a multi-grade context. Little (2004), on the other hand, is optimistic that curriculum delivery can be beneficial for learners if there can be an increased awareness of multi-grade schooling, curriculum adaptation, quasi mono-grade (group teaching as if mono-grade teaching) and learner and materials-centred learning. Through these strategies teachers' attitude can be changed. Little (2004, p.13) asserts that policy makers need to be aware of the multi-grade reality and suggests that they should develop resources, plan the curriculum, develop materials, and engage in teacher preparation and assessment strategies "...in collaboration with teachers".

I urgently recommend that special provisioning by curriculum policy developers should be made for multi-grade schooling where guidelines and constituents will be systematically unpacked for such schooling systems. I also recommend that curriculum developers should work collaboratively with teachers in developing materials as they are the ones responsible for curriculum implementation. Furthermore, intensive teacher training workshops and seminars on multi-grade teaching are of high necessity as teachers are in "sink or swim" conditions in their schools. Such massive in-service training of teachers will impact positively on their attitude towards multi-grade teaching as some consider this kind of schooling as detrimental to the education system in South Africa for schools situated in rural settings.

5.2.5 Support from Department of Education Officials

It was evident from the data collected from the participants that they felt that teachers across schools were faced with conditions where minimum or no support was rendered by the Department of Education officials. Participants revealed that lack of support had a massive contributing factor towards their negative attitude to multi-grade teaching. They were expected to teach and also assess learners using prescribed strategies even though there were no support structures from the department.

The literature also revealed that in some rural schools quality teaching and learning is lacking as teachers are at times losing motivation to carry on against all odds. Brown (2009) argues that the

involvement of parents in their children's learning can combat the high levels of challenges that teachers face when teaching reading in their classrooms. They should be involved in assisting teachers with teaching their learners to read although some of them are illiterate. For example, forming community structures for reading activities could motivate learners to have a passion for reading. In addition to this, departmental officials can also organise community training like "Mobile Library on Wheels", a reading awareness programme whereby the community can have a designated area where a library bus is parked. The librarian can then help the community with reading skills development. As a result, teaching reading in a multi-grade classroom could bear minimum challenges as some learners will be assisting the teacher through peer teaching and self-study.

In addition to this, I recommend that the Department of Education officials need to engage themselves in learning how other developing countries across the globe manage multi-grade teaching for effective teaching and learning in rural schools. In the meantime, support training in Clusters and Wards is a necessity as teachers need moral support and suitable strategies for teaching reading multi-grade classes.

5.3 Opportunities for teaching reading in multi-grade classes in rural settings

In spite of all the challenges that have been highlighted about multi-grade teaching, there are opportunities and advantages for teaching in this complex context. The literature reviewed has revealed that there are advantages in teaching in these contexts, although they diminish because of often over-powering challenges. Mulryan-Kayne (2004) lists some advantages from multi-grade teaching. She says that gains are two-fold: there is gain for the teachers and also gain for learners. An advantage for learners based on academic achievement is that those who are low-achievers gain an advantage of revising previous years' work while at the same time making links with the current year's work. An advantage for teachers is that they get to know learners better. In this way learners improve their performance and learning styles because they spend two academic years being taught by the same teacher. Brown (2009, p.80) commends multi-grade teaching by stating that "...it plays a significant role in efforts to open access to education and improve the quality of education provision in rural communities in South Africa".

Little (2004) also applauds multi-grade teaching because it promotes social understanding among learners. They are often engaged in peer teaching and learning while the teacher is attending to the other group, which thus makes them understand one another better. Those learners who are high achievers assist in pulling through those who can't read well; in that sense teachers' duty becomes lighter.

The findings revealed that teachers' negative attitude towards multi-grade teaching was aggravated by the lack of support from departmental officials. They also revealed that teaching in a rural area was a challenge on its own and that multi-grade teaching made it worse. In addition to this, teaching reading became hectic because there was a lack of teaching and learning resources. This affected the pace at which they could teach. However, Prinsloo (2008), in a research study conducted by HSRC, reveals that the teaching methods for reading used by teachers are often a loosely-applied whole-language approach which places emphasis on reading whole passages of meaningful and authentic texts and more lenient approaches to literacy development. It is thus evident that should teachers be given training opportunities on how to use language appropriately to teach reading, they will be able to teach reading even in a multi-grade teaching context.

I recommend that schools with multi-grade classes be given first preference for training of teachers and refresher courses on how curriculum, learner discipline, classroom organisation and different teaching methods should be administered when teaching. The DoE should also generate and supply teaching and learning resources that are multi-grade teaching friendly. There is a probability that, through these endeavours, teachers will be able to understand the advantages of multi-grade teaching. I think it is also the duty of the Department of Education to transform teachers' perceptions about multi-grade teaching through networking with different stakeholders like subject advisors and organisations that promote literacy.

5.4 Strategies Used by Teachers when Teaching Reading in a Multi-grade Classroom

Currently there is neither literature nor curriculum policy that speaks directly about strategies of teaching reading in a multi-grade classroom. Consequently, teachers are compelled to generate their own strategies which are classroom experiences-based. This creates a lot of tension for

teachers as they have to strive helplessly to find suitable methods for teaching reading. This situation is exacerbated for novice teachers.

Through a two-day observation, I realised that teachers lacked the knowledge of how to use multiple methods for teaching reading as they only used reading aloud. I also realised that during the reading period teachers were concentrating on word-building and vocabulary instead of having well-grounded objectives based on knowledge, skills and attitude for each reading activity. I suggest that all strategies for teaching reading, namely emergent reading (exposure to environmental print), reading aloud, paired reading, shared reading and independent reading, are feasible if a teacher has a well-grounded knowledge of how to apply these strategies.

Furthermore, teachers failed to engage learners in self-study, peer-teaching or collaborative learning. Older learners were not given the opportunity to teach younger learners how to read. This lack of collaborative learning led to ill-discipline as learners were uncontrollable when the teacher was concentrating on the other group of learners. Brown (2009) suggests that professional development needs to focus on curriculum adaptation and multi-grade classroom management which need to be taken into consideration when training teachers on multi-grade teaching.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter provided a summary of the findings and offered recommendations. The study aimed at exploring foundation phase teachers' pedagogical content knowledge for teaching literacy in a multi-grade classroom in a rural context. Teaching of reading in IsiZulu Home Language was singled out as the main point of interest. Some gaps were identified, thus arousing the need to be explored. Multi-grade teaching in South Africa is becoming a widespread phenomenon, more especially in rural areas and sparsely populated areas. There is therefore a need to capacitate teachers with adequate skills that will deepen their knowledge with regard to teaching literacy. On-going professional support from the Department of Education officials is the most needed priority for supporting teachers engaged in multi-grade teaching. This professional support includes organising of workshops and seminars, provisioning of adequate teaching and learning

resources, improving school and classroom infrastructure, and provisioning of learner-support systems.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT LETTER

28 June 2012

Informed Consent

Dear Research Participant

I hereby write this letter to request your permission to be the participant of my research study that I will conduct in your school. Kindly receive hereof a brief description on how the research will be conducted:

I am a Master in Education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. One of the requirements for the fulfillment of this degree is to do a dissertation. My dissertation topic is: Exploring foundation phase teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) for teaching Literacy in multi-graded classrooms in rural contexts. This study is focusing on teachers' content knowledge for teaching reading as Literacy component and their pedagogical knowledge for teaching it.

The reason for conducting this study is to explore teachers' knowledge for Literacy content and the methods of teaching different components of Literacy as a subject in a multi-graded classroom. The study will assist in better understanding of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge through interviews, observation and analysis of their monthly and daily planning.

This study will expose kinds of pedagogies that you as Foundation Phase teachers have for teaching Literacy in a multi-graded class in rural context. This will serve the purpose of informing my practice and knowledge in this area of teaching. Furthermore, this study will afford me, policy makers and other departmental officials the opportunity to understand how multi-grade teachers teach reading across learners of different grades but in a single classroom.

Data will be collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. This will involve asking teachers open-ended questions which will be audio-taped. Secondly, observations during teaching will be conducted in order to get an understanding of how the teacher involves

learners in reading activities yet in different grades. Analysis of teachers' preparations, assessments and scoring will be done as a last method of data collection.

It is important for you as a participant to understand that:

- a) Your identity and your school will never be exposed. Pseudonyms will be used when writing this report.
- b) If during the research study you feel like withdrawing due to certain circumstances, you are allowed to do so.
- c) In cases where you don't want to answer questions posed, you are free to remain silent.

The information that will be collected will be used for research purposes only.

Kindly receive my contact details as well as my Supervisor's:

Patience Jabulile Mzimela: 073 324 8882/ jabu.mzimela@gmail.com

Supervisor: Prof. Labby Ramrathan: 031 260 8065/ ramrathanp@ukzn.ac.za

School of Education & Development

Edgewood Campus

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Yours faithfully

P.J. Mzimela

Student No.: 207 522 452

CONSENT FORM

I (Name and surname in full), hereby give consent to be the participant on a study based on: The exploration of foundation phase teachers' pedagogical content knowledge for teaching Literacy in multi-graded classrooms in rural context.

I fully understand that I am permitted to withdraw from this project if need arises.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF REQUEST TO THE PRINCIPAL

28 Tollgate Road

Southgate

Phoenix

4068

28 June 2012

The Principal

Dulini Primary School

Ndwedwe

4342

Dear Madam

REQUEST FOR A PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL

I hereby write this letter to request the permission to conduct a research study in your school. Kindly receive hereof the details of how the study will be conducted:

I am a Master in Education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. One of the requirements for the fulfillment of this degree is to do a dissertation. My dissertation topic is: Exploring foundation phase teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) for teaching Literacy in multi-graded classrooms in rural contexts. This study is focusing on teachers' content knowledge for teaching reading as Literacy component and their pedagogical knowledge for teaching it.

The reason for conducting this study is to explore teachers' knowledge for Literacy content and the methods of teaching different components of Literacy as a subject in a multi-graded

classroom. The study will assist in better understanding of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge through interviews, observation and analysis of their monthly and daily planning.

This study will expose kinds of pedagogies that Foundation Phase teachers have for teaching Literacy in a multi-graded class in rural context. This will serve the purpose of informing my practice and knowledge in this area of teaching. Furthermore, this study will afford me, policy makers and other departmental officials the opportunity to understand how multi-grade teachers teach reading across learners of different grades but in a single classroom.

Your school was sampled based on the information that it was engaged in multi-graded teaching. Data will be collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. This will involve asking teachers open-ended questions which will be audio-taped. Secondly, observations during teaching will be conducted in order to get an understanding of how the teacher involves learners in reading activities yet in different grades. Analysis of teachers' preparations, assessments and scoring will be done as a last method of data collection.

I solemnly promise that any information that will be provided during this study will remain confidential and that it will only be used for research purposes only.

The information that will be collected will be used for research purposes only.

Kindly receive my contact details as well as my Supervisor's:

Patience Jabulile Mzimela: 073 324 8882/ jabu.mzimela@gmail.com

Supervisor: Prof. Labby Ramrathan: 031 260 8065/ ramrathanp@ukzn.ac.za

School of Education & Development

Edgewood Campus


University of KwaZulu-Natal

Yours faithfully

P.J. Mzimela (207 522 452)

APPENDIX C

APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE DoE

 **Department of Education**
SOUTH AFRICA

Prophet Shadrach Akor **Tel: 012 345 6789** **Fax: 012 345 6789**

Minister of Education
25 Tlokgeng Road
Gauteng
Pretoria
0000


Dear Mr. Akor:

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THIS FOR DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **Regulating Foundation Phase Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) for Teaching Literacy in a Multi-graded Classroom in Rural Contexts**, in the **WuZhu-Mat Department of Education Institutions** has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher guarantees that education and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. (primary, secondary, tertiary and institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research).
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 21 August 2012 to 31 December 2013.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Education Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mr. Akor at the earliest convenient time.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Research Planning, Private Bag 70107, Pretoria 0001.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to the following schools and institutions:

10.1 Duff Primary School


Minister of Education
Head of Departmental Education

24-06-2012
Date

Minister is present and personally
signed the end of duty.

28 Aug 2012 15:50

9 0 940 108

APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE RESEARCH PROTOCOL



APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. How long have you been teaching at the Foundation Phase?
2. Which contexts were you teaching in during this period? Was it a multi or mono-graded class?
3. How long have you been teaching Literacy? In which context were you teaching the Literacy?
4. What are some of the things that the teacher has to know when teaching reading at the Foundation Phase?
5. Do you think there's a difference in teaching reading in mono or multi-graded class?
6. What are some of the challenges that you face when teaching reading in a multi-graded class?
7. Why do you think you are facing these challenges? What knowledge do you require to face these challenges?
8. What strategies do you think can be used to alleviate these challenges? How did you come to know about these strategies?
9. Did you have any training for teaching in multi-graded class? What kind of training did you get?
10. If you can be chosen as a trainer, what will be your focus, why? What will you consider as the most important thing and why?
11. Is there anything you want to share with me or can benefit me in this topic?

APPENDIX F

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Criteria	Frequency				
	0	1 - 25	26 - 50	51 - 75	76 - 100
Teacher's introduction of lesson					
Activities that learners are engaged in					
Teacher's focus					
Learners' response towards activities					
Classroom arrangement					
Kinds of questions asked by the teacher					
Guidance to learners					

Keys: 0% = not at all; 1-25% = very little; 26-50% = sometimes; 51-75% = often; 76-100% = all the time

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

FIRST PARTICIPANT

CODES: Interviewer: **PJM**

Grades R&1 Teacher: **MISS K**

PJM: Good afternoon colleague, it is pleasure to me to meet you this afternoon. I would like to thank you for allowing me to conduct this research in your school and also spending time with me which you would have used for other things important to you. I promise that whatever that we will discuss here will never be known by anybody else. In order to keep this anonymity, I will change your identity.

I would first like to know how long have you been teaching in the Foundation Phase. In order to keep track on your responses I would like you to answer these questions freely and they are not going to be used for any assessment of any form or whatsoever.

MISS K: *I have 17 years teaching experience in the Foundation Phase, eh...(showing some thought on the answer given in order to give more information) it was very bad that time, I was still young and didn't have experience for teaching young learners more especially in rural areas...in fact, deep rural areas.*

PJM: Mmm... you were young. Which contexts were you teaching in when you started teaching at the Foundation Phase? Was it a multi or mono-graded class? How many years have you taught in each context?

MISS K: *Yes, I have taught in almost both contexts. I have taught in mono-graded class for 11 years and this is my sixth year teaching the multi-graded class.*

PJM: Oh...you have taught in both contexts...er... have you been teaching Literacy all these years as one of the subjects at the Foundation Phase or there was subject specialisation that was being conducted in the schools you were in? If so, how long have you been teaching Literacy?

MISS K: *Yes, I have been teaching Literacy all along, the teacher at the Foundation Phase is supposed to teach all the subjects...three of them. Ever since I started teaching I have been also teaching Literacy.*

PJM: Mmm...I get you; tell me, what are some of the things that the teacher has to know and teach when teaching reading at the Foundation Phase?

MISS K: *Err... it is important that learners are reading with comprehension, understanding the vocabulary of words in the story or whatever that is being read. I usually encourage them to tell me any words that they don't understand from the passage that is going to be read. We first read those words and also give their meanings. I don't want them to read for the sake of reading but I want them to understand whatever that they are reading. They have to know how words are pronounced and also have phonemic awareness because this will also increase their vocabulary.*

PJM: Wow...(showing appreciation), Do you think there's a difference in teaching reading in mono and multi-graded class?

MISS K: *Yes there is a difference ...and it is very distinctive. The situation is complex and we are compelled to construct strategies all the time when we are teaching. It is quite difficult at the beginning but you always end up inventing your own ways of survival in such a hectic situation.*

PJM: What are some of the challenges that you face when teaching reading in multi-graded graded class, more especially here in the rural area?

MISS K: *There is a lack of resources; projectors, tv's, radios because there is no electricity and books and other resources that can help us to teach reading. If resources were sufficient, we would be able to give them some that they will take home in order to practice more reading skills. Another challenge we face is that parents are illiterate; therefore you can't be relying on them to assist you through. Most of the learners here are not staying with their biological parents; their parents have migrated to big cities for job seeking and they are left with their grandparents who are weary and old.*

PJM: Ow...is that the problem you are facing here? Why do you think you are facing these challenges? What knowledge do you think you require in order to face these challenges?

MISS K: *In fact we have three major challenges; lack of parental involvement, secondly lack of teaching and learning resources and also that the context we are teaching under is not conducive. Really it is so hard teaching reading in these conditions. We are facing these problems because we are not in urban areas. In urban areas, the situations they are working under are much better than ours. The Department of Education is organising workshops on multi-graded teaching, to be honest with you, we are not gaining much from these workshops because those people who are facilitating workshops are not faced with the reality but we are. There is a lot of expectation from the curriculum as such and yet the situations we are in are complex, we can't fulfil the expectations of the curriculum; the assessment activities and different aspects that should be taught in each subject. I need to know how to teach reading to different learners with different learning abilities, because seemingly I teach as if they are all in the same level. Those learners who are slow are being neglected.*

PJM: What strategies do you think can be used for teaching reading in order to alleviate these challenges? How did you come to know about these strategies?

MISS K: *I think if we can get training on how to teach multi-graded class all strategies for teaching reading can be used effectively. I know about reading aloud, paired reading, shared reading, and independent reading, however all these methods are not easy to use in a multi-graded class. I have a document on reading; it tells us about all these strategies.*

PJM: Did you have any training for teaching in multi-graded class? What kind of training did you get if there is any?

MISS K: *Yes there is training that was organised by the department but it was not efficient and effective. They were speaking about things they have never experienced personally, they were generalising.*

PJM: If you can be chosen as a trainer, what will be your focus, why? What will you consider as the most important thing and why?

MISS K: *If I can be chosen as a trainer I will capacitate teachers who are working in rural areas because most of the time they are marginalised. I will consider, errr... (thinking) training*

them on curriculum implementation in a multi-graded classroom, planning and assessment strategies that are suitable.

PJM: Is there anything you want to share with me or can benefit me in this topic?

MISS K: *Mmmm....ya.. there is. I just wish you can stay a little longer just to see how much we suffer here. Even if you try, the situation doesn't permit. I wish you can speak to the departmental officials about this. Will you be able?*

PJM: Though I can't promise you that I can be able to help you now, but this research is aiming at helping you and all those teachers who are in the same situation as you. Thank you for your time. Tomorrow I will come to your class to observe you teaching your class.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

SECOND PARTICIPANT

CODES: Interviewer: **PJM**

Grades 2&3 Teacher: **MISS L.**

PJM: Good morning colleague, it is great to me to meet you this morning. I would like to thank you for allowing me to conduct this research in your school and also spending time with me which you would have used for other things important to you. I promise that whatever that we will discuss here will never be known by anybody else. In order to keep this anonymity, I will change your identity.

I would first like to know how long have you been teaching in the Foundation Phase. Please when you answer your questions be free, I won't be judging you against what you said to me.

MISS L: *I have 2 years teaching experience in the Foundation Phase,*

PJM: Wow... you have just started

MISS L: *Ya... it is only 2 years*

PJM: Have you ever taught a mono-graded class?

MISS L: *Yes, last year I was teaching a mono-graded class, it is only this year I have started to teach a multi-graded class.*

PJM: Mmm... were you also teaching Literacy last year?

MISS L: *Yes, I was teaching Literacy to my learners.*

PJM: Ok...what are some of the things that the teacher has to know and teach when teaching reading at the Foundation Phase?

MISS L: *They have to know how to read words, sentences and paragraphs. Grade 3's can now even read the whole story. They know how to use punctuation marks.*

PJM: Mmm...that is great! Do you think there's a difference in teaching reading in mono and multi-graded class?

MISS L: *Yes there is a difference.*

PJM: What are some of the challenges that you face when teaching reading in multi-graded graded class, more especially here in the rural area?

MISS L: *We are not being trained on how to teach reading in multi-graded class. We are juast left to fend for ourselves, isimo sinzima sisi wami (the situation is hectic my sister)*

PJM: Ow... What knowledge do you think you require in order to face these challenges?

MISS L: *I have to know how to teach in this situation, that is all I can say.*

PJM: What strategies do you think can be used for teaching reading in order to alleviate these challenges? How did you come to know about these strategies?

MISS L: *I think we need to get training*

PJM: Did you have any training for teaching in multi-graded class? What kind of training did you get if there is any?

MISS L: *No. There is no training that I have attended thus far but I think they are still going to organise them.*

PJM: If you can be chosen as a trainer, what will be your focus, why? What will you consider as the most important thing and why?

MISS L: *Mmm... (laughing). I can train teachers on how to teach in these situations. I think teaching methods, planning, assessment, classroom organisation and discipline are the most important things.*

PJM: Is there anything you want to share with me or can benefit me in this topic?

MISS L: *Are you going to help us in our school?*

PJM: Yes I promise to help you one day. Thank you for your time. I will see you tomorrow for observations. Thank You once more.