Final-year teacher training students' perceptions of THRASS

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Our purpose was to see if THRASS (Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills) is a programme that should be taught to Foundation Phase (FP) and Intermediate/Senior Phases (ISP) pre-service teachers at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). The term 'literacy' is defined as an evolving, developing and complex concept, not only because it describes a set of practices, but also because it is context-driven. The THRASS programme is fundamentally for teaching phonics, and is described as being at the 'word' level teaching of literacy. We argue that word level teaching should be done in context and within texts. A mixed method research design was used in order to provide better understandings and answers to the research question: What are the BEd 4 students' perceptions of THRASS? A questionnaire and two focus group interviews were used to gather data. Qualitative data were analysed, using an inductive approach. The findings confirm that pre-service teachers going to teach in schools feel prepared to teach reading, but not spelling or creative writing.

Keywords: developing countries; graphemes; literacy; phonemes; pre-service teachers' perceptions; synthetic and analytic phonics; THRASS

Introduction

During the past decade, much attention has been given to both the literacy rates in South Africa and how classroom teaching of reading is envisioned and studied. Our purpose in this article is to describe the perceptions of final-year Foundation Phase (FP) and Intermediate/Senior Phases (ISP) BEd students of THRASS (Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills), a programme designed specifically to teach reading and spelling skills.

In the past four years, the THRASS training programme has been offered to many schools in our developing country, South Africa. In 2008 five universities and linking schools were invited to be part of a national project. Our university was included and therefore we decided to use this opportunity to research the final year students' perceptions of THRASS. All final-year FP and ISP BEd students are exposed to multiple methodologies of teaching reading and writing during their four years of study. Knowing that many of our pre-service teachers struggle to teach phonics effectively, we were interested to see if THRASS would enhance their teaching of phonics, reading and spelling skills.

Four questions guided the research of this article. Firstly, what is the underlying theoretical framework of THRASS? Secondly, how does THRASS fit into the literacy curriculum taught at CPUT during a student's four years of undergraduate study? Thirdly, what were the students' perceptions of THRASS after they had used it for six months in a local school? Finally what conclusions can be drawn from this research on THRASS? By deliberating on

the advantages and limitations of THRASS, and on recommendations suggested for the future use of THRASS at CPUT, these questions will be addressed.

THRASS

As there is a dearth of research on the theory of THRASS, we refer to Mead (2006), the media director of THRASS, who claims that 'THRASS can more than double the normal rate of progress for learning reading and spelling for primary and secondary school children and also for dyslexics and those for whom English is not their first language.' Davies and Ritchie (2006:9) explain that the focus of THRASS is on foundation level learners and their teachers, as this is a key stage for children to grasp lifelong learning skills across the curriculum. However, the programme can be taught to learners of all ages and abilities.

THRASS is a synthetics and analytic phonics programme where young children learn to spell, read and write by using pictures and keywords. The natural links between the 44 phonemes (the smallest speech sounds) and the 120 key graphemes (spelling choices) are taught to learners in order to identify blend sounds for reading, and to segment and spell sounds in words for writing. This is accomplished by introducing learners to words commonly found in the environment, such as names of people, places and products (Davies & Ritchie, 2006:9). According to Davies and Ritchie (2006:11), synthetic teaching of phonics involves part-to-whole learning where learners are taught letter-sounds so that they can blend the letter-sounds to construct words. Learners learn up to 44 phonemes and their related graphemes. They recognise each grapheme, then sound out each phoneme in a word, building up the sounds together through blending in order to pronounce the word phonetically. Analytic phonics involves whole-to-part learning, which is the analysis of whole words to detect phonetic or orthographic (spelling) patterns, then splitting them into smaller parts to help with decoding. This whole process takes learners through a ten-stage programme to eventually read words in English.

The resources for THRASS, which are extremely extensive and available both in hard copy and interactive software, can be accessed from the internet (www.thrass.co.uk) and subscribed to for a fee. Although it is not appropriate to list all the resources in this article, it is important to note that many of the resources have copyright and so it is illegal to copy or scan them. This becomes significant for long-term sustainability purposes of teaching THRASS at a university. As lecturers teaching THRASS after the five-year project, we may only be able to show the THRASS process instead of allowing the students to interact with the materials. Walker and Rattanavich (1992:96) suggest that ideally, literacy programmes introduced into developing countries (such as South Africa), should have the following characteristics: they should be inexpensive, the teaching methodology should suit the widest possible range of children and be uncomplicated, should relate strongly to everyday life and finally bring rapid results. They further suggest that the cost per student

of books and other materials must be low enough to be affordable when very few parents can contribute to the costs of schooling.

A critical understanding of literacy

'Literacy' is an evolving and developing concept that is central to this article. Freebody (2007:6) states that definitions of literacy are complex, not only because they describe a set of complex practices, but also because they are context-driven. Nevertheless, this article includes definitions and understandings of 'literacy' to include authors who have worked in the South African context and internationally.

Three questions have guided the analysis of critically understanding how literacy is defined in South Africa's education system.
1. Firstly, how do different authors define and express what they mean by 'literacy'?
2. Secondly, how is the pedagogy of reading and writing taught at CPUT to pre-service teachers in both Foundation and Intermediate/Senior Phases?
3. Finally, in what ways does the definition of THRASS harmonise with the previous definitions of literacy?

1. How do different authors define and express what they mean by 'literacy'?

Since we are focusing on South Africa, it is strategic to begin by describing the National Department of Education's (NDoE) understanding of literacy. The NDoE's National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (2002:23) refers to a 'balanced approach' to literacy development as it begins with children's emergent literacy, thereafter involving them in reading 'real books', and writing for genuine purposes while also giving attention to phonics.

Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) has played a central role in influencing teaching methodology. The NCS (2002:20-21) policy document describes six learning outcomes for the Language Learning Area. Although these are presented as separate outcomes, they should be integrated in teaching and assessment. The National Reading Strategy (2008:14) states that learners should know a range of techniques to help them to reach appropriate reading levels with comprehension, to derive information and enjoyment.

In 2006, South Africa and 39 other countries were involved in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2008) test. Howie *et al.* (2008:25) explain that the test assessed the learner's ability to practise answering comprehension questions that required them to focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information from texts, make straightforward inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and information, and examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements. According to Mullis, Kennedy, Martin and Sainsbury (2006:3) the report defined literacy as:

> The ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Your readers construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment.

Pretorius and Machet (2004) and Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) posit that teachers in primary schools should be made aware that storybooks mediate literacy acquisition in a fun-filled and non-threatening way and that learners need to read in order to become good readers. Learners need exposure to a variety of print material. A study in seven South African high performing but low-income community primary schools (Sailors, Hoffman & Matthee, 2007:370), noted that there was a strong and central focus on language and literacy achievement across these schools. They found competent teachers who offered their learners print-rich environments. The classrooms contained a combination of commercially prepared and teacher-created texts prominently displayed in the classrooms and on the walls. Many of the books showed signs of much use and wear. Condy (2008:623-624) researched the core indicators of an effective reading teacher and the outcome of her research was a questionnaire that focused on seven unique purposes for teaching reading which were: reading scaffolding techniques; reading for meaning and interpretation; reading for scanning and research; reading for reflection and analysis; reading for understanding; reading for application; and reading to make judgements.

The above discussion suggests that for literacy to be effective there needs to be a 'balanced approach', which includes involving learners in reading 'real books', reading and writing for a variety of genuine purposes, and constructing meaning from a variety of texts for enjoyment, in print-rich environments.

2. How is the pedagogy of reading and writing taught at CPUT to pre-service teachers in both the Foundation and Intermediate/Senior Phases?

The following discussion attempts to summarise and briefly elaborate on this complex task. Hill, Thornhill and Alexander (2008) state that, based on the assumption that a quality programme is structured and sequenced so as to promote progression and links between its various elements, the teaching of reading at CPUT shows: continuous structure; planned sequencing; organised progression; and intentional and inadvertent integration across subjects in the programme, namely, Drama, Art, Music, Human Movement and Education subjects. The teaching of reading occurs explicitly in these subjects: Literacy first language; First additional language; Home Language: English. During their four years of study, all students are sent to a variety of English-speaking schools that reflect the social, political, economic and multilingual contexts within South Africa, including special schools.

The SAIDE (South African Institute for Distance Education) report (2008) states that, from the lecturers and student data collected, the programme at CPUT covers three broad paradigms. These are traditional views (behaviourist theories), cognitive views (psycholinguistic theories) and metacognitive views (what you are doing when you read) of teaching reading. These apply to both Foundation and Intermediate/Senior Phases.

The students are taught to teach all the language outcomes as stated in the NCS document (2002): listening, speaking, reading and viewing, writing,

thinking and reasoning, and language structure and use. They are taught to think critically about the teaching of reading and to solve reading pedagogy problems independently. The following aspects of teaching, planning and assessing reading are taught across both FP and ISP: phonics (phonemes and graphemes), phonemic awareness, structural analysis, contextual analysis, predicting, punctuation, vocabulary, fluency, comprehensions based on Bloom's taxonomy, poetry, a variety of writing genres, spelling, emergent literacy, family literacy, functional literacy, adolescent literacy, children's literature, critical literacy, how to plan and assess an oral lesson, the teaching of grammar, sentence building and sentence types, guided reading, reading aloud, independent reading, shared reading and how to select appropriate reading material. The Western Cape Education Department's (WCED:2010) Diagnostic Assessment Results indicate that in 2007 the Grade 6 literacy rate was 44.8%. In 2009 there was a slight improvement to 48.6%. Therefore, we felt that the knowledge of how to teach phonics would be one way of empowering all pre-service teachers being trained at CPUT to assist all learners in their English classes.

3. In what ways does the definition of THRASS harmonise with the previous definitions of literacy?

Across all the definitions presented in this article there are commonalities and gaps. THRASS is a programme for introducing learners to the word level within a rich curriculum. It is taught at a pace that matches the learners and in a multisensory manner. Speaking and listening are the foundations for the synthetic approach to blending phonemes and segmenting words into their constituent parts. However, these skills need to be embedded in texts where the learners can have opportunities for constructing meaning for enjoyment, in print-rich environments.

Method

This research project was situated within an interpretivist paradigm and aimed at understanding the perceptions that students had of the THRASS programme. Henning (2007:20) describes interpretivist research as looking for frames that shape meaning within social contexts. The study used a mixed method research design in order to enhance trustworthiness and to provide better understandings and answers to the research question, 'What are the final-year BEd students' perceptions of THRASS?' The questionnaire (using 3-point Lickert scaling) elicited quantifiable data regarding the students' experiences of teaching THRASS, while the two focus group interviews provided more detailed exploration of their (the focus group's) perceptions of THRASS and their understandings of literacy. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2008:376) state that focus group interviews yield insights from the interaction of the group.

At the end of 2007, all 120 FP and ISP 3rd year pre-service teachers received a two-day THRASS training in preparation to teach THRASS in the following year, 2008. Between January 2008 and June 2008 the respondents

received 12 hours of additional THRASS training at the university, as well as spending an hour a week over a ten-week period in a local school, teaching THRASS to learners in Grades 2 to 4. In 2006, the primary school teachers were trained and used THRASS as the literacy programme in their English classes.

At the end of 2008, a questionnaire was given to all the participants in the THRASS programme. The response rate was 66.7%. Data were collected on the participants' perceptions of the programme, the effectiveness of their teaching of literacy, the value of THRASS and the dynamics around delivery of the programme. Two focus group interviews were completed with a total of 16 FP and ISP students. These students were purposively selected as being either English or non-English majors.

The data were analysed inductively using coding and categorising, i.e. responses were coded and then categorised into themes and further literature on the themes was obtained to strengthen the discussion and interpretation. Each category contained codes that were semantically related (Henning 2007: 102). Data from the questionnaires were analysed, using descriptive statistics which provided simple summaries about the sample and the measures. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity of participants and schools.

Findings
Our findings for this study are presented using two headings, namely, questionnaire results and focus group interviews analysis.

Questionnaire results
In September 2008, 78 questionnaires were completed; however, we noted that Question 3 had only 77 responses. Almost all respondents provided the ranking (a lot, a little, not at all), but not all provided comments to all questions. However, some comments were too brief to be informative, so only the meaningful comments have been noted under each question as either positive or critical. The number of times the comment has appeared is indicated in brackets.

Results of the questionnaire administered to final-year FP and ISP students are presented in Table 1. Question 1 asked, 'How well do you think the four year BEd programme has helped and prepared you to teach English next year?' Since this is not our focus in this article, we have chosen not to include this question in our discussion.

Interpretation
In all the questions, there is a significant difference in the number of responses to each of the three response options. However, if the two response options ("A lot" + "A little") are combined, then there is no significant difference between the two (the combined option vs "Not at all") in three out of the five questions; even though **the highest** response was in the column "Not at all". See Table 2.

Table 1　Results of the questionnaire

Questions	Ranking provided			Common/significant comments
	A lot	A little	Not at all	
Q2. How much do you think the THRASS programme is benefiting your teaching?	4	36	38	Positive: - THRASS provided a new strategy for teaching English (4) Critical:- - instructions on how to use THRASS are unclear (9) - I didn't benefit (6) - training time was not enough - did not get enough input on how to use THRASS (9)
Q3. How useful do you think the weekly teaching of THRASS at .... Primary School was?	5	29	43	Positive: - helped to develop an understanding of the lower grades/Foundation Phase Critical: - not useful because we were not adequately prepared to teach (5) - time wasn't enough/transport problems (3) - there was no feedback - no benefit because I am trained to teach ISP - the course was not well organised (12) - a waste of time (6)
Q4. How well do you think you have been supported with follow-up and advice in your school?	2	29	47	Positive: - teachers were at the beginning enthusiastic to have us Critical: - contact person was usually not available in the library - received no support(35) - the class teacher regarded us as an inconvenience - the teacher was not sure about THRASS (2)
Q5. How useful and adequate have the materials been in your THRASS teaching (software, phonic charts, rap songs, scheme of work, guide, profile card, etc.	2	53	23	Positive: - all resources were in place - it was exciting to use the materials Critical: - space to host the groups of three was not suitable

Table 1   Continued

Questions	Ranking provided			Common/significant comments
	A lot	A little	Not at all	
scheme of work, guide, profile card etc.)				- only used the phonic chart (9) - did not know how to use most of them (3) - too little time to use the materials (2) - have not used the materials (5) - we were not taught how to use them (3)
Q6. Is there any specific problem, not covered above, that you would like to mention?				Positive: Critical: - the course was not well organised (6) - we need to be taught how to use THRASS efficiently (12) - teaching space was inadequate (2) - THRASS is a waste of time (2) - support from the schoolteachers could have helped (2)

Table 2

	Three response options		"A lot" and "A little" *vs* "Not at all"	
	χ^2	p	χ^2	p
Question 2	28.0000	0.00000	0.0513	0.9747
Question 3	28.7792	0.00000	1.0519	0.5910
Question 4	39.4615	0.00000	3.2821	0.1938
Question 5	50.5385	0.00000	13.1282	0.0014

It would be better to combine "A little and Not at all" and then compare that with the responses to "A lot". This can be seen in Table 3. This shows that there is a significant difference in the number of responses between the groups "A lot" and "A little and Not at all".

The significantly small number of responses in the columns "A lot" indicates a high number of problems with the way in which THRASS was implemented.

Table 3

	"A lot" *vs* "A little" and "Not at all"	
	χ^2	p
Question 2	62.8205	0.0000
Question 3	58.2987	0.0000
Question 4	70.2051	0.0000
Question 5	70.2051	0.0000

The comments given by the respondents indicate dissatisfaction. There are far more critical comments than positive ones. The critical comments given so far are important and must be noted, as these indicate the nature of the problems being experienced and therefore are helpful in suggesting measures to be taken to improve matters. The responses show that the students did not have enough input to competently engage with the programme; as a result most of them evaluated their teaching at .... Primary School[1] to be non-beneficial. However, some students commented that if they had had more support from the class teachers, and if the THRASS experience had been better organised, the THRASS programme would have improved.

From the few positive comments made by the respondents, it seems the programme could be important in that it provides a variety of new, exciting ways of teaching English. This is encouraging.

However, the many critical comments indicate that many of the students were not happy with the implementation of the THRASS programme. Most comments show that the course was not well organised and that the training period was too short, and most of the students did not know how to use the materials for the programme; which makes the programme complicated. Consequently, most of the students did not know what to do and felt that the programme was a waste of time. Lack of feedback and/or follow-up may also have worsened the situation.

Focus group interview analysis
From the analysis of the two focus group interviews, the following themes were identified:
• Individuals' feelings about aspects of teaching literacy;
• Teacher education regarding literacy teaching;
• THRASS and literacy teaching;
• Gaps existing in schools.

Individuals' feelings about aspects of teaching literacy
When the participants were asked about the aspects of teaching literacy with which they felt particularly confident, most of them felt more comfortable teaching reading than the other skills. Spelling and creative writing were the as-

pects they felt most uneasy about teaching, because the teachers felt they had not been equipped with the necessary practical teaching skills to teach these. The respondents complained about some of the teaching and learning materials used during lectures for teaching creative writing. They said the way the material was designed and presented was not helpful when the teachers went to schools to teach creative writing. The focus of THRASS is at the word, phonics and spelling level, it is not a programme that is designed to teach creative writing.

Responding to the question, 'What aspects of teaching literacy do you feel particularly confident teaching?' some participants said:

> *The easiest I found was reading ... Creative writing I don't know if it was me, but I could not get it the learners just to be creative … especially referring to that for special education.*
>
> *I think writing because you can look on the article and you can see where they are going wrong, but the actual comprehension is something else entirely.*
>
> *I cannot identify where the child has got the problems, is it spelling convention or what part the word is the child actually struggling with, I don't know how to identify that and that scares me a lot.*

While some participants blamed the media for poor spelling amongst learners, others said they found teaching spelling difficult, simply because they had not been introduced to enough strategies to teach this particular aspect of literacy. Some respondents indicated that some of the difficulties they experienced were because their lecturers did not demonstrate practical issues to them. One respondent said:

> *… one thing about literacy teaching is that I would like to see ...* [2] *teaching the children, I would like to see teaching the children because in class they criticise you don't do that don't do this … Why not showing us how to do it with the kids … but I would love to see them with the children.*

Teacher education regarding literacy teaching

The analysis shows that the respondents who are going to teach the Intermediate/Senior Phases feel that they have not acquired skills which would enable them to assist a learner in Grade 4 or 6 who cannot identify words or read. Responding to the question, 'Would you be able to assist a learner in Grade 4 who cannot identify words and/or read?' some of the respondents had this to say:

> *We have been exposed to that but I think it was brief … and that was also only this year … but I wouldn't be able to if the child is not able to identify words ... and that's also a common problem with foreign learners that are coming in … but I don't think I would be able to assist.*
>
> *I feel very scared about next year … I don't feel confident about teaching … I do feel the university has prepared me but in some ways I don't feel adequately prepared, maybe its just me, I don't know …*

Regarding whether the teaching methods taught at CPUT are in alignment with the way literacy is taught in the mainstream schools where they will be

teaching, most of the students thought there was some alignment. The respondents commented that they have learnt the theory about OBE, but had not been instructed on how to put that into practice and that some of their lecturers even advise them not to model OBE. According to their (the respondents') observations, many teachers in schools are not really following OBE practice. Most of the teachers are reluctant to change because for them the old methods of teaching work better than those of OBE. Some of the respondents said:

> *… they* (the teachers) *are not using the OBE things because to them it is not working. The old way is working so OBE is tokenism, it just looks like everything is OBE, but everything else is taught in the old way, talk and chalk and whatever …*
>
> *Lecturers would say for the most part, don't model OBE. I think there is actually one or two that are making an attempt to model it. And even then it is often an isolated lesson … but for the most part they're not teaching us OBE. They're teaching us about the system but not modelling it for us.*

While in some instances the respondents see examples of alignment, they also see gaps and/or mismatches. Most of the respondents said they were learning many things from the teachers in schools rather than learning them at CPUT. The respondents thought it might be helpful to know what the schools are doing before the pre-service teachers go for teaching practice, because, in most cases, when they go to schools, they find that they do not know what to do when trying to take over from the class teacher. Most of the respondents felt embarrassed about this. One of the respondents narrated:

> *… the last schools I went to … for teaching prac … I did quite a bit of literacy teaching and learned a lot from the teacher. We did VAK, phonics and all that type of things … lets do VAK today … when I spoke to the teacher, she was like: you are in fourth year, you haven't done this type of thing … It was like I was learning much of it from the teacher.*

It seems the respondents had mixed feelings about their teacher education and their lecturers. While some perceived their lecturers to be up-to-date about research and teaching styles, some complained that some lecturers gave them outdated notes, or even disorganised notes containing no references. About the materials they got from class, some respondents had the following to say:

> *I found what we got in class very boring but like here and there they give you something that they found in the journal.*
>
> *… but then the stuff we get is so from the ark or it seems like it is from the ark.*
>
> *… some of the notes we got look like they were typed on a typewriter.*

THRASS and literacy teaching

While some respondents commended THRASS as a very well designed programme which could help in the teaching of phonics, most of the respondents complained that they had inadequate input to understand the programme. Because they did not understand THRASS, most of the pre-service teachers

saw the programme as a failure and a waste of time. The following is what two respondents said when they were asked to comment on how THRASS had helped them, as well as how it could be useful in literacy teaching:

> *I think THRASS is a very well-designed programme, there is a place for THRASS, believe it or not … but is very clever … and it helps in the teaching of phonics.*

> *I can say the word that I know what it means or they don't know the word because they don't know what it looks like or sounds like so THRASS can assist with that … but also meaning-making, there is no teaching focusing on meaning-making.*

Based on the respondents' reported experiences of THRASS, it seems it could be a good method of teaching spelling. Perhaps the problem is the way the programme is introduced to the pre-service teachers. According to the respondents the programme was not well explained to them. Consequently, they could not use it and felt THRASS was a waste of time and resources.

> *I think it can be useful but maybe if I understood this whole phonics thing going on in Foundation Phase, then I could apply myself to THRASS … for me I still couldn't see where I was going with THRASS … given all the song picture location of the sound … but still for me I could not see where I was going with THRASS.*

> *I think it was introduced to us too quickly … 2-day course was not just enough to be honest I have used only once in my teaching … I don't even know what THRASS stands for, I don't know anything … and I just think I don't know how everyone else felt but I just felt like … over my head … just throw THRASS on me … I did not know what THRASS was and I know quite a few people I have talked to did not know what they were doing either.*

The pre-service teachers reported having both good and bad experiences with THRASS. Some could see the value of using it to teach graphemes and phonemes, whereas others mentioned that it was not connected to meaning. The two major complaints were that the training period was too short and that there was a lack of organisation. However, it was surprising that no students mentioned that they were grateful for all the resources they received. This may be because they did not understand fully how to use them.

Gaps existing in school

According to the respondents, children at school are not really encouraged to use libraries and read for themselves in their own time. Most children do not acquire adequate listening and speaking skills. The children do not see adults, including their own teachers, reading.

> *… in the classroom, the kids aren't encouraged to read. They aren't encouraged to go to the library; they aren't encouraged to have personal reading time … I think we need to model that behaviour because I read a lot at home, my children are reading. Parents don't read so the children don't really want to read. But I mean as teachers, if we, just as a token, sit*

with a book just for five minutes, and show that the teacher is reading as well. Maybe they will cotton on to it.

I think with regard to the reading, I think the children don't read. And they don't write. They don't do it often enough. Undeveloped listening and speaking skills in the children … because often you ask a child a question and would say, no I don't agree with you. When you say why? They don't know, they just don't agree. Or yes, or no, why? I don't know. And they can't reason out why they are saying yes or why they are disagreeing or anything like that. There's no backing to their answers.

It is interesting to note the gaps mentioned by the respondents which exist in schools. Most of the respondents indicated that they did not feel adequately prepared to teach spelling and creative writing. They did not know how they could address such problems. This may mean that teacher education needs to be revisited, to ensure that teachers go to the classrooms adequately prepared to teach.

Conclusions

The analysis has shown that the pre-service teachers going to teach in schools feel prepared to teach reading but not spelling or creative writing. The pre-service teachers have been exposed to a great deal of theory about teaching, but very little about practical teaching. This imbalance leads to a lack of confidence in the pre-service teachers when they are required to teach literacy in their classrooms. Therefore there is a need to revisit the teacher education process regarding literacy teaching in schools, if the pre-service teachers are to feel adequately prepared to teach all aspects of literacy well.

Some pre-service teachers see THRASS as a good programme for teaching graphemes and phonemes. However, the way the programme was introduced to the teachers led to most of them disliking it and not using it to its full potential. The training period was too short and confusing for the students to fully understand THRASS. Many students commented on the disorganisation of the THRASS programme when they went to teach it in the schools.

While some students enjoyed using the resources, some of them commented on how expensive these were. They were concerned that they would not be able to teach THRASS if their schools did not have the necessary resources. This is a genuine concern since THRASS is a project dependent on sponsors. Many schools operate at unsustainable financial levels, especially schools that are categorised by the National Education Department as either quintile 1, 2, or 3 (Gower 2008). Therefore when introducing new literacy methods into South Africa, we should select programmes that are cost-effective, uncomplicated, relate to everyday life, and whose methodology suits all learners.

Literacy approaches that use only phonics may seem effective in the short term, but unless they are embedded within meaningful and purposeful texts and reading activities, they may well be viewed as exercises for school and not as reading 'for real' genuine purposes. THRASS is fundamentally a programme that is for decoding graphemes and phonemes. However we do believe that

this basic knowledge of graphemes and phonemes in context is vital before learners can begin to make inferences and judgments about texts.

From the results of the research it is recommended that the training and organisation of THRASS be addressed. A suggestion is that we separate the FP and ISP students in order to train smaller classes and achieve better engagement with the presenters. Regarding organisation, we suggest that the FP and ISP students go into the schools on different days. The assignment would consist of observing a more experienced class teacher in a local school teaching THRASS for one hour in their English class. The teachers and students would meet in the hall to discuss what and why they had used certain strategies, and this would help prepare the students to teach a lesson the following week. During the training, the pre-service teachers should be exposed to many more practical applications of THRASS, along with discussions on theory.

Acknowledgement

Notes
1.   The name of the local primary school is withheld for ethical considerations.
2.   The name of the lecturer is withheld for ethical considerations.

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