



Preparing South African Foundation Phase Preservice Teachers to Teach Reading for Meaning

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Abstract

Scholars have widely documented the current reading crisis in South Africa. This crisis has drawn attention to the need for adequately prepared teachers to teach reading for meaning, particularly in the Foundation Phase classroom. However, little is known about how South African teacher education institutions prepare preservice Foundation Phase teachers to teach reading for meaning. This article addresses this gap by offering recommendations on how South African teacher education institutions can prepare preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning in the Foundation Phase classrooms. The article argues that there is an urgent need for South African teacher education institutions to rethink their curricula to prepare teachers to teach reading for meaning in the South African Foundation Phase classroom. By focusing on preparing Foundation Phase teachers to teach reading for meaning, the article seeks to contribute to a reconceptualization of the content and structure of the South African Foundation Phase teacher education curriculum. It also lays the groundwork for further research on the preparation of South African Foundation preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning.

1. INTRODUCTION

The South African education system is currently amid a reading crisis. According to research, 78% of fourth-grade students across all South African languages cannot read for meaning (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), 2016). This is cause for concern, as reading is a fundamental skill essential for success in school and life. This reading for meaning crisis implies a rise in the demand for adequately prepared teachers to teach reading for meaning, especially in the Foundation Phase classroom. This challenges preservice teachers in South Africa, who must teach their Foundation Phase learners reading for meaning. In light of this current reading for the meaning crisis, the role of South African Foundation Phase teachers has changed. In addition to being knowledge experts, they must have appropriate skills and knowledge to teach reading for meaning. This indicates an urgent need for teacher education institutions to equip them to teach reading for meaning. Without adequate preparation, South African Foundation Phase teachers would continue to face challenges in teaching reading for meaning. Although there is a growing concern about the reading crisis in South Africa, there is relatively little research examining the preparation of South African Foundation Phase preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning. South African teacher

education institutions must play a pivotal role in preparing future teachers to teach reading for meaning.

Preparing preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning is not just a recommendation but also a requirement for South African teacher education institutions. Recently, President Cyril Ramaphosa emphasised the urgent need to address the reading of the meaning crisis in South Africa during his 2019 State of the Nation Address (SONA) Speech. The president stated that early reading is the basic foundation that determines a child's educational progress through school, higher education, and the workplace. He emphasised that all other interventions will not produce the desired results unless attention is given to ensuring that children can read. There is a pressing need to prepare South African Foundation Phase teachers to teach reading for meaning, as research indicates that teachers cannot teach what they have not been taught (Dehaene, 2010). Unless this issue is addressed, it will intensify. This calls for reading for meaning to be at the centre of teacher preparation programmes. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that teachers know and understand how to teach reading for meaning. Teaching reading for meaning in the South African Foundation Phase classroom requires expertise.

The urgent need for teacher preparation programmes to adequately prepare teachers was clearly articulated in the Reading Panel Report (2022). The South African Reading Panel (2022) has called for "a sector-wide audit of requirements regarding time allocated to the teaching of reading and mathematics" (Reading Panel Report, p.4). The report emphasises the fact that the current curricula lack coherence around the fundamentals of teaching reading and mathematics. This critical issue needs to be addressed to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach reading for meaning in the Foundation Phase. According to Spaul (2022), South African faculties of education are not adequately preparing teachers to teach reading in the home language. Spaul (2022) asserts that after reviewing teacher training curricula, it is clear that many programs lack coherence around the fundamentals of teaching reading and mathematics at the primary school level.

Research indicates that South African teachers are not adequately prepared to teach in South African classrooms (Van Der Merwe, 2022). This lack of adequate preparation is largely due to the lack of inadequate reading for content meaning in existing teacher education programmes. Preservice teachers must receive adequate training on the curriculum they will teach. This is especially important for teachers who teach reading for meaning in the Foundation Phase classroom. Moats (2020) argues that all learners can be taught to read, but their teachers also need "the knowledge, skills, and supported practice that will enable their teaching to succeed" (p. 5). Binks-Cantrell, Washburn, Joshi, and Hougen (2012) support this argument by asserting that inadequate knowledge creates a "Peter effect." This means that the Foundation Phase preservice teachers cannot teach reading for meaning unless they are adequately prepared to do so at the teacher preparation level.

Despite the growing calls for teachers who are adequately prepared to teach reading for meaning, little is known about how South African teacher education institutions prepare Foundation Phase preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning. This article's rationale lies primarily in preparing South African Foundation Phase teachers to teach reading for meaning. The article recommends preparing preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning in the

South African Foundation Phase classroom. In addition, the article provides recommendations for future research.

2. An overview of the Foundation Phase Teacher Preparation Programme

The Bachelor of Education Foundation Phase program in South Africa is a four-year program offered in the South African higher education context. The program is aimed at preparing prospective teachers for the Grade R-3 level. According to Nomlomo and Desai (2014), the purpose of the program is to provide a four-year Bachelor of Education degree with the aim of training well-grounded and competent FP teachers who will have adequate knowledge and skills to facilitate learners' epistemological access to the Foundation Phase curriculum in the subject areas of language and literacy, numeracy, and life skills and who will be able to teach in the learners' home languages. According to Nomlomo and Desai (2014), the program aims not only to expose preservice students to diverse and inclusive learning environments but also to help them understand the complexities and dynamics of teaching in the South African context.

2.1. Reading for meaning

Although there is growing agreement about the importance of reading for understanding, there is still a lack of clarity about what exactly "reading for understanding" means, with existing definitions often just treating it as another term for reading comprehension. To prepare preservice teachers to teach reading with the goal of understanding, it is crucial first to understand the different meanings that underlie instruction for reading with understanding.

Seidenberg(2017) argues that “reading is an extraordinarily complex act...that is a product of our capacities to see, hear, write, speak, learn, remember, and think”(p. 187). Rosenblatt (2005) argues that reading is an event or transaction that involves a particular reader, a text, time, and context, with the reader and text being dynamic. This means that the text does not have inherent meaning, and the reader assigns meaning to the text. Barrentine, Waller, and Beck (2011) define the reading process as “a language-based, meaning-making, and problem-solving process” (p. 26).

Drawing on these conceptualisations and for the purposes of this article, I define reading for meaning as a

a complex process that involves a reader’s use of cognitive abilities, linguistic resources, real-life experiences, skills, and strategies to construct and derive meaning from a variety of texts for different purposes.

This definition of reading for meaning is an attempt to start discussion regarding the importance of shared understanding of reading for meaning. I argue that there is a need to understand reading for meaning, specifically what it is and how it can be taught at the teacher education level. I believe this is important, as it will enhance the learning experience and enhance prospective teachers' ability to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies.

2.2.Statement of the problem

The importance of reading for meaning in the South African education context cannot be underestimated. To ensure that all South African children have the opportunity to learn to read for meaning, preservice teachers must teach reading for meaning. The problem is that many preservice teachers lack the knowledge and skills necessary to teach reading for meaning effectively. As a result, they are often unprepared to meet all learners' needs. Teaching reading for meaning is important for all teachers, especially for preservice teachers and those new to teaching. Teaching reading for meaning is a core aspect of professional development that prepares preservice teachers to teach foundational skills. In particular, teaching reading for meaning as a part of teacher preparation programs helps provide educators with the knowledge, skills, and understanding to meet the needs of diverse learners.

It is evident that the crisis of teaching reading for meaning in South Africa is not only occurring in schools but is also deeply ingrained in teacher education institutions. It is time for South African teacher education institutions to pledge to better prepare preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning in Foundation Phase classrooms. If Foundation Phase teachers are better equipped to teach reading for meaning, this can provide them with better information to teach reading for meaning instruction in their classrooms. As Binks-Cantrell et al. (2012) assert,

Effective teaching is the best weapon against reading failure, and to improve preservice teacher preparation, an increase in teacher educators' understanding of the critical basic language constructs of reading is needed (p. 535).

If South African teacher education programs hope to address the current reading for meaning crisis, they need to make sure that all preservice teachers have access to a solid reading for meaning teacher preparation curriculum. This curriculum should focus on preparing Foundation Phase teachers to teach reading for meaning effectively in the classroom. If Foundation Phase teachers are not adequately prepared, they will be pressured to teach reading for meaning, making the beginning teacher's journey more complicated.

Despite the current reading crisis in South Africa, there is also a lack of research on how South African teacher education institutions prepare Foundation Phase preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning. This article argues that to prepare preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning, teacher education institutions need to take a close look at their curriculum and make changes to how they teach language and literacy in the Foundation Phase. If reading for meaning is not embedded in the current curricula, preservice teachers will experience challenges teaching it in the Foundation Phase classroom.

2.3.Recommendations for Preparing teachers to teach reading for meaning

As mentioned earlier, little is known about how they are prepared to teach reading for meaning in the Foundation Phase classroom. It is therefore important to pay attention to what South African teacher education institutions need to teach Foundation Phase preservice teachers to prepare them to teach reading for meaning. This is related to the concepts they learn and the knowledge needed to teach reading for meaning adequately. This section suggests how South African teacher education institutions can prepare Foundation Phase teachers to teach reading

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for meaning. The recommendations highlight the importance of preparing preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning in the South African Foundation Phase classroom.

Align Teacher Education Curricula with South African Policies and Standards Teacher Education

The Foundation Phase teacher preparation programme needs to be aligned with policies and standards to ensure that teachers are properly prepared to teach in the country. This would ensure that the Foundation Phase preservice teacher preparation programmes remain relevant for the South African context. Key national policy imperatives and curriculum standards must underpin the programmes. If the teacher preparation curriculum does not align with these national standards and policies, there will be a disconnect between their knowledge and the requirements on the ground.

The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011–2025, requires universities to offer high-quality programmes that provide teachers with meaningful development. To be prepared to teach in the classroom, newly qualified teachers must have strong content knowledge in the subject or discipline and knowledge of teaching practices and experience. In the case of reading for meaning, this means that newly qualified teachers should have strong reading content knowledge, as well as knowledge of teaching practices and experience, to be prepared to teach reading in the Foundation Phase classroom. It is also important for preservice teachers to be familiar with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) to implement the curriculum at the Foundation Phase level properly. Without this insight, the preservice teachers would not clearly understand the curriculum they must teach and the concepts and outcomes for each level.

The Reading Brain and How learners learn to read

Research indicates that teachers must know that the brain learns to read. According to Gatlin-Nash et al. (2020), to effectively teach reading, teachers need to deeply understand how the brain learns to read and how reading develops. Similarly, Foundation Phase preservice teachers need adequate knowledge of the reading brain and how learners learn to read. Gatlin-Nash et al. (2020) argue that reading development "requires explicit, systematic instruction, and without it, children will not learn to read proficiently" (p. 34)

Reading is not an instinctive skill that children can rely on their natural abilities to learn (Moats, 2020). Moats (2020) argues that most teacher preparation programmes ignore the scientific evidence on how children best learn to read. To effectively teach reading for meaning in the Foundation Phase classroom, preservice teachers need to comprehensively understand how the reading brain works and how learners acquire the skill of reading. If Foundation Phase teachers are not taught that learners are not naturally wired to read, they will fail to teach reading for meaning and respond to learners' reading-for-meaning needs.

This article argues that the research on how children best learn to read has important implications for Foundation Phase teacher preparation programmes. The premise of this article is that what the teachers know about how children learn to read can guide literacy instruction

in the Foundation Phase classroom. This challenges current teacher preparation programmes that typically fail to train preservice teachers on how learners learn to read and how they learn to read for meaning.

3. Pillars of Reading instruction

South African Foundation Phase teacher education programmes need to provide explicit instruction and practice on the components of reading instruction. The National Reading Panel (NRP) identifies 5 pillars of effective literacy instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The science of reading also emphasises explicit instruction on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world. It is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages (The Science of Reading Defining Guide, 2022, p. 6).

Phonemic awareness

Phonemic and phonological awareness have been recognised as critical foundational skills for decades. Yet, it remains an under-addressed aspect of reading instruction at the teacher preparation level, particularly in South Africa. South African Foundation Phase teacher preparation programmes must provide adequate phonological and phonemic awareness training. According to Ehri (2022), this skill is important for developing the decoding skills needed for independent reading. According to Kilpatrick (2013), “phonemic awareness plays an essential role in the storage of written words and is very critical and has not been an important part of teaching reading” (p. 6). Faizefu (2022) concurs that “Children need an awareness of phonemes themselves before they can make sense of words on a page” (p. 26).

Duke, Ward, and Pearson (2021) argue that “developing foundational word-reading skills-phonemic awareness, print awareness, phonics, and word recognition instruction instruction-is critical to developing reading comprehension” (p. 664). To teach reading for meaning, preservice teachers need to understand the underlying concepts of phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. Phoneme awareness involves identifying individual sounds within words, for example, the knowledge that the word “cat” has three phonemes/k a t/.

Preparing teachers in South Africa to teach reading for meaning effectively necessitates teaching them explicit phonemic awareness and how to teach it. Although this is an essential component in effective early instruction, previous research indicates that it is largely neglected by practising teachers (Moats 2019; Liben and Liben 2019), exacerbating the global need to decongest children's English language development.

Critical in understanding phoneme awareness is the ability to pronounce these sounds accurately. Teachers must be taught explicitly how to pronounce phonemes correctly to ensure this skill is acquired. Hence, Foundation Phase preservice teachers need to be adequately trained on how to pronounce English phonemes accurately, as this enhances their understanding of the phonemes and helps them facilitate their children's learning of those sounds.

The Foundation Phase preservice teachers also need explicit phonics instruction to teach their students this foundational reading skill effectively. Phonics instruction focuses on letter-sound relationships and is crucial to ensuring students have the tools to decode and spell words correctly. According to Ehri (2022), phonics instruction should be a key part of preservice teacher education programs so that future teachers are better prepared to teach decoding in their classrooms. Decoding involves transforming graphemes into phonemes and blending them to form a recognisable word (p. 56). If preservice teachers are fully prepared to teach decoding, they will be better informed to help their learners develop decoding skills and read new words. This would enable teachers to make better instructional decisions, deliver quality phonics instruction, and assess students more effectively.

Ehri (2022) defines phonics as "the form of instruction that teaches students the major grapheme-phoneme relations and their use to decode and spell words" (p. 53). Phonics instruction focuses on letter-sound relationships. During explicit phonics instruction, students are taught the letter or letter combinations representing the 44 sounds or phonemes in the English language. Ehri (2022) further asserts that reading development

Requires mastery of letters, phonemic awareness, knowledge of the alphabetic writing system and how to spell the sounds in words, and acquisition of a growing vocabulary of sight words. Learning these skills is facilitated by systematic phonics instruction (p.53).

Preservice teachers who have received explicit phonics instruction know that English has 26 letters and that 44 phonemes represent these letters. They also know that there are several sounds for some spellings and several spellings for some sounds (Moats, 2022). Furthermore, they understand that although both components are essential for reading, they are different. Therefore, teachers in the Foundation Phase must receive explicit instruction in phonics, which should include the alphabetic principle, letter-sound knowledge, and the articulation of speech sounds. They should also understand that phonemic awareness and phonics work together when teaching learners to read and spell. Although they are related concepts, phonemic awareness and phonics are different because words are made up of sounds (phonemic awareness), and the letters represent them in print (phonetics).

Fluency

South African Foundation Phase preservice teachers need adequate preparation to teach fluency. Fluency is the ability to read quickly, accurately, and with proper expression. Good reading fluency makes reading a natural, enjoyable, and meaningful experience. "Reading fluency is an important part of reading proficiency, and reading a text fluently is critical for comprehending it" (Hudson et al., 2012, p.484). Fluency is a bridge between decoding and meaning-making, an important component of reading skills (The National Reading Panel, 2000). Hasbrouck (2006) notes that fluency is often misunderstood and incorrectly taught and assessed.

Fluency is not only about reading quickly; it is about understanding what the learners are reading. Speed, accuracy, expression, and prosody are important components of fluency. To increase speed, children need to be able to decode words and recognise sight words. To increase accuracy, children need to be able to read words without mistakes. To increase expression, children need to be able to change their voices to show feelings when reading. Another important but often neglected fluency skill is prosody or reading with expression. Readers who read with an appropriate expression that reflects the text's meaning strive to comprehend that text. To enhance their learners' fluency, teachers need knowledge of the skills it takes for learners to read fluently and how those skills are taught explicitly and systematically.

Vocabulary

Foundation Phase preservice teachers need to be equipped with knowledge and skills on how to teach vocabulary, as there is a strong correlation between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Ehri (2022) asserts that vocabulary is significant because it is necessary for children to decode words never read before, to sort through the possible pronunciations to find the right word, and because it also awakens children's awareness of words. Solari, Yaacov, Petscher, and Hall (2021) suggest explicit, systematic, and evidence-based vocabulary instruction to improve reading for meaning.

Vocabulary is crucial to the reading process because it allows learners to derive meaning from the words they encounter in print (Ehri, 2022). Furthermore, Ehri posits that vocabulary is essential to reading comprehension; without knowing the meanings of most words, readers cannot understand what they are reading. As children progress to read more sophisticated texts, they must expand their vocabulary by learning the meaning of new words that are not part of their everyday speech. Therefore, it is important to have a thorough understanding of the structure of English orthography and the patterns and rules that govern the teaching of single- and multisyllabic regular and irregular words.

The Foundation Phase preservice teachers also need adequate training on how to teach spelling to improve beginning readers' ability to read words in text and bond their meanings to spelling and pronunciations in memory, according to Ehri (2022). However, Cartwright (2010) cautions that care and consideration should be exercised when preparing preservice teachers to teach vocabulary. Some learners may have fluent decoding and solid vocabulary but poor comprehension skills. A solution to this may be to provide preservice teachers with adequate training on enhancing their learners' vocabulary skills and identify and support learners with the necessary vocabulary skills but experience challenges with comprehension. This would ensure that preservice teachers gain an adequate understanding of vocabulary and the knowledge they need to enhance learners' vocabulary and reading for meaning.

Comprehension

South African Foundation Phase Teacher preparation institutions need to provide explicit instruction in comprehension instruction and assessment. Harris and Hodges (1995) define comprehension as "intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader". Snow (2002) defines reading comprehension as

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simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning. Snow and Sweet (2003) define reading comprehension as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning” (p. 1).

According to Scarborough (2001), two significant strands of reading skills are language comprehension and word recognition. The word-recognition strands (phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words) work together as the reader becomes accurate, fluent, and increasingly automatic with repetition and practice. The language-comprehension strands (background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge) reinforce one another and then weave together with the word-recognition strands to produce a skilled reader. Scarborough (2018) argues that weakness in any of the strands can disrupt reading, and weakness in several can disrupt reading more. Catts (2022) argues that “building background knowledge that is both deep and broad is needed to lay the foundation for comprehension and further knowledge acquisition” (p. 30).

Foundation Phase teachers need to understand that comprehension comprises several subskills, rather than just one ability, but a combination of graphophonological, semantic, and cognition skills. These skills include abilities that connect word reading and comprehension (Catts, 2022; Duke, Ward, & Pearson, 2021). I agree with Catts (2022) that readers can have different levels of comprehension depending on the text and the purpose of reading. Therefore, Foundation Phase teachers need proper training on levels of comprehension and the purposes of reading.

4. Research-based reading for meaning Instructional and Assessment practices

Preservice teachers must have strong knowledge of reading foundational skills and evidence-based reading instruction and assessment practices. Seidenberg (2017) asserts that

Reading is an area in which there is a large body of research related to teaching...ranging from theories that integrate a broad spectrum of findings, ruling out other accounts, to experiments that compare the effectiveness of different methods for teaching specific skills. (p.286)

Despite the availability of reading research, the literature also indicates that schools have taught children using “a theory about reading that cognitive scientists have repeatedly debunked. And many teachers and parents don’t know about there’s anything wrong it” (Hanford (2019)). It is, therefore imperative that Foundation Phase teacher education preparation programmes anchor their reading modules with research on research-based instructional and assessment practices. The programmes need to draw on research to train the preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning using effective and evidence-based methods. By training preservice teachers on these research-based practices, they would be prepared to implement these methods in their Foundation Phase classroom to enhance learners’ reading for meaning skills. As suggested by Goldberg et al.,

Teachers should not be expected to implement their own approach to teaching reading. They need experts to curate approaches, curricula, and materials that are research based, field-tested, and revised based on student performance (p. 7).

Teaching reading for meaning is a complex process requiring multiple instruction and practice levels. Research indicates that teachers must be well prepared to implement research-based programs and practices and have the knowledge and skills to use professional judgment when those programs and practices are not working for particular children. According to Moats (2020), teachers should be equipped with the necessary knowledge, strategies, and materials to make decisions about what to do with individual children based on observation, evidence, and an understanding of the science of reading, child development, and content rather than relying on ideology.

In the Foundation Phase, preservice teachers must learn how to effectively assess their students' reading progress and identify areas that need further development. They need to understand the role of informal and formal reading assessments, including the documentation of results, to make instructional decisions to address individual student strengths and needs. Furthermore, preservice teachers need to be able to use a variety of assessment strategies to monitor student progress and identify areas of concern.

Foundation-phase preservice teachers should also have opportunities to transfer the reading for meaning knowledge they have learnt to practice in a real-life classroom. This would give them opportunities to learn validated instructional practices for the reading for meaning component and coaching and supervised teaching experience (Moats, 2020). Therefore, preservice teachers must have opportunities to practise teaching reading for meaning before they enter the classroom. This can be done through microteaching sessions or by working with a tutor who can give feedback on their performance. By teaching students how to read text for meaning effectively, preservice teachers will be better prepared to enter the classroom and provide quality instruction from day one.

5. Language Structure

Teacher education institutions need to prepare South African Foundation Phase preservice teachers by teaching them the structure of language. This will ensure that the preservice teachers have in-depth knowledge of the linguistic structure of the languages they will teach in the classroom. Moats (2020) argues that a few teachers are ill-prepared to teach reading because their training programs do not equip them with enough knowledge of the structure of the English language. Therefore, Foundation Phase teacher preparation programmes must provide adequate training on phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The following are recommendations on these language structure components that should be taught at the teacher education level.

Phonology

Preservice Foundation Phase teachers need training on English phonology and phonemes and their significance to teaching reading for meaning in the classroom. Kilpatrick (2020) argues that phonemes are the smallest detectable sound units in spoken language that allow learners to distinguish one syllable (or word) from another. Furthermore, Kilpatrick (2020) contends that phonemic skills are foundational for fluent, word-level reading in alphabetic writing systems, as they not only assist in sounding out new words but are also central to remembering words.

According to Moats (2020), preservice teacher education programmes must equip teachers with adequate knowledge of phonetics. It is paramount for preservice teachers to know when and how to teach these English sounds. Although teachers may be taught about the schwa, they seldom use it in their own classroom teaching. To enhance their knowledge and understanding of phonetics, preservice teachers should receive explicit instruction as well as ample opportunities to practice using and teaching English phonemes.

Morphology

In addition to phonetics and phonology, the Foundation Phase of the teacher preparation programme also needs a component that focuses on morphology and its relationship to reading for meaning. Despite research demonstrating the importance of strong morphological awareness teaching (Kirby & Bowers, 2017), it has remained overlooked, particularly in preservice teacher training programs. This article argues that South African higher education institutions must teach morphological awareness at teacher preparation level.

Morphology is the study of the form and meaning of words, and understanding this connection can help learners increase their knowledge in these areas. According to James et al. (2020), preservice teachers need to understand that morphemes are the smallest units of meaning in written and spoken language. Morphological awareness is a metalinguistic skill representing the ability to manipulate word morphemes (Carlisle, 1995). Duke, Ward, and Pearson (2021) state that morphological awareness helps learners “recognise and interpret inflectional and derivational morphemes” that clearly express the role of a particular word in its linguistic context” (p. 452). Edwards et al. (2004) found that it helps learners determine the meaning of new words. Edwards et al. (2004) identify nine key features of morphological instruction:

- Integrating morphology with other aspects of literacy instruction.
- Extending morphological instruction to include etymology.
- Integrating morphological instruction with subject-area learning.
- Employ an inquiry-based problem-solving approach.
- Targeting free and bound bases as well as affixes.
- Teaching morphological families using a matrix, rather than isolated morphemes.
- Targeting instruction to reduce the effect that phonological and spelling shifts (suffix changes) across morphology words have on reading and spelling.
- Including a focus on meaning-making in morphological instruction.
- Encouraging children to use their developing knowledge of morphology to read and spell new words.

Foundation Phase preservice teachers are adequately prepared to implement these features of morphological instruction in their classroom. These components are important for reading for meaning because Foundation Phase teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to enhance their learners' morphological skills.

Syntax

Foundation Phase Preservice teachers should know syntax and how it contributes to reading development. Syntax is defined as the formation of sentences and the associated grammatical rules. Preservice teachers must be aware of phrase structures, parts of sentences, and how they support their learners' language development. By using and providing syntax and exposing learners to sentence structures, they will be able to enhance their oral and written language. Herriman (1991) asserts that syntactic awareness includes:

- Awareness of the sentence as a basic unit of written language,
- Awareness of grammatical acceptability and well-formedness as it relates to sentences or word strings, and
- Judgments about the relations between syntactic structure and semantic properties of sentences (p.330).

If the Foundation Phase preservice teachers gain knowledge of the structure of words, their sound-spelling, meaning, and how they function in a sentence, the better prepared they will be to teach reading for meaning. If preservice teachers are equipped with syntactic knowledge, they will be better prepared to enhance their learners' sentence-building skills and expand their vocabularies.

Semantics

Yule (2020) emphasises the importance of semantics in developing reading-for-meaning skills in teachers. Semantics is the study of meaning, and its role in literacy development is crucial for teachers to understand. With a strong knowledge of semantics, teachers can develop the skills needed to teach reading for meaning in the Foundation Phase classroom. They will also develop skills to enhance their learners' understanding of meaning at the word, sentence and text level. Without such training, the teachers would experience challenges teaching reading and writing at the Foundation Phase level.

6. Teaching reading to culturally and linguistically diverse learners

The South African context is multilingual and multicultural, with 12 official languages, including South African Sign Language. The Department of Basic Education has also proposed three new language options in the schooling system: Khoi, Nama and San. Therefore, teacher education institutions must prepare adequately to teach culturally and linguistically diverse learners. This means that the increasing diversity of learners challenges Foundation Phase teachers in their classrooms. Therefore, it is important to prepare foundation-phase teachers to teach reading for meaning to learners with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Foundation Phase preservice teachers need to be familiar with a range of approaches and be able to adapt their instruction to meet the needs of their learners. Preservice teachers need to know that all their learners, regardless of their socioeconomic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds, have valuable background knowledge, experiences, concepts, and languages to help them develop reading for meaning skills. They embrace their role as adding to rather than replacing what the learners bring to their classrooms

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If preservice teachers are adequately prepared to teach diverse learners, they would develop an understanding that all learners bring a wealth of knowledge and experiences to the classroom, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds. Preservice teachers must be equipped with knowledge and skills on how to embrace cultural differences so that they will be in a position to understand their learners' reading for meaning needs and how to support them in safe and supportive learning environments. Duke and Cartwright (2021) note that learners who rarely afford opportunities to read texts that reflect their culture often experience reading differently. As such, South African Foundation Phase preservice teacher preparation programmes need to equip the teachers with adequate knowledge on how to teach linguistically and culturally diverse learners.

Teaching Reading for meaning to learners with reading difficulties

South African preservice Foundation Phase teachers need to be knowledgeable and skilled in delivering evidence-based reading instruction and interventions specifically designed for learners with reading difficulties, including dyslexic learners. However, research indicates that teachers that qualified teachers lack specialised knowledge in teaching learners with visual, auditory, and intellectual impairments and developmental disabilities. It is important for preservice teachers in the Foundation Phase to understand that "not all reading difficulties are alike" (Moats, 2020). Therefore, Foundation Phase teacher preparation programmes should provide adequate training on how to identify and support learners with reading difficulties, as well as how to provide instruction that meets the needs of each individual learner based on their language, reading, writing, and cognitive profile (Moats, 2020).

Snow (2020) argues that oral language and literacy difficulties are some of the most common developmental problems in early literacy development (Snow, 2020). If preservice teachers in the Foundation Phase are adequately prepared, they will understand that reading difficulties can be caused by decoding, language comprehension, phonological awareness, mixed difficulties, and dyslexia (Sleeman, et al., 2022). Therefore, teachers must be aware of dyslexia and the reading difficulties experienced by learners with dyslexia. Although learners with dyslexia often have difficulty with phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondence, they can improve with practice. This knowledge can help preservice teachers solve instructional difficulties and better support their dyslexic students in the classroom. Without this knowledge, teachers may inadvertently perpetuate reading problems instead of addressing them.

Technology Integration

While there is a lot of focus on teaching reading for meaning, it is also imperative to equip Foundation Phase teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach reading for meaning in a way that will prepare future-ready teachers. The COVID-19 pandemic, the 4th Industrial Revolution and the advent of new pedagogical approaches opportunities afforded by technology point to the need for a new profile for Foundation Phase teachers. These technological advancements imply that Foundation Phase teachers are increasingly under pressure to integrate new technologies and use digital resources to support the teaching of reading for meaning.

This calls for South African teacher education institutions to keep abreast of these latest trends and prepare teachers with knowledge so they can be relevant to the ever-changing educational landscape. Preservice teachers need adequate preparation for using digital tools that support specific learning objectives, enrich the desired learning experience, and promote creativity in the classroom. For example, they must be prepared to use animated videos, interactive slides, digital audio-visual materials, and virtual reality. The internet is also inundated with reading for meaningful information and resources. Foundation-phase teachers need adequate knowledge on how to evaluate the resources and customise them for their classrooms. They also need information on how to access and use online reading resources, free webinars for teachers, blogs, and websites so they can enrich their reading for meaning classroom sessions.

7. CONCLUSION

The article has provided recommendations on the content and structure of Foundation Phase teacher education programmes to prepare teachers to teach reading for meaning. In light of the current reading for the meaning crisis in South Africa, there is an urgent need for teacher education institutions to prepare preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning.

While there are concerns about the current reading for the meaning crisis in South Africa, there is a lack of research on how South African teacher preparation programs should prepare teachers to teach reading for meaning in the Foundation Phase classroom. The article has proposed recommendations on how South African teacher education institutions can prepare Foundation Phase preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning.

However, it is important to note that the recommendations presented in the article are not exhaustive. Rather, they are a call to action towards deep engagement with preservice teacher preparation and reading for meaning. The recommendations should be used as a basis for curriculum review and implementation of programmes that prepare teachers to teach reading for meaning in the South African Foundation Phase classroom. It is suggested that South African teacher educators undertake intensive curriculum review processes to ensure that their curricula prepare preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning in the South African Foundation Phase classroom. By preparing preservice teachers to teach reading for meaning, teacher education institutions would ensure that South African learners have the opportunity to learn to read and that fully equipped teachers teach them.

It would be interesting for future research to explore further the recommendations outlined in this article and make further suggestions for preparing South African Foundation Phase teachers to teach reading for meaning. Further research could also provide empirical evidence on how teacher education programmes prepare teachers to teach reading for meaning. I also suggest researching how the preservice teachers' views on their preparedness to teach reading for meaning in the South African Foundation Phase classroom. Finally, future research must examine how teachers teach reading for meaning in real teaching contexts. In this way, researchers and teacher educators can better understand how South African teacher education institutions can adequately prepare Foundation Phase teachers to teach reading for meaning.

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