

CHAPTER SEVEN

PHASE TWO FINDINGS:

CASE STUDIES OF SELECTED SCHOOL CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS OF PRACTICE FOR READING LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

7.1 ORIENTATION

In this chapter, findings are presented for the Phase Two qualitative case studies of schooling contexts for the development of reading literacy. They complement and extend the results of the secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire data presented in Chapter Six. As such, the chapter deals with further findings for research sub-question one for the study, namely:

What are the schooling conditions in which Grade 4 reading literacy instruction practices occur at each identified PIRLS 2006 achievement benchmark?

The goal of the chapter is to present and compare characteristics of purposively selected schools which had a class average achievement at the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks of EFL 550 (School A), EFL 475 (School B), EFL 400 (School C), and the South African benchmarks of EFL 325 (School D), EFL 325 (School E) and EAL 175 (School F). The data presented in the chapter are an amalgamation of findings gleaned from the analysis of: interviews³⁹ with the Intermediate Phase Head of Department and the participating Grade 4 teacher at each school; selected PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire items; photographs of literacy resources in libraries and Grade 4 classrooms taken at each school; and classroom observation (see Chapter Five).

Firstly, in section 7.2, a general overview of each school's environment is provided. As it is theorised that learner attributes and parental involvement not only impact classroom teaching but also help to determine the nature of school environments overall, the characteristics of the learners and parental involvement at each of the schools are outlined in section 7.3. In section 7.4, resource adequacy for learners' reading literacy development at each school is considered in relation to the other case study schools. Thereafter, professional organisation

³⁹ Direct quotations taken from transcripts of the interviews conducted have been edited via the removal of obsolete words and phrases which impeded readability. Ellipses in the quotations signify where editing has occurred. No changes have been made to the quotations that would alter the original meaning as portrayed by the interview participants.

of reading literacy teaching and learning at each of the schools is compared (7.5). This is followed by discussion of perceptions and experiences of curriculum implementation at each school (7.6). Lastly, discussion and summary of the data for meso level contexts and conditions of practice for the development of reading literacy is provided (7.7).

7.2 SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

School A (EFL 550) was an exclusive private school situated in an affluent urban Gauteng neighbourhood in Johannesburg serving learners from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. Average class size at the school ranged between 20 and 23 learners and the school catered for learners from Grades 0 to 12. Schools fees for Grade 4 in 2009 were R46 769. A total of 473 learners attended the primary school in 2009, and there were 38 teachers on the staff. It was estimated that the pupil: teacher ratio at the school was about 19:1. The vast majority of teachers and learners at the school were White. *Twenty-five to 50%* of the learners were considered to be from middle to upper class homes. *Less than 10%* of the learners did not have the language of teaching as a first language. An index of availability of school resources compiled via responses to the PIRLS school questionnaire was high, as were indices of the principal's perception of school safety and of school climate. The learners at School A were depicted as very spontaneous, confident, resilient, active and enthusiastic, and were outspoken and challenging in a respectful way.

School B (EFL 475) was a former Model C school situated in an urban residential neighbourhood in the midlands of KwaZulu-Natal. It offered dual-medium English and Afrikaans instruction although an English cohort of Grade 4 learners was assessed for PIRLS 2006. The school had balanced numbers of Black, White, Indian and Asian learners enrolled. The majority of teachers at the school were White. Only *0 to 10%* of the learners were considered to be from economically disadvantaged homes and no learners received a free or reduced-price lunch. The language of teaching was not a first language for *25 to 50%* of the learners. Indices of the principal's perception of school safety and school resources revealed a high level of both at the school. An index of the principal's perception of school climate was at medium level. At School B, the learners were described as being mostly from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds. In general, the HoD felt that learners had changed significantly in recent years in that they had a lack of self-discipline and no sense of responsibility. The Grade 4 teacher described her learner group as talkative and active but otherwise experienced very few discipline problems from them.

School C (EFL 400) was a former Model C school situated in an urban, industrial area on the East Rand in Gauteng. A charity had identified the school as a “needy school” as 90% of the learners were from township areas (P4, 4:4, 66:66⁴⁰) and some learners lived in informal settlements. Schools fees for 2009 were R4 000. A total of 860 learners attended the primary school in 2009, and there were 32 teachers on the staff. It was estimated that the pupil: teacher ratio at the school was about 40:1. Most children at the school were Black learners with a minority of Indian learners. The teachers at the school were diverse, representing nine South African official language groups⁴¹. At school C, 11 to 25% of the learners were reportedly from economically disadvantaged homes but none received a free or reduced-price lunch. Moreover, English as the medium of instruction was not the first language for *more than 50%* of the learners. According to the indices compiled, there were high levels of resource availability, safety and school climate.

School D (EFL 325) was a Roman Catholic private school located in a large urban township in Johannesburg, Gauteng. All learners and teachers were Black. Schools fees in 2009 were R2 600. Although private, the school still received a government subsidy. At school D, 11 to 25% of the learners were reportedly from economically disadvantaged homes and some received a free or reduced-price lunch. English as the medium of instruction was not the first language of 25 to 50% of the learners, suggesting that the others spoke it at home. High levels of resource availability, school safety and school climate were apparent from the PIRLS data. The School D teacher acknowledged that the learners were from a slightly higher socioeconomic background than most children in the general location. The Grade 4 learners at the school were experienced as motivated learners (P3, 3:72, 157:160).

School E (EFL 325) was situated in an urban, predominantly Coloured neighbourhood adjacent to a large township area south of Johannesburg. Both Coloured and Black children from the surrounding community attended the school. Teachers were Black or Coloured. The school was dual-medium English and Afrikaans, although a group learning in English were assessed for the PIRLS 2006. Some learners reportedly received a free or reduced-price lunch. At School E, *more than 50%* of the learners were reportedly from economically disadvantaged homes and *more than 50%* did not speak English as a first language. The PIRLS indices compiled showed a medium level of resource availability, safety and climate at

⁴⁰ For audit trail purposes, each participant comment or quotation is followed by a bracketed reference as to where the data can be found in the Atlas.ti hermeneutic unit in which it is situated. For example, the “P4” in the reference “P4, 4:4, 66:66” refers to primary document number 4; “4:4” refers to code 4 in primary document 4; and the numerals “66:66” refer to the line numbers of the verbatim quotations.

⁴¹ There were: 11 Afrikaans home language teachers; 10 English teachers; 1 Setswana teacher; 2 IsiXhosa teachers; 2 IsiZulu teachers; 1 Sesotho teacher; 1 Sepedi teacher; 2 Tshivenda teachers; 1 Xitsonga teacher; and 1 teacher who spoke another home language at the school.

the school. The teacher described most of the learners as inclined to being quiet, sedentary workers. She also reported that those learners who participated were respectful and inquisitive, asked questions and challenged her when they disagreed (P2, 2:49, 146:149) (P2, 2:50, 153:153). In spite of these positive learner attributes, the teacher felt that a major impediment to achieving her teaching goals with her learners was the level of learner absenteeism, even at Grade 4 level, with learners roaming the streets during school hours (P2, 2:69, 222:230).

School F (EAL 175) was located in a suburban township in a small town near Pretoria in Gauteng. It had been extended five years previously, to cater for an increase in learners from a growing informal settlement on the outskirts of the area, the closure of farm schools and the integration of a Grade R class. The school had just been afforded “no-school-fees” status at the time of data collection. In 2010, an amount of R855 per year was allocated to each learner at such schools. A total of 1 446 learners attended the school in 2009, and there were 38 teachers on the staff. The HoD estimated that the pupil: teacher ratio at the school was about 50:1. There was an active feeding scheme at the school which was used by all of the learners and a vegetable garden for the scheme and parents in need. Grade 4 learners at the school were assessed in English for the PIRLS 2006 main study. The principal reported that *11 to 25%* of the learners did not speak the language of instruction as a first language, here seemingly referring to Sepedi as the medium of instruction from Grades 1 to 3 and not to English as the medium of instruction from Grade 4. Medium levels of resource availability, safety and school climate at the school were calculated from the PIRLS 2006 indices. The HoD at School F pointed out that the learners were predominantly the children of farm workers who lived on the farms or in informal settlements in the area. Their parents had little or no income. Revealing the impact of an impoverished educational environment at home, the HoD also suggested that school holidays had a negative impact on the learners’ performance as teachers seemed “...*to have to start again...*” (P1, 1:4, 6:6).

7.3 LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT FOR READING LITERACY

Learner characteristics are broadly discussed in this section in terms of their language abilities (7.3.1) and the involvement of parents in these learners’ academic lives (7.3.2) at the six schools.

7.3.1 Learner language abilities

In this sub-section the following themes are considered: the language background and literacy skills of learners (7.3.1.1); the impact of preschool attendance on learners' literacy and language proficiency (7.3.1.2) ; the influence of mixed ability grouping in classes and learners' with learning problems on teaching (7.3.1.3); and the audiovisual-technological orientation of learners which effects their reading motivation (7.3.1.4).

7.3.1.1 *Language background and literacy skills*

In specific reference to reading at School A, a minimal number of learners still needed to decode during the Intermediate Phase grades. Also, there were a small number of learners at this phase who still pointed with their fingers, sounded out words and/or needed to refer to their phonics chart when reading. Moreover, once learners had mastered the skill of reading, especially from the age of 10 upwards, the HoD felt that reading became passé to them, that it was viewed as “nerdish” and that it bore a stigma. The School B HoD specifically noted a decline in learners' foundations such as writing sentences, the ability to summarise, and the ability to find main ideas in text. The HoD stated that, *“We are getting children that are missing out on things that we never had before... after 30 years of teaching English, you notice it”* (P1, 1:51, 38:38). As a result of a lack of reading by learners, the HoD at School B experienced that they had a poor vocabulary, nonetheless acknowledging that their abilities varied from year to year. She specifically felt that the national starting age for schooling has a negative impact on learners' reading development in the latter primary school years, as they are developmentally too advanced for their reading levels:

This starting school at seven is a major crisis... Those kids sitting in Grade One, when it comes to reading are bored. Bored becomes a habit. They get to Grade Seven or even Grade Six [and] they are emotionally, socially, sexually, too advanced for what they're having to do...and that is a huge problem, because they now can't cope with what we expect them to read in Grade Seven and so they become disinterested. They are bored all the way up through school, so they have lost that excitement for learning, reading... (P1, 1:63, 46:50).

A problem with literacy was noted at School C. Over and above their problems with the English medium of instruction, learners were considered to be disinterested in reading books and were *“...lazy to take the book and read it”* (P4, 4:25, 30:30). The Grade 4 teacher also felt that the children *“... are so spoon-fed ideas and concepts [that] they cannot think critically”* (P6, 6:18, 34:34). In reference to learners' reading skills, the School D teacher indicated that she had many good readers who could read with comprehension, however, similarly to School A, she had a few learners *“who read but... count words... go slowly, they*

are not confident enough to say 'I will read', making it difficult for them to understand and follow the story" (P1, 1:13, 31:31) (P3, 3:4, 8:14). When asked about the learners' written comprehension skills in particular, the teacher judged the learners' skills as being good, although some still spelt words phonetically when writing, unless they were copying words directly from the text (P3, 3:48, 107:108). At School E, learners' reading speeds varied (P2, 2:40, 131:131), with a few experiencing problems with reading. The teacher felt that the Foundation Phase teachers should have addressed these learners' difficulties, stating that "...I can't catch up what they've lost..." (P2, 2:55, 164:167).

Except for learners at School A, where language of instruction was not mentioned as an issue, learners' English language proficiency influenced language teaching and learning to varying extents at the other schools. At School B, the non-English vernacular speakers had a Zulu mother tongue, whilst their White and Indian peers were EFL learners. At Schools C, D, E and F, most if not all learners were non-English learners with an African language mother tongue.

At School B, the African vernacular learners' spoken English was reportedly good as many were brought up speaking English at home and had attended English preschools. Therefore, these learners only struggled with low frequency vocabulary and also sometimes with "... *the finer points, the hidden subtleties...*" of the language, which their peers seemed to pick up relatively easily (P2: 2:15; 27:31). Literacy difficulties at School C were linked to the non-English vernacular status of most of the learners. Some of the learners had poor spoken and written English skills (P4, 4:13, 24:24) (P4, 4:18, 26:26). The HoD also felt that they had lost interest in English and did not recognise its importance, in spite of the school's strategy to reward them for using English (P4, 4:16, 26:26). Many of the Grade 4 learners, especially those who did not speak any English at home, battled with basic comprehension (P5, 5:10, 14:14). Suggesting a lack of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1981) in English, the learners in the school still needed to think in their vernaculars.

As observed by the HoD interviewed:

...it doesn't seem to me as though they're thinking in English and writing in English. They are thinking in an African language but are trying to translate it into English language... you can see that the words are transcribed incorrectly and... the manner in which they write out their answers, you can see that the child was not thinking in English... (P4, 4:15, 26:26).

At School D, although the teacher found that the learners became increasingly proficient in English as opposed to their vernaculars as they progressed through the primary school years

(P3, 3:64, 239:140), they still sometimes switched to their vernaculars when trying to articulate themselves in English (P3, 3:63, 130:130).

As the only school in the sample with a switch to English at Grade 4, learners' EAL standing at School F seemed to have the most negative effect on their language abilities. The learners were not likely to have had any English exposure at school entrance, nor always understand Sepedi, the language of instruction at the school for Grades 1 to 3, (P1, 1:37, 112:122). This lack of English proficiency at school entrance seems to have been compounded by an ill-advised directive reportedly received from the DoE district office to introduce English only in the third term of the learners' Grade 3 year, which is counter to the National DoE's (2002b) policy to introduce the additional language in the Grade 1 year. The learners' lack of English proficiency in particular was likely to stay with them well into the Intermediate Phase, impacting their reading proficiency in the language (P1, 1:32, 91:93), as additionally revealed by the HoD:

Okay, the reading, it's very bad, very bad. First the learners, most of them are from the farms... they just spoke their mother tongue and that is it. And when they come to school it's a struggle to start from that [basis]. You find that even though they have moved from the Foundation Phase into the Intermediate Phase it's as if they have never heard any English... and so usually the first time you start them from scratch and you build on that (P1, 1:1, 4:4).

The School F Grade 4 teacher also pointed out that although the learners read and understood Sepedi very well by the end of Grade 3 the switch to English at Grade 4 created difficulties for them (P3, 3:8, 19:28) and was the “*main challenge*” that teachers experienced (P3, 3:10, 29:30). The teacher further explained that some of her learners could read very well but some could not read with understanding. Still others could not read the majority of English words. The teacher thus suggested that learners should be introduced to English as LoLT at Grade 4 from their Grade R year (P3, 3:23, 77:80). Despite the learners' difficulties with English language and reading, the HoD indicated that the learners performed better in other learning areas which were also taught in English (P1, 1:16, 32:36).

The perceived value of having learners start in English in the Foundation Phase was emphasised by comments made about their entering schools C and D in the Intermediate Phase with limited English proficiency. According to the School C HoD, if learners entered the school at a later stage and had not been attending English medium schools, teachers had to start again with Foundation Phase readers to help them to improve in English (P4, 4:28, 24:36).

Also, as suggested by the Grade 4 teacher, the trend for parents to send their children to an English medium school later in the primary school years impacted negatively on classroom practice:

I do notice that we've had a great influx of children who have come from other schools, predominantly because their parents want them to become more literate in English, but these children have not had any foundation in English and they tend to hold the class back and there is not enough time with forty children to give that child the focused attention that he or she needs (P5, 5:23, 26:26).

Moreover, when parents were not upfront about their child's English language proficiency, the school might have to retain the child, send the child to a support class or have the child assessed to determine his or her difficulties (P4, 4:71, 72:72). The School D teacher further stressed that those learners who did not have basic reading skills tended to have been at other schools prior to entering Grade 4 at the school (P3, 3:22, 37:39).

7.3.1.2 *The impact of preschool attendance*

At schools B, C and D it was acknowledged that learners' attendance of preschool had a positive influence on their language and literacy abilities at Grade 4. At School C it was estimated that about three quarters of the school's children had attended Grade R at the school (P5, 5:27, 36:36). The Grade 4 teacher articulated that, together with the school's policy of English conversation in all settings, by the time these learners got to Grade 4 they *"are able to hold a conversation very well and even if the parents don't speak to them at home, the brighter ones pick up the language amazingly fast and are able to function [academically] extremely well"* (P5, 5:25, 28:32). At School B, learners are only admitted from a satellite pre-primary school and the school's own Grade R, with the school reaching their quota of children in this way. Related to this, the school also has a policy to try to get learners into Grade 00 two years before they start Grade 1 to ensure that they first have at least two years in an English classroom. As a teacher stated *"...so that makes a big difference to our standard even as they enter Grade One"*⁴².

The School D teacher indicated that most of the learners did attend Grade R at the school, which made a difference to their basic skills. When entering Grade R some of the learners did already have *"... a little bit of background in English..."* due to attendance of good crèches (P3, 3:62, 131:136). The teacher related that *"sometimes you will find that we take a learner who went to maybe this crèche that has a Grade R and you take the child in Grade*

⁴² Interview with School B Foundation Phase Literacy coordinator- not included in *Atlas.ti* analysis for this study.

One and you find that the child doesn't know some of the things that our learners know, so it makes life easier if our [own] Grade R is feeding us" (P3, 3:27, 49:54).

7.3.1.3 *Mixed ability grouping and learners with learning difficulties*

At schools B and C, teachers experienced mixed ability grouping as problematic for teaching learners according to their academic abilities. As the School C Grade 4 teacher stated:

It creates extra stress for the teacher... and I think that is the biggest mistake the Department has made, because if you have children of similar ability working together you can move faster... I think children can reach their potential much better that way ... a child who is having problems, if they're in a class with other children who are having similar problems, as a teacher you are much better equipped to deal with it... especially things like reading, I think that you can equip children with skills much better if you are dealing with children of the same ability basically, because sometimes children feel inferior or not confident enough to speak up when there are brighter children in the class and we have some really above average brilliant children in our school... They are quick and they are smart and the others don't speak up for fear of being ostracised or being looked at as foolish or stupid... (P6, 6:2, 4:6).

In discussing the academic abilities of her learners, the School B Grade 4 teacher stated that, whereas during the previous six years she had taught "A classes", implying learners with above average academic ability, she had a mixed ability group at the time of the research visit. The teacher did find that, in comparison to having a group of learners with similar abilities, the mixed ability composition of the class was challenging due to the need to extend faster learners and assist those who were battling. In further reference to the impact of mixed ability grouping, the HoD at the School B expressed her beliefs about the need for streaming:

... they did away with streaming of children, which I feel we need to go back to, right from the beginning because the slow, slow child is being left out because they take too much time and there is no time for them, so it is the middle of the range of the class that's sitting in front of you, which is weak. The bright children are getting totally ignored. There are a lot of bright children, so they're being held back (P1, 1:62, 46:46).

According to both the HoD and the Grade 4 teacher at School C, having Learners with Special Education Needs (LSEN) in classes at the school was also having a negative impact on teaching and learning. The Grade 4 teacher estimated that 15 to 20% of the Grade 4 children she taught had a Grade 1 level reading ability with extremely poor basic word recognition. The DoE expected evidence of interventions to assist learners with barriers before approving retention of a learner, which the HoD described as "... *overwhelming...*" in terms of classroom practice (P4, 4:39, 56:56).

7.3.1.4 *The audiovisual-technological orientation of learners*

The School A subject area leader, the School B HoD and the School C Grade 4 teacher spoke of the impact of technology on the reading abilities and interests of learners. The School A subject area leader was concerned about the audiovisual orientation of learners which she thought impacted negatively on their literate language abilities, declaring that *“They’re so used to seeing everything presented visually on the television or audio. Everything’s seeing and hearing but there’s no thinking needed. There’s a huge lack of imagination. Children cannot write stories any more. They cannot tell stories any more”* (P3, 3:90; 107:107).

She further acknowledged that as a result of the technological age the learners live in, many had a strong dislike of books, especially the boys. Therefore, teachers at the school used multiple strategies to ensure that the learners developed an interest in reading and did not get bored with classroom teaching for reading.

In a similar vein, in describing learners’ literacy skills, the School B HoD noted that learners had no listening skills and as a result had poor pronunciation, which infringed on their reading skills. The HoD also found that the learners did not read. She specifically apportioned blame for this on their orientation towards technology and television. Perhaps revealing the impact of television on learners’ reading interests, the Grade 4 teacher experienced that the learners seemed to be oriented towards *“Americanised”* books based on popular television characters (P2, 2:259, 139:141).

Rather than focusing on the negative impact of technology on learners, the Grade 4 teacher at School C felt that she had to find ways to engage learners to retain their interest and advance their thought-processing. As she argued:

... Grade Four [learners] today are so advanced technologically, they are so aware of what’s going on in the world that dumbing down things [such as reading] and telling them about “John and Jill” and keeping it too basic, leads to boredom and it doesn’t stretch their minds (P6, 6:4, 12:12).

7.3.2 **Parental involvement**

On the whole, School A was the only one where teachers had mostly positive views of parental involvement in their children’s education. Parents were described as enthusiastic with a willingness to attend meetings and work with the staff. This positive parental involvement is likely a result of the school’s drive to elicit their involvement. At the beginning

of each school year, teachers at the school issued a list of learning area outcomes and expectations of learners to the parents. Also, there was a parents' initiation evening for each grade, at which the teachers spoke about their learning area and expectations, and gave parents clear guidelines about what was expected from them and from their children.

Teachers at Schools D and E also had positive experiences of parental involvement with their learners, albeit only in relation to parental attendance of meetings. Parents of learners at School D were described as being responsive to requests from teachers if they lived in the vicinity of the school. At School E specifically, the teacher reported that most parents would respond to requests for meetings and implemented whichever recommendations were made by the teacher. For the few parents who did not respond to a request for a meeting, the teacher reported trying to visit them at home or otherwise asking the principal or vice principal to telephone the parents to encourage them to attend a meeting with the teacher, which they would then do.

In contrast to the experiences of parental involvement at Schools A, D and E, experiences were less positive at the other schools. Teachers at Schools B, C and F specifically indicated that it was difficult to get the cooperation of parents of learners who were struggling. These parents would not attend meetings to discuss their children's difficulties and could even be hostile towards teachers when meetings were requested, as in the case of School F (P1, 1:20, 47:48). At school C, parents were required to monitor their children's reading via a reading record, but the HoD was not certain that they did so as she had seen no improvement in some of the learners' English skills (P4, 4:12, 24:24).

Regardless of whether or not parental involvement was experienced as positive, few learners at School A, B, C, D and F came from a background of literate language exposure at home, as evidenced by the following interview discussion with the subject area leader at School A:

....we find very few parents are actually reading to their children. Our children don't know their nursery rhymes [Researcher: That, I was interested in... do you find that they come to school from literate home environments, in terms of a love of reading?]... Absolutely not. Very, very few, very few. (P3, 3:131, 131:133).

At Schools C, D and F, parental literacy levels were specifically problematic. Reasons for this lack of an optimal home literate language environment were attributed to the busy lifestyles of parents, parents who were not interested in reading, or the poor literacy levels of parents themselves. At School F, most parents were seemingly illiterate and unable to assist their children with schoolwork. Furthermore, there was a stigma attached to attending the Adult

Basic Education and Training classes offered at the school. At School D, many of the learners lived with grandparents who could not read and write. Although they may have been able to read, the parents of learners at School C may not have been “... *functionally literate in English so they cannot provide the support with regard to homework or reading activities at home with regard to reading*” (P5, 5:24, 26:28). Moreover, the school C teacher felt that parents did not encourage learners to read at home due to ignorance about the importance of reading from a young age. The teacher estimated that roughly half of her learners did not come from a literate home environment (P5, 5:24, 26:28).

7.4 RESOURCE ADEQUACY

As suggested in Chapter Three, one of the reasons often given for variation in average learner achievement across different schools is resource adequacy. In terms of reading literacy resources, adequately resourced schools have ample textbooks, classroom and school library reading materials (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992). In this section, school library availability and use at each of the participating schools is considered (7.4.1), followed by descriptions of classroom reading resource availability and management thereof (7.4.2), and learning support resources (7.4.3).

7.4.1 School library availability and use

At Schools A, B, C and D, a school library was available. However, it was only at Schools A, B and C that it was evident that well-resourced, well-managed libraries were actively in use. School E did have a library but it was not functional, and, perhaps suggesting that libraries are of little value in schools with space problems, the library at School F had been converted into a Grade R classroom. Schools A, B and C had either a full-time school librarian or a media teacher, which is the likely reason these libraries were well-managed and organised. Schools B and C also had senior learners volunteer as library monitors.

Whilst at face-value the School A library had the best facilities and reading materials availability⁴³, the School B and C libraries were also well-stocked, featuring books in good condition and with recent or new book publications available on the shelves. Each of the libraries for these schools was organised using the Dewey classification system, with clearly labelled sections for junior and senior fiction and non-fiction, subject area sections, and reference materials. At Schools A and C, there were also teacher reference sections

⁴³ See photographs of the literacy resources at each case study school in Appendix H.

featuring teaching methodology and subject area books. At School C, teachers had access to DVDs and posters from the library to use in their classrooms. Teachers could also do a block loan so that the children could take the books from class (P4, 4:43, 61:62). The school received second-hand book and magazine donations from a charity (P4, 4:4, 66:66).

At School B, while the library teacher did not work in conjunction with teachers, she did discuss with them which themes teachers were working on in class, and set aside these books so that they could be used in the classroom. There were also a number of magazine titles available in the School A and C libraries. At School C, these magazines were donated. At School D, the books were separated into fiction and non-fiction, references and subject areas in an orderly manner on bookshelves. However, in comparison to Schools A, B and C, the shelf labels were old, difficult to read or peeling. The books themselves were older, with little evidence of newer books on display. A number of books were damaged.

It was only at the two schools at the highest benchmarks that Grade 4 learners had formally scheduled time to visit the school library during teaching and learning time. At School B specifically, learners had a library lesson during which they worked on their research skills. There was no time for a library period for Intermediate Phase learners (P5, 5:32, 42:44) at School C due to DoE time allocation directives for teaching and learning (P4, 4:43, 61:62), although the learners did apparently use the library in their spare time. The School D learners seemingly visited the library when their teacher decided to take them to choose books, usually on a weekly basis. At School A and B, learners had access to the library at breaks and after school, while at School C, library access was limited to break times.

7.4.2 Classroom reading resource availability and management

In 7.4.2.1 reading resource access and management at school level are elucidated and print environments and policies for their creation at each school are discussed (7.4.2.2).

7.4.2.1 Resource access and management

There appeared to be substantial classroom reading resource availability differences between schools A, B and C at the PIRLS international benchmarks, and schools D⁴⁴, E and F, which did not reach these benchmarks. At schools A and C, no indication of resource access problems was suggested.

⁴⁴ Although the teacher did not refer to resource access problems, this judgement has been made on the basis of the materials used and the classroom observed.

The subject area leader at School A and teacher at School C affirmed this with the following statements:

... there's so much available in a variety of sources that I think [the children] don't get time to get bored and that's why they're active learners and really very spontaneous (School A, P3, 3:117, 117:117).

...At this school, we are fantastically fortunate that whatever resources we require for reading, they are provided almost immediately. My principal is passionate about reading and one of the school's goals is to improve literacy and to encourage a love for reading, so as far as resources go, its fine (School C, P5, 5:21, 26:26).

There was a budget allocation for books at school C to purchase whatever was needed (P4, 4:46, 64:64). Although School B could be considered very well-resourced in comparison to schools D, E and F, the HoD nevertheless referred to the negative impact of government budget cuts, meaning that school fees were used to supply resources. Rising costs meant that this was not adequate and funding for such resources had to be staggered with a grade receiving the money each year (P1, 1:65; 55:56).

The School B HoD also found it difficult to access appropriate information and reading material samples to help make decisions on reading material purchases at the school (P1, 1:155; 42:42) (P1, 1:68; 56:56). The HoD specifically commented about the need for differentiated reading materials at each grade. As she further explained:

...you have to make a decision and sometimes you make an incorrect decision... you know, sometimes it might be a book for Grade Five but our Grade Fours need that book because they are a bright bunch or vice versa, ... so it is no good saying [to publishers], 'right, I teach Grade Seven, bring what is available'. I need to know what's in Grade Eight and in Grade Six (P1, 1:69; 57:60).

The HoD also wanted to implement a reading series programme in the Intermediate Phase, as the teachers did not have access to one reading scheme. She felt that there was a need for a reading series programme and perceived that learners would benefit from the continuity offered from grade to grade (P1, 1:97; 134:140).

Monitoring of the success of purchased literacy programmes by all role-players was seemingly unique to School A. The process was described by the subject area leader:

[Management] would have reviewed... [the programme] first before giving us the go-ahead to purchase it. They will call us in first of all as subject leaders and they would say 'How is your staff finding it?' They would then go to the staff themselves and say 'How are you finding it?' and on the odd occasion they do call in children and say 'how are you finding it?' So every stakeholder will report back on the success of what has been purchased and then ultimately the subject leader would be responsible then to reporting to the principal of the primary school and then quite regularly a yearly interview with the executive head where we are questioned on the progress of

what has been done. So there's that constant monitoring to make sure that our standards are upheld (P3, 3:121, 123:125).

At School E, the teacher experienced reading materials resource problems not only in English but also in other subject areas (P2, 2:13, 33:33). The teacher had to buy books using her own salary (P2, 2:14, 33:33), or get worksheets from other schools as materials were not always available (P2, 2:11, 29:29). The teacher found this unacceptable and had spoken to the principal, who told her to ask other teachers which books they were using and then fill out a Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) form so that she could get new books (P2, 2:38, 122:131). The teacher acknowledged that she had to find a solution to the problems she experienced with resources in the class by asking the School Management Team (SMT) for assistance (P2, 2:13, 33:33). It thus seems that there was no proactive support on the part of school management to assist the teacher in this regard.

At School F, the HoD pointed out that there was a problem with availability of reading materials at each Grade (P1, 1:14, 27:30) and there were very few readers. At the time of the research visit, readers had been ordered (P1, 1:8, 10:10) as the school had just been declared a “*No-fee school*”, resulting in an LTSM budget allocation (P1, 1:10, 15:20). In the interim, the HoD reported that teachers would use the classroom chalkboard to write letters so that children would be able to see the letters to pronounce them (P1, 1:9, 10:14). Photocopy handouts of stories that the teachers had typed out were also being used for reading instruction (P1, 1:11, 18:22). Another strategy was to use stories available in the textbooks for other learning areas (P1, 1:14, 27:30). Older Sepedi materials were also used for instruction. Perhaps suggesting difficulties in identifying appropriate materials and confusion about links between curricula and reading materials, the HoD mentioned that they used phased out RNCS books:

Well, there are these old RNCS books that ...we requested them during that time [of the RNCS]. We are still using them now because we don't have anything of NCS. The teachers checked the latest material and they did not like them so there is nothing of them (P1, 1:41, 136:147).

7.4.2.2 *Policy on creation of literate classroom environments for learning*

At schools D, E and F, poor literate language classroom environments were observed. At School D, minimal handwritten posters for other subject areas were on the walls, as well as a few newspaper pullouts relating to government. The posters were old, torn and fading. When asked about the availability of readers in the classroom, the teacher at School D indicated that she collected books from the library for a library box for the learners to read during spare time at home, when they had finished their work in class, or if a teacher was out of the class.

Instead of returning the books to the library, the learners swapped them amongst themselves, reading them at their own pace (P3, 3:29, 55:60) (P3, 3:76, 168:168). Management were supposed to check whether or not teachers had books in their library box (P3, 3:77, 168:168). At School E, there was no classroom reading corner and only a few handwritten posters with language rules on the wall. The teacher attributed the lack of a reading corner and posters to a lack of space in the classroom and her recent move to the school (P2, 2:37, 115:121). At School F, there was only a partly visible handwritten English alphabet frieze on the poster boards, an unused birthday chart and one other handwritten poster relaying language rules. Three other handwritten posters containing content on the history of South Africa were displayed. The teacher said that she brought her own magazines to the school for the learners to read and had in the classroom a cardboard box containing readers (P3, 3:36, 151:151) (P3, 3:37, 153:155).

In contrast to these less than optimal print environments, at schools A, B and C there were more posters on the walls and a reading corner or bookshelf in each classroom. School A had the most posters on the walls in the classroom and learners were allowed to personalise the reading corner with their photographs, posters and writing. It was policy at the school for every classroom to have a reading corner and a language-rich environment featuring labels, flash cards, current affairs and events text (P6, 6:17, 89:89) (P6: 6:18, 90:90). Author boxes with stories written by a specific author also featured in classrooms, to introduce learners to different author styles and to encourage a love and enjoyment of reading (P6, 6:25, 88:88).

At School C, it was also school policy for teachers to have a reading corner and posters on the wall (P4, 4:23, 30:30) (P4, 4:44, 62:62). Nonetheless, at School C most of the commercially-bought posters evident in the class had content for other learning areas, with only a few posters related to Language.

At School B, no such policy on the creation of print-rich environment was mentioned. However, the Grade 4 teacher's classroom did feature picture posters and posters for different subject areas, a birthday chart and a 'thought for the day' chart. With regard to the books available on the bookshelf in the classroom, the school B teacher explained that the school did not have money to make books available in the classroom (P2, 2:293, 206:206) so the teacher provided them (P2, 2:89, 200:200), as well as old children's magazines (P2, 2:70, 157:165). In addition, some learners donated them (P2, 2:92, 206:206).

At schools C, D, E and F, it was interesting to note that although the Grade 3 classrooms at these schools were filled with posters and labels for incidental reading, there were minimal

such materials in the Grade 4 classrooms. Therefore, it seems that the creation of a literate classroom environment was no longer considered as important at Grade 4 in these schools.

7.4.3 Learning support resources

Whilst a strong focus was not placed on availability of learning support⁴⁵ resources for data collection for the PIRLS 2006, access to learning support services for learners was an important resource consideration in the six selected schools. All of the schools had learners experiencing learning difficulties to varying extents. At schools C, E and F, teachers' reports on the incidence of learning difficulties seemed to be more prominent than at the two highest performing schools, schools A and B, as well as School D, especially for those African language vernacular learners for whom English was the main language of learning and teaching. Even so, School A was the only school with comprehensive learning support resources for teachers and their learners experiencing difficulties. These resources were in the form of on-site educational support professionals⁴⁶, screening assessments for learning difficulties, tutorials and informal peer tutoring. There were on-site educational support professionals in the form of an educational psychologist, a speech and language therapist and an occupational therapist at the school. In Grades 4 to 6, whole group screening assessments for literacy and mathematics were undertaken to "...*gauge the child's chronological age as opposed to their performance results*" (P3, 3:66, 83:83). On the basis of the results of these screening tests, decisions were made as to whether a full scholastic assessment was needed for a learner. Full scholastic assessments were either made privately by the parents or free of charge at the school by the school's educational psychologist with the parents' permission. Parents were reportedly given recommendations and asked to follow them up, while teachers were made aware of learners' areas of difficulty so that they could work on them in class (P3, 3:67, 83:83). Scholar tutorials were given once a week to assist weaker learners, as well as functioning as in-house training for staff to learn how they could address the children's difficulties (P3, 3:64, 89:89). This strategy suggests that learners were treated as partners in their own education at the school.

⁴⁵ Learning or educational support is commonly described as being in the service of the goal for learning and educational development to take place (Green, *et al.*, 1999). Learning support is not confined to a single activity and can be initiated in different ways to fulfil different purposes (Tennant, 2001).

⁴⁶ The term "educational support professional" is often used in the context of learning support (Engelbrecht, 2001, p.17). These professionals may include, but are not limited to, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and psychiatrists or psychologists who have been involved in specialised support provision from within the school context as well as outside the school environment (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002).

Peer tutoring, wherein other children in the class voluntarily help a child who is battling, was another strategy used. This strategy, which the teachers supervised, was used as teachers found that peers of the same age could sometimes explain better than other persons. As a specific learning support strategy for literacy, each learner from Grades 1 to 4 was given a phonemic chart for their desk. Thereafter, in Grades 5 to 7, each child had a photocopied reference of the phonemic chart. The chart was used to help learners who still needed to decode, regardless of which grade they were in.

None of the other schools had such an array of learning support strategies. At School B, with the exception of limited access to other learning support professionals, teachers were tasked with assisting learners experiencing difficulties. Although School B did have a full-time remedial teacher, this teacher was assigned to work with all of the learners at the school except for learner at Grades 6 and 7, as their timetable was too full for the inclusion of remedial tuition. The Grade 4 teacher suggested that the half-hour time allocation once a week was perhaps not enough as she did not see noticeable improvements in the learners who did attend. Teachers at the school were also encouraged to do their own remedial work. However, the HoD recognised that it was not always possible for teachers to do individual or even group work due to the large size of classes and time limitations caused by a full extracurricular timetable at the school. Therefore, teachers had to resort more and more to class tuition to help learners experiencing problems.

At schools C, D, E and F, learners experiencing difficulties were mostly reliant on the efforts of individual teachers and co-opting parental assistance to support them with any difficulties experienced. At schools C, D and E, a main strategy for learning support at Grade 4 was seemingly to obtain materials from the Foundation Phase to use for remedial assistance.

A few teachers at School C had remedial education experience (P4, 4:19, 28:28) and other teachers at the school consulted with them to find out what they could do to help their learners with difficulties (P4, 4:60, 98:98). The Grade 4 teacher specifically consulted with these teachers to find out at which level a child was functioning and what to expect from the child in terms of performance in class (P6, 6:26, 49:50). When the Grade 4 teacher needed to support a child who had severe literacy problems, she would also obtain sight word lists and readers from the Foundation Phase to use. As most learners at the school were ESL learners, teachers also tutored those experiencing problems with English (P4, 4:20, 30:30). When learners with poor English proficiency came to the school from other schools it was sometimes necessary for teachers to “...go back to square one...” by getting Foundation Phase readers to help them to improve their English (P4, 4:29, 34:36). Also, teachers

sometimes had to ask other children in the class to explain tasks to a child in their own languages (P4, 4:70, 72:72). When learners experienced difficulties, teachers sent extra work home for these learners to complete (P4, 4:64, 100:100).

At School D, the teacher reported photocopying Foundation Phase work, calling in the child's parents, giving them the materials and asking them to help the child at home (P3, 3:8, 18:18). Nor was seeking parental support always possible, as parents were absent and the grandparents with whom children lived were not always literate (P3, 3:11, 20:20). Moreover, even though the teacher would "... *take the child for ten minutes maybe after school...*" many of the children were unable to remain behind after school due to transportation issues (P3, 3:11, 20:20). Staff at the school were apparently looking into the possibility of employing a remedial teacher because the existing teachers did not have the time to work individually with a child, due to administrative commitments in the afternoon (P3, 3:24, 44:44).

The teacher at School E reported trying to give learners with difficulties lessons in reading after school (P2, 2:56, 165:165). The teacher would also ask one of the Grade 3 teachers for an advanced Grade 3 level reader so that she could make photocopies of it, and would then ask for assistance from the child's parents by requesting them to read the material with the child at home (P2, 2:57, 167:167). At school F, there was one support teacher for the whole school who would come into the classroom to help learners when requested by the teachers (P1, 1:34, 96:99). Other than consulting with the support teacher, help for children experiencing difficulties was undertaken by the teacher herself. In particular, the Grade 4 teacher would work with learners experiencing difficulties after school hours. She would also work with parents who were willing and able to assist their children by giving the parents worksheets to do with the children.

In contrast to School A, which had onsite educational support professionals, access to such professionals was more limited at the other schools. Schools B and C did appear to have more access to learning support professionals than did Schools D, E and F. School B specifically had a speech and language therapist and an occupational therapist who visited the school weekly to work with learners. The occupational therapist did offer lower rates to parents who could not afford her services. Also, if parents at the school could not afford the services of learning support professionals, there was a limited fund to assist these parents. At School C, an educational psychologist from the DoE came to the school to make assessments, which were paid for either by the parents, using medical aid funds, or by the school. Prior to consulting with the educational psychologist, the school's guidance counsellor would speak to the child and review his or her work so that she could write a

report to give to the educational psychologist before assessment. Nonetheless, this educational psychologist was only able to visit the school perhaps once or twice a term as he worked with many other schools. When the educational psychologist did assess learners, he gave a report to the remedial teacher and guidance counsellor. He was able to tell teachers: what areas the child needed support in; whether or not the child had a learning disability; whether the child could cope in mainstream education; what the teacher needed to do; and if it was advisable that the child needed to see other educational support professionals. The teachers would then try to adapt instruction to assist the child (P4, 4:58, 83:96). Although the school did not work in conjunction with these providers, when learners experienced difficulties teachers would also refer them to external remedial education providers (P4, 4:63, 100:100).

At School D there were seemingly no visiting education support professionals, and parents were requested to take their children for an assessment when their child experienced a learning problem (P3, 3:23, 37:40). When learners in her class had specific learning disabilities, it was difficult for the School E teacher as she had to request information and strategies for dealing with these learners from specialists outside of the school (P2, 2:60, 167:179). The teacher reportedly had to make an appointment with a DoE official, seek the parents' permission to take the child to see the official, and then wait for the official to advise the teacher what to do (P2, 2:62, 184:187). The only form of help the school received directly was from a DoE psychologist, who would evaluate the child and offer advice. However, the psychologist had only recently visited the school for the first time and the teacher had not met with this support specialist. Also, this psychologist worked with the whole school. As the teacher said in this regard:

So, it's quite difficult because you never get to see... and speak to her... about the problems that you encounter in class, because... as a teacher, I'm not specialised on that level, I don't know, I also need some guidance there (P2, 2:60, 167:179).

The only other learning support option the teacher mentioned was filling in support forms and referring the child to a school for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN). The teacher also sought informal advice from the vice-principal of the school, who, even though she taught Economic Management Sciences, knew the learners well as she had been teaching at the school for a long time (P2, 2:63, 188:195). The school did not have any remedial teachers as these had been removed by the DoE (P2, 2:60, 167:179).

Although Schools C and E appeared to receive minimal and likely ineffective support from DoE officials for educational support, due to time lapses between visits and lack of contact

with teachers. School F had even less support. Although the school had also sought help regarding remedial support from the DoE district office, the person responsible had only been to visit the school once during the school year, two months earlier. As stated by the teacher *“She wouldn’t have come had we not invited her... when she came we expressed our concerns and then she also saw what we gave her and then she said she will render the support she can ...”* (P1, 1:35, 99:107).

7.5 PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATION OF READING LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING

In this section, school-level organisation and initiatives for reading literacy teaching and learning are discussed, in particular, planning and monitoring (7.5.1); management of phase and grade transitions (7.5.2); opportunities available for continuing professional teacher development (7.5.3); collegial support and cooperation between teachers at each school (7.5.4); initiatives for learners’ reading literacy development (7.5.5); and time allocation for English language (7.5.6).

7.5.1 Planning and monitoring

Perhaps impacting planning, at Schools A, B and D, all of the Grade 4 teachers were responsible for teaching English language. Whereas, at Schools C, E and F, one teacher taught English Language only at Grade 4, at the other schools the teachers taught other subject areas too.

Although their occurrence varied, formally scheduled planning meetings were in place at Schools A, B and C, which had class averages at the PIRLS international benchmarks in 2005. At School A, there were monthly grade-based planning meetings between the subject area leader and the Grade 4 teachers. At these meetings, book and assessment quality control occurred; feedback was given on cluster meeting attendance; ideas were shared; goals were set for teaching; and reflection on the success of previous approaches took place. Teaching methods, specifically new methodologies, were discussed and flexible problem-solving was employed to explore options. Another feature of literacy programme planning at the school, was so-called *“road mapping”* in which staff met to plan for the following year, discussing strategies that worked, those that had not and goals for the future (P3, 33, 47:47). The primary school principal was involved in strategising teaching:

And then we’ve got... our principal who will bring us feedback from the principals’ meetings and

she'll say 'this is what's happening at other schools. Would you like to try it?'. So it's quite democratic, there's nothing autocratic. It's not set in stone. So we'll say 'you know we tried it. It didn't work. Can we try something else?' (P3, 3:119, 121:121).

The Grade 4 teacher also provided insights into classroom-level planning. She mentioned having a year plan and a weekly plan for teaching. The weekly plan was adjusted according to current events to maintain learners' interests whilst adhering to the broad objectives of the year plan. As the HoD stressed:

There's intense planning and I must say in my thirty-one years of teaching, twenty-one were spent at another school and ten here, I have never in all my talks with other colleagues seen a school that puts so much emphasis into their work structures and the remediation (P3, 3:183, 89:89).

Besides active involvement in planning for learning at School A, the subject area leader acted as chief moderator of assessments; a teacher at the grade would set the assessment obtaining input from a teacher at the grade which follows this grade (P3, 3:13, 28:35). In this way cross-grade assessment quality control was achieved.

With the exception of meetings at the beginning and end of the school year, formal planning for teaching at School B was driven by teachers via weekly grade meetings. The HoD was unable to attend any of these, explaining that there was not enough time for meetings as teachers worked all of the time between classes and extra-murals (P1, 1:8, 10:10). As an alternative, she conducted informal "veranda meetings" if she had ideas to share with individual teachers or if teachers were experiencing problems they wanted to discuss. The Grade 4 teacher also provided some insights into her experiences of planning at School B, saying that all of the Grade 4 teachers did the same work and their learners wrote the same tests. The learners had to write the same tests with the same marking standards to allow for decisions to be made for streaming them at the end of Grade 4 (P2, 2:95; 213:216).

The teacher also declared that: "...we're actually just redoing all our planning to put [in] all the LOs and ASs⁴⁷..." (P2, 2:48; 90:91), and, perhaps revealing her frustration with the changes, went on to explain that:

... we used to have like a very old fashioned traditional planning where we had our day book... and weekly and yearly planner, but now that we are changing over to the new system. We're actually 'very up in the air' with planning at the moment... [Researcher: Is it a school system or a district...] It's what the government wants... and the union has given guidelines, and then... [the HoD] has given guidelines, but putting it all together is taking forever... we've done quite a lot of subjects. We've left Maths and English because they're more difficult... So, we've been doing this since the beginning of the year (P2, 2:97; 210:212).

⁴⁷ LOs = Learning Outcomes; ASs= Assessment Standards

When asked about planning at School C, the HoD cited staff meetings, phase meetings, subject area meetings, standards head meetings, and school management team meetings (P4, 4:35, 54:54). When planning, role-players involved discussed ideas and strategised the best options available (P4, 4:36, 56:56). The Grade 4 English teacher explicated phase-based planning at the school (P6, 6:24, 43:44). For English as a learning area, each grade in the phase followed the same eight themes, but the content became more advanced as the learners moved into the higher grades of the phase (P6, 6:21, 38:38). The language teachers in the Intermediate Phase met once a term to discuss activities, progress made and any problems experienced. In this regard, the teacher experienced the school as a very supportive environment (P6, 6:25, 45:48). Beyond formal planning strategies, teachers were constantly discussing strategies in an informal manner. As the HoD noted “...*Teachers never stop being teachers, because it is during the break, after school, in our spare time we’re always discussing ‘maybe we can do this right or do that right’*” (P4, 4:34, 54:54).

Whereas formal planning strategies were in place at schools A, B and C, teachers were less clear on how planning took place at schools D, E and F. There were three Grade 4 English teachers at School D, with each teaching one English class. A discussion around the planning of teaching between these teachers was somewhat vague and mostly seemed to revolve around the sharing of materials, with no indication of any formal arrangements. The HoD and teacher explained that “*so what we do, we sit together and we follow a certain plan and if I have got extra material... I would photocopy for the other teachers, if they have extra material they photocopy and give me*” (P3, 3:18, 31:32). The four Grade 4 teachers at School E did grade-based preparation, which was also theme-based with a goal of cross-curricular integration across the subject areas (P2, 2:21, 55:59) (P2, 2:61, 180:183). Teachers at the school had a year-plan file containing work schedules, but each teacher was able to decide whether he or she wanted to do daily, weekly or monthly lesson planning (P2, 2:21, 55:59) (P2, 2:61, 180:183). The teacher herself planned her lessons according to a two-week cycle, mainly as a result of monitoring of planning implementation by the DoE. As the teacher expressed:

I normally work on a two weekly cycle, because you tend to find that you prepare your lesson for over two days and then you don’t finish it within that two days and then you can either finish it in that time over a period of the two weeks, you can still finish it ... because the Department comes and they say: ‘you said you were going to finish this within two days, why haven’t you?’... So, it’s just to cover yourself (P2, 2:22, 60:75).

Given the teacher’s discussions around planning and organisation at the school, one can surmise that she may have had little support from the HoD for teaching and learning. When the teacher started at the school two months prior to data collection it was frustrating for her

as she needed to go to the previous teachers to find out at which level her learners were. The teacher also had to teach English to the Afrikaans and English Grade 4 classes, and was confused about whether or not to use first or second language material as the learners were mostly second language learners. Once this was cleared up, she had to go back and draw up work for both learner groups, perhaps suggesting that no existing materials were made available for her use. The teacher stated that “...it was actually a bit frustrating, because I couldn’t find my feet at first, I was [thinking] ‘what should I do now?’” (P2, 2:7, 29:29). On this basis, it seems that school management had provided little or no assistance to the teacher when she started at the school.

The School F HoD admitted that planning structures at the school were remiss. There had been a change of school administration which made meeting and planning for learning difficult:

... We have a new administration, we have a new principal. And then, a lot of things changed... but, mostly, even the educators themselves thought, now we... will relax... And then there was that conflict that took place, it’s not yet over, but... We are getting there... And as a result we had to sit in long unending meetings... Trying to fix up ourselves as management first and then getting to the educators and getting our things in order first... It has been a lot of work (P1, 1:50, 213:227).

Prior to the changes, the HoD indicated that teachers used to meet informally in the afternoons to help each other with work, although not necessarily in learning area groupings (P1, 1:51, 229:235). The HoD further pointed out that the last time any active planning on the learning programmes and work schedules took place at the school was in 2006, when the teachers worked together and did planning for 2007, 2008 and 2009. As such, teachers worked individually following the work schedule and learning programme and the HoD made sure that they stuck to this planning in their teaching (P1, 1:45, 165:169). The HoD had “...to see to it that the language is improved” (P1, 1:22, 60:60), render whatever support possible and make sure that teachers had what they needed (P1, 1:23, 60:60). The HoD also had to monitor teachers by making sure that they did teach in class and by checking their files. However, this monitoring of teachers was not always easy as “... the attitude of teachers it’s not that good” (P1, 1:25, 60:65). The Grade 4 teacher mentioned that although she was the only English teacher at Grade 4, teachers usually tried to teach using the same theme across the learning areas as cross-curricular integration was encouraged (P3, 3:18, 48:50).

7.5.2 Phase and grade curriculum implementation coordination

School A was the only school with an active strategy to deal with the coordination of teaching and learning across the phases at the school. Grade 4 reading literacy teaching at School A

took place within a larger school-wide framework for the teaching of reading literacy and promotion of reading literacy development. Reading literacy teaching programmes at each phase in the primary school (including the pre-primary) were co-ordinated to meet the reading literacy requirements for the next grades and phase of schooling. One of the tasks of the Intermediate Phase English language subject area leader was to meet with the Foundation Phase literacy leader and high school teachers during the school year to ensure that learners entering and exiting the phase would be able to meet the standards of reading literacy development expected of them at the first grade in their next phase of education.

At Schools B and C, teachers were in the early stages of grappling with the issue of coordination and continuity either between the grades or between the phases. Although the School B HoD recognised the importance of coordination and continuity of teaching between the Intermediate Phase grades, no active strategy was yet in place. The HoD was experimenting with strategies to get learners reading specifically at Grade 7 with the intention of trying to implement these strategies at other grades at a later stage. She wanted the Intermediate Phase to go back to the basics of reading. As the HoD pointed out, *“we want to have a filter from Grade Three so that there is continuation right through to Grade Seven and should there be problems, then we go back to Grade Four and see what we can do ...”* (P1, 1:6; 10:10). Although, the School C HoD monitored progression in curriculum implementation across the Intermediate Phase grades, in interacting with the DoE, teachers had also realised that there was a gap between Grade 3 and Grade 4 education. As a result, teachers in the Intermediate Phase had started to interact with the Grade 3 teachers *“to find out exactly where they are with their literacy and numeracy and we try to bridge the gap with them”* (P4, 4:31, 37:40). Plans were also in place to provide the work schedules for Grade 4 Mathematics and Languages to work on the gaps between the two phases (P6, 6:29, 52:54).

At Schools D and F, interactions between grades only took place at the end of each school year to exchange information on where each learner was. At School D, the Grade 4 teachers interacted with the Grade 3 teachers to obtain information about their learner group for the following year. Also, if a child experienced problems at Grade 4 the teacher could go back to the Grade 3 teacher for information about their experiences of the child (P3, 3:26, 45:46). At School F, the teacher met with both the Grade 3 and Grade 5 teachers at the end of each year so that they could discuss the learners' progress in reading and each teacher would know where to begin the following year (P3, 3:9, 28:28).

7.5.3 Opportunities for Continuing Professional Teacher Development

Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) was only acknowledged as a feature at Schools A and C. Ideas for teaching at School A were generated via: attendance of cluster meetings each term; attendance of courses; workshops; inviting guest speakers to the school; research; and conference attendance. The expertise of School C teachers was utilised for further CPTD. During staff meetings “mini workshops” where teachers with more experience in a certain topic, e.g. remedial education, discussed with the other teachers what could be done to help their learners (P4, 4:59, 98:98). Also, when there was an issue that needed to be addressed at the school, workshops with people from the school or from outside were organised. The DoE also provided information on workshops that teachers at the school would sometimes attend (P4, 4:59, 98:98). In contrast, in reference to the challenges of CPTD for teachers at School B, the HoD outlined that *“There is always so much more we could do, but (a) we don’t have any exposure, (b) we don’t have the money, (c) we don’t have the time”* (P1, 1:94; 120:120).

7.5.4 Collegial support

The only two schools where collegial support for teaching was strongly evident from the data were Schools A and C. At school A, teacher teamwork was emphasised with teachers parallel teaching, making parallel assessments and parallel marking. There was an open-door policy in each classroom and colleagues would observe each other’s lessons and offer peer critique and support. The subject area leader observed that *“... everything is done as a whole. We always emphasise that there is no - and I know it sounds clichéd - but that ‘there is no ‘I’ in team”* (P3, 3:21, 31:33). As further emphasised by the subject area leader:

Lately we’ve really just ‘all come to the party’... [teachers] say ‘I don’t really agree with what you’re saying, can we try it this way?’... it’s trial and experiment. We [management] don’t profess to know everything and ... [the teachers] will say ‘sure, let’s give it a shot’ and we’ll reconvene and we’ll say ‘you know it really didn’t work. Are there any other avenues that we can explore?’ so it’s really superb (P3. 3:26, 43:43).

Likewise, there was evidence of collegial support for the development of language at School C too. As noted by the HoD:

...we have realised that if there is a problem in English it flows... onto the next subject and the next and the next. So, if the Maths educator for example says: ‘you know what, these kids really do not understand this concept’ then we will try and figure out... how we can make these kids understand it. For example if the child does not understand a concept in maths and it is a specific word then we will say ‘take out your dictionary, use it, even if it is Maths period you still take the dictionary because you are learning a skill...’ and we have realised that English leads onto everything else

and if the child doesn't understand English we are going to have a major problem in everything else. So as educators we work together, we realise that you must have a support system, you have to work together, if you cannot work together then everything else falls apart. So at the moment I am happy to say that we are working together as a team and we try to address whatever problem we have... for example if there is a concept that my children are having a problem with and the next educator is teaching it in their subject they can explain it better I would tell the teacher: 'you know what, I had a problem with this, just explain to them again' and I then I will help out again when they come to me, so in that way we help each other out (P4, 4:41, 59:60).

7.5.5 Initiatives for learners' reading literacy development

School-level initiatives to encourage learners to read were apparent at Schools A and C. School A had a number of strategies to encourage learners to read across the primary school. A 'readathon' was held every year for the Foundation Phase grades and every alternate year for the Intermediate Phase grades. There was a "character in theme day" held at the school every year, in which learners dressed up as their favourite book character. A literacy quiz was also held every alternate year. Moreover, drama productions of novels were undertaken at the school (P3, 3:123, 127:127). At School C, there was a reward system in place wherein the best reader in each grade as determined by a reading record was given a bursary (P4, 4:75, 8:8). Moreover, learners had to donate a book to the school on their birthdays, stating from whom it was received to make the donor feel special. It was also policy at the school for learners to speak English at all times to improve their proficiency (P4, 4:26, 30:30).

No formalised strategies to encourage reading literacy development were mentioned at Schools B, D, E and F. When asked about strategies in place at school D, the HoD responded that management encouraged teachers to: take learners to the library; use extra materials for reading; and share these materials with other teachers (P3, 3:73, 161:164). Although no mention was made of any direct school-wide strategy to improve learners' reading literacy at School B, there were a number of organisational plans in place that could play a major role in learner achievement in reading literacy at the school. Firstly, the school streamed learners according to ability from Grade 5 onwards. In 2005, when the PIRLS 2006 assessments were administered, the school still used streaming from Grade 4. Secondly, as highlighted above, the school was very much involved in ensuring that learners' entered Grade 1 with at least two years of English language exposure. Thirdly, although it was acknowledged as being against policy, the school only introduced Afrikaans as an Additional language in Grade 3. Lastly, the school tried to ensure a supply of quality teachers by employing student teachers so that they were experienced in the school's methods and also understood the learners. These teachers then remained at the school for a certain period after their training (P1, 1:75; 63:74).

7.5.6 Time allocation for English language

There was slight variation in the time allocated for English language instruction at each of the schools. At Schools A and C, four hours per week were allocated. Of the four hours allocated at School A, one-and-a-half to two hours were spent on reading instruction. The Language timetable at School C was reportedly structured according to the DoE time guidelines for teaching certain areas of the language, such as listening, speaking and writing (P4, 4:8, 18:18). At School B, five hours for English language instruction were allocated per week (P1, 1:49, 34:36). The amount of time allocated to reading instruction in each class was dependent on the individual teacher. The HoD had told teachers that they should dedicate one hour a week to writing and the rest to all of the language activities that encompassed reading (P1, 1:104, 153:160).

At School D, the teacher estimated that approximately four-and-a-half hours were assigned to English language instruction per week. Half-an-hour per week was allocated to formal reading instruction. Learners at School E had five periods of English a week. Judging by the class timetable provided by the teacher, the periods were approximately 40 minutes each, meaning that learners had about four hours of English language instruction a week. School F had a six-day timetable. English was allocated six periods during this cycle of 35 to 45 minutes each (P3, 3:27, 112:119). The district reportedly had recently told the school that this was not enough time and recommended one hour periods, which the teacher felt was not practical (P1, 1:46, 172:183).

Time allocation for Grade 4 English language instruction was experienced as problematic at Schools A, B, E and F. Time constraints could impede implementation of the curriculum. The HoD at School A pointed out that the time allocation was not enough to fulfil the school's goal of making their learners better and consistent readers, which is why parental involvement was needed (P3, 3:40, 53:53). Moreover, covering the curriculum was quite pressurised, especially as the school had to fit a second additional language into the timetable too (P3, 3:180, 198:198). At School B, teaching time allocation was also experienced as problematic. The HoD found that as learners were "...so slow these days..." with poor skills, curriculum implementation had also slowed down (P1, 1:49, 34:36). Emotional, home and discipline problems also impinged on teaching time (P1, 1:159, 42:42). The School E teacher found that the teaching time allocation was inadequate and wished to have less administration and longer periods so that she could have more teaching contact time with the learners (P2, 2:27, 81:81). As a result of time constraints, she found that she did not always get through the planned content for the week and so had to continue with it in the following week (P2, 2:32,

97:101). A time-consuming problem at School F was that the teacher had to revert to work from prior grades to help the learners with their English reading, with the result that she too battled to keep up with her work schedule. This sometimes meant that she used after-school hours to do the work (P3, 3:13, 34:38).

7.6 PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

A number of themes regarding perceptions and experiences of curriculum implementation came to the fore. In this sub-section the following themes are discussed: curricular implementation strategies and problems experienced in this regard at each of the schools (7.6.1); the teachers' critique of: curriculum documents (7.6.2); DoE support for curriculum implementation (7.6.3); administrative tasks associated with the curriculum (7.6.4); pace of curricular implementation (7.6.5); indications of experiences with the Foundations for Learning Campaign (DoE, 2008a) (7.6.6).

7.6.1 Overview of curriculum implementation strategies and challenges

Differences in understandings of and approaches to curriculum implementation emerged. At schools A and C, although the approaches followed in achieving this were different, there appeared to be much more focus placed on coverage of the LOs and ASs for the Language curriculum than at the other schools. Moreover, at Schools A, B and D, traditional approaches to teaching were reportedly combined with curricular approaches.

Of the six schools, School A seemingly had the most comprehensive strategy of curriculum implementation. The teaching curriculum at School A was strongly aligned to the LOs and ASs for English Home Language learning as outlined in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (DoE, 2002b). The importance of curriculum alignment at the school was noticeable by: the allocation of an LO and AS to every task written or pasted into the learners' workbooks; parent meetings at the beginning of the year to discuss curriculum requirements; the placement of posters depicting the LOs for English Language in each classroom; and the provision of an assessment rubric with LOs and ASs stated for each assessment task. Furthermore, the Grade 4 learners were aware of how their learning tasks aligned to the LOs and ASs, as highlighted by the following:

"The kids are so [familiar with the RNCS Learning Outcomes]... It's actually amazing... If I say 'LO 6', they say 'what AS?'" (P11, 11:70, 340:344).

Operationalisation of the LOs and ASs at the school was, however, deemed necessary as it was considered difficult to ascertain what teachers should teach from the curriculum documents:

... OBE is very broad-based and it is 'do whatever you feel comfortable with'... whilst we adhere to the Assessment Standards... we've got formal teaching methodologies in those places. So we'll say 'the children need to be able to focus on...' but we will be specific. We won't just say 'Spelling' because spelling can have a wide variety of interpretations (P3:79, 94:99).

Teachers at the school also continuously reflected on and adapted these operationalised curricular goals as a result of the outcomes that they experienced with their learners (P3, 3:79, 94:99). When commenting on OBE specifically, the School A subject area leader expressed that OBE was failing in South Africa and that the teachers were resorting to the traditional strategies of 'talk and chalk', building the basics, drilling and repetition (P3, 3:172, 188:188). The subject area leader also pointed out the need to ensure consistency of implementation of the curriculum across schools, especially as *"...some people are following the curriculum and others aren't. Some are focusing on certain Assessment Standards and others aren't"* (P3, 3:162, 171:171).

At School B, the formal curriculum did not appear to play such an incremental role in teaching practices. The teacher at School B generally linked her ideas of the curriculum to her impression of OBE and her strategy to combine traditional methods with some aspects of OBE, which she felt worked at the school. In comparison to curriculum implementation at Schools A and C, there did not seem to be a cohesive strategy for implementation, as revealed by the following statements:

... you see we are not really a very OBE sort of a school, to be honest. [The principal] announced five years ago that OBE won't work and then at prize giving at the end of last year, he just said to the parents, ... 'I was on record five years ago saying OBE won't work and now the government has admitted that it's not working...'... So, we combine traditional methods, but ...we take what's best from OBE, but ... [the HoD] she's very into OBE, she loves it, she thinks it's the best thing ever... (P2, 2:107, 259:260).

But I wouldn't say we're very, maybe 'OBEfied' [at Grade 4]...The same in Grade Five... I think Grade Six as well. I think it's only Grade Seven where... [The HoD] is really pushing [OBE] (P2, 2:111, 270:275).

As did the teachers at School A, the School B HoD further reported using the curriculum by operationalising it in terms of her experience and according to the needs of her learner group each year. In this regard, she maintained that *"...you've got to be flexible. You cannot use work that you did last year exactly the same as this year. You've got to adapt to the children that you've got"* (P1, 1:39; 31:32).

At School C, teachers reportedly understood the curriculum and were able to implement it (P4, 4:11, 20:20). In preparing lessons, teachers apparently tried to make sure that there were cross-curricular links between the various learning areas, even if it was just via incidental learning (P4, 4:40, 58:58). The Grade 4 teacher further reported using “...a lot of simple common sense” (P6, 6:22, 38:38) in implementing the curricular guidelines. The HoD at the school specifically used curriculum documents to ascertain what the learners should have been able to do at each grade. The HoD had to check teachers’ lesson preparation to make sure that: all aspects of the curriculum were covered sufficiently; the work set for learners was age-appropriate; there was progression in the level of difficulty of the work covered from grade to grade; and that the work was appropriate for ESL learners in terms of their ability to understand it (P4, 4:1, 4:6). The HoD also moderated examinations and tests to ensure maintenance of standards, developmental appropriateness of questions and increase in assessment difficulty from one grade to the next (P4, 4:4, 8:12). The HoD was perhaps in this way checking quality of curricular implementation at the school.

When speaking about curriculum implementation at School D, similarly to the focus on cross-curricular links at School C, the HoD/ teacher acknowledged that teachers were supposed to work on cross-curricular themes. However, this did not always work as curriculum implementation was dictated by the needs of her learners, and sometimes she had to go back to basic skills, meaning that theme-based teaching was not practical (P3, 3:19, 33: 34). The teacher felt that some of the language ASs were acceptable for learners at Grade 4, others were too easy and others were above the level of a Grade 4 learner. Therefore, the HoD adjusted the work to a Grade 4 level if it was too easy. In this regard, she used traditional materials: *“if it is too easy I kind of move it to the Grade Four level, especially using the old books. I have the old books, the material you know that they used on us when we were still at school”* (P3, 3:40, 79:80).

The School E teacher showed little insight into the school’s curriculum implementation. When asked about her thoughts of the curriculum, she said that she did not experience problems with whatever the curriculum required, and explained that nobody prescribed what she should do. Nor did she have to work only from one source but could do research and use multiple sources (P2, 2:35, 110:113). At School F, the HoD admitted that teachers had difficulties in implementing the curriculum (P1, 1:48, 201:210).

A balanced approach to implementation of the Language curriculum was followed by teachers at School C with all of the LOs assessed (P4, 4:73, 4:4). The teacher reportedly did much integration of each Language LO into each of her lessons (P5, 5:37, 55:56). Likewise,

at School A, no learning outcome was considered more important than the others, and therefore equal focus on all of the LOs for Languages was promoted (P3:35, 51:51). In contrast to the experiences of School A and C in following a balanced approach to implementation, the School F HoD found that the teachers would try to focus on just one AS in their lessons, not realising that they could also indirectly be touching on other ASs (P1, 1:48, 201:210). The School F teacher indicated trying to work on all of the Language LOs during each six day cycle (P3, 3:27, 112:119) but gave no indication of integration. The HoD further admitted that the school had a problem with assessment (P1, 1:47, 188:196).

Despite advocating a balanced approach, the School C HoD acknowledged that the Listening and Speaking LOs were recognised as “...*extremely important*...” (P4, 4:73, 4:4). The HoD at School D was further concerned about what she perceived to be too much focus on oral performance outcomes in the curriculum. The HoD cited the negative impact of this focus instead of on other language abilities:

My problem is that it would say: ... if a learner is orally good, then pass the learner... And then you find out the learner is bad in writing, the spelling is awful... Now the problem is, it catches up with the learner, the higher... [they] go the more problems the learner is going to encounter. When you get to university level, then we've got learners who are very good in speaking, but when it comes to writing, it's a problem. That's my problem with this new curriculum (P3, 3:32, 68:70).

7.6.2 Critique of curriculum policy document

Participants at Schools A, B, C and D conveyed that the RNCS documents for Language were vague and difficult to follow due to complex terminology use (P3, 3:170, 180:188) (P5, 5:34, 45:48) (P3, 3:38, 80:82). Teachers at Schools A and B revealed that with experience and expertise they were able to work with the document.

However, they raised concerns about the ability of other teachers to work with the document, especially non-English teachers:

Look fortunately for us, we've got the materials available and we've got the expertise. So we are able to manipulate the document to suit our needs. But I think even for an underprivileged school teacher that isn't very well versed in the English vernacular. For them to interpret that document even as a second language is very difficult (school A, P3, 3:174, 192:192).

... I know instinctively what I am looking at and I can link it up, but what about these poor teachers that don't have the vocabulary and they are given that thing in English? No wonder we are not getting anywhere in this country. The curriculum needs to be written in plain easy language... (School B, P1, 1:37; 26:26).

The School A subject area leader suggested that the documents needed to be condensed with examples given. The School C Grade 4 teacher in particular had experienced many discrepancies regarding what needed to be done at a certain Grade; found that it was difficult to ascertain whether her learners were progressing at an acceptable level as the RNCS allowed too much leeway; and felt that a curriculum that is much clearer about what children are supposed to do at each Grade is needed (P5, 5:35, 50:54). The teacher stressed that:

Tell us what we need to teach them so that the teacher in Grade Five knows exactly what they are dealing with... and as a Grade Four educator I can do my best and my children are equipped with the skills when they go into Grade Five (P5, 5:38, 58:58).

The School B HoD was concerned that she could not find any direct reference to comprehension in the curriculum (P1, 1:37; 26:26). She further criticised the way teachers might interpret and implement the curriculum:

Well, you see, this is the problem, ...[the curriculum] relies on interpretation. Me, I can keep going for the next twenty years with the same class because there is so much to do, but if you look at the way it's written there... I mean it's a list a mile long, so you do one of everything and tick it off and you say you have done it. I mean, that's not teaching... [teachers are] happy if they can tick it off... To me, if I only do half of it, but the kids can do it properly, then I'm happier than just saying 'well yes I've done everything, aren't I a good teacher?' I'm a blooming rotten teacher because they might have done everything, but they can't do anything (P1, 1:38; 27:30).

The School B teacher also recognised that resources play a role in curriculum implementation, meaning that there could not be one strategy for implementation at all schools. As she indicated, “*there are so many discrepancies between what one school has and what another school has that to blanket treat and say 'this is what needs to be done'. Yes. I don't know*” (P2, 2:114, 282:282).

7.6.3 Critique of support from the Department of Education

Teachers at School B, D and F were critical of the DoE in terms of constant changes and a lack of adequate support. The School B HoD was critical of system changes, stating that “*... it is just the system and everything else, with this OBE nobody actually knows what is going on anymore*” (P1, 1:30; 22:22). The comments of the School D HoD/ teacher dovetail with the School B HoD's concerns about instability due to changes:

... this whole new curriculum thing it's like ...okay we had OBE and it didn't work out. We had RNCS it didn't work out, now we are having NCS and [if] we have new [government education] ministers... [they] will say 'okay, we are moving from NCS to CS' you know (P3, 3:31, 66:66).

The School B HoD pointed out that poor guidance from the DoE contributed to teachers' confusion because "*Everybody comes along and tells you something different, half of it doesn't make sense, because they have never done it in their lives before anyway*" (P1, 1:30; 22:22). She suggested that practical training was needed from enthusiastic people rather than people who "*...just stand there and read from a piece of paper*" (P1, 1:72; 174:174).

At School C, DoE support for curriculum implementation came in the form of memoranda collected from the DoE by the school's principal and cluster meetings. The district facilitator at the cluster meetings was experienced as knowledgeable about her subject and the Foundations for Learning. However, perhaps sharing the experiences of School B, facilitators in the past had not been able to assist with queries as they had been "*...starting off in their subjects for the very first time...*" (P4, 4:9, 19:20).

The School F HoD blamed poor training and support from the DoE on the difficulties teachers at the school had in understanding assessment as the district just sent NCS circulars and memoranda, and did not provide training as they had previously with the RNCS (P1, 1:47, 188:196). According to the HoD, since early in 2007 the District had not had a subject facilitator for English, meaning that the school had received no support until the week before the research visit when officials came for the first time in three to four years (P1, 1:30, 78:87). With regard to district involvement the HoD expressed that:

... and you see the problem with them is that when they come they don't say 'oh we have not done this and we should have done this'. No, all they come is to say 'this is a mess, now you will have to do this' and they will just impose things ... And it becomes difficult because now to the teacher, it is, yes, 'now the boss is here and he has found this and this and this wrong, now I'm guilty, now this is what's going to happen, I will be logged'...all these negative things and now as we speak, teachers are not happy because of the visit, whereas there should have been support. There hasn't been a support just criticising... (P1, 1:30, 78:87).

Moreover, the HoD found that when the district wanted something from the school, they gave unreasonable deadlines. As a result, teachers were forced to be out of the class dealing with the request, which destabilised teaching and learning activities and so led to delays in implementation of the curriculum (P1, 1:52, 235:251). The teacher also affirmed that "*...things that we attend to as a school...*" led to the leaving out of certain AS (P3, 3:24, 83:84).

7.6.4 The impact of administration on teaching and learning

Teachers at five of the schools linked their curricular experiences to time-consuming administration and preparation. At School A, adherence to curriculum-based preparation for teaching and learning was experienced as very time-consuming, involving much after-hours work by teachers (P3, 3:166, 175:177). At School D, the HoD complained about the amount of administrative work. DoE district officials would apparently check the teachers' files, which *"... makes teachers run around fixing... file[s]"* (P3, 3:36, 75:78). However, the HoD thought that teachers should rather get into classes and teach, as files could be in perfect order but this did not guarantee that teachers actually did what was in the file in the classroom (P3, 3:36, 75:78). This line of thought about the DoE's checking of files was echoed by teachers at Schools B, E and F:

you as a teacher have to do everything. You have to work out an assessment task, you have to work out a rubric,... you say... what you're looking for in the lesson, what you want the child to achieve... You have to record marks in a mark book, you have to have an observation book on what the child did in the lesson... personally I think there's too much admin work and too little time in class to spend with the children (School E, P2, 2:26, 79:81).

You will find that someone who is doing well in class, but he is not doing well in the ... the administration and the one who does the administration work is not doing that good in class (School F, P1, 1:26, 65:67).

...That's the last... priority on my list... Contact with the children is priority number one... You know, this other paperwork is, that is the biggest thing that needs to stop. In education, with reading and everything, we don't have time to go and read extra books, extra journals, find out about new ways of reading, explore different computer things, we don't have time because we are too busy filling the date here and ticking there... [rather than doing]... what is necessary, what is needed... (School B, P1, 1:84; 101:108).

7.6.5 Slow implementation of the curriculum

The HoD at School B maintained that there was definitely something wrong with curriculum implementation. She felt that implementation was perhaps too slow in the Foundation Phase, stating that *"...something is not right... it's going too slowly..."* (P1, 1:50; 36:36). She also felt that *"...we are underestimating children..."* (P1, 1:52; 40:40) and that *"it's not that we've got stupid children... there is something wrong in the system and the system's been rocked too many times in the last 10, 15, 20 years. We need stability"* (P1, 1:108, 174:174). Perhaps as an illustration of the School B HoD's concerns about slow implementation, although the School F teacher cited using the curriculum to aid her planning, her discussion suggested difficulties in following the curriculum assessment standards:

...we have a policy document where we see which level to use in Grade 4, but that usually...

[doesn't] work because we have many things that we attend to as a school. As a result there are some.... assessment standards which we miss, so when I consult with a Grade Three English teacher, she will tell me where she left off and then I take over from there (P3, 3:24, 83:84).

The School D teacher also made comments which suggested a curriculum implementation lag. Although specific guidelines were given as to how often to assess learners for a specific LO, it was not always possible as *“there is nothing to assess, the learners are not yet where I need them to be, I think that's the problem”* (P3, 3:33, 70:72). The teacher further explained that she found it better to work at the learners' pace, making sure they were at a certain level before she moved onto the next level (P3, 3:33, 70:72).

7.6.6 Exposure to the Foundations for Learning Campaign

Exposure to the Foundations for Learning Campaign was discussed by teachers at schools B, C and F, with the teacher at School B and HoD at School C mostly positive about it. The School B teacher thought the campaign was good, although it still needed *“... fine tuning...”* (P2, 2:103, 238:242). She also mentioned that *“the whole school was still in the early stages”* (P2, 2:103, 238:242) of exposure to the campaign. The School C HoD experienced its guidelines as being much more specific, telling teachers exactly what the child should be achieving at a certain level and giving teachers *“... a clearer picture of how they go about preparing their lessons”* (P4, 4:6, 14:16).

Differing from the outlooks at Schools B and C, the teachers at School F had ambivalent experiences and feelings about the campaign, as they felt that it had been imposed on them with no explanation (P1, 1:27, 69:77), thus leading to confusion. The HoD thought that that the campaign was no different from what they were already doing at the school, except that plans for the first term were now implemented in terms two or three. Some teachers had thus left their plans as they were and others had made the changes (P1, 1:27, 69:77). The teacher herself mentioned that she did not realise the significance of the campaign:

We had a problem with implementing Foundations for Learning, but our facilitators were here just last week and they encouraged us to implement that because we didn't think it's that important, yes, but we found out that we must do that. So from this week onwards we are planning to implement that. We are fitting the Foundations for Learning, especially... the milestones, we are fitting them in our lessons” (P3, 3:21, 66:66).

The teacher viewed the Foundations for Learning Campaign as *“an old way of teaching”*, as it introduced reading every day and assessed written and spoken work, which she thought was an effective strategy (P3, 3:22, 68:76). Apparently, the school did follow the Foundations for Learning directive to do ten minutes of reading every morning regardless of the learning

area. The school also got a learner to read during assembly. Although the school already had done this previously they were now forced to do it at certain times, which was not always practical (P1, 1:27, 69:77).

7.7 DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY OF DATA

A number of main themes emerged in the analysis of the meso level school data for the six case study schools. The main themes as summarised in this sub-section are: overall school environment (7.7.1); learner characteristics and parental involvement (7.7.2); resource adequacy and management (7.7.3); professional organisation of reading literacy teaching and learning (7.7.4); and perceptions and experiences of curriculum implementation (7.7.5). As to be expected, given the maximum variation sample, schooling conditions varied immensely across the six schools. Nonetheless, there were commonalities between the cases for a number of themes.

7.7.1 Overall school environment

In terms of overall school environment at each of the schools, there were differences in school fees and percentages of learners from economically disadvantaged homes. The highest performing school was an exclusive private school with high fees and few if any learners who were from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (A), both aspects likely to play a fundamental role in achievement levels at the school.

There was variation in socioeconomic status of learners at the two former model C schools sampled (B and C). Similarly to the highest performing school, School B at the next highest benchmark had few if any learners from an economically disadvantaged background, whereas School C at 400 according to class benchmark had 11 to 25% of learners from such a background. School D below the international benchmarks also had 11 to 25% of learners from an economically disadvantaged background. The other two schools (E and F), which were both low-performing, reported that the majority of learners were from economically disadvantaged homes, with School F as the lowest performing school having learners from extremely deprived backgrounds. As indicated in Chapter Three, variation in learner achievement has been linked to whether schools serve privileged or less privileged communities (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992). Given these school profiles, whether or not the school was privileged or not certainly does seem to play a role for the case study schools.

7.7.2 Learner characteristics and parental involvement for reading literacy

- Learner characteristics

The only school environment with little diversity in terms of learners' language and race was School A, the highest achieving school. School B had the most heterogeneous learners in terms of race. However, the ESL status of some did not seem to have a major impact as reportedly they only battled with the finer nuances of the English language. Schools D and F were homogeneous in terms of language and race, however, the majority of the School F learners did not speak English at home, whereas only 25 to 50% of the School D learners did not speak the language at home. Although Schools C, E and F reported that the majority of the learners did not speak English at home, School C had the highest performance level of the three schools, reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks in 2005. Therefore, School C is significant as it reflects a relatively high performing school in spite of a predominantly ESL learner cohort who were not from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds.

At each of the schools, various insights were provided into the learners' language abilities. At Schools A and B, the LoLT was not mentioned as a major issue for the learners, with ESL learners at School B only struggling with low frequency words and finer subtleties of the language. The LoLT was more problematic at Schools C and F. At School C, Intermediate Phase learners reportedly battled with English, were disinterested in the language and had not yet achieved CALP. The learners also struggled to think critically. This could explain why the class average in 2005 was at the Low International benchmark, which required basic reading skills and the retrieval of straightforward information from the text, not at higher benchmarks which required more advanced levels of comprehension. At two of the schools below the international benchmarks, learners code-switched to their vernaculars when struggling to express themselves in English, suggesting that they had not yet achieved optimal BICS in English. As the only school with a switch to English at Grade 4, the School F learners had only been exposed to English in the third term of Grade 3, with detrimental consequences throughout the Intermediate Phase. Another relevant issue for teachers was the negative impact of ESL learners with little English background entering the school after the Foundation Phase.

For reading specifically, only a few Grade 4 learners at Schools A, D and E reportedly experienced problems with reading, such as slow reading speed, needing to sound out words, finger pointing to follow text and lack of confidence. Teachers at schools D and E could view reading success as decoding only, given generally poor performance levels at the

schools in 2005. At School B, much reading ability variation was reported and a decline in learners' foundation skills and vocabulary had been noted. Teachers at schools A, B and C were concerned about learners' lack of motivation to read, reporting loss of interest in reading once they had mastered the skill, laziness to read and disinterest. The School B HoD shared her opinion on a lack of learner motivation to read by indicating that learners in South Africa start school too late, with the result that they are later too developmentally advanced for their reading levels and reading content leading to boredom.

At the three schools reaching the international benchmarks another prominent issue was the audiovisual-technological orientation of learners. Learners' orientation towards technology had a negative impact on their reading skill and motivation to read. According to teachers, this orientation also led to a lack of learner imagination, thinking and listening skills and poor pronunciation. The School C teacher felt that texts had to be challenging to retain learners' interest.

Mixed ability grouping was problematic at schools A and C, with such classes experienced as stressful for teachers. They had a negative impact on learners in realising their potentials as those requiring extension were held back, and those with difficulties were left out. Teachers could be forced to teach to the middle range of the class and pace of curriculum implementation could be negatively affected. The requirement to provide proof of interventions for LSEN could also be overwhelming for classroom practice. Mixed ability grouping therefore may not be optimal as teachers do not have the support needed to deal with such grouping, especially with large class sizes and a lack of support staff.

Learners' attendance of preschools with English exposure, especially the school's own Grade R, was thought to have a positive impact on learners' language abilities later on in schooling. The School B learners had to have two years of exposure to English at either the school's satellite preschool or its own Grade R, which may have helped ESL learners at the school.

- Parental involvement

School A had positive parental support for their children's learning. This was likely a result of the school's drive to elicit their involvement by means of provision of a document explaining the school's reading development strategy and outlining strategies for parents to assist their children with reading; meetings to explain expectations of parents and learners, as well as provision of LOs for the year to the parents. No other schools had such strategies in place to

encourage parental involvement, and, although parents at School C were required to monitor their children's reading it was unclear whether or not they did. Two other schools reported positive parental support, albeit only by means of meeting attendance. At schools B, C and F it was particularly difficult to get the cooperation of parents whose learners were struggling with some parents at School F even being hostile to teachers.

7.7.3 Resource adequacy for reading literacy teaching and learning

- School library availability and use

Four of the six schools had a library. The three schools at the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks had well-managed and well-resourced libraries featuring recent reading materials. A librarian was appointed at each school and two of the schools had senior learners as library monitors or volunteers. Learners at these three schools had either access to their libraries at breaks and/or after school. However, it was only at the two highest performing schools that Grade 4 learners had formally scheduled time each week for a library period. In contrast, only one school with an average below the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks had a functional library, which did not feature recent materials and did not appear to be as well-managed as the other libraries.

- Classroom reading resource availability and management

There were vast differences in reading resource availability and management between schools reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks and those that did not. Although the two schools had major differences in school fee structures, no difficulties with reading resource access were reported at Schools A and C. At School B there were however indications that government budget cuts had started to impact negatively on funding for reading resources, meaning that the school had to carefully manage the resource allocation process by means of staggered funding across the grades.

At two schools below the international benchmarks, reading material availability was a major problem. At one school the teacher did not seem to have adequate information or support from school management to obtain much needed LTSM materials. At the other school, there was no budget available for LTSM materials, with the result that teachers had to improvise by using the chalkboard and photocopy handouts of stories and textbooks from other learning areas. At this school, reading material adequacy also seemed to be equated to whether or not the materials were RNCS or NCS aligned. The teachers may not have understood that

there is no distinction, and may not have been able to judge for themselves whether materials were developmentally appropriate for their learners regardless of whether or not labelled by publishers as curriculum-based.

School A was the only one which seemed to have managerial structures in place to monitor progress made in using reading programmes and materials purchased. Multiple role-players were involved in providing feedback on the success of implementation of materials purchased.

Other important issues that were mentioned regarding reading resources were: a perceived lack of appropriate information and samples from publishers to help make informed decisions about LTSM purchases; a need for differentiated materials at each grade due to mixed ability learner groupings; and the need for affordable reading series.

At the three schools below the PIRLS international benchmarks, poor literate classroom environments were observed, with few or no posters or other visual texts for incidental reading. None of the three schools had a reading corner or bookshelf and only class book boxes were reported. At the schools at the PIRLS international benchmarks, there were more posters evident and a reading bookshelf or corner in each Grade 4 class. Indeed, at Schools A and C, posters and other texts, as well as reading corners, were school policy. At School B, this was teacher-initiated without monitoring at school level. At School A, it was also policy for classrooms to have author boxes, flash cards and current affairs texts displayed. Importantly, at School A, each classroom had posters with the RNCS LOs and ASs displayed for the learners, encouraging greater engagement with the curriculum. The discrepancy between literate classroom environments at Grade 3 and Grade 4 were noticeable at Schools C, D, E and F, with Grade 3 classes being superior in this regard.

- Learning support resources

Each school had different processes or structures in place to assist learners experiencing difficulties. Only the highest performing school had ample learning support resource access and structures in place. There were screening assessments to detect difficulties that learners experienced; tutorials for teachers and learners; informal peer tutoring and full scholastic assessments carried out on-site or privately by parents. At the next highest performing school, there was one remedial teacher who worked with all learners. Teachers did not have time to give support to learners due to large class sizes and time limitations caused by a full extracurricular timetable.

At the other schools, learners experiencing difficulties were mostly reliant on teacher and/or parental assistance. At Schools C, D and E, Foundation Phase materials were specifically used for learners experiencing difficulties at Grade 4. The School D teacher pointed out that there was not time to assist learners in the afternoon. At School C, resourcefulness was displayed with teachers consulting with other teachers who had training in remedial education.

Access to external support professionals was not ideal at Schools B, C, D, E or F. At School B, occupational and speech and language therapists visited the school weekly to provide services. However, although a limited school fund was available for parents without the financial means, they had to pay for these services. Teachers at schools C, E and F were reliant on support from DoE-appointed psychologists. Given that a psychologist was appointed for the whole school and other schools in the district, only visited infrequently and did not have contact with the teachers, it would be unlikely that this would be of any help to teachers and their learners. Also, the manner of help afforded would in no way empower teachers to assist their learners as these educational support professionals did not seem to consult directly or collaborate with teachers to render support.

7.7.4 Professional organisation of reading literacy teaching and learning

- Planning and monitoring

The schools at the international benchmarks were the only ones at which it was clear that formally scheduled planning meetings took place regularly. Furthermore, Schools A and C had better planning and monitoring structures in place than School B. School A had monthly meetings for the Language learning area, with the subject area leader's participation. School B Grade 4 teachers had weekly meetings and phase meetings at the beginning and end of the school year. School C used staff, phase, subject area, standards head, and SMT meetings for planning.

During meetings at School A, book and assessment quality control took place. The subject area leader gave feedback from cluster meetings, while teachers set goals, reflected on the success of approaches implemented and shared knowledge and ideas. Yearly 'road-mapping' meetings also contributed to planning structures and monitoring of curriculum implementation. There was also cross-grade assessment quality control at the school. School A was the only one where the principal was also involved in strategising teaching and learning. Teachers followed year plans and week plans which were adjusted according o

current events at the time of implementation. At School C, teachers discussed ideas and best strategies during meetings. Once a term, phase-based meetings were held to discuss progress, difficulties and activities. The HoD monitored curriculum implementation at the school by checking teachers' work.

It was less clear how planning took place at the other schools. At school E, grade-based planning took place, with the teacher working from a year plan and work schedules. Individual teachers could decide how to do planning, which suggested a lack of a school strategy. At School D, there were no direct indications of formal planning arrangements, with the teacher suggesting that teachers met to share materials. At School F, teachers also worked individually, following a work schedule. No planning took place as management was in disarray. It was apparent that teachers also resented any attempts by the HoD to monitor or check their work.

- Phase and grade curriculum implementation coordination

The three schools at the international benchmarks had recognised that it was imperative to coordinate language teaching and learning between Grades 3 and 4. Schools B and C were in the early stages of grappling with the problem of how to go about achieving coordination. At School B, the HoD was investigating how to coordinate teaching between the Intermediate Phase grades only, but whereas the School C HoD monitored progression in teaching in these grades, the school had only just realised the gap between Grades 3 and 4, meaning that teachers were interacting and swapping work schedules to work on the gap. School A had a comprehensive strategy in place to coordinate teaching and learning across all phases and grades at the school. All reading literacy programmes at pre-primary, Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase, Senior Phase including the school's high school, were coordinated to ensure that learners would be able to meet the requirements for the next grades and phase of their schooling. The Intermediate Phase subject area leader met with the Foundation Phase literacy leader and high school to ensure learners would meet standards at the next phase. In stark contrast, at schools D and F, teachers either met with the Grade 3 and 5 teachers to indicate where they left off for reading or to discuss learner characteristics in general only.

- Opportunities for Continuing Professional Teacher Development

Schools A and C were proactive in organising CPTD for teachers. At school A, they attended courses, workshops and conferences, conducted research or invited guest speakers to the

school. At School C, teachers utilised their own teachers' expertise by getting staff with specific skills or knowledge to present mini-workshops to other staff. The teachers also attended external CPTD courses. At School B, the HoD indicated that there was no time, money or opportunities for CPTD, because the school was not in a main centre. No information was available from the three other schools in this regard.

- Collegial support

Collegial support for teaching and learning was only apparent at Schools A and C, with teacher teamwork emphasised at the former. Teachers did parallel teaching, marking and assessment, and there was an open-door policy wherein they could observe and critique their colleagues' lessons. They also explored teaching options together. At School C, regardless of their subject area, they worked together on language development as they all realised its importance for teaching and learning.

- Initiatives for learners' reading literacy development

Only Schools A and C had formalised initiatives to encourage learners' reading literacy development. No formalised strategies were reported at the other schools.

- Time allocation for English language

There was a slight variation in the amount of time allocated for English language instruction at each school, from roughly 3 hours and 45 minutes a week at School F, to five hours a week at School B. Teachers at schools A, B, E and F complained that the time allocation was not enough for curriculum implementation. Learners with difficulties and teacher administration could impact negatively on the time available.

7.7.5 Perceptions and experiences of curriculum implementation

- Overview of curriculum implementation strategies and challenges

In comparison to the other schools, much more focus was placed on curricular coverage at Schools A and C. School A had the most comprehensive strategy of curriculum implementation, as evidenced by curricular alignment of all learning tasks, learner awareness of LOs and ASs, and LO and AS posters displayed in classrooms. At School C, teachers

used curriculum documents for planning, which the HoD checked to ensure curricular coverage. Teachers also tried to create cross-curricular links in their teaching.

At Schools A, B and D, traditional approaches to teaching reading literacy were combined with curricular approaches. Operationalisation of the curriculum to specific goals was deemed necessary at the two highest performing schools, with School A implementing specific teaching methodologies, reflecting on and adapting curricular goals, and School B implementing the curriculum according to experience and learner needs. Similarly, at School D, learner needs dictated implementation and the teacher adjusted curricular goals according to these needs and her experience. However, this meant that cross-curricular linkages were not always feasible. There was concern about a lack of consistency in curriculum implementation across schools in the country. At schools A and C, a balanced approach to using all of the LOs was followed. However, the school C HoD recognised the importance of the Listening and Speaking LOs. Nonetheless, at School D there were concerns about too much focus on oral work in the curriculum and at School F it was felt that teachers did not recognise that a balanced approach meant that they could integrate more than one AS into their lessons. At School E, the teacher seemed to have little insight into the curriculum, while at School F the HoD acknowledged that teachers had difficulties with it.

- Critique of curriculum policy document

At four of the schools, the curriculum was regarded as vague and difficult to use, due to complex terminology. Teachers at Schools A and C felt that teachers needed expertise and experience to successfully interpret it for classroom practice. The School C teacher noted discrepancies in the expected ASs and found it difficult to ascertain if her learners were progressing to an acceptable level. She therefore thought that the curriculum allowed too much leeway for interpretation by teachers and needed to be much clearer. The school B HoD felt that curricular documents needed to be condensed with examples given. It was also her perception that there was no direct reference to comprehension development in the curriculum and she was further concerned that its implementation was reliant on schools having access to resources.

- Critique of support from the Department of Education

Teachers criticised constant changes to the curriculum and a perceived lack of adequate support from the DoE for its implementation. DoE officials were perceived as being either ineffective, with a lack of understanding, or critical rather than supportive of teachers. At

School F, district DoE demands and unreasonable deadlines were experienced as interfering with the process of teaching and learning at the school.

- The impact of administration on teaching and learning

Teachers at five of the schools pointed out that administrative tasks had a negative impact on their teaching practices. These tasks were experienced as time-consuming and led to teachers working on their files instead of focusing on teaching.

- Slow implementation of the curriculum

There was concern that curriculum implementation was occurring too slowly in the Foundation Phase, with teachers underestimating children's abilities. The School D teacher admitted that she sometimes worked at the pace of her learners and not according to curricular expectations, so as to ensure learners adequately grasped the work. External factors at School F also meant that teachers missed addressing some ASs.

- Exposure to the Foundations for Learning Campaign

Exposure to the Foundations for Learning Campaign was only mentioned at Schools B, C and F. Schools B and C were positive about the campaign, while it was experienced as much more specific for planning lessons at School C. However, at School F, it was felt that it had been imposed on teachers, and teachers did not see its relevance.

7.8 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This chapter has dealt with the presentation of data to partly answer the first sub-question for the study. Each of the school cases were compared for similarities and differences in the conditions of practice for Grade 4 learners' reading literacy development.

Findings for the phase 1 secondary analysis of the micro level PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire data partly answering research sub-question two are dealt with in the next chapter.