

A professional development programme for Grade R teachers: A focus on phonological awareness

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature

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Abstract

Professional development is considered an essential mechanism for deepening teachers' content knowledge and developing their teaching practices. As a result, professional development could be a cornerstone of systemic reform efforts designed to increase teachers' capacity to teach to high standards. Professional development refers to those programmes, activities and experiences where teachers review, renew and change their attitudes, skills and knowledge. However, most professional development programmes currently available to teachers, still consist of the one-shot workshop model for professional development. This is in contrast to what is suggested by research-based literature. According to the literature, effective professional development programmes make provision in their design for the following aspects, namely: the participants in the programme (the "who"), the relevant knowledge and skills taught during the programme (the "what"), and lastly the models and techniques that will be utilised during the programme (the "how"). Addressing these aspects in professional development programmes ensures that the attitude, motivation and context of the participants are taken into account. Furthermore, that the content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and learner knowledge of teachers are taught through the best interactive and integrated activities as part of effective professional development models and techniques, that are on-going over time and provide follow-up support. To affect change in the participants' attitude, skills, knowledge and practice, which is the aim of any professional development programmes, it is important that these aspects are addressed.

Significant research and professional development efforts during the past several decades have focused on increasing scholarly and pedagogical knowledge about the nature and relevance of phonological awareness for children's early literacy development (e.g., National Reading Panel, 2000; Lonigan, Burgess, Anthony & Baker, 1998). Despite these concerted efforts, many early childhood educators, particularly those providing child care and preschool education, are lacking in a sophisticated understanding of phonological awareness and of how to promote its development appropriately in young children (Dickinson & Brady, 2005; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Zill & Resnick, 2006). As a result, opportunities are missed for

supporting the emergent literacy development of many children, particularly those from backgrounds that make them at risk for reading difficulties.

In order to teach phonological awareness skills effectively within the Grade R classroom, it is essential that the Grade R teachers have the relevant content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and learner knowledge to teach phonological awareness skills daily, explicitly and systematically in small groups.

This study analysed Grade R teachers' content knowledge and teaching practices relating to phonological awareness, as well as the "who", the "what" and the "how" of professional development programmes currently available to Grade R teachers within the Sunshine District in the North West Province. The results revealed striking gaps in the content knowledge relating to phonological awareness of the participating Grade R teachers and that phonological awareness skills are taught haphazardly within the relevant Grade R classrooms. The results further reflected that the professional development programmes available to the participating teachers are lacking in aspects such as providing follow-up support, encouraging collaboration, being on-going over time and taking the context of the participants into account.

Key terms:

professional development programme, effective professional development, phonological awareness, early childhood, teacher knowledge.

Opsomming

Professionele ontwikkeling word erken as 'n noodsaaklike instrument om onderwysers se inhoudskennis te verdiep en ook hul onderrigpraktyke te verbeter. Dit word aanvaar dat professionele ontwikkeling die hoeksteen kan wees vir die doelgerigte ontwikkeling van onderwysers se kapasiteit om hoë standaarde in hul onderrig te handhaaf. Professionele ontwikkeling verwys na al die programme, aktiwiteite en ervarings waardeur onderwysers hul houdings, kennis en vaardighede kan hersien, vernuwe en verander. Tog is die meeste professionele ontwikkelingsprogramme wat tans vir onderwysers beskikbaar is, steeds in die eendag-werkswinkel formaat. Dit is in teenstelling met dit wat in die bewys-gebaseerde navorsingsliteratuur aanbeveel word. Uit die literatuur blyk dit dat effektiewe professionele ontwikkelingsprogramme voorsiening moet maak vir die beplanning van die volgende aspekte, naamlik ten opsigte van die deelnemers aan die programme (die "wie"), die relevante kennis en vaardighede wat in die programme onderrig moet word (die "wat"), en laastens, die modelle en tegnieke wat gedurende die aflewering van die programme gebruik gaan word (die "hoe"). Indien hierdie aspekte in die beplanning van 'n professionele ontwikkelingsprogram verreken word, sal dit verseker dat die houding, motivering en konteks van die deelnemers aan die program in ag geneem word. Verder sal verseker word dat inhoudskennis, pedagogiese kennis en leerderkennis onderrig word deur middel van die beste inter-aktiewe en geïntegreerde aktiwiteite as deel van die effektiewe professionele ontwikkelingsmodelle en tegnieke, wat op deurlopende basis aangebied word en opvolg-ondersteuning voorsien. Om verandering in die programdeelnemers se houdings, vaardighede, kennis en praktyk te bewerkstellig, wat tog die doel van enige professionele ontwikkelingsprogram is, is dit belangrik om aan al hierdie aspekte behoorlike aandag te gee.

Relevante navorsing en professionele ontwikkelingsprojekte gedurende die afgelope dekades, het daarop gefokus om die opvoedkundige kennis van onderwysers, ten opsigte van die aard en relevansie van fonologiese bewustheid tydens leerders se vroeë taalontwikkeling, te verbeter (e.g., National Reading Panel, 2000; Lonigan, Burgess, Anthony, & Baker, 1998). Ten spyte van hierdie doelgerigte pogings, het talle onderwysers wat by vroeë kinder-ontwikkeling en veral by voorskoolse

taalonderrig betrokke is, steeds 'n gebrekkige begrip ten opsigte van die belangrikheid van fonologiese bewustheid in taalontwikkeling. Die meeste van hierdie onderwysers het ook 'n gebrekkige kennis insake die wyse waarop hierdie vaardighede op gepaste wyse by jong leerders ontwikkel kan word (Dickinson & Brady, 2005; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Zill & Resnick, 2006). Dit lei daartoe dat belangrike geleenthede verlore gaan om die ontluikende taalvaardighede van jong leerders te ontwikkel. Dit is veral van toepassing in die geval van die leerders wat uit sulke omgewings afkomstig is wat die risiko verhoog dat hulle leesprobleme sal ontwikkel.

Om die effektiewe onderrig van fonologiese bewustheidsvaardighede te verseker, is dit van kardinale belang dat die Graad R-onderwysers die tersaaklike inhoudskennis, pedagogiese kennis en leerderkennis het en dat die fonologiese bewustheidsvaardighede daaglik op doelbewuste en stelselmatige wyse in klein groepe onderrig word.

In hierdie studie is die Graad R-onderwysers se inhoudskennis en onderrigpraktyke ten opsigte van fonologiese bewustheid ontleed. Die "wie", "wat" en "hoe" van beskikbare professionele ontwikkelingsprogramme vir Graad R-onderwysers in die "Sunshine District" van die Noord-Wes Provinsie is ook bepaal. Die navorsingsbevindings het opvallende leemtes in die onderwysers se inhoudskennis ten opsigte van fonologiese bewustheid aangetoon en bevestig dat dit op lukrake wyse in die meeste Graad R-klasse onderrig word. Uit die navorsingsbevindings is dit ook duidelik dat die beskikbare professionele ontwikkelingsprogramme wat onderwysers kan volg, nie genoegsame aandag verleen aan aspekte soos die opvolg-ondersteuning, die aanmoediging van samewerking, die deurlopende aard daarvan en dat die konteks van die deelnemers nie genoegsaam in berekening gebring word nie.

Sleuteltermes:

professionele ontwikkelingsprogramme, effektiewe professionele ontwikkeling, fonologiese bewustheid, vroeë kinder-ontwikkeling, onderwyserskennis.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAPS – National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Standards

CEPD – Centre for Education Policy Development

CV – Curriculum Vitae

DBE – Department of Basic Education

NCSALL – The National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

NSDC – National Staff Development Council

PD – Professional development

PPS – Professional Practice Schools

TS – Teaching Schools

UTCRLA – The University of Texas Centre for Reading Language Arts

Chapter 1:

Contextualisation and Problem Statement

1.1 Problem statement

Teacher quality has become a topic of increasing interest in the discussion of South African education (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Teachers currently employed are under enormous pressure for good learner results, as teachers' quality is determined by student achievement (Mestry, Hendricks & Bisschoff, 2009). Research suggests that teachers can make a 40% - 90% difference in the achievements of learners (Public Education Network, 2004). Mestry, Hendricks and Bisschoff (2009) are of the opinion that professional development is a way of raising the quality of teaching and learning.

Several decades of research have clearly demonstrated that the short and long term positive effects that high-quality early childhood programmes have on children's development is depended on teacher effectiveness (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan & Carrol, 2004). To be effective, early childhood teachers must have specialised knowledge, skills and practices related to literacy teaching. The key to sustaining teacher effectiveness and promoting continuous growth is high quality in-service professional development (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Access to effective in-service professional development has not kept pace with the growing recognition of its significance. The Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy reported that, by and large, professional development for early childhood teachers is limited, inconsistent, and fragmented (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001). Inconsistency refers to the wide variability in content, approach, duration and quality of the in-service programmes available (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

Most early childhood professional development programmes do not provide follow-up to support teacher implementation of new practices. The traditional approach to teachers' professional development has to be changed from the usual day-long workshop sessions, to a process that is on-going, encourages participation through hands-on opportunities and is goal specific. Day-long workshops do not guarantee

that teachers will be knowledgeable in the content and the application of it in the classroom. The pressure is on institutions (e.g., universities, departments of education, etc.) to find more effective approaches to professional development that will ensure changes in teachers' content knowledge, and ways of teaching to ensure better learner achievement (Lehr & Osborn, 2005). High quality professional development programmes are a necessity to increase the skills and deepen the knowledge of teachers working in pre-school education (Borko, 2004).

The South African Department of Education (2009b) appointed a panel of experts to investigate the nature of the challenges and problems experienced in the implementation of the National Curriculum and Policy Statements. The panel reported that teachers do not know what to teach and how to teach it. Teaching requires a large selection of skills and the ability to know when to do what, how and why (Learning First Alliance, 2000). This does not happen overnight; the teacher must be able to use the theory of research done and incorporate it into the context of daily teaching (Learning First Alliance, 2000).

The results of a study done by Wessels (2011) on phonological awareness indicated that teachers do not have adequate knowledge and teaching skills to teach phonological awareness to Gr. R learners. They are not prepared to teach phonological awareness in Gr. R, and do not have the appropriate resources to teach phonological awareness in Gr. R. Hugo et al. (2005) state that the best time to develop phonological awareness is before formal reading teaching starts, thus in the case of South Africa, Grade R. It is, therefore, important for Grade R teachers to know when and how to teach phonological awareness skills (Learning First Alliance, 2000).

Significant research and professional development efforts during the past several decades have focused on increasing teachers' knowledge about the importance and relevance of phonological awareness for children's early literacy development (e.g., National Reading Panel, 2000; Lonigan, et al. 1998). Despite these efforts, many early childhood educators are still lacking in a sophisticated understanding of phonological awareness and of how to promote its development appropriately in young children (Dickinson & Brady, 2005; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Zill & Resnick, 2006). As a result, opportunities for developing the emergent literacy of many

children are missed, particularly those from backgrounds that make them at risk for reading difficulties.

The aim of this study is firstly, to analyse the problems levelled against professional development programmes and the way they are implemented in practice critically. Secondly, to determine the attitude of Grade R teachers towards professional development and phonological awareness, the teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness and how they implement the teaching of phonological awareness in practice. Lastly, to formulate guidelines when developing a professional development programme that focuses on the who (characteristics and context of the teachers and the children they serve), the what (what teachers should know and be able to do), and the how (the organisation and facilitation of learning experiences) of early childhood professional development with a specific focus on phonological awareness.

1.2 Literature review

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1993) defines professional development as initial preparation (pre-service) and learning experiences (in-service) designed to improve the knowledge, skills/behaviours, and attitudes/values of the early childhood workforce. In order to ensure the provision of high-quality early childhood programmes for young children, it is necessary to have highly competent teachers teaching early childhood. Professional development provides the path to achieving this goal. It is the process where teachers continuously review, renew and change their practices and ways of thinking. Mestry et al. (2009) describe in-service education and training as the continuous development of the attitudes, knowledge, and practices of teachers in employment.

Professional development is defined as *“facilitated teaching and learning experiences that are transactional and designed to support the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills and dispositions as well as the application of this knowledge in practice”* (Buysse, Winton & Rous, 2009, p. 235). The conceptual framework of this study is situated within a contextualised approach to professional development focusing on the core to delivering professional development in terms of evidence-based content and methods, namely the who (characteristics of teachers,

for example, their attitudes), the what (knowledge) and the how (practices) (cf. National Professional Development Centre on Inclusion, 2010).

Targeting the dimensions of attitudes, knowledge and practice differentiates this approach to professional development from the workshop model that very often focuses on the single dimension of knowledge (Chen & McCray, 2012). Despite increasing recognition that one-shot, cursory workshops are not effective in helping teachers translate knowledge into practice; the model still dominates the field of teacher professional development (Viadero, 2005). In a typical workshop, an expert delivers knowledge on a particular topic to a large group within a limited time period. Here the attitudes of the participants towards the topic are not relevant. Practice may be discussed by the expert, but there is not enough time for teachers to engage in practical implementations of the new skills or knowledge learned. Follow-up support is not included when the new practices have to be implemented (Guskey, 2002).

There may be several reasons why **attitudes** are not a concern in professional development programmes. Knowledge and skills are more readily defined as deliverables that can be measured and be covered in specific time periods, whereas, attitudes are associated with belief systems and cannot be altered in one-day time frames. Research on teacher professional development consistently indicates that attitudes are closely related to teachers' knowledge acquisition and classroom practice (Pajares, 1992,1996; Vartuli, 2005).

Teachers' attitudes towards phonological awareness are of utmost importance, as it is closely connected to teachers' knowledge attainment and classroom practice (Chen & McCray, 2012). Teachers' attitudes will determine how much time and energy will be put into the modeling and teaching of the different phonological awareness skills, as one of the most challenging aspects of teaching phonological awareness is that one cannot make a child understand or analyze the sound structure of a language (Schuele & Boudreau, 2008).

Despite several professional development efforts in international contexts, many early childhood teachers are lacking in a sophisticated understanding of phonological awareness and of how to appropriately promote its development in young children (Zill & Resnick, 2006). Children's understanding that words are made up of smaller sounds such as syllables and phonemes helps them to "break the code" of written

language and acquire the alphabetic principle. The alphabetic principle refers to the fact that written words represent spoken words in a sound-by-sound correspondence. Sounds are signified by a single letter, or, in some cases, several letters indicating a single sound in a word (e.g., *sh* and *ch*). When teachers and parents tell a child who is trying to write or read to “sound it out,” this suggestion will only make sense if the child grasps the concept that the word can be broken down into these smaller components. Phonological awareness, letter name knowledge, and letter sound knowledge come together in young children to forge this conceptual understanding and to facilitate reading and writing development. This is accomplished when children use their understanding of the regular relationships between sounds and letters to sound out unknown words (Ehri, 2002; Phillips & Torgesen, 2006).

Research by Lonigan and colleagues (e.g., Lonigan, 2004; Lonigan, et al. 1998) and others (e.g., Hecht, Burgess, Torgesen, Wagner & Rashotte, 2000, Webb, Schwanenflugel & Kim, 2004) has shown consistently that preschool and early school-age children from lower income backgrounds and those whose parents have less education demonstrate lower phonological awareness skills than more affluent peers. This discrepancy holds for the other key emergent literacy skills of print knowledge and oral language as well. Data indicate that there is a persistent gap in skill level and in the rate of new skill acquisition (Lonigan, 2004). Current theory suggests that these social class differences in early skill levels are likely related to early language environments and vocabulary development (e.g., Hoff, 2003) as well as to the general home literacy environment (e.g., Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2000; Phillips & Lonigan, 2009). Such findings suggest that teaching in phonological awareness and other emergent literacy skills is especially critical for preschool children from these at risk backgrounds if early education is to meet its aspirational goal of closing the gap in educational achievement for children who grow up in disadvantaged conditions. Phonological awareness, as with other decoding skills, is not an intuitive or naturally developing ability, as language skills may be for some children, but may rather require deliberate teaching and practice opportunities. The greater challenge in learning is, in part, because phonemes do not exist naturally in spoken language. When both children and adults speak, they do not distinctly pronounce each isolated phoneme. Instead, human speech includes what is called

“co-articulation” of the speech sounds, with each phoneme affected by the ones preceding it, subsequent to it, or both. For example, not all words that begin with the letter *b* include the same version of the /b/ phoneme. When we say words such as *bit*, *bright*, or *body*, the phoneme is pronounced differently depending on what vowel or consonant comes after. The fact that phonemes do not exist as distinct units of sound when people speak, and that children and adults may be more disposed to pay attention to the meaning of words than to the specific sounds of words, represents a potential barrier to developing phonological awareness at the phoneme and larger unit levels. This suggests that a key early focus of phonological awareness teaching for many children is to prompt them to learn to attend to the sound structure of words in addition to what the words mean.

Implementing new practice requires more than rote application of attitudes and knowledge (Beaudin & Grigg, 2001). Borko (2004) points out that a gap between knowledge and practice is often found after participating in a training programme. Applying new knowledge and methods learned through professional development programmes, teachers inevitably encounter unexpected challenges that require adaptations to make practices effective. Implementation also requires teachers to apply what they have learned in the context of existing practices used with a particular group of children. Practice entails both knowledge-constructive and knowledge-internalisation processes. As teachers implement new practices, they deepen their understanding through the active processes of elaborating and integrating knowledge. Without time and support for practice, a teacher professional development programme is bound to fail (Borko, 2004; Elmore & Burney, 1999).

In order to have an effect on teaching practice, professional development programmes have to address the following professional learning needs:

- Help teachers to understand the underlying theory that makes the research-based practices or new ideas important enough for the teachers to know.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to observe the new skill or knowledge.
- Provide ample time for the practice of the new skill or knowledge.
- Provide time for feedback.
- Provide time for collaboration and reflection.

- Address issues of appropriate assessment methods (Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2010:13).

The following research questions are addressed:

1. What is the attitude and motivation of Grade R teachers towards phonological awareness and professional development?
2. What does the professional development currently available to Grade R teachers' focus on, and is it relevant and effective for their needs?
3. What knowledge do Grade R teachers have concerning phonological awareness?
4. How is phonological awareness taught in Grade R classrooms?
5. How is phonological awareness for Grade R addressed in the Department of Basic Education (DBE) documentation?

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to determine:

- Grade R teachers' attitude and motivation towards professional development;
- what the professional development currently available to Grade R teachers' focuses on, and if it is relevant and effective for their needs;
- what knowledge Grade R teachers have concerning phonological awareness.
- how phonological awareness is taught in Grade R classrooms;
- how phonological awareness for Grade R is addressed in DBE documentation; and
- formulate guidelines essential when developing a professional development programme that focuses on the who (characteristics and context of the teachers and the children they serve), the what (what teachers should know and be able to do) and the how (the organisation and facilitation of learning experiences) of early childhood professional development with a specific focus on phonological awareness, and which takes cognisance of the criticism that has been levelled against professional development programmes.

1.4 Central theoretical statement

Professional development programmes offered within the Sunshine District focusing on phonological awareness are currently presented in a haphazard and uncoordinated manner.

1.5 Research methodology

A detailed discussion of the research methodology used in this study is given in Chapter 4.

1.5.1 Research paradigm

This study is situated within an interpretive paradigm. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007a), the main aim of interpretivists is to offer a perspective on a situation and focus on the subjective experiences of the participants. In essence, this research paradigm is concerned with reaching a deeper understanding and explanation, allowing the researcher to understand the subjective meaning of the participant's social action (Fouché & Schurink, 2011). The interpretive paradigm was utilised within this study to analyse and understand the participants' attitude and motivation concerning attending professional development programmes, and also the knowledge and practice of the participating Grade R teachers with regard to the teaching of phonological awareness skills.

1.5.2 Research approach

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007b), qualitative research is concerned with answering the "why" questions of research, thus understanding the processes. Qualitative research focuses on gathering deep and rich data, instead of the extensiveness of the data and typically studies participants within their natural environment. A qualitative approach was chosen for this study as the study was conducted in order to understand and explore the issues of the availability of professional development programmes to Grade R teachers and Grade R teachers' knowledge and teaching practice regarding phonological awareness.

1.5.3 Research design

A phenomenological study was undertaken. The main concern of a qualitative researcher is to understand, to observe and explore the natural reality from an insider's perspective (Fouché & Schurink, 2011). The main aim of phenomenology is to go back to the tangible and to describe (Groenewald, 2004). Within this design, the researcher makes inquiries in order to identify the core of human experiences about a phenomenon, by studying a small number of participants (Cresswell, 2009). Groenewald (2004) states that it is important for the researcher to structure questions in such a way that it is directed at the meaning of participants' attitudes about the phenomenon being researched, without influencing them in order to understand and interpret the essentials of the participants' experiences (Fouché & Schurink, 2011).

1.5.4 Participants and sampling

Non-probability sampling is used in qualitative research, where the researcher purposively seeks out participants that are deemed to be the best sources of information required.

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007b), the selection of participants, or sampling, depends on the goals of the study. Purposive sampling is based on the judgment of the researcher, who selects subjects who are most characteristic of the population or most likely to be exposed to or have had experience of the phenomenon in question; in this case, the foundation phase teachers (specifically Gr. R) and the subject advisor for English Home Language for foundation phase within the Sunshine District.

The Grade R teachers represented a wide age group and had English, Afrikaans and Setswana as a home language. However, the participants had to use English as the language of learning and teaching in their classroom.

1.5.5 Data collection methods

The data collection methods chosen for this research provided rich data, specifically focused on the research questions. Data collection methods included: a questionnaire, observations, document analysis and interviews.

A questionnaire: The information gathered from the literature study was used to develop and design a structured questionnaire with open-ended questions, which was used to gather information regarding teachers' in-depth knowledge about phonological awareness.

Observations: An observation is a systematic procedure where the researcher observes and records the behavioural patterns of the participants within their daily routine (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). Within this study observations were made of the Grade R teachers in their classes. The observations focused on what and how teachers teach phonological awareness.

Document analysis: Nieuwenhuis (2007c) emphasises that when one uses documents as a data collection technique you focus on written communications that shed light on a particular phenomenon you are investigating. He also provides researchers with a list of criteria on how to select documents, which include guidelines for the types and the nature of the documents the researcher is dealing with.

Relevant documents from the Department of Basic Education were analysed, namely: *The National Reading Strategy* (Department of Basic Education, 2008a); *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher's Handbook* (Department of Basic Education, 2008b) and *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grade R-3 English home language (CAPS)* (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The participating teachers' planning files were collected to be studied and analysed. The planning files of the teachers were analysed in order to identify any planning regarding the teaching of phonological awareness skills done by the teacher.

Interviews: Greeff (2011) is of the opinion that interviews are one of the main methods for the collection of data in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from the subject advisor and the participating teachers, regarding Grade R teachers' attitude and motivation toward professional development programmes, to determine what professional development programmes are currently available to Grade R teachers and what these professional development programmes focus on.

1.5.6 Data collection procedure

The necessary permission was gained from the Department of Basic Education as well as the principals of each participating school in order to enter the schools to gather the data. Permission was gained from the participating Grade R teachers and a time for the observations and interviews was arranged. The subject advisor was also contacted to request participation and an interview time was scheduled. The researcher maintained good relationships with the participants, as this helped to gather quality data. The interviews were audiotaped, after permission was granted by the participants, in order to be transcribed at a later stage. The data gathered by observing the participants were written down, to be analysed at a later stage.

1.5.7 Data analysis

According to Babbie (2007), qualitative analysis is the *“non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships”* (p.378). Researchers such as Cresswell (2009) and Denscombe (2007) suggest a number of steps should be followed during the process of data analysis and these are the steps that were followed in this study. These steps include:

- Gathering the relevant data.
- Organising and preparing the raw data for analysis by transcribing the mp3 interview recordings, typing the observation notes as well as the questionnaires.
- Reading through the data in order to become familiar with the data.
- Interpreting the data, this entails coding the data to create relevant categories or themes.

1.5.7.1 Data organisation

The collection of rich and descriptive qualitative data requires a well-organised data-collection plan that will support the analysis of the data. This researcher utilised the software programme Atlas.ti. 7 as a data analysis database. Atlas.ti. 7 was used to organise and manage the data. The programme is able to retain documents such as interview transcripts, observation field notes, and visual data. Each document was

coded by attributes that provided detail to the content and features, thus facilitating data searches and analysis.

1.5.7.2 Coding

Coding is the process where the data gathered is read carefully and then divided into meaningful analytical units (Nieuwenhuis, 2007c). Although there are many computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software programmes available, Atlas.ti 7 was chosen as the most suitable. Atlas.ti 7 (2011) made it possible for the researcher to ask questions, make comparisons and look for connections between themes/categories within all the data gathered. With the use of Atlas.ti 7 the researcher coded the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews, the questionnaire, the observations and the relevant policy documents. Data coding took place by highlighting sections of the text to identify different codes. As categories or nodes emerged, it was possible to look for data that relate in meaningful ways.

1.5.7.3 Interpretation

Interpretation of the data is necessary to make sense of the data collected (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011). Nieuwenhuis (2007c) states that the researcher uses the analysed data and compares it to existing theory in order to uncover new understandings and knowledge.

This research moved from the descriptive level to the interpretive level in order to deepen the understanding of the attitude, motivation, knowledge and practice of Grade R teachers towards phonological awareness and how a professional development programme should be used for support. The first level was to classify the data into themes and categories systematically. The next level involved making inferences and drawing conclusions.

1.5.8 Trustworthiness

The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are "*worth paying attention to*" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). In any qualitative research project, trustworthiness ensures that the four issues of trustworthiness namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability

are evident in the research (Given, 2008). Credibility is an evaluation of whether the researcher has accurately represented the data, thus if the research findings represent a 'credible' conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data (Given, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Denscombe (2007), transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of an inquiry can apply or be transferred beyond the bounds of the study. Providing detailed and rich data enables the reader to consider the transferability of the research findings. Dependability is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection and data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is a measure of how well the research interpretations and findings are supported by the data collected (Given, 2008). In this study, trustworthiness will be enhanced by using strategies such as keeping of paper trails.

1.5.9 The role of the researcher

When a qualitative research is conducted, it requires the researcher to fulfil several roles. Firstly, within the interpretive paradigm the researcher is required to fulfil the role of making sense of and explaining the phenomenon. The researcher also has to fulfil the role of "research instrument" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b, p. 79). Thus, the researcher must develop the appropriate skills in order to be the vehicle through which data will be collected and interpreted. Finally, the researcher also fulfills the role of designer of necessary data collection techniques, transcriber of the gathered data and data analyst (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b).

1.5.10 Ethics

Prior to participation, participants received sufficient information to make decisions about participating. They signed informed consent forms which detailed their involvement and the study's purpose. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, and of the terms of confidentiality for this study. All participants participated voluntarily and their identities remained anonymous. Ethical clearance was obtained from the North-West University's Ethical Committee before the commencement of the study.

1.6 Chapter division

In Chapter 1 the contextualisation and problem statement is discussed. Chapter 2 reviews international and national literature with regard to professional development programmes and the characteristics essential to ensure effectiveness. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth discussion regarding phonological awareness, what it entails and the knowledge teachers need in order to teach it effectively. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology employed within the study and Chapter 5 presents the data and discussion thereof. Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter and discusses the guidelines for developing a professional development programme with a focus on phonological awareness. Limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for further research are suggested.

Chapter 2: Professional Development

2.1 Introduction

Currently in South Africa more and more teachers feel the pressure to be competent in their classrooms (Steyn, 2008), as teachers' quality is also determined by student achievement (Mestry, Hendricks & Bisschoff, 2009). To be effective in class teachers need adequate support and tools to rise to expectations (Lehr & Osborn, 2005). This support can be in the form of effective professional development. Research shows that the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained through professional development can have a tremendously positive effect on teachers' effectiveness, if it is sustained over time, focuses on important relevant content and is context relevant. This improvement in teacher knowledge and skills results in better learner achievement (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009).

Like many other countries, South Africa has recently been compelled to review and transform its education system in order to address the needs of the country's teachers and learners (Steyn, 2009). According to The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (SA, 2006), The Ministerial Committee on Rural Education noted "*a shortage of qualified and competent teachers ... and limited access to professional development programmes for teachers*" (p 7).

It is also reported in the policy that one of the most critical challenges of education in South Africa is the limited conceptual knowledge of many teachers currently teaching. Thus, The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development was created with the following intention in mind: "*to provide an overall strategy for the successful recruitment, retention and professional development of teachers*" (SA, 2007 p. 1). The aims of the policy, among others (as stated in the amended policy of 2007), is to ensure that teachers are capable of doing their challenging task and that there are opportunities available for teachers to improve their skills and practice continuously.

Nevertheless, research indicates that professional development in education is currently deeply flawed and that a huge gap exists between what is believed to be

effective professional development (PD) and what research actually states effective PD is (Darling-Hammon *et al.*, 2009; Guskey, 2002). Questions have arisen about the gaps between PD available to teachers and the training needs of teachers (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). These gaps have led to an increase in the interest in ensuring that the professional development supplied to teachers is effective in developing the necessary skills, knowledge and practice of teachers (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). It is crucial for education professionals to participate in continuous learning the way other professionals (such as accountants and nurses) do - continuously, collaboratively, in order to address common problems and crucial challenges (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2009).

In this chapter the key components of professional development are discussed, namely the characteristics and context of the teachers and the children they teach (the “who” of professional development), what teachers should know and be able to do (“what” should be learned), and the organisation and facilitation of learning experiences (“how” the learning of teachers should be supported).

2.2 Definition of professional development

In broad terms, Glatthorn (1995) defines professional development as the development of a person in his or her professional role. Mestry *et al.* (2009) and the organisation Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (Lehr & Osborn, 2005) expand on this definition by defining teachers’ professional development as the process whereby teachers continuously review, renew and change their practices and ways of thinking. Cooper (2002) narrows the term a little and explains that professional development encompasses different categories of training such as staff development, in-service training and continuous professional development. Thus, PD are those programmes and activities that take place in-service, as a way to keep teachers informed and up-to-date on a range of topics and issues of importance to their learners and schools.

The National Professional Development Centre on Inclusion (NPDCI, 2008) considered various assumptions about effective professional development and proposes the following definition for professional development applicable for early childhood education:

Professional development is facilitated teaching and learning experiences that are transactional and designed to support the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills and dispositions as well as the application of this knowledge in practice. The key components of professional development include: (a) the characteristics and context of the learners (the “who” of professional development, including the characteristics and contexts of the learners and the children and families they serve); (b) content (i.e., the “what” of professional development; what professionals should know and be able to do; generally defined by competencies, standards and credentials); and (c) the organisation and facilitation of learning experiences (i.e. the “how” of professional development; the approaches, models, or methods used to support self-directed, experientially-oriented learning that is highly relevant to practice) (p.3).

For this study the following definition of professional development is used:

PD is the process whereby teachers continuously review, renew and change their practices and ways of thinking, it also includes the growth a professional achieves professionally through formal and informal experiences and includes workshops, mentoring and reading published articles. Professional development refers to those programmes, activities and experiences that are sustained over time and designed with the aim of keeping teachers' attitudes, knowledge and skills up-to date on a range of topics and issues of importance to them, their learners and their schools, and consist of the key components of the professional development: the “who”, the “what” and the “how”.

2.3 Theoretical framework

This study uses the theory of change as point of departure. Professional development forms an integral part of the improvement of education, with the aim to change systematically the professional practices, attitudes and knowledge of teachers. Most professional development programmes are initiated with the aim of bringing about specific changes in teachers' attitudes, skills and practices so that change can be facilitated in learners' outcomes (Guskey, 2002). However, developing teachers' knowledge and skills in order to influence learner achievements

does not happen overnight (Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2010). It is generally assumed that when there is a change in attitude and belief, it will ensure commitment, acceptance and enthusiasm within the teachers, which will lead to change in attitude, knowledge, skills and practices. Guskey (2002) disagrees with this assumption and is of the opinion that the process of teacher change is seldom taken into consideration when PD programmes are designed, as it takes considerable effort and time to ensure changes in teachers' attitude, knowledge and practices.

He suggests an alternative model of change (cf. Figure 2.1) for professional development. This model differs from the conventional idea that change in beliefs and attitudes should happen before new knowledge, skills and practices are implemented.

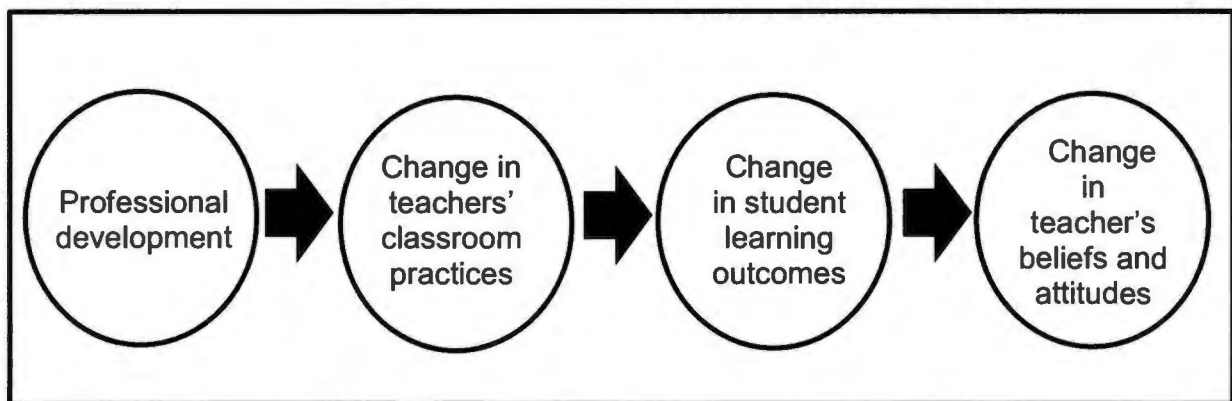


Figure 2.1: A model of teacher change
(Guskey, 2002, p. 383).

With this model, Guskey (2002) suggests that it is essential for teachers to see the change in learner achievements before a change in their attitude, skills and practice can be made. Change is usually an uncertain and uncomfortable process that can cause anxiety and confusion, but when teachers see that the new knowledge, skills and/or practices enhance learner achievement, this will bring about change in their attitudes and beliefs, and teachers' become more committed and willing to deal with the anxiety and confusion caused by the change.

the first stage in the teachers' domain. This is where teachers implement new knowledge, skills and practices in their classrooms, thus changing their classroom behaviour.

The change in classroom behaviour leads to the **student learning domain**, which forms the centre of the theoretical framework as improving learner results are the end goal of any professional development programme. If an improvement in learners' results is evident, this will lead to a change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs. The significance here is that it is not the professional development programme that essentially produces the change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs, but the successful implementation of the new knowledge, skills and practices that resulted in improved learner results (Guskey, 2002).

This then leads to the fourth stage in the professional development domain, reflection. Reflection is very important as it will guide the presentation of future professional development programmes, after teachers have reflected on how their skills, knowledge, attitudes, practice and beliefs were changed (Tinoca, 2005).

However, these domains and how they connect to each other are not the only aspects that should be kept in mind when designing a PD programme. Therefore, in the following section the "who", the "what" and the "how", as crucial components of the conceptual framework, when designing a professional development programme are discussed.

2.4 Conceptual framework

It is generally acknowledged that professional development can have a tremendously positive influence on teachers' attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and skills, thus their teaching practice. For PD programmes to be effective and effect relevant change it should not just focus on the acquisition of knowledge and skills by the participants, as is the case in most traditional approaches to PD (Chen & McCray, 2012).

Since so many professional development programmes fall short in actually effecting change, The National Professional Development Centre on Inclusion (NPDCI, 2008) has suggested the use of a particular conceptual framework, in order to ensure that all the different concepts of professional development are included when designing a

PD programme. This conceptual framework includes the following concepts, namely: **the “who”** - the teachers that will participate as learners in the PD programme; **the “what”** - the content (knowledge and skills) that will be learned by the teachers in order to improve teaching practices and **the “how”** - the processes (models, strategies and techniques) used when the professional development is provided (Chen & McCray, 2012; NPDCI, 2008; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The framework is presented schematically in Figure 2.3:

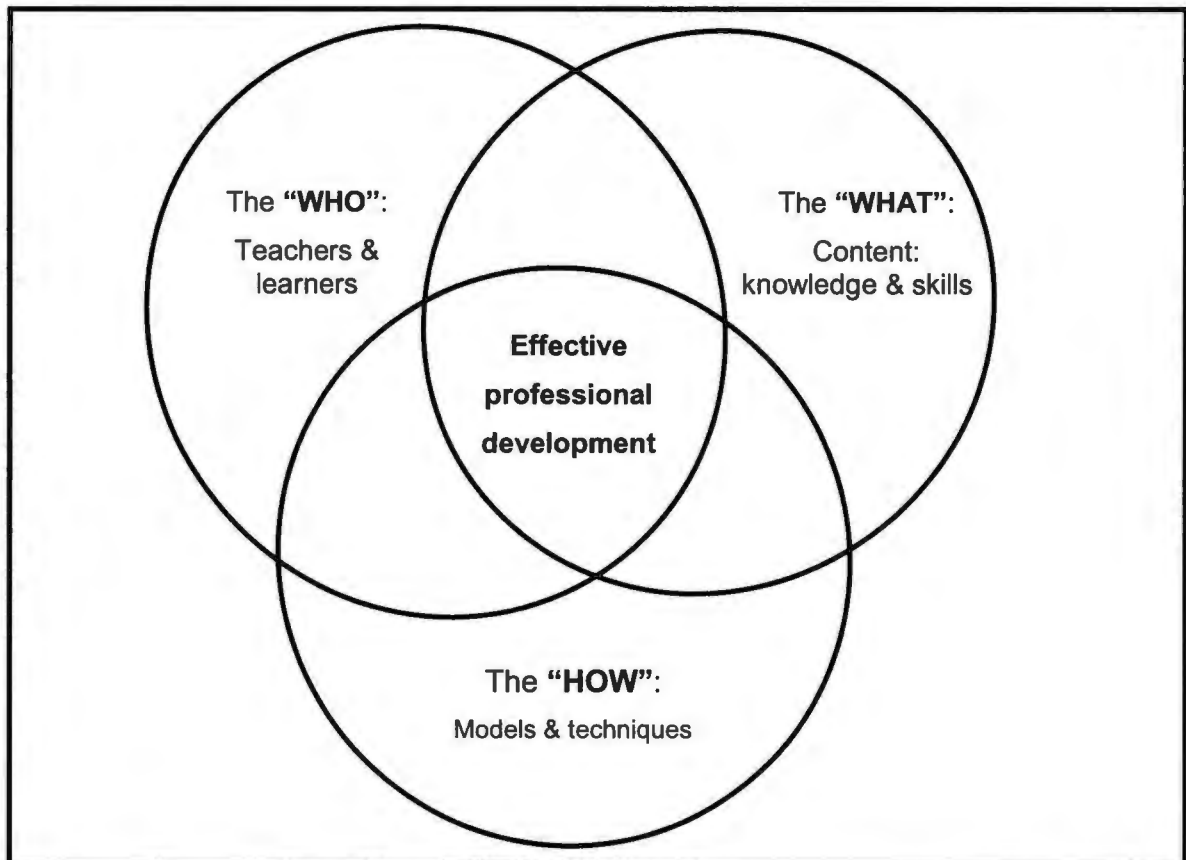


Figure 2.3: Conceptual framework for Professional development in Early Childhood Education (NPDCI, 2008, p. 4).

2.4.1 The teachers as learners within professional development programmes

The **“who”** of professional development programmes focusses on the learner within the professional development programme, which in the case of teacher professional

development will be any professional teacher requiring specific knowledge, skills and practices in order to teach learners in South African classrooms.

Research clearly indicates that the ineffectiveness of many PD programmes is due to different factors. Two of these factors are the lack of **motivation** of teachers to participate in PD programmes, as well as their **attitude** towards the PD programmes. According to Stout (1996), teachers have various motivations to attend professional development programmes, such as career mobility and gaining new skills/knowledge. In a study done by Livneh and Livneh (1999) three factors emerged that predicted participation by teachers in PD programmes, namely a high internal motivation to learn, for example, being the best possible teacher one can be; a high external motivation to learn, for example, a salary increase and when participants have lower levels of formal education. Ottoson (1997) found that a strong predisposition (attitude, motivation, background and prior knowledge of the teachers) positively affects implementation, even when the conditions are not perfect and without follow up support. Most teachers believe that if they expand their knowledge, skills and practice, it will have a positive influence on their learners' achievements. This is what mostly motivates teachers to participate in PD programmes. PD programmes are often seen as the most promising and easily available path to job growth and satisfaction. Being better teachers also motivates them to change their attitude, knowledge and practice (Guskey, 2002).

However, Steyn (2009) conducted a study where she interviewed diverse teachers at four different schools regarding the quality of PD in South Africa. In her study, participants reported that the PD available to them by the Department of Basic Education, usually makes them feel morbid and negative afterwards. One participant from this study is of the opinion that this is due to the format used and the standard of the PD programmes provided by the Department of Basic Education.

A teacher's **attitude** about a content area, subject or teaching practice has an influence on the teacher's thinking, behaviour, depth of learning and in the end the implementation of the new knowledge, skills and practices learned (Chen & McCray, 2012). A positive attitude will result in a teacher spending more time and effort on preparation to deal positively with present challenges. Thus, by attending to teachers' attitudes in a professional development programme, the likelihood of the PD being successful will be increased, which suggests that the new knowledge,

skills and practices will be implemented. If teachers believe that the PD programmes will help them to achieve their own goals, the goals of their particular school and the expectations of the Department of Basic Education (DBE), their attitude will change positively towards the PD programme. This will also lead to a greater chance of teacher change happening and implementation to follow as an end result (Peneul, Fishman, Yamaguchi & Gallagher, 2007). Research done in Ohio, USA (as cited in Villegas-Reimers, 2003) found that teachers that are involved in intensive professional development activities, show a strong, positive and significant growth in their attitude, preparation and practices that are sustained over several years.

Another factor that has to be considered for professional development programmes to be truly effective is the **context** of the participants' (the teachers attending the PD programme) background. The context and individuality of each teacher has to be recognised in order to support teacher learning (Borko, 2004). Teachers as participants in any PD programme, bring their own context with them to the PD programme (Peneul et al., 2007). Context and what really occurs at every school every day plays a huge part in every teacher's life. The context of schools differ, and this means that what (i.e., techniques, strategies and activities) works at one school, might not work at another. This context does not merely include the community within which they work and prior knowledge or experience, it also includes, for example, their schedules, budgets, equipment and resources available at their school (Peneul et al., 2007). Thus, professional development programmes that will be constructive to teachers, will have to differ, because teachers' pre-service training, experiences, expertise and contexts differ (PEN, 2004). This is why "**one size fits all**" PD programmes do not work.

Joughin (as cited by the National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy [NCSALL], 2003) is of the opinion that some teachers have the ability to quite easily grasp and understand new knowledge, skills or practices and how to implement it, while others need extra support and structure to do so. This necessitates that before presenting a PD programme the characteristics (prior knowledge, formal training, age, culture and teaching experience) of the participants as well as the characteristics of the learners they work with and the community they work in must be taken into account. This suggests that for a PD programme to be effective, the PD programme has to ensure that it makes provision and provides (if possible) in

most of these needs of the teacher participants (Peneul et al., 2007). For example, the most powerful content will have no effect if the context has not been considered. The solution is to identify core features that an effective PD programme should consist of, and then decide how to adapt these in order to consider the context of different learners and schools (Guskey, 2000). This suggests that a professional development programme in reading skills, for teachers teaching early reading skills, will differ depending on the age range of the learners taught and the prior knowledge of the teachers (Lehr & Osborn, 2005).

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) state that the ability of teachers to learn new knowledge and un-learn old beliefs and practices, is another factor that influences the effectiveness of PD programmes. Most PD programmes are assembled with the aim of bringing about specific changes in teachers' attitudes, skills and practices, in order to bring about change in school learners' outcomes. This suggests that for a PD programme to be effective, the participating teachers possibly have to make fundamental changes in their teaching techniques and teaching beliefs. Most teachers find these changes unsettling, since research indicates that the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their teaching practice is complicated in nature (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). When the process of teacher change is not taken into consideration, a problem arises, as it takes considerable effort and time to ensure changes in teachers' attitude, knowledge and practices (Guskey, 2002). Supplying teachers with hand-outs, advice and catalogues full of the latest educational ideas and activities will not necessarily bring about change in teachers' beliefs or practices (Ball & Cohen, 1999). It might cause a fleeting spark of imagination and change, but as soon as the pressure increases or difficulty is struck, it will be back to the old ways of teaching. In a study conducted by Herbert and Rainford (2013) they found that by helping the participant to reflect on the classroom practices that needed adjusting and modelling the behaviour they wanted the participant to take back to the classroom, had a huge impact on the participant's classroom practices. They are of the opinion that this caused the participant to trust the judgment and suggestions of Herbert and Rainford (2013), which made implementing the new skills and practices easier for the participant. Thus, the participant was motivated to implement the new skills and practices. This suggests

that developing a PD programme is not a task that should be taken lightly (Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon and Rowe, 2003).

This is especially true when developing a PD programme to develop teachers' skills in teaching learners to read, as teaching reading is a task for an expert. Reading proficiency is vital for learner achievement in any subject, and for this reason it is crucial that teachers of early grades are able to teach early reading skills effectively. Teaching reading is a complex task which requires knowledge, skills and experience (Learning First Alliance, 2000; Moats, 1999). Teachers of early reading will have to make changes regarding techniques used, scheduling and organising classroom reading teaching, monitoring achievement and keeping learners on task (Lehr & Osborn, 2005). This is supported by the National Reading Strategy (Department of Basic Education, 2008a), launched by the Department of Basic Education, which states that:

Many teachers in South Africa have an under-developed understanding of teaching literacy, reading and writing. Many teachers simply don't know how to teach reading. Too often, teachers only know one method of teaching reading, which may not suit the learning style of all learners. Teachers don't know how to stimulate reading inside, and outside, the classroom (p. 8).

The National Reading Strategy (Department of Basic Education, 2008a) further discloses that many Foundation Phase teachers have not been intentionally taught to teach early reading skills.

2.4.2 The content of professional development programmes

A report "Teacher Education Research and Development Programme (TEP) conference, 2008" was compiled and published by the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD, 2009), after the completion of the Teacher Education Research and Development Programme (TEP) that ran from 2005 to 2009. The key objective of this collaborative research programme was to address the main problem of the poor quality of teaching and learning in South African schools by investigating the processes, practices and the outcomes of teacher education (CEPD, 2009). In this report it is stated that the lack of skills, knowledge and understanding by South

African teachers is mostly recognised as a key barrier to South Africa realising its development vision and dramatically improving its service delivery.

Teaching is often seen as an act of common sense and that continuous learning is not important for maintaining an acceptable level of successful teaching practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999). Teachers need adequate teaching skills and core content knowledge in order to teach increasingly diverse learners and to understand how learners learn. Research confirms that by improving the knowledge, skills and practice (i.e., the professional learning) of teachers is an important step in transforming schools and improving learner results in the end (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). The problem is that this continuous learning to effectively support teachers in their teaching practices, and therefore, their learners is not readily available. No teacher can change teaching beliefs, knowledge and practice just by being told to do so (Ball & Cohen, 1999). Continuous professional learning of teachers has to be organised and planned in order to benefit their learners' and have an effect on their achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009:3).

Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich and Stanovich (2004) state that "teachers tend to overestimate their reading related subject matter knowledge, and are often unaware of what they know and do not know" (p. 140). Howie (as cited in CEPD, 2009) reports that teachers' inadequate subject knowledge and the inability of teachers to communicate, have a negative impact on the reading achievements of learners in South African classrooms. Research (Chard, 2004; Moats, 1999; Moats, 2001) indicates that unless learners are taught to read with an instructional approach that is organised, systematic and efficient, by a knowledgeable teacher, they will never learn to read. Research also indicates that most teachers that are required to teach early reading skills are not equipped to do so (Moats, 1999:10). Although most teachers aim to educate their learners to the best of their ability, their ability to teach reading is not at the required level. Their training to teach early reading skills is usually too brief, too general and not based on evidence-based research (Van der Merwe, 2012). Teaching learners to read requires skilled knowledge about the language structure, how learners acquire reading skills and methods of teaching early reading skills, and these are usually the gaps in teachers' knowledge which have to be addressed (Learning First Alliance, 2000). This is confirmed by research which found that many teachers are inadequately equipped to live up to the high

expectations expected of them to support learners to acquire reading skills. Moats (2009) also found key gaps in teachers' understandings about language structure, reading instruction and how to use assessment effectively as a source of information.

Training teachers, pre-service and in-service, adequately to teach reading, is critical in the universal goal to prevent reading problems for all learners. This will only be achieved if teacher preparation is aligned with research based reading instructional strategies as well as effective reading instruction (Moats, 1999; Moats, 2001). This is especially relevant for South Africa, as there is much confusion about which methods should be used to teach reading skills and in which language it should be taught (CEPD, 2009). For this reason, it is important that a PD programme that focuses on teaching reading skills to teachers comprises of in-depth knowledge, skills and dispositions that are grounded in research regarding the “**what**” of a PD programme.

A study done by Garet et al. (2001) found that although the processes and delivery systems used in a PD programme are very important, a focus on **content** is also vitally important in ensuring an effective PD programme. The content of a professional development programme is one of the essential factors that can ensure an improvement in teachers' knowledge and practice. This suggests that a focus on **content** should be a core element of an effective PD programme, focused on sharing information with the participants to enhance their teaching practices, which will lead to better learner results (Lehr & Osborn, 2005). The content (knowledge, skills and practice) should include new approaches to teaching and learning, how to implement and use new skills and practices in a specific setting, what the purpose of the new skills or practice is, which PD programme goals and objectives relate to the knowledge and skills and lastly, what evidence exists that the knowledge and skills will be effective (NPDCI, 2008). Relevant content will contribute to a positive attitude by the participants to the PD programme. Several participants in the study of Steyn (2009) expressed annoyance with the content of most PD programmes available and one participant referred to the PD programme content as a “warra warra” of things they already know (p.127). Another participant referred to the content of PD programmes as “just a different sound track with the same content” (p.127).

When teaching reading researchers agree that teachers require knowledge about five essential components in order to teach early reading skills effectively. These five

components are: phonemic awareness (the ability to hear and distinguish between the speech sounds of a language), phonics (an understanding of letter-sound correspondence), fluency (the efficient decoding of words), vocabulary (an understanding of the meaning of words) and comprehension (an understanding of sentences, paragraphs and longer sentences) (Van der Merwe, 2011).

However, it is not only content knowledge (**what** must be learned) that is important, knowledge about teaching methods (**how** to teach the new skills and knowledge) and learner knowledge (**who** will be taught the new skills and knowledge) must be included in the PD programme (Chen & McCray, 2012). Furthermore, when designing a PD programme it is important to remember that knowledge is not static; it changes continuously as new ideas and evidence are presented. This suggests that teachers must be prepared to change their knowledge and practices often, keeping it up to date with new research. Another point of importance is that the content should not be confused with teaching materials. Teaching materials enable teachers to teach effectively but it is only a means to an end (Rosemary, Roskos & Landreith, 2007).

It is essential for the teacher to be able to integrate different types of knowledge, while teaching. Yendol-Hoppey and Dana (2010, p. 10-12) describe these different types of knowledge as follows:

- **Content knowledge:** It is essential that the teacher knows and understands the basic concepts and facts, and that the teacher has a framework that can be used to organise and connect the facts and concepts logically.
- **Pedagogical knowledge:** Teachers should know of and be able to use different methods of planning, teaching and assessment to ensure meaningful teaching experiences.
- **Learner knowledge:** It is important for the teacher to have knowledge of the learners' characteristics, as this will determine the method of teaching and assessment. This has to be done because the same knowledge can be interpreted and scaffolded differently due to different backgrounds, prior knowledge and experiences.
- **Curriculum knowledge:** It is very important as this knowledge will help the teacher to make the necessary adjustments regarding the knowledge and

skills as part of the curriculum taught and to differentiate according to the needs of the learners.

- **Context knowledge:** The teacher must be aware of the environment in which teaching takes place such as the resources available, needs of the learners, responsibilities of each teacher, expectation expected of each teacher and the surrounding community.

In the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (SA, 2006) the importance of teachers having the necessary content and pedagogical knowledge to ensure effective teaching in practice, is stated. PD programmes that highlight the joint development of content knowledge and pedagogical skills in teachers' teaching, and focuses on knowledge and skills that are uncommon is seen as important by the policy.

By developing teachers' knowledge, skills and practice the benefit will be better learner results (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). When a teacher has ample and in depth knowledge in the subject content being taught, he or she will spend more time on preparing lessons that inspire the learners to understand the subject better, by effectively using curricular materials. This will lead to the teacher being able to change and adapt necessary teaching methods in order to provide in the individual needs of all the learners and they will reflect on their teaching methods, in order to improve their teaching practices (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Effective PD programmes also highlight elements of active teaching, assessment, observation and reflection, instead of the one-way discussions of the traditional PD approach (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). This is confirmed by a survey done by Garet et al. (2001) during which teachers reported that when they attended a PD programme that was coherent, focused on content knowledge and active learning, it had a positive effect on their teaching practice and knowledge. When a PD programme is designed to focus on learner learning and the development of pedagogical skills of the teachers to teach specific kinds of content, it has a strong and positive effect on teachers' practice.

For professional development to be most effective it is also essential that it addresses the everyday challenges that teachers experience in their classrooms. Research results suggest that teachers find PD programmes most useful when it

consists of hands-on activities that will build their content knowledge, and show them how to teach it in a context relevant manner (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Teachers must be able to use what they learn to alter, refine and improve their teaching practice. Thus, they must be able to use what they learn about how their learners think and work in order to adapt and develop their practice accordingly (Ball & Cohen, 1999). A study done by Garet et al. (2001) found that when the activities, as part of a PD programme, focused on **content** and offered opportunities for **hands-on activities** (active learning) that are **integrated** into the daily work life of a teacher (coherence), it had a positive influence on the improvement of knowledge, skills and practice. It is, therefore, essential for a good professional development programme to keep the whole teacher in mind, while encouraging expertise in the components of the whole.

Researchers also advocate that it is important for teachers not only to know and understand the core concepts of the subjects, but also to be aware of how learners' come to understand these subject concepts, how these concepts are connected to each other and which methods are necessary to teach the concepts (Borko, 2004). Teachers should know the characteristics and contexts of the learners they teach, how they learn, what they will most probably struggle with as well as what they will find interesting. This includes, for example, an understanding of cultural differences, gender and community life (Ball & Cohen, 1999). Professional development programmes that expect teachers to define precisely which concepts and skills their learners should learn and the content that the learners might struggle with, has been found to improve teacher practice and in the end the learners' achievement. According to Rosemary et al. (2007), teachers' understanding of early reading skills is evident when:

educators can explain effective reading instruction by providing comprehensive, scientifically supported, and justifiable accounts of their practice; when they can interpret literacy education ideas to others with clarity, logic, and accuracy; when they can apply scientifically based evidence in everyday instruction; and when they can reflect, by showing a willingness to critique their own practice and to consider multiple perspectives on literacy education (p.11).

The learners of teachers who regularly consult multiple data sources on learners' performance and use the data to improve teaching, also showed an increase in results (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). In other words, teachers must be able to use their skills and knowledge to bridge theory and practice. This can be done by assessing the needs of the learners and according to this decide which tools are needed to ensure better learner achievement (Learning First Alliance, 2000).

2.4.3 The models and techniques of professional development programmes

Professional development programmes, in recent years have been in the form of occasional workshops, typically lasting a day or two focusing on different topics, leaving the implementation of what was learned to the teachers' discretion. These fragmented workshops are usually not focused on the apparent needs of the participants (the teachers) (Vesay, 2008).

Three issues with this kind of fragmented professional development have been noted by Malone, Straka and Logan (2000), namely: for most teachers it is difficult to take independently what has been learned and incorporate it effectively into their current teaching practice, it is impossible to meet the needs of all participants with a "one-shot" workshop approach, and the lack of follow-up visits will most probably lead to new skills and knowledge not being implemented, and if it is implemented it might not be accurately applied. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) state that the problem with irregular workshops detached from classroom practice is that it does not enable teachers to truly engage with what was learned, experiment with it in their classroom situation and reflect on changes that should be made. It also does not allow for demanding learning by teachers. Evidence further suggests that any professional development that lasts 14 hours or less, will have no impact on the achievements of the learners taught by the teachers (National Staff Development Council [NSDC], 2009).

For this reason, the "**how**" of professional development programmes is extremely important. The "**how**" of professional development programmes emphasises that any approach to professional development must be focused on practices and consist of content-specific teaching. It should be aligned with the goals, standards and curriculum materials used in practice, while it is sustained over time and feedback

and follow-up visits are provided. From years of research, done by many researchers, the body of research concludes that an effective professional development programme should have specific characteristics (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Ball & Cohen, 1999; Smith et al., 2003; Lehr & Osborn, 2005; Peneul et al., 2007; Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2010). These characteristics are discussed below:

i. Active participation and learning by the participants

It is important that the participants in PD programmes have opportunities where they are actively involved in meaningful discussions, practice and planning. Active learning can occur in many forms such as: (1) observing experts or to be observed by experts and receiving feedback; (2) to plan how the new knowledge, skills and practices learned during the PD can be implemented into the context of the particular teacher's classroom; (3) by reviewing and examining learners work teachers might gain insight on how learners learn and challenges they might face, and (4) by participating in discussions teachers have to really understand and adopt the new knowledge, skills and practices learned (Garet et al., 2001, p. 925-926). This is important as the participants have to be given opportunities to integrate theory and practise (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). This will occur when the PD programme is based on constructivist theory, where teachers are viewed as active learners developing their own concepts of understanding (McLaughlin & Zarrow, 2001).

All the participants in a study conducted by Steyn (2009) conveyed frustration with the lack of the majority of PD programmes available, which makes applying theory to practice impossible. The participants complained that the content of the PD programme was not always clear and had to be adjusted with implementation to suit individual needs. Some PD programmes are also criticised as being too theoretical with little practical value.

ii. A coherent teacher learning programme

To effect change in teachers' attitude, knowledge, skills and practice, it is important that they view the PD activities used as a coherent programme of teacher learning. PD programmes are often criticised that the activities used

are disconnected from each other. Research suggests that when professional development activities correlate with curriculum guidelines and assessment practices, thus if the teachers use the new knowledge, skills and strategies learned to achieve curriculum and assessment standards, their attitude will change and they are more likely to implement what has been learned (NSDC, 2009). To evaluate whether the activities do create a coherent teacher learning programme, it is important that the activities (1) build on what teachers already know and develop from an easier to a more advanced level, (2) highlight content and pedagogy aligned with the national curriculum as teachers receive guidance from many different places on improving attitudes, knowledge, skills and practice, and (3) encourage professional and sustainable communication with other teachers (Garet et al., 2001, p. 927-928).

iii. Collaboration between colleagues

There is a rising need for PD programmes that are designed for groups of teachers from the same school and grade levels. Teaching has to a large extent become a profession where it is perceived that teachers work by themselves and most schools are operating that way. This has developed into a situation where teachers are reluctant to share their skills, knowledge and ideas with others. This results in teachers isolating themselves in their classes, believing that they know best and the tendency to incorporate change becomes less and less. However, research indicates that when teachers work collaboratively it influences their effectiveness and attitudes positively, and in the end it results in improved learner achievements (Goddard et al., 2007). That is why it is important that professional development programmes encourage a collaborative process of meaningful interactions between all relevant parties (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Teachers that work collaboratively are more likely to discuss challenges that might arise during the PD experiences and share common resources and assessment requirements. This might lead to the integration of what is learned with all aspects of the teaching context. When teachers work together in a safe and trusting environment, it creates the opportunity and basis for inquiry and reflection. This allows teachers to raise concerns,

ask questions, take risks and express problems regarding their own practice (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; NSDC, 2009).

iv. Follow-up support in teaching environment

Effective professional development should also be “**site-based**”. This entails that follow-up support is offered to the participants in their own teaching environment and context (Smith et al., 2003). The common criticism against most workshops available is that they do not offer **follow-up support**. Learning new knowledge, skills and practices requires of teachers to make changes in their current attitude, teaching beliefs and practices. These changes can be uncomfortable at the very least. Some researchers are of the opinion that change does not take place if the context of learning is considerably different from the context of practice (Herbert & Rainford, 2013). Without follow-up support most teachers will just reject the new knowledge, skills or practices learned or they will attempt to incorporate the new knowledge, skills or practice into their current manner of teaching which will lead to little substantive change (Peneul et al., 2007). Different schools have different requirements according to their school structure, beliefs and practice, and the professional development programme has to be structured in order to satisfy these specific needs. This is necessary to ensure that the correct professional development models and techniques are identified to ensure optimal change in teachers’ attitudes, knowledge, skills and practice (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). This goes hand in hand with individualised delivery of professional development programmes. It is essential to enable teachers to adapt the new knowledge and skills to their own teaching and their learners’ particular needs (Vesay, 2008). For this reason it is important to supply follow-up support to teachers in order to help them deal with other possible factors that might obstruct teacher change and the implementation of the new knowledge, skills and practices.

From the study of Steyn (2009), it is clear that teachers are positive towards, require and would appreciate follow-up support. Most participants reported that follow-up support, monitoring or evaluation is not supplied after any PD

provided by the Department of Basic Education. After attending a PD programme which offered follow-up support, a participant reported:

The Department of Education should do the same. It should not be a top down thing where they come and lecture. They don't follow up, they don't even monitor whether we implement that which we have been taught (p.128).

Another participant within the same study reported that she would have appreciated follow-up support as after attending a PD programme she felt like “being left in the dark to experiment” (p.128).

v. Time

Time also plays an integral part in effective professional development programmes. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) report that research shows that teachers that attended 80 hours or more of professional development were significantly more likely to implement new knowledge and skills in their practice. Increased learner achievement was also evident when teachers participated in professional development sustained over time. This is possibly due to the fact that professional development sustained over time enables teachers to integrate new knowledge and skills into practice and is often supported by either study groups or coaching. Professional development that is of longer duration and happens in multiple cycles, forces the participants to construct in-depth knowledge, skills and practices, while one-shot workshops do not. One shot workshops do not provide the participants with enough time to explore and internalise new knowledge, skills and practices and to come back and discuss problems experienced (Peneul et al., 2007). This correlates with reports from teachers, participating in long-term professional development, about the value of sustained professional development. Teachers believe that professional development sustained over time is more effective than “one-shot” workshops. However, arranging time for teachers to participate in long term professional development is not an easy task, but it is possible and requires substantial investment from education managers. Eighty five per cent of schools in Belgium, Finland, and Denmark provide time for professional development as part of teachers' work week. In

Sweden, 15 days per year is allocated for professional development. In Singapore, teachers have to spend 20 hours a week visiting other teachers' classrooms to study teaching. This creates the opportunity for on-going professional development (NSDC, 2009:15-17).

Nonetheless, the study done by Steyn (2009) revealed that there is a great deal of inconsistency among the participants regarding when the PD should take place. While nearly all participants agreed that PD during school hours is not always possible, some participants are of the opinion that PD should happen after school. Others consider this to be unpractical, as most teachers are tired after school and have extra-curricular activities. These teachers are of the opinion that teachers should be available during the holidays to participate in PD.

Having discussed the different characteristics necessary to design an effective professional development programme, it is necessary to discuss the different models and techniques of a PD programme to ensure that all these characteristics of effective professional development are addressed.

2.4.3.1 Models used in professional development programmes

Different models have been used to provide effective professional development programmes to participants. Villegas-Reimers (2003) describes the models of professional development as approaches to professional development that involve certain organisational or inter-institutional partnerships in order to be effective. The different models can be used in a number of different ways to ensure effective professional development. However, each of these models requires active participation from the participants, collaboration between colleagues, follow-up support and feedback to ensure effectiveness. A few of the most common models are discussed below:

i. Professional development schools

Professional development schools were created on the initiatives of the Holmes Group and Carnegie task force; who proposed that schools and universities form partnerships in order to unite educational theory and practice. The goal of professional development schools is to provide PD

experiences for both pre-service and in-service teachers, and in doing so raise the standard of education in schools. Koehnecke (2001) states that professional development schools can be used to provide PD opportunities from the beginning to the end of a teacher's career. Professional development schools differ in goals and organisation, but have the following in common: (1) dual restructuring – the school will only be transformed if the universities transform too; (2) educators of both the university and the school are of equal value to the partnership and the process of professional development, and (3) common goals are identified such as rearranging the preparation and induction of teachers into the teaching profession, the improvement of teachers' working conditions, an increase in the quality of education offered to learners, and to supply opportunities of PD to teachers (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p. 72).

Professional development schools have the following **advantages**: (1) the learners of the schools benefit from the extra capacity and inputs of mentor teachers and members of the university, as well as the new knowledge and energy learner-teachers bring to the classroom; (2) experienced teachers are kept up to date with the latest research and theories and their own PD is supported as they learn to become mentors; (3) learner-teachers are introduced to the teaching profession with the support of experienced teachers and theory-based knowledge, and (4) the university benefits as it now has a partnership with teachers in the field in order to find the golden highway between theory and practice (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p. 72-73).

The following **disadvantages** are also reported: (1) the introduction of changes and development of trust takes time, especially the trust between the teachers and members of the university, which is a core element for the success of the PD school; (2) learner-teachers are usually exposed to only one school during their training; (3) the university supervisor has the tall order of supervising learner-teachers from different disciplines and the number of co-operating teachers might be small (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p. 74).

One of the goals the DBE wants to achieve before 2020 (SA, 2011) is to establish Teaching Schools (TSs) and Professional Practice Schools (PPSs)

which seems to resemble some of the features of professional development schools. In the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011-2025, (SA, 2011) Teaching Schools are defined as:

TSs are 'teaching laboratories', where student teachers can engage in learning-from-practice, such as by observing best practice, participating in micro-teaching exercises and taking subject methodology courses (p.18).

The same document defines Professional Practice Schools as:

PPSs are sites at which student teachers are placed for the actual practical components of their programmes (including school observation visits and Work Integrated Learning experiences). Student teachers will spend extended periods of time at the schools (p.18).

The main aim of these two types of schools is to strengthen the teaching practice/school element of initial teacher education programmes. The teachers teaching at the TSs and PPSs will be trained as mentors. However, the idea is to also use PPSs for the development of professional learning communities (SA, 2011), that can lead to raising the education in schools. Nonetheless, although establishing TSs and PPSs will have many advantages, such as keeping teachers up to date with recent research, there are also some disadvantages to consider. Building relationships of trust between the PD participants and the mentors will take time to ensure that the participants' teaching practice is changed. In conclusion, developing TSs and PPSs will require in-depth planning and once it is up and running it will require perseverance and commitment by all stakeholders.

ii. School networks

For some time it has been suggested that schools, communities, business and universities should work together in order to have a positive effect on the development of learners (Day, 1999). More so, it is expected of schools to create networks to work together in order to help one another achieve more. School networks are created with the goal to support teachers' professional

development (gaining knowledge and skills such as learning, participation, co-operation and research), school change and educational reform (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Day (1999) states that networks aim to result in systematic change as the schools work together over prolonged periods of time. Because of the prolonged involvement between schools and other parties it creates opportunities to implement interventions and/or change.

iii. Teacher networks

Teacher networks create a place where teachers can meet and discuss the problems they experience at work, thus improving their own professional development as individuals and as a group. By engaging in continuous dialogue about their practice **and** learner achievements, teachers are encouraged to examine their teaching methods (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). These meetings can be done informally (regular meeting between teachers) or formally (institutionalise the relationships, communications and dialogue) as a means of providing support (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Huberman (2001) argues that the advantage of having these teacher networks is that teachers create their own process of communication, decide themselves which issues to address, can observe other teachers' practice, reflect on own practices, share knowledge and skills and can bring in experts from other fields. However, some teachers might find it difficult to be part of the learning community at first. Researchers have found that creating a learning community is often slow and filled with conflict, silence and misunderstandings. Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth (2001) found in their study that teachers are able to overcome their differences in order to form an effective learning community and to support fellow colleagues in their professional development.

2.4.3.2 Techniques used in Professional Development Programmes

The techniques of professional development are described as methods that can be implemented on a small scale. Professional development programmes usually consist of a combination of different techniques or methods used to ensure the effectiveness of the PD programme (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). A few techniques are

discussed below:

a. Supervision: traditional and clinical

Traditionally, supervision is the process when a head of department or headmaster comes into a teacher's classroom and observes a lesson. The observed lesson is then judged according to a list of requirements in order to see if the teacher reaches and applies the necessary knowledge, skills and practices. The process of supervision is then ended with or without feedback from the observer. Today this format of supervision is the most common element of initial teacher education (Villages-Reimers, 2003). However, supervision can be a very effective method of professional development, provided that it is applied properly. Villages-Reimers (2003) defines supervision as a way of providing teachers with helpful feedback and suggestions on improving on particular elements of their practice, such as teaching methods. This definition contains the crucial part of effective supervision, which is that helpful feedback should be given. Wang and Seth's (1998) study found that if teachers received supervision where the observations and feedback were conducted in a placid way, the teachers' attitudes changed. This study concluded that the participating teachers regarded observations and feedback as a positive way to achieve growth and development.

b. Learners' performance assessment

Some researchers advocate that learner assessments are used as the core activity of professional development. For this approach toward professional development to be successful, the assessment of the learners has to be gathered in order to make conclusions regarding the learners' understanding, needs as well as teaching goals. Researchers have found that for assessment to be used as a form of professional development, it has to consist of the following elements: assessment must be seen as a process that provides on-going support and feedback to the teachers, substantial time must be available in order for the process to be effective, and an understanding should exist that teachers must play an active role in the process (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

c. Workshops, seminars, courses

The most common type of PD programme, and the most criticised, is the workshop. Other common types are short courses and seminars. These techniques are usually of short duration with no or very little link to the participants daily work life and environment. In these types of PD programmes the focus falls on teachers acquiring immediate and direct tools and strategies to implement in class (Hamilton, 2012). These techniques of PD programmes usually do not support teachers to understand the underlying theory that makes the research-based practices or new ideas important enough for the teachers to know and implement. Instead it just focuses on rote memorization of the facts. Furthermore, these techniques do not necessarily provide opportunities within the PD programme for teachers to observe the new skill, knowledge and practices.

d. Co-operative or collegial development

The aim of the co-operative or collegial development techniques is for teachers to form small groups in order to take responsibility for their own professional development. It encourages the teachers to work as a team to develop curriculum materials and assess the implementation of practice. A learning community is created where onsite assessment, active teaching and reflection are possible in order to have improved learner achievement as a result (Hamilton, 2012). This technique leans heavily on collaboration between teachers in order for effective professional development to take place (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Herbert and Rainford (2013) state that teachers must engage in conversations with other teachers in order to decide on the best principles of teaching and learning to use within their classrooms. Thus, rather than learning from 'experts', teachers collaborate with their peers to make sense of teaching and learning processes within their own contexts (Hamilton, 2012). Rosemary et al. (2007) report that they used the small group technique effectively within their project. The technique was utilised not only to bring members of different faculties together, but also to create small groups that the specialist could work with. They found that these small groups became closely knit networks where teachers felt safe to

share ideas and report problems. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) are of the opinion that when professional groups study practice and research together, it creates an ideal opportunity for teachers to make sense of new strategies and concepts, and offer support. However, for teachers to learn from and allow their peers and colleagues to assess them, requires a shift in their perspectives as well as the ability to listen to one another (Hamilton, 2012).

e. Observation of excellent practice

Hamilton (2012) states that peer observation is also a technique of embedded professional development. According to Hamilton (2012), the best way to learn is by observing others or receiving feedback from an observation. Desimone (2011) is of the opinion that the most influential PD learning takes place in the classroom setting, either when teachers observe or are being observed. Regular visits to another teacher's classroom can provide feedback and assistance to the visiting teacher's professional development. Offering teachers the opportunity to observe colleagues that are seen as experts prompts them to reflect on their own knowledge, skills and practice (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

f. Reflection: teacher as a reflective practitioner

McLeod (2013) describes reflection as a meta-cognitive process that requires self-examination of what people think or do. Reflection as part of teaching requires teachers to see teaching as a whole through different lenses and to be able to listen to different views and ideas that might be contrary to own beliefs.

Zeichner (as cited in Hamilton, 2012) claims that no teacher is an unreflective teacher. This technique requires a teacher to pay attention to what happens in the classroom regarding learners understanding, teaching methods and assessments and use it to think about the meaning and effectiveness of these elements. Reflection can take place in isolation or in association with others, and as an element of professional development urges teachers to review their practice, through introspection or discussions

with others in order to make changes to achieve better learner results (Hamilton, 2012). Potter and Badali (2001) suggest that these reflections should focus on aspects such as adjusting the curriculum when necessary in a particular situation, the purpose of certain actions, and moral and ethical issues that might arise.

g. Action research

Action research is defined by Day (1999) as the study of a social situation, where the participants take on the role of researcher, with the aim to improve the quality of a particular action, in this case teaching. Action research encourages teachers to raise questions about theory and practice, pursue these questions through data collection, and by discussing the answers discovered with peers and or experts - it enables them to evaluate their teaching practice systematically (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). It is a very rewarding technique of professional development, according to Craft (2009), as it addresses the essential characteristics of professional development. According to Villegas-Reimers (2003), this is true because action research is:

inquiry-based, and allows teachers to investigate their own worlds; it is aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in schools; and it leads to deliberate and planned action to improve conditions for teaching and learning (p. 108).

By utilizing action research as a technique of professional development, change is implemented willingly as the evidence found by the participating teachers, and will be credible and valid for their specific needs (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) are of the opinion that action research entuses teachers to engage in professional development as they identify new areas of knowledge to improve through their research.

h. Coaching/mentoring

Parsloe and Leedham (2009) define **coaching** as the process that facilitates learning and development to take place in order to improve performance in

the end. Rhodes and Beinecke (2002) describe **mentoring** as much more than coaching. Mentoring includes additional behaviour such as counselling, support and professional friendship. Positive changes in teachers' thinking and practices can be brought about if the PD programme includes coaching or mentoring as an element of a professional development programme (Grace, Bordelon, Cooper, Kazelskis, Reeves & Thames, 2008). According to the NSDC (2009), many studies have shown that teachers who receive coaching as part of PD are more likely to implement the new skills and practices and apply them more accurately. However, a study conducted in the Netherlands found that although teachers who were coached felt more confident in implementing a new skill or practice, they weren't necessarily rated more effective than those that were not coached. A study conducted by Veenman, Denessen, Gerrits and Kenter (2001) found that if teachers received coaching on specific strategies, it did not necessarily mean that they were able to decide when to use one strategy over another. Rhodes and Beinecke (2002) state that both coaching and mentoring are complex activities deeply associated with the support of individual learning.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter professional development was defined as those events where teachers review, renew and change their skills, knowledge and practices. These events include formal and informal experiences that are sustained over time. Too often teaching is seen as an act of common sense that does not require continuous learning in order to maintain an acceptable level of successful teaching practice that correlates with current research (cf. par 2.4.2). The literature confirms that by improving the knowledge, skills and practice of teachers through professional development, it will lead to better learner results and is, therefore, seen as an important step in transforming schools.

After reviewing international and national literature, it was concluded that most professional development programmes currently available to teachers do not comply with the requirements of being effective. The conceptual framework outlines the importance of designing effective professional development programmes that focus

on the following key components, namely: the “who”, the “what” and the “how” of professional development.

Firstly, a “one-size fits all” one-shot workshop approach to professional development is not sufficient. According to Bowman, Donovan and Burns (2001), it is crucial to provide individualized delivery of professional development programmes in order to develop the knowledge and skills teachers need, and to adapt and individualise their own teaching for learners with different needs. Guskey (2000) is of the opinion that the solution is to adapt the key features of a professional development programme continuously in order to consider the context of different learners and schools. It is also crucial to attend to the attitude and motivation of the participants during the professional development programme.

It was indicated that the “what” of professional development programmes refers to the content (knowledge, skills and practice) of a professional development programme. The content of a professional development programme can lead to the improvement of teachers’ knowledge and practice. The content should include: new approaches to teaching and learning, how to implement and use new skills and practices in a setting, what the purpose of the new skills or practice is, which PD programme goals and objectives relate to the knowledge and skills and lastly, what evidence exists that the knowledge and skills will be effective.

Lastly, the “how” of professional development refers to the models and techniques used to bring about change in teachers’ knowledge, skills and practice. The theoretical framework specified that for change to occur within teachers’ teaching practice, which is the aim of all professional development programmes, it is essential that the new knowledge and skills are implemented by the teachers. When the teachers experience the positive effect the newly implemented skills and knowledge have on the achievements of the learners, only then will change occur in the teaching practice and beliefs of the teachers. The literature also indicated that an effective professional development programme consists of the following characteristics: the programme should be a coherent programme which encourages active participation and learning by the participants and collaboration between colleagues; it is on-going over time and offers follow-up support for the participants within their teaching setting. Follow-up support is essential as teachers find it very difficult to implement new knowledge and skills learned after professional

development, without additional support within their teaching setting. Developing professional development programmes that are effective can be achieved through combining different models and techniques.

Chapter 3:

Phonological Awareness

3.1 Introduction

The development of literacy and reading skills starts long before formal teaching on reading and writing begins (Cladwell, 2008; Cunningham, Zibulsky & Callahan, 2009). Research results clearly indicate that almost every child can become a good reader with effective teaching (Moats, 1999; Spear-Swerling, 2002). It is also accepted that the relation between phonological awareness and reading is reciprocal in nature. Early reading is dependent on having some understanding of the internal phonological structure of words.

Having developed phonological awareness skills gives learners a strategy to use when they are learning to read. This is due to the fact that they are able to hear, identify and manipulate the sounds they hear and the letters they see (Dahmer, 2010). When learners are made aware of the link between oral language and reading, thus the distinct units of speech, it provides them with a greater understanding of the phonological and orthographic representations of the English language. This prepares learners for word recognition and decoding which is essential when learning to read (Dahmer, 2010; Pollard-Durodola & Simmons, 2009).

Research has concluded that phonological awareness has a tremendously positive effect on word decoding abilities of learners when formal reading teaching is started (Schuele & Boudreau, 2008). Snider (1997) is of the opinion that phonemic awareness, as part of phonological awareness, *“forms a bridge that enables naïve readers to translate the squiggles on the page into the spoken language that they already know”* (p. 203).

This chapter distinguishes between phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics. The continuum of phonological awareness is discussed as well as the relevant knowledge teachers' need in order to know what and how to teach phonological awareness.

3.2 Differentiating between phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics

From the literature it is clear that the concepts *phonological awareness* and *phonemic awareness* and *phonics* differ, although they are often used interchangeably (Love & Reilly, 2007:1; Moats & Tolman, 2008:1). The main reason for the confusion might be the fact that they are intimately interwoven as aspects of a reader's ability in phonological processing. The term phonological processing is a general term for several oral language processing abilities which includes the ability to reflect consciously on and identify the sounds of language as part of the phonological system of that particular language.

Phonological processing skills include: phonological memory, phonological access and phonological sensitivity. Phonological memory is essential as it holds information regarding the sounds that are heard in the memory, thus it has an important role during decoding. Phonological access assists in the retrieval of sounds held in the memory and helps to make the process of decoding easier. Phonological sensitivity (also referred to as phonological awareness) is the ability to manipulate smaller units of sound. This ability assists learners with the connections that must be made between the sounds that are heard when words are spoken and the letters that represent these sounds in written form (Nel, 2013).

Phonological awareness is a more inclusive term and consists of a variety of skills. For the last decade researchers have explained phonological awareness as: the ability to be explicitly aware of the phonological structures of any language (Torgeson & Mathes, 1998), the understanding of different ways that oral language can be divided into smaller components and manipulated (Chard & Dickson, 1999), and the ability to reflect consciously on or 'tune into' the sound (phonological) system of a language (Love & Reilly, 2007).

The term phonological awareness refers to a general appreciation of the sounds of speech, distinct from the meaning of the words, by an individual (Chard & Dickson, 1999; Oakhill & Kyle, 2000; Cassady, Smith & Putman, 2008). It implies a sound awareness by learners and that they understand that language is words, words consist of syllables and that syllables contain individual sounds (or phonemes) (Joubert, Bester & Meyer, 2008). Phonological awareness involves the ability to observe, to notice, to identify, to think about and to manipulate sound groups

(Torgesen, 1998). It implies that learners should be aware of the different ways that oral language can be divided into smaller components and how these different components can be manipulated (Chard & Dickson, 1999).

Therefore, phonological awareness can, in general, be defined as the ability to receive, consider and manipulate the individual sounds heard in words. Thus, it is the ability to manipulate phonemes explicitly and segmentally within words, or to manipulate or segment the words in a sentence (Oakhill & Kyle, 2000:152). It includes the matching, blending, adding, segmenting and deleting of spoken sounds. Phonological awareness is not necessarily concerned with the meaning of the word, but rather what the word sounds like (Vanden Heuvel, 2005; Zeece, 2006; Phillips, Clancy-Menchetti & Lonigan, 2008; Yopp & Yopp, 2009). This suggests that a learner that is phonological aware will be able to hear and identify that the sentence "I have blue eyes" consists of four words, that the word banana can be divided into three parts and that *cat* rhymes with *mat* (Vanden Heuvel, 2005; Project REEL, 2006).

The more complex or deep level of phonological awareness is **phonemic awareness**, which suggests that phonemic awareness is one aspect of phonological awareness (Schuele & Boudreau, 2008). Phonemic awareness refers to the auditory ability of an individual to notice, differentiate between and use individual sounds, for example at the beginning, the middle, and/or the end of words (Spear-Swerling, 2002; Joubert, Bester & Meyer, 2007). Thus, phonemic awareness refers to the ability to take notice of, to think about and to work with (i.e., manipulating, deleting and substituting) the smallest distinguishable auditory unit, the phoneme in a particular word (Chard & Dickson, 1999; Zeece, 2006; Yopp & Yopp, 2009). A phoneme represents the smallest unit of sound in language or the smallest sound characteristic of a word that makes a difference in words and in the meaning of words. In order to read effectively and with insight, knowledge and awareness of phonemes are very important (Torgeson & Mathes, 1998; Uys, 2009). One single phoneme can have an influence and make a difference in communication. By changing only one phoneme in the word dog, the /g/ to a /l/ it changes the meaning of the word from dog to doll. When these words are put into sentences, such as "you may have a doll" and "you may have a dog" the power of a phoneme is apparent (Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

Phonemic awareness is primarily demonstrated by the ability of the reader to segment syllables in their constituent phonemes (Burgess & Lonigan, 1998). An indication that a learner has developed phonemic awareness skills is when he/she is able to say that the word /cat/ consists of three sound pieces, namely /c/ /a/ and /t/. It is not necessary for the learner to be aware that the sound pieces are represented by the letters /c/ /a/ and /t/. The focus is on hearing the three different sounds. Another example is when a learner is able to hear the sounds /p/ /i/ /g/ and is able to put them together to make the word pig (Phillips et al., 2008). When learners are able to hear the differences and/or similarities amid words, it will help learners with their future reading and writing (Project REEL, 2006).

Pollard-Durodola and Simmons (2009) state that phonemic awareness is a precursor when learning to read in all alphabetic languages, where spoken words are represented by written words in a sound-by-sound correspondence (Phillips et al., 2008). Therefore, it is essential for learners to have an understanding of the sound patterns in words, in order to benefit from phonics, as a technique of reading instruction (Vanden Heuvel 2005).

Phonics refers to the ability to relate individual sounds in spoken words with unique letters of the alphabet of a particular language (Uys, 2009; Spear-Swerling, 2002). Thus, phonics is defined as a technique of teaching letter and sound knowledge to learners, when reading instruction is started (Yopp & Yopp, 2009; Phillips et al., 2008). When children understand that words can be divided into individual phonemes and that phonemes can be blended into words, they are able to use their phonics knowledge to read and build words (Chard & Dickson, 1999). When a learner is taught to know that the sounds /c/ /a/ /t/ in the word cat are represented by the letters c, a and t, then the learner is taught phonics. Phillips et al. (2008) state that developed phonological awareness skills, including phonemic awareness, will support a learner during phonics instruction. This is confirmed by Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) when they reported on the study done by Byrne and Fielding-Barnsley (1989) on mastery of the alphabetic principle. Byrne and Fielding-Barnsley (1989) found that when learners were taught to associate the letter M with the sound /m/, but they had not developed phonological awareness skills, they did not meet the criterion for knowing the alphabetic principle. The authors concluded that it is necessary to teach learners phonological awareness as well as letter-sound

knowledge before formal reading teaching starts. It is clear that learners, who understand the relation between letters and phonemes as the basis of words and sentences, become better readers (Torgesen, 1998).

The relationship between phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

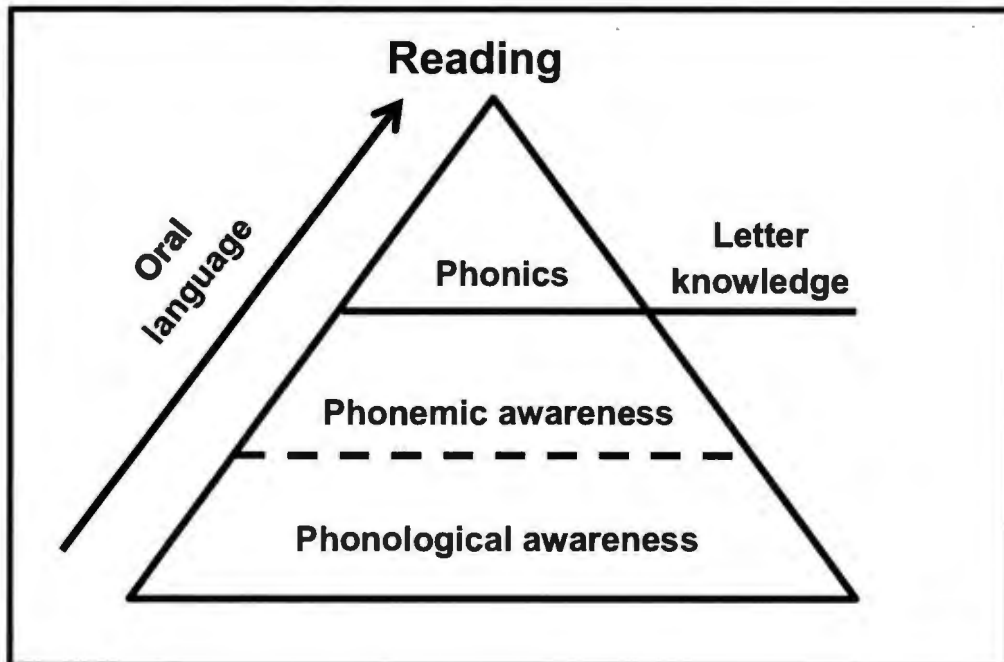


Figure 3.1: Illustration of relationship between phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics (Nel, 2013).

In summary, one of the most common phrases said to a learner, by a parent or teacher, when he or she struggles to read a word is “sound it out”. This phrase will only make sense to a learner if he or she is aware and understands that words consist of smaller parts, which include larger parts such as syllables and smaller sound units such as individual phonemes (Phillips et al., 2008).

3.3 Continuum of phonological awareness development

Phonological awareness includes a range of skills. Research has repeatedly shown that phonological awareness skills are developed starting from a holistic, simple form of awareness, to more complex forms of phonological awareness, smaller units of

speech (Chard & Dickson, 1999; Cassady et al., 2008; Schuele & Boudreau, 2008). This is supported by Burgess and Lonigan (1998) when they state that phonological awareness can be viewed as a hierarchy of different levels of complexity. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that all of these skills draw on the same underlying knowledge base. Anthony and Lonigan (2004) state that “*phonological awareness is a single ability that can be measured by a variety of tasks (e.g., detection, blending, and elision) that differ in linguistic complexity (e.g., syllables, rimes, onsets, and phonemes)*” (p. 51).

This suggests that the earlier levels set the stage for the levels to come. For example, if a learner is able to break a sentence up into words, a word up into syllables, then identifying individual phonemes in a word should not be that difficult to do.

However, it is not essential for a learner to achieve one skill before another can be achieved. Anthony, Lonigan, Driscoll, Phillips and Burgess (2003) define the achievement of the different phonological awareness skills as “*quasi-parallel progression*” (p. 470). Schuele and Boudreau (2008) agree and are of the opinion that the different levels of complexity should not be seen in isolation as sequential stages, but rather as interrelated stages that overlap. Therefore, it can be concluded that phonological awareness develops typically along a continuum, from an awareness of large units of sounds such as identifying individual words in a spoken sentence, to identifying smaller units of sound such as the phonemes in a single word (Vanden Heuvel, 2005).

Over decades researchers have disagreed about which levels of phonological awareness skills are truly beneficial for and are a precursor to reading success. This is evident when Anthony, Lonigan, Burgess, Driscoll, Phillips and Cantor (2002), report that:

...recent studies have found that children's reading and spelling achievement are more strongly related to prior phoneme segmentation skills than to prior rhyme detection or rhyme production skills (Muter, Hulme, Snowling, & Taylor, 1997; Muter & Snowling, 1998; Nation & Hulme, 1997). In contrast, Goswami and Bryant (1992) found that rhyming abilities facilitated children's abilities to make use of analogy in

reading unfamiliar words, after controlling for the effects of phoneme sensitivity (p. 69).

On the other hand, later in the same article, they report:

Wagner and colleagues (Wagner et al., 1994; 1997) similarly found that kindergarten children's broad sensitivity to rhyme, syllables, and phonemes was a strong predictor of later phonological sensitivity and text decoding skills. The findings above parallel those of the present study in which the various levels of phonological sensitivity accounted for the same variance in letter knowledge, print concepts, and rudimentary decoding skills (p. 85).

Anthony et al. (2002) concluded with "...it appears to be children's general sensitivity to the sound structure of language that is important for learning to read and write in an alphabetic system" (p. 87).

In a study conducted by Anthony and Lonigan (2004) they chose four studies from different researchers and analysed the results of these studies in order to review the acceptability of the above mentioned statement. After intensively analysing the data, they concluded that phonological awareness is a single ability that develops from a sensitivity of words to a sensitivity of phonemes. In their study they found that younger learners are more sensitive towards bigger units of sounds and older learners show sensitivity towards both bigger and smaller units of sounds. They concluded that the important question is not which level of phonological awareness is most important for teaching reading, but rather which levels are developmentally appropriate for individual learners.

Researchers have also disagreed about the order of the phonological awareness skills along the continuum. In 1990, Adams identified five levels of task difficulty along the continuum. These levels range from the awareness of rhyming words and rhyming patterns, to an awareness of alliteration, awareness of syllables, segmenting phonemes and lastly, the deletion, substitution or addition of phonemes. Chard and Dickson (1999) were convinced that the order of the phonological awareness skills was the following: rhyming songs, sentence segmentation, syllable segmentation and blending, onset-rime, blending and segmentation and the blending and segmentation of individual phonemes. According to the Early Intervention

Reading Initiative of the Department of Education of Virginia (1998), the sequence of phonological awareness skills along the continuum are: listening, rhyme, word awareness, syllable awareness and phonemic awareness.

According to the results of the study conducted by Cassady et al. (2008), it is crucial that phonological awareness is developed systematically with sensitivity towards the difficulty of the task. Anthony et al. (2003) state that mastery of one level is not a requirement for progression to the next level. In their study, they found that learners might “*learn and refine a variety of phonological awareness skills simultaneously*” (p. 482). The overlap indicates that the levels on the continuum cannot be separated totally. The continuum chosen for the purpose of this study can be seen in Figure 3.2.

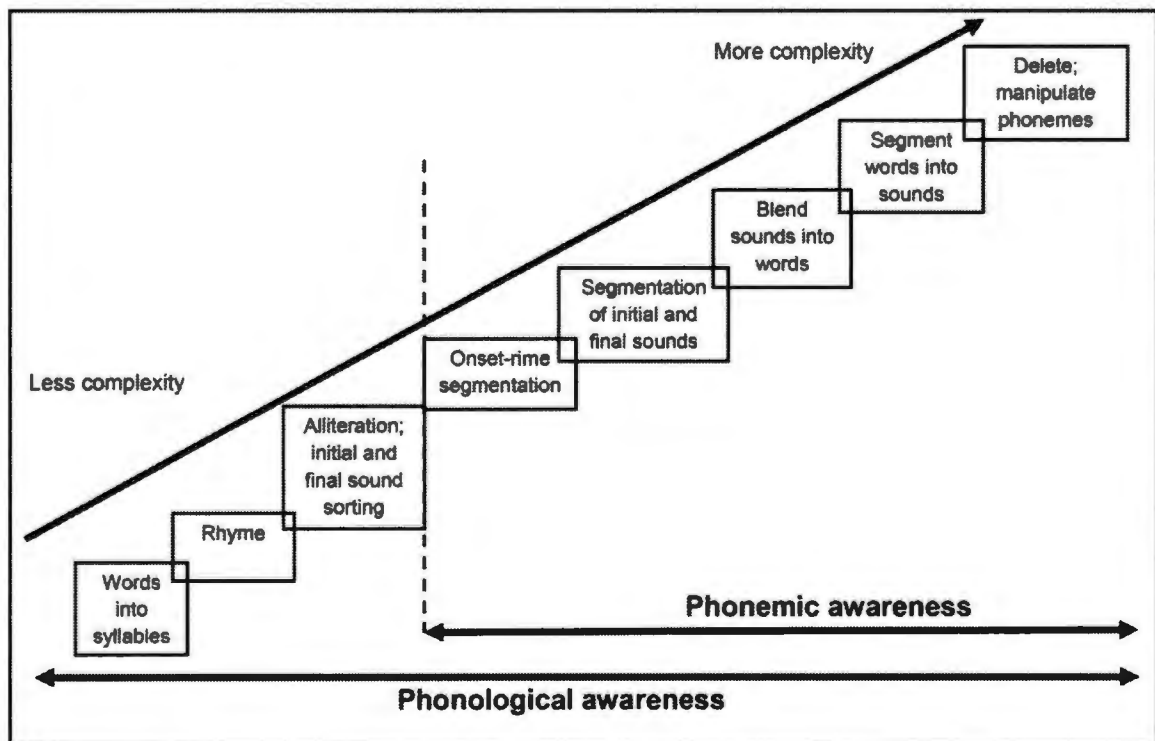


Figure 3.2: Sequence of phonological awareness development and instruction (Schuele and Boudreau, 2008, p. 6).

Figure 3.2 indicates the different phonological awareness levels that must be developed from less complex to more complex. In order to understand the relationship between these levels as well as what each level entails, it is important to discuss each level. Although word awareness is not included in Figure 3.2, it was

seen as an important level that had to be included for the purpose of this study. Many researchers include word awareness as a level of phonological awareness (Anthony & Lonigan, 2004; The University of Texas Centre for Reading Language Arts [UTCRLA], 2004; Wessels, 2011) as they are of the opinion that words are the biggest sound unit learners should have awareness of. The following levels are discussed: word awareness; words into syllables, rhyme; and alliteration and initial and final sound sorting, onset-rime, segmentation of initial and final sounds, phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation and phoneme manipulation.

3.3.1 Word awareness

This is the awareness that sentences can be divided into individual words, and that these words can be manipulated. It is essential to remember that learners are made aware that when we speak, we use sentences. These sentences are made up of words. Body percussion can be used to create an awareness of the words in sentences (i.e., learners can clap, jump, wave, and touch different parts of the body for each word heard). A marker can also be used to create an awareness of words; the marker is moved along a number line for each word that is heard. Sentences can be created in many different ways, such as topic words, or a picture can be used to create sentences. These activities should be auditory activities. At a later stage the sentences can be written down as this creates an awareness of print (Virginia Early Intervention Reading Initiative, 1998).

The awareness of words can be extended to compound words. Compound word awareness expects of the learner to be aware that some words can be divided into two separate words or that two words together can make one new word, for example: the words *tea* and *pot* will make the new word *teapot* or *rainbow* can be divided into *rain* and *bow*. Blending two words will be an easier task for learners, and pictures can be used. Deleting a word from a compound word (i.e., say *rainbow* without *bow*) will be much more difficult, and deleting the first part of the compound word more difficult than deleting the last part. By blending and deleting words learners are already gaining skills that will help with segmenting and blending phonemes at a later stage during phonemic awareness (Sheils & Sawyers, n.d.; Nel, 2013).

3.3.2 Syllable awareness

This skill entails the awareness that words can be broken up into smaller units of sound, called syllables. Each of these parts will always contain a vowel. Syllables can be identified by placing a hand horizontally under the chin, each time the chin drops, it indicates a syllable. Yopp and Yopp (2009) regard the ability to identify and count syllables in words as one of the earliest skills to develop in a learner's life. Mastery of this skill entails that the learner is able to segment a word into syllables and to blend syllables into words.

- Segmenting words (table) into syllables: ta-ble
- blending syllables (bas-ket) into words: basket

Yopp and Yopp (2009) are of the opinion that it is easier for learners to create the word when it has been divided into syllables, than it is to break a word into syllables. By encouraging learners to move their body (i.e., snap fingers, jump and clap hands) dividing words into syllables becomes fun and learning happens in a playful manner. During early activities of syllable awareness, learners should be provided with visual representations as this will help make the task more concrete (Nel, 2013).

3.3.3 Rhyme

The next skill along the continuum is the awareness of rhyme. The awareness of rhyme entails that a learner understands the concept of rhyming, thus words rhyme when they sound the same at the end of the words, also recognising and generating rhyming words. Being aware of rhyming words is one of the first indicators that learners are becoming aware of the phonological structures of words, as it is a critical step in metalinguistic awareness. Metalinguistic awareness is the ability to think about language, independent of meaning (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). In order for a learner to hear if two words rhyme, learners have to pay attention to the sounds in the words and not to the meaning of the word (Torgeson & Mathes, 1998; Gillion, 2008). According to Bryant (1990) (as cited by Sheils and Sawyers, n.d.), sensitivity to rhyme has a direct and indirect influence on learning to read:

Directly, it helps students appreciate that words that share common sounds usually also share common letter sequences. The child's

subsequent sensitivity to common letter sequences then makes a significant contribution to reading strategy development. Indirectly, the recognition of rhyme promotes the refining of word analysis from intra-word segments (such as rhyme) to analysis at the level of the phoneme (the critical requirement for reading) (p.18).

This corresponds with the conclusion made by Harper (2011) in her study where learners were given explicit instruction in nursery rhymes. These instructions consisted of visual, auditory tactile-kinaesthetic and hands-on activities. She concluded that nursery rhymes which consist of words that rhyme definitely play a role in early literacy development. This is due to the fact that words that rhyme create an awareness of linguistic sound patterns in words. This leads to the awareness of phonemes that are the same in different words. She stated that by adding tactile-kinaesthetic activities to nursery rhymes, jingles and chants, where the language is purposely discovered, manipulated and explored leads to rhyme awareness.

When developing awareness of rhyme, visual representations might provide assistance. This is to support the learner on focusing on the rhyme presented, and not on recalling the word heard. Rhyming activities can include: Ask learners if words rhyme “Does cat rhyme with mat?” and “Which of these words is the odd one out? dish, fish, mat”. It will be easier for a learner to recognise whether two words rhyme, than producing a word that rhymes (Virginia Early Intervention Reading Initiative, 1998).

3.3.4 Alliteration and Initial and Final sound sorting

Alliteration is the recognition or production of words with the matching initial sound. Alliteration helps learners distinguish the initial sound of a word from the rest of the sounds they hear in the word. Tongue twisters are a good example of alliteration and learners are generally keen to chant tongue twisters, faster and faster (UTCRLA, 2004).

By prompting learners to pay specific attention to the initial and final sounds of words, creates an initial awareness that words might consist of more than one sound. This is especially necessary because of co-articulation of phonemes. When a

word is spoken, for example /cat/, the phonemes of the word are not pronounced individually, it is a single burst of sounds. This co-articulation of the phonemes in words, that makes speech fluent, creates an obstacle in recognising the individual phonemes within the word. When learners are asked to say whether two words start with the same sound, learners are encouraged to think consciously about what is heard and they are consciously made aware of sounds (Phelps, 2003).

Alliteration and sound sorting skills can be developed by activities where objects are sorted or matched according to their initial or final sound in their name. Songs can also be used where the initial sound of some or all of the words are changed, for example the words of the song:

“Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream
merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily life is but a dream”,
can be changed to

“Sow, sow, sow sour soat, sently sown she stream
serrily, serrily, serrily, serrily sife is sut a sream”.

Or when the song Old Mc Donald is sung, the chorus part can be changed, for example if Old Mc Donald has a pig on the farm the words can be changed to pe-pi-pe-pi-po (Yopp & Yopp, 2009).

Moving into the developmental level of phonemic awareness skills, the units of sound that have to be identified are getting smaller, which makes the tasks more difficult.

3.3.5 Onset-rime

Segmenting words or syllables into onset-rime requires of the learner to divide the word or syllable into the preceding consonant or consonant cluster, and the vowel and any sounds that follow, for example the word “hand” will be segmented into /h/ as the onset and /and/ as the rime. The two syllables in the word carpet (car-pet) will be segmented into /c/ as the onset and /ar/ the rime, /p/ the onset and /et/ the rime. However, learners will find it easier to blend onsets with their rimes as an introductory skill. When learners understand that by blending the onset /f/ with the rime /ish/ to make the word fish, the concept of segmenting a word fish into its onset

(/f/) and rime (/ish) will be much easier understood (UTCRLA, 2004; Virginia Early Intervention Reading Initiative, 1998).

Being able to segment words and/or syllables into onset-rime will help learners at later stages to break words up, thus less units to hold in their memory when reading. Awareness of onset and rime helps learners to make analogies, thus realising that when words sound the same they might share the same letter pattern. These analogies will assist learners at a later stage during spelling and word decoding attempts (Hugo et al., 2005).

3.3.6 Segmentation of initial and final sounds

The segmentation of the initial and final sounds of a word requires the ability to isolate the beginning or ending sound of a word from the rest of the sound units. By asking learners to isolate the beginning or ending sound of a word, encourages learners not just to think consciously about the sounds that were heard, but also the order of the sounds in order to identify the first or last sound of the word. However, learners should first be made aware where to find the initial and final sounds of a word. This can be done by repeating the first or last sound of a word when the word is spoken, for example, ttt- table, fff – flower, bed-ddd and hop-ppp (UTCRLA, 2004).

Activities for segmenting either the initial or final sound can be done by saying a word and asking the learners to say what the first or last sound in the word is. Games such as “Simon Says” can also be played. The teacher gives the instruction that only action words that start with a specific sound (i.e., the /s/ sound) should be done. Hence, if Simon says skip – the learners skip, if Simon says sing – the learners sing, if Simon says roll – the learners stand still, because roll does not start with the /s/ sound (Sheils and Sawyers, n.d.).

3.3.7 Phoneme blending

Phoneme blending is the ability to hear a word broken into phonemes and combining (blend) individual phonemes together to make a word, for example, combining the phonemes /h/ /a/ /t/ to make the word “hat”. By asking learners to blend the individual phonemes of a word, encourages them to go a step further by not just thinking consciously about the initial and final sound of a word, but also all the other sounds

within the word. The awareness that words consist of many smaller sounds is deepened. Being able to blend phonemes into words is particularly important for reading, as it will help the learner to decode the words when they are read (Nel, 2013).

The ability to blend phonemes can be developed through many different activities. During class time when the teacher gives instructions, she can segment words and the learners have to blend the phonemes in order to complete the instruction, for example, “Go and get your /b/ /oo/ /k/ /s/” or “Line up by the /d/ /oo/ /r/”. Games can also be played, for example, “I spy with my little eye” the teacher says “I spy with my little eye, a /w/ /i/ /n/ /d/ /ow/. The learners then blend the phonemes and say what she is seeing (UTCRLA, 2004; Virginia Early Intervention Reading Initiative, 1998).

3.3.8 Phoneme segmentation

Phoneme segmentation is the reverse of phoneme blending and is more challenging than phoneme blending. Here it is expected of the learner to segment a word into its individual phonemes, thus isolating all the individual sounds. This ability to segment words into individual phonemes is particularly important for spelling, as it will help the learner to divide the spoken word into its individual phonemes in order to spell it correctly (Phelps, 2003; Nel, 2013).

The ability to segment words into individual phonemes can be developed through many different activities. The teacher can make use of a phoneme frame. The learners have to segment a particular word into phonemes and place one counter on the phoneme frame for each phoneme segmented. The teacher can also have objects available on a table. Each object’s name should have a different number of phonemes. She can then show the learners a number and they have to say which object’s name has that number of phonemes when segmented (Gillion, 2008).

3.3.9 Phoneme manipulation

Phoneme manipulation is the last ability on the continuum and also the most complex. The ability to manipulate phonemes requires of the learner to either delete an initial or final phoneme (i.e., “Say the word train, without the /t/), substitute an initial, middle or final phoneme (i.e., say the word pig but with a /e/ sound in the

middle) or add a phoneme at the beginning or end of the word (i.e., say the word car but add an /s/ at the beginning). Once learners have gained confidence in manipulating phonemes, it can be used in conjunction with phonological awareness skills already learned, for example, “Give me a word that rhymes with cat, and starts with /b/” (Gillion, 2008).

Young children naturally enjoy joining in with activities that require playing with language, for example, making different sounds or noises while they are playing or running outside. Every time a learner is surrounded by sounds or engaged in activities regarding language sounds, such as singing and chanting, they learn more about the phonological structures of a language. For this reason, the preschool years are the ideal time to use a learner’s natural inclination for playing with language structures to develop the necessary phonological awareness skills that will lift the burden of learning to read later on (Yopp & Yopp, 2009).

Nevertheless, for many learners developing phonological awareness skills does not come automatically or easily, and explicit teaching is needed (Spear-Swerling, 2002). However, even with explicit teaching it is not guaranteed that all learners will develop their phonological awareness skills at the same tempo. This creates the complex situation that at any given time in a preschool classroom, the classroom will include learners at various levels of skills development along the continuum. Therefore, it is essential for pre-school teachers to have the necessary and essential skills and knowledge to develop the phonological awareness skills of pre-schoolers (Dahmer, 2010). According Schuele and Boudreau (2008), teachers have the ability to bridge the gap between research and practice when they have a deep and rich knowledge and understanding of phonological awareness and its importance, by implementing it in the classroom.

3.4 Teacher knowledge regarding phonological awareness

Some learners are able to teach themselves to read accurately and fluently with little formal instruction. However, most learners will never learn to read without systematic teaching through a well-designed teaching approach that consists of research-based components and strategies, taught to them by a knowledgeable teacher (Moats, 1999; Spear-Swerling, 2002). This is also true for phonological awareness.

According to McEwan (2002) (as cited by Hugo et al., 2005), learners will achieve phonological awareness either by having the inherent ability to understand and use phonological awareness skills, having parents that introduce them to stories and nursery rhymes or having teachers that will teach them the necessary phonological awareness skills in an explicit and systematic way. It is impossible for teachers of preschool learners to teach and respond to phonological awareness problems if they have not yet acquired the basic content knowledge (Cunningham et al., 2009). Cunningham et al. (2009) state that *“Teachers need to recognize how phonological awareness and the alphabetic principle are at the very foundation of learning to decode accurately.....”* (p. 491).

According to Moats (2009), the 80- 90 percent of typical learners will develop the different levels of phonological awareness skills at approximately the following ages (cf. Table 3.1):

Table 3.1: Ages at which 80-90 percent of typical learners have achieved a phonological skill

Age 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rote imitation and enjoyment of rhyme and alliteration
Age 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rhyme recognition, odd word out ■ Recognition of phonemic changes in words ■ Clapping, counting words
Age 5 $\frac{1}{2}$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Distinguishing and remembering separate phonemes in a series ■ Blending onset-rime ■ Producing a rhyme ■ Matching initial sounds; isolating an initial sound
Age 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Compound word deletion ■ Syllable deletion ■ Blending two and three phonemes ■ Phoneme segmentation of words that have simple syllables with

	two or three phonemes (no blends)
Age 6 $\frac{1}{2}$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Phoneme segmentation of words that have up to three or four phonemes (include blends) ■ Phoneme substitution to build new words that have simple syllables (no blends)
Age 7	■ Sound deletion (initial and final positions)
Age 8	■ Sound deletion (initial position, include blends)
Age 9	■ Sound deletion (medial and final blend positions)

(Moats, 2009, p. 21).

Scheule and Boudreau (2008) are of the opinion that most kindergarten learners (i.e., Grade R age), have achieved mastery in rhyme and alliteration tasks by the middle of their kindergarten year. By the end of their Grade R year, most Grade R learners should have achieved mastery in blending and segmenting tasks. Many researchers (Torgeson & Davis, 1996; Lonigan, Burgess & Anthony, 2000; Yopp & Yopp, 2009) agree that if learners have developed phonological awareness by the time formal reading teaching starts, the process of learning to read will be much easier. Foster and Miller (2007) conducted a study to assess if learners who enter formal schooling years prepared to commence in phonics teaching have an advantage. They found that:

The results of this study indicate that by the end of the first grade, students who enter school prepared to engage in phonics at the kindergarten level possess the decoding skills necessary to begin to seriously transition into subsequent phases of literacy development. It was not until the end of the third grade, though, that the students in the low readiness group attained the decoding proficiency level that the other two groups experienced by the end of the first grade. Students who enter school without the necessary emergent literacy skills will quickly fall behind their more advantaged peers.... Schools cannot wait

until second or third grade to initiate aggressive support for literacy (p. 178).

For this reason, it is essential to teach phonological awareness skills during Grade R in order to ensure all learners have developed these skills when they enter Grade 1. According to Schuele and Boudreau (2008), a learner should have a solid foundation of phonological awareness in order to benefit from phonics teaching. This foundation should include:

... the understanding that language is composed of syllables and sounds. This understanding is operationalized as the ability to segment and blend CV, VC, and CVC (C = consonant, V = vowel) words with some consistency and independence and an emerging ability to segment and blend words with consonant clusters or blends (CCVC, CVCC) (p. 9).

In the USA, all preschool teachers are expected to teach preschool learners phonological awareness skills systematically and efficiently along the multiple levels of the continuum of phonological awareness skills (Phillips et al., 2008; Cunningham et al., 2009). Hugo et al. (2005) state that this is also true in South Africa and that teachers are required to develop learners' phonological awareness.

However, in her study of 13 Grade R teachers, specifically trained to teach Grade R, Wessels (2011) found that Grade R teachers are not prepared and do not have sufficient knowledge to teach phonological awareness. She reported that, although, some of the participants were aware that Grade R learners had to develop skills in order to support them during the process of learning to read, they did not know what these skills were or how to develop them. On the other hand, some of the remaining participants overestimated their knowledge. They were convinced that they knew all there is to know regarding teaching literacy skills in Grade R, however, they did not have the relevant knowledge to teach phonological awareness skills to the learners.

Cunningham et al. (2009) state that the inability of teachers to teach phonological awareness skills is due to a lack of knowledge regarding the role of phonological awareness in acquiring the reading skills, the specific component of phonological awareness to be acquired by the learners, the contribution of phonological awareness in reading development and how to include phonological awareness in a

learning programme for beginner readers. The lack of knowledge prevents teachers recognising the importance of the use of phonological awareness in their reading instruction (Dahmer, 2010).

It is, therefore crucial that there should be means available to teach teachers the very important phonological awareness knowledge and teaching skills (Hugo et al., 2005; Cunningham et al., 2009). Although a proper and comprehensive programme will help prepare teachers to teach phonological awareness skills effectively, only an experienced and well trained teacher will be effective in responding to learners difficulties, as she understands why problems arise and how to correct errors, how to explain concepts and which examples to use (Moats, 2009; Cunningham et al., 2009).

As there are so many teachers in practice who do not have the appropriate knowledge to teach phonological awareness it is crucial to develop professional development programmes that will teach them these skills (Moats, 1999). In the literature it is evident that there is a need for effective professional development programmes that will build teacher knowledge in early literacy skills ensuring an improvement in learners' literacy achievements (Cunningham et al., 2009; Otaiba, Connor, Lane, Kosanovich, Schatschneider, Dyrland, Miller, Wright, 2008). The focus of these professional development programmes should not just focus on **what** preschool teachers should know regarding early literacy skills, but also on **how** these very important early literacy skills should be taught, thus the implementation of teaching approaches in practice (Cunningham et al., 2009; Otaiba et al., 2008). However, the task of developing these professional development programmes cannot be taken lightly, as teaching learners to read and write is a complex and extensive process that requires expert knowledge (Cunningham et al., 2009).

According to Yopp and Yopp (2009), it is possible to teach learners phonological awareness skills if the activities are age appropriate and intentional. They also state that it is important to teach phonological awareness skills from the less complex to the more complex along the continuum of development. Cassady et al. (2008) reported that after only one semester of intensive formal phonological awareness teaching, learners rapidly acquired the skills taught. It is important that teachers understand that for phonological awareness teaching to have an impact it must be

purposefully planned, intentionally implemented and appropriately assessed. It is the responsibility of the teacher to plan, implement and assess (Dahmer, 2010).

According to the Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (Department of Basic Education, 2008b) document, it is a teacher's responsibility to:

provide, plan and teach an effective reading programme that will enable the learner to become a skilful reader (p.7).

According to the literature, an effective reading programme includes teaching phonological awareness skills in Grade R. Thus, teachers must be able to provide, plan and teach these very important phonological awareness skills in Grade R.

Phillips et al. (2008) state that more learners will benefit from teaching regarding phonological awareness that is explicit and systematic, carefully planned and properly sequenced and that focuses on building conceptual insight and understanding. Systematic and explicit teaching requires the following key elements: (1) sequencing of instructions, (2) explanation and modelling of the tasks expected from the learners, (3) scaffolding of the instructional tasks and (4) feedback (Phillips et al., 2008, p. 8-10).

3.4.1 Sequencing of instructions

The sequencing of instructions is important as it requires of the teacher to plan beforehand which phonological awareness skills will be taught, the order in which the different skills will be taught, how it will be taught and also what the pacing of teaching will be. In order for a teacher to be able to do this planning, a teacher should have **content knowledge** of phonological awareness skills, **pedagogical knowledge** and **learner knowledge**.

According to Vanden Heuvel (2005), teachers will require **content knowledge** that will enable them to teach learners the sound structure of language according to complexity, the correct pronunciation of basic phoneme sounds, use the correct teaching strategies and use support material correctly. Creating an environment in the classroom that enables learners to review the learned phonological awareness skills is essential. This is made possible by making the resources used in the teaching activities, such as picture cards or books made, available to the learners to

play with and explore independently. For example, if the teacher had used picture cards to teach the recognition of words that rhyme, the learners can use these cards in the literacy area to play a matching game. This way learners review the learned skills in a playful manner that will ensure mastery of the skill. This also creates the opportunity where learners use their newly acquired skills in different activities in order to gain expertise (Phillips et al., 2008). Nonetheless, teaching materials will only assist a teacher in knowing what to teach and not necessarily how to teach it (Schuele & Boudreau, 2008). The literature suggests that the most effective way of teaching phonological awareness skills is in small groups or individually, for about ten to fifteen minutes every day (Phillips et al., 2008).

Pedagogical knowledge necessitates that, for each phonological awareness skill along the continuum of phonological awareness development, the teacher has to keep in mind the **cognitive tasks required** by the learners (such as blending, segmenting or manipulating), the **nature of the task** (such as judging, matching, sorting), and lastly, **the size of the unit to be analysed** (such as word, syllable or phoneme) (Schuele & Boudreau, 2008). When planning the sequencing of tasks the teacher must also keep in mind the complexity of the tasks. It is important to note that the simple tasks will precede the more complex tasks, as the simpler tasks will lead to success in the more complex tasks. For example, recognising that two words rhyme or have the same initial sound is a much easier task than producing a word that rhymes or another word that starts with the same initial sound (Phillips et al., 2008). This suggests that during the simpler tasks the learner will probably have a 50% chance of getting it right, while during the more complex tasks the learner will have to use the knowledge gained to achieve success (Schuele & Boudreau, 2008).

Learner knowledge will require of the teacher to know that learners will differ according to the tempo at which mastery of the different levels is achieved and, therefore, the **pacing** of the activities is also very important. The pacing of the activities has to be fast enough to keep the learners engaged and on task, but not too fast so that errors are created. Activities should be playful, engaging and interactive. It is also important to limit each lesson to introducing and teaching one skill to the learners in order not to divide the focus of the learners or confuse them. It is also important that the teacher is able to employ the correct strategies to assess the learners in order to ensure that the correct level of phonological awareness is

taught to each learner. Thus, the teacher has to determine the existing knowledge that children have and work from there. After the initial assessment has been done, the teacher has to group the learners into small groups and teaching should then be focused on the appropriate level of the group. As learners will differ in the tempo of achieving new levels, the teacher has to constantly re-assess and regroup the learners as necessary. Therefore, it is important that preschool teachers first and foremost assess the levels of development of all the learners in the class. Some learners will enter Grade R already having the awareness that words can be divided into syllables, while others will have no knowledge about sentences and/or words (Phillips et al., 2008).

3.4.2 Explanation and modelling of the tasks

Explaining and modelling the task has to be done clearly and correctly. It is essential that the learners understand what they have to do to complete the task and what it will look like when they are busy with the task. Firstly, the concept has to be explained and then an example should be given, for example: “When two words sound the same at the end, then the two words rhyme. Listen to these two words: bat / cat. Can you hear both words end with an ‘at’ sound? Listen to these two words: pan / man. Do they sound the same at the end? Yes, so these 2 words rhyme” (Phillips et al., 2008). It is important to provide guided practice as well as constructive and motivating feedback.

Another important feature of teaching phonological awareness skills is that the articulation of letter sounds, when they are modelled, has to be clear, consistent and audible. It is important that teachers have the knowledge to know that it is critical not to pronounce an “uh” at the end of any letter sound. When the word /pot/ is sounded out as /puh/ /o/ / tuh/, it will confuse the learners if they have to blend the sounds to know which word it is. When busy with phonological awareness activities, learners are usually expected to remember many sound pieces which might lead to memory overload. The teacher can use props, pictures or physical movement to help ease complexity of the task. For example, by clapping or using movements that indicate the segmentation or blending of sounds, syllables or words, teachers can help learners complete the task correctly as it makes the activity more concrete for the learners (Phillips et al., 2008). Probably one of the most challenging aspects of

teaching phonological awareness is the fact that a teacher cannot make a learner understand and know the sound structure of words. It is only through modelling and repetition that a child will achieve mastery. According to Hugo et al. (2005), practising the different skills is the key to mastery.

3.4.3 Scaffolding of the teaching tasks

Scaffolding focuses on providing the learners with just the right amount of support to enable the learners to reach the correct answer or to complete a skill independently. The aim of scaffolding is to provide learners with a structure to guide them to master the relevant skill (Vanden Heuvel, 2005). This support can be in many forms, such as repeated modelling, verbal cues, extra examples, guided practice or adjusting tasks. Tasks can be adjusted by reducing the amount of phonemes in a word or using sounds that are easier identified such as /c/ instead of /p/.

During the process of scaffolding (cf. Figure 3.3) the responsibility of completing the task is shifted from the teacher to the learner. First, the teacher demonstrates the skill, then the learners are encouraged to join in, and lastly, after many repetitions, the learners complete the task independently (Nel, 2013). Thus, if a teacher does not have the necessary content knowledge and skills to teach phonological awareness, it will be impossible to provide the proper scaffolding required during lessons.

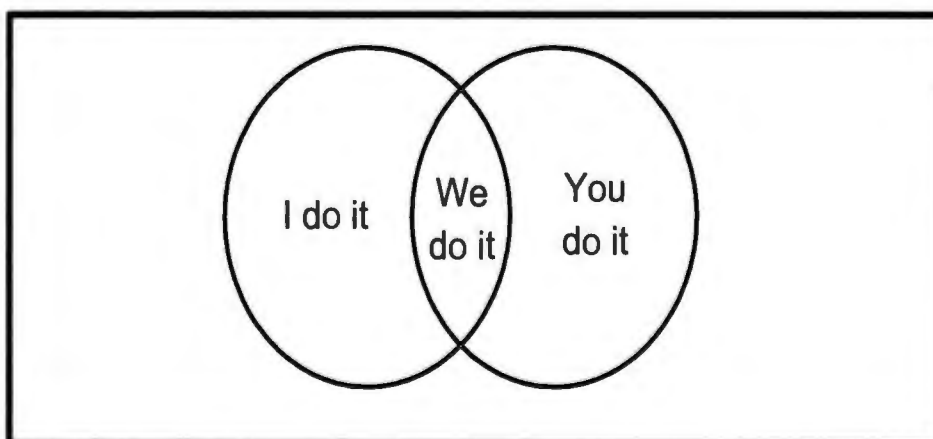


Figure 3.3: The process of scaffolding
(Boston Ready, 2010, p 33).

During phonological awareness lessons the teacher can use different cues such as hand signals to communicate with the learners in a less disruptive way. This can include hand signals to show if it is the teacher's or the learner's turn to repeat the skill (Vanden Heuvel, 2005; Phillips et al., 2008).

3.4.4 Feedback

Feedback plays an integral role in the development of phonological awareness skills as in any other skill. For feedback to be effective it has to be specific, positive, frequent and immediate. When feedback is immediate, positive and frequent it helps the learner to achieve the required skill, especially during the acquisition phase (Phillips et al., 2008).

3.5 Summary

A review of international literature affirms that there is a difference between phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics. However, these concepts are often confused with one another. Phonological awareness is the ability to attend to the sound structures of words separate from the words meaning. Phonemic awareness is an aspect of phonological awareness and is the ability to pay specific attention to the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. Phonics is a strategy used to teach learners letter-sound knowledge.

Phonological awareness skills develop along a continuum and include following the abilities: word awareness; dividing words into syllables, the recognition and production of words that rhyme; identifying alliteration and sorting words according to their initial and final sounds, dividing words into onset-rime, segmentation of initial and final sounds of words, blending of phonemes into words, segmentation of words into phonemes and manipulating phonemes within words.

The literature review indicates that phonological awareness is an essential skill that should be developed by learners before formal reading teaching begins. When learners are able to pay attention to the sound structure of spoken words before formal reading starts, it will ease the process of reading teaching for learners, as it prepares them for word recognition and decoding (Adams, 1990).

It is for this reason that it is essential that teachers, teaching in pre-school grades, have the relevant knowledge and skills to develop these essential phonological awareness skills. Pre-school teachers have the opportunity to bridge the gap between research and practice when they develop learners' phonological awareness skills, explicitly and systematically. To be able to do this they must have deep and rich knowledge regarding planning teaching activities that consists of the following key elements: sequence of instructions, explanation and modelling of the tasks expected from the learners, scaffolding of the teaching tasks and feedback.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Given (2008) states that the research methodology is the assumptions, rules and methods, the roadmap, used by researchers as tools and techniques to collect data. Methodology, therefore, consists of the actions to be taken as well as the reasons for these actions. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the research design and methodology selected for this study.

4.2 Research paradigm

A paradigm is a theoretical model or framework for understanding the social world and natural knowledge, which influences and shapes what we see, how we interpret and understand it in order to guide the actions to be taken (Babbie, 2005; Cresswell, 2009). The paradigm, therefore, determines how a particular phenomenon is viewed and explains why specific research methods will be utilized to study this particular phenomenon (Given, 2008). In essence, the research paradigm is concerned with reaching a deeper understanding and explanation, allowing the researcher to understand the subjective meaning of the participants' social action in their real context (Fouché & Schurink, 2011).

This study is situated within an interpretive paradigm. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007a), the main aim of interpretivists is to offer a perspective on a situation and focus on the subjective experiences of the participants. The interpretive paradigm is utilised within this study to analyse and understand the attitude and motivation of Grade R teachers with regard to professional development and determine their knowledge and teaching practice of phonological awareness. Since the interpretive paradigm guides this study, the qualitative research tradition was regarded as applicable to complete the study.

4.3 Research approach

Cresswell (2009) describes qualitative research as a form of interpretative inquiry, where the researcher makes interpretations of what is seen, heard and understood as the phenomenon is described and explained by the participants. Qualitative research refers to research that prompts the participants to describe their meanings, beliefs and perceptions about a phenomenon (Fouché & Delport, 2011).

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), qualitative research is used when a phenomenon of a complex nature is being researched and the researcher aims to describe and understand the phenomenon from the participant's point of view. Thus, the whole research process is more holistic in nature and the researcher is expected to enter the research setting with an open mind, and be prepared to engage in the complexity of the situation and interact with the participants. The main concern of a qualitative researcher is to understand, to observe and explore the natural reality from an insider's perspective in order to gather descriptive and true data (Fouché & Schurink, 2011). During this study the researcher was required to enter the classrooms of the participating teachers in order to gather data that would help the researcher understand and explain the participants' attitude and motivation towards professional development programmes, and to determine their knowledge and teaching practice regarding phonological awareness skills.

4.4 Research design

For the purpose of this study, phenomenology was chosen as research design. Cresswell (2009) considers phenomenology as an approach that describes the meaning of the lived experiences of a phenomenon or concepts of individuals.

The phenomenological study aims to describe what the 'world of immediate experience' consists of, or which concepts and structures of experience give meaning and shape to it (Fouché & Schurink, 2011; Given, 2008). The researcher, therefore, has the very important task to describe the experiences, beliefs and values of the participants as accurately as possible. The researcher must refrain from interpreting, analysing or repackaging the experiences of the participants (Denscombe, 2007).

In order for the researcher to describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible, the researcher has to refrain from his/her own framework, beliefs, expectations and predispositions about the phenomenon. However, phenomenologists believe that it is impossible to detach oneself from one's own presumptions. Nonetheless, some do believe that this detachment can be achieved by 'bracketing', and Denscombe (2007) states that one way of 'bracketing off' is to take the attitude of a stranger. He explains that a stranger is naïve about how things work, has to figure things out as they go and is faced with the outlook of understanding how the participants interpret and understand a phenomenon. This provides the researcher with the opportunity to actually 'see things for what they are', uniquely and untangled by predispositions and assumptions.

Within this design, the researcher makes inquiries in order to identify the core of human experiences about a phenomenon, by studying a small number of participants (Cresswell, 2009). Groenewald (2004) states that it is important for the researcher to structure questions in such a way that it is directed at the meaning of participants' attitudes about the phenomenon being researched, without influencing them in order to understand and interpret the essentials of the participants' experiences.

Cohen (as cited by Dowling & Cooney, 2012) states that phenomenology is most useful when the aim is to understand an experience as it is understood by those who are having it. Phenomenology was, therefore, chosen as design for this study because the researcher wanted to gather data about the experiences, attitude and motivation of the participants in their natural settings regarding professional development and phonological awareness as they experience and implement it.

4.5 Participants and sampling

Given (2008:597-598) is of the opinion that research participants play an important role when a researcher is trying to understand human behaviour within the context of a phenomenon better. Participants can contribute in a number of ways to the data of the research. In this particular study, the participants contributed through interviews, observations and the completion of a questionnaire.

Participants were identified through sampling. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007b), sampling refers to the process of selecting participants from the selected population to participate in the study. Non-probability sampling and purposive sampling is generally used in qualitative research. According to Maree and Pietersen (2007), the selection of participants, or sampling, depends on the goals of the study. Given (2008) agrees with this and adds that there is no general best sampling strategy, as the context of the study, the nature of the research objectives and the research methods will decide the best sampling strategy to be used. Purposive sampling is based on the judgment of the researcher, who selects participants who are most characteristic of the population in order to collect the richest possible data. For this study purposive sampling was used to select the participants that would be able to provide the richest possible data. The participants included Grade R teachers (in schools with English as the Language of Teaching and Learning) as well as the subject advisor for English as a Home Language at the Department of Basic Education of the Sunshine District. At the time of the study there was not a subject advisor specifically appointed for Grade R. For this reason, the subject advisor for English as a Home Language was the only subject advisor consulted. The necessary permission was gained from the Department of Education in order to enter the schools to gather the data (cf. Addendum A).

Eight schools in the Sunshine District were identified according to the following criteria: the school must accommodate Grade R, and the language of teaching and learning must be English. Of the eight schools, five were independent pre-primary schools and three were public schools. The independent schools operate independently from the Department of Basic Education in the Sunshine District and are required to register with the Department of Social Development in the Sunshine District. The Department of Social Development is responsible to ensure that the schools use a proper curriculum and maintain a safe environment for the learners at the school. This is evident from Section 92 as inserted into Section 4 of the Children's Act 41 of 2007:

“92. (1) The Minister, after consulting with interested persons and the Minister of Education, Finance, Health, Provincial and Local Government and Transport must include in the departmental strategy a comprehensive national strategy aimed at securing a properly resourced, co-ordinated and managed early childhood

development system, giving due consideration as provided in section 11, to children with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

- (2) The MEC for social development must –
 - (a) maintain a record of all the early childhood development programmes registered in the province; and
 - (b) within the national strategy referred to in subsection (1), provide for a provincial strategy aimed at a properly resourced, co-ordinated and managed early childhood development system.
- (3) The MEC for social development must compile a provincial profile at the prescribed intervals in order to make the necessary information available for the development and review of the strategies referred to in subsections (1) and (2).” (Bosman-Sadie & Corrie, 2010, p.106).

In Section 91(3) of the same Children’s Act, an early childhood development programme is defined as the following:

“91. (3) An early childhood development programme means a programme structured within an early childhood development service to provide learning and support appropriate to the child’s developmental age and stage” (Bosman-Sadie & Corrie, 2010, p. 105).

Once the schools fitting the criteria were identified, the headmaster was contacted for permission (**cf. Addendum B**) to conduct the research at the school. As soon as permission was granted by the headmaster, the Grade R teacher was approached for permission (**cf. Addendum C**). Permission forms were completed by the headmasters and the participating Grade R teachers. Lastly, the subject advisor for English as a Home Language for foundation phase in the Sunshine District was contacted in order to request participation in the study.

In order to obtain quality and rich data, the choice of research participants is important, especially regarding who they are, for example, their age, qualifications and the context within which they teach. Thus, in this section the teachers as research participants and their teaching environments are described. The biographical information of the participants is indicated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Biographical information of participants

Participant	Age	Qualification	Teaching experience	Gender
Red school	45-50	Teaching Diploma Primary school: 4 years	20-25 years	Female
Blue school	40-45	Currently enrolled in a Foundation Phase course - UNISA	10-15 years	Female
Green school	40-45	BA degree and Post Graduate Certificate in Foundation Phase	5-10 years	Female
Yellow school	35-40	Certificate Level 4 Early Childhood Development	5-10 years	Female
Purple school	45-50	BA Social Work and Post Graduate Certificate in Early Childhood Development.	5-10 years	Female
Orange school	45-50	Certificate Level 5 Early Childhood Development	10-15 years	Female
Pink school	45-50	Teaching Diploma Primary school: 3 years	15-20 years	Female
Brown school	45-50	Junior Primary Teachers Diploma	5-10 years	Female
Subject advisor: English as a Home Language	45-50	B.Ed. (Hons) Learner Support	5-10 years	Female

The only characteristics the participants have in common are the fact that they are all female and the LoLT of the school they are teaching at is English. Their qualifications are very diverse; three participants have a teaching diploma (four and three year diplomas, respectively), two have a post-graduate certificate, two teachers have a certificate in Early Childhood Development (on a Level 5 and Level 4 certificate), and one teacher is currently enrolled at UNISA in a Foundation Phase course. The teacher with the Level 4 qualification mentioned that she was enrolled for Level 5, but due to the demands at her privately owned pre-primary school, she had to drop out. Although all of the teachers use English as the Language of Teaching and Learning, only one of them has English as a home language. Most of the participants have Afrikaans as a home language, one participant has Setswana as a home language, and one participant has isiXhosa as a home language. None of the participants had less than five years teaching experience and twenty-five years was the most. The subject advisor has nine years teaching experience and has been subject advisor for five years. Her academic qualification is higher than the rest of the participants.

4.5.1 Context of the schools

This section describes the background and teaching environment of the grade R classes of the participants.

a. Red school

Red school is a public primary school and can be described as a previous Model C school. The grade R classes are on the far side of the school with their own play area for the learners. The outside play area is neat, colourful and safe. There is a sand pit, a jungle gym, but no grass area. Many Grade R learners arrive at school early in the morning because of transport, and are then allowed to play in this area until classes start. A Grade R teacher has to be at school early to look after these children. The participating Grade R teacher reported that learners arriving by public transport (usually taxis) are a huge problem, as the teachers do not have the opportunity to communicate with the parents regularly to report any problems.

When it is time to go into the classroom, the learners line up neatly and enter the class in an orderly manner. The class is spacious, neat and colourful. Teaching support materials can be seen against the walls and boxes with toys are stacked along the wall. There is also a reading area visible and a role play area.

There are 24 learners in the class and 97% of them do not speak English as a home language. In the class are enough tables and chairs for all the learners, as well as a big carpet which the learners sit on during carpet time.

b. Blue school

Blue school is an independent boarding school and consists of a primary school and a high school. The primary and high school are on the same grounds, but separate. The Foundation Phase is on the far side of the school, totally separate. Grade R and Grade 1 learners are combined in one class. The classroom is quite small, just enough space to fit the desks and the teachers' table. There are eight learners in the class, six in Grade 1 and two in Grade R. The Grade R learners sit on their own, separate from the Grade 1 learners, at a smaller coloured plastic table next to the teacher's table, which is at the back of the classroom. The Grade 1 learners and the Grade R learners wear school uniform. The walls are covered with teaching support materials, consisting of numbers, letters, animal pictures, shapes and a birthday chart.

When the teacher was asked about the home language of the learners, she replied:

... it really differs. I'm really struggling with that, because some of them they are from the public crèche where they speak Setswana. When they come here I have to teach them everything in English.

c. Purple School

Purple school is an independent school that is funded by a church, and contains a pre-primary school and a primary school. The school is on the church grounds. The Grade R class is part of the pre-primary school, which is separate from the primary school grounds. The Grade R class is in the

same building as the younger classes (e.g., the 3-4 year old learners), only the baby class is in a separate building. The school has a lovely big and safe play area outside.

There are 27 learners in the Grade R class and the classroom is big and spacious, with the tables and chairs arranged in rows at the back of the class. There are enough tables and chairs for all the learners, where they sit and complete worksheets during some mornings. At the front of the class is a carpet where the learners sit during carpet time. Teaching support material and the work of the learners' are visible against the walls. Toys and resources are visible around the class.

Most of the learners come from the nearby townships and arrive at school with public transport (i.e., taxis). The principal of Purple school reported the same problem as the teacher from Red school with regard to learners arriving at school with public transport, namely that they never get to see the parents of the learners to discuss learner progression and/or achievements. The majority have Setswana and isiXhosa as a home language. There are also a few learners from foreign countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia and Kenya in the class.

d. Green school

Green school is a public primary school and can be described as a former Model C school. There are two Grade R classes that are situated at the front of the school. They have their own outdoor play area consisting of a jungle gym and sand pit which is safely surrounded by a palisade fence. The Grade R classroom is big and neatly organised and accommodates 28 learners. The tables are arranged on the side of the class, in groups of four. On the other side in front of the teacher's table there is a carpet for carpet time. Many teaching support material is visible on the walls and hanging from the roof. On the far wall of the class is a blackboard that the teacher uses as a teaching resource.

The learners are mainly from the surrounding neighbourhoods and townships and most of them do not speak English as a home language.

e. Pink school

Pink school is an independent pre-primary school and situated within a previous disadvantaged neighbourhood, but not a township. The ages of the learners in the school range from 3 months to Grade R age (6 years). The school rents a building from the primary school within the neighbourhood, but operates independently. The Grade R class is in the first classroom of the building and also serves as the principal's office, as the Grade R teacher is the principal of the school. The classroom is spacious and there are 60 learners in the class. The tables are arranged in rows at the back of the classroom, and at the front of the classroom is the carpet where the learners sit during carpet time. Teaching support materials can be seen against the walls such as the alphabet, numbers, birthday chart and also a registration chart. At the back of the class are some teaching resources and toys stacked away in boxes. The outdoor play area consists of a slide, a sand pit and some other climbing equipment. There is no grass in the outdoor play area. Most of the learners have Afrikaans as a home language, a few Setswana and isiXhosa.

f. Yellow school

Yellow school is an independently owned pre-primary school which is situated in a house in a previous disadvantaged neighbourhood, but not a township. The owner of the pre-primary school used to live in the house, but has moved out and turned the house into a pre-primary school. The ages of the learners in the school range from 3 months to Grade R age (6 years). The grade R class is located in the first room of the house and has a door to the outside. The classroom is quite small for the 44 learners in the Grade R class. There are some tables and chairs, but not enough for all the learners. The classroom is quite dark inside, as there are only two small windows for light. Only a few teaching support materials can be seen against the walls. The work that the learners have done is displayed against the walls. Most of the learners speak Afrikaans as a home language, and some Setswana. None of the learners have English as a first language. According to the teacher all the learners are from very poor households.

g. Brown school

Brown school is a public primary school and is a dual medium school. The LoLT of this particular Grade R class is English. None of the learners have English as a home language. The Grade R class is situated in the building right at the back of the school, on the ground floor. There is no separate outdoor play area for the Grade R learners and they share the playground with the Foundation Phase learners. The Grade R learners do not have to wear school uniform.

Inside the classroom are coloured plastic tables with four chairs each. The learners sit at these tables and chairs all the time, during class time. There is a small carpet at the front of the class. There are 35 learners in the Grade R class. Some teaching support materials can be seen displayed in the classroom, and there is a blackboard at the front which the teacher uses during teaching times. No learning or play areas, toys, art resources or children's books are visible in the class. The teaching instruction of the teacher observed during the lesson was very formal.

h. Orange school

Orange school is a privately owned pre-primary school. The school is situated in a building on the grounds of a church. The classroom is quite small and the chairs and tables are stacked away when they are not needed during teaching and learning time. There are 50 learners in the class and their home language is either Afrikaans or Setswana. The walls of the classroom are covered with teaching support material such as numbers, the alphabet, posters about the seasons and also photographs of the previous Grade R classes. There is no outside play area for the learners to play.

4.6 Data collection methods

The data collection methods chosen for this research has provided rich data, explicitly focused on the research questions. Data collection methods included: interviews, a questionnaire, observations and document analysis.

4.6.1 Interviews

Greeff (2011) is of the opinion that interviews are one of the main methods for the collection of data in qualitative research. Greeff (2011) defines an interview as the process where a researcher collects data or information directly from an individual who is known or expected to hold the information or knowledge needed. Nieuwenhuis (2007b) states that the aim of an interview is to see the particular phenomenon through the eyes of the participant. An interview can be a valuable source of rich information and descriptive data if used correctly. The quality of data collected depends on the skills of the researcher as interviewer (Greeff, 2011).

Greeff (2011) accentuates that the researcher might face challenges when conducting an interview. These challenges include building rapport with the participant in order to collect the relevant data, coping with unforeseen problems, and large quantities of data produced by even relatively short interviews.

There can be differentiated between two types of interviews, namely unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Greeff, 2011, p.347-353):

Unstructured interviews are often in the form of a conversation where the researcher explores the views, beliefs, ideas and attitude of the participant regarding a particular phenomenon or event. Nieuwenhuis (2007b) expands on this and cautions that open-ended interviews should not be based on a single informant, as the authenticity of the data will not be ensured.

Semi-structured interviews are usually used in order to collect and confirm the data gathered from other sources and requires the use of an interview schedule. The interview schedule is used to define the line of inquiry through a set of predetermined questions. Semi-structured interviews allow for probing when the researcher identifies new emerging lines that are directly linked to the particular phenomenon being studied.

For the purpose of this study the researcher used semi-structured interviews. With the semi-structured interview the researcher had a set of predetermined questions on an interview schedule (**cf. Addendum D**), which was used as a guide during the interview session.

An interview schedule is defined by Greef (2011) as a written questionnaire compiled in advance. By compiling the interview schedule, the researcher is forced to think explicitly about what the aim of the interview is, thus to determine the nature of the data the researcher wants to gather. In this study, a focused literature review was conducted to guide the researcher in understanding the topic at hand and to identify the relevant questions that will produce rich data. Open-ended questions were asked in order to allow the participants to express their views and opinions regarding the topic (Greef, 2011).

The semi-structured interview was conducted to gather relevant data regarding the participants' attitude and motivation towards and experiences of professional development. Participants were given the opportunity to do the interview in their home language, which was mostly Afrikaans. Only one participant had English as a home language. The participants with Setswana and isiXhosa as a home language had the option to use available interpretation services, but the participants chose to do the interviews in English. All the interviews were audiotaped (with the permission of the participant) to ensure the accuracy of the data. These recordings were transcribed and will be kept for eighteen months after the completion of the study after which they will be destroyed. The interview questions addressed the following issues:

- teachers' understanding of professional development;
- teachers' general attitude and motivation towards professional development;
- the methods and strategies used in available professional development; and
- the professional development available to Gr R teachers.

Greef (2011) mentions that one-to-one interviews have various weaknesses and strengths. Interviews are an effective way of collecting large quantities of data and also depth in the data. However, one-to-one interviews require personal interaction and cooperation to be effective. This is where the limitations might be evident as participants are unwilling to share information or the information shared is false.

4.6.2 Questionnaire

According to Denscombe (2007), for a questionnaire to qualify as a research questionnaire, it must be designed with the purpose in mind, which is to gather

information or to discover issues. The questions must be written down, clear and direct in order to ensure that all the participants read an identical set of questions. Denscombe (2007) continues to note that questionnaires are used when the information required is fairly straightforward, such as information about the participants' knowledge and attitude. Nieuwenhuis (2007b) states that when a questionnaire is designed the appearance of the questionnaire, the wording and sequence of the questions and the response categories have to be considered carefully. If all of the previously mentioned aspects are carefully considered and applied, the questionnaire will become an instrument to prompt the required data.

In this study closed and open questions were used in the questionnaire (**cf. Addendum E**). The closed questions were included to gather background information about the participants. Information gathered from the literature study was used to develop open-ended questions with the goal to gather information regarding teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness. According to Denscombe (2007), the ordering of the questions in the questionnaire is very important. Questions have to be arranged in such a way that the first questions do not affect the answers of the later questions and also so that the participant will persevere with the task of completing all the questions in the questionnaire. For this reason, the closed questions appear first on the questionnaire with the open-ended questions after that. The questions utilised to test the participants' knowledge regarding phonological awareness were put last as it was the most difficult part of the questionnaire.

Nieuwenhuis (2007b) lists the following advantages and disadvantages of open-ended questions. The advantages of using open-ended questions in a questionnaire is that the participants are able to give honest answers with significant and important detail, complex questions can be sufficiently answered, and it can supply the researcher with interesting information, categories and sub-categories. The disadvantages are that it takes time as the participants have to think about the answers and then write it down, the amount of detailed data differs among participants, and lastly difficulties might be experienced during the coding process.

4.6.3 Observations

An observation is a systematic procedure where the researcher observes and records the behavioural patterns of the participants within their daily routine (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). It offers the researcher a way of gathering data that does not rely on what people say they do or think, (Denscombe, 2007) in a systematic and purposeful way in order to learn about the phenomenon (Given, 2008), and it can be done anywhere (Babbie & Mouton 2001).

According to Given (2008), observations as a data collection method in qualitative research is exploratory in nature and attempts to capture life as experienced by the participants, their views or beliefs of a phenomenon as well as the meanings they attach to events. Four types of observations used in qualitative research are identified by Nieuwenhuis (2007b, p. 85), namely complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer and complete participant.

Complete observer: The researcher observes the phenomenon from a distance, thus a non-participant observer. This type of observation is limited as the observer never really becomes engrossed in the situation which means that he/she has limited understanding of what is being observed.

Observer as participant: The researcher still remembers his/her role as observer by remaining uninvolved, but gets into the situation without influencing the dynamics. This is done in order to find patterns of behaviour to understand the assumptions, values and beliefs of the participants.

Participant as observer: The researcher immerses himself/herself in the research process, in order to gain insider perspective of the phenomenon. Thus, the researcher takes on the role of participant and is allowed to intervene as well as to alter the dynamics of the situation.

Complete participant: The researcher immerses himself/herself in the research process so deeply, that the participants are not aware that they are being observed. This type of observation is seldom used as it raises serious ethical issues.

In this study Grade R teachers were observed within their classrooms while teaching phonological awareness skills. The researcher took on the role of an observer as participant, with the aim of understanding the attitude, motivation, knowledge, skills

and practice of the participants, without influencing dynamics in the classroom. The participants were not directly asked to teach a lesson on phonological awareness, but were aware that the study was about phonological awareness. This was done in order to see what the participants' knowledge regarding phonological awareness really is, as the researcher did not want to explain the term "phonological awareness" if it was not known to the participants and risk seeing lessons that were especially planned according to what was explained by the researcher. The participants were asked if the researcher could observe any lesson regarding emergent literacy and early reading skills. During these observations the researcher recorded field notes on an observation schedule.

Observations schedules (**cf. Addendum F**) are explained by Given (2008) as a form prepared in advance that is utilised as a guide to record the behaviour and events observed during the observation. It helps the researcher to be more focused during the observation and when recording data. It is important that the researcher makes full and accurate field notes on what is seen. For the purpose of this study, the observation schedule was used to guide the observation process. The observations schedule was compiled with the purposes of the study in mind, and what is known from the literature about what teachers should know and do when teaching phonological awareness.

4.6.4 Document analysis

Nieuwenhuis (2007c) emphasises that when documents are used as a data collection method the focus falls on any written communication that might shed light on the particular phenomenon that is being investigated. These sources include company reports, administrative documents, reports, letters or any other document related to the research topic. A distinction is also made between primary and secondary sources of data, where primary data sources are documents gathered directly from the participants. Given (2008) states that the focus, when analysing documents, should be on what is contained within the documents. Nieuwenhuis (2007b) encourages researchers to verify the following when selecting documents for analysis:

- Is the document a primary or secondary source?

- What is the purpose of the document?
- What is the publication date of the document?

For the purpose of this study the following documents were analysed: the National Reading Strategy (Department of Basic Education, 2008a), Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s Handbook (Department of Basic Education, 2008b), The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011) and the planning files of the teachers. All the documents analysed were primary sources.

The *National Reading Strategy* (Department of Basic Education, 2008a), the *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teachers Handbook* (Department of Basic Education, 2008b) and the *National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements* (Department of Basic Education, 2011) documents, all official documents of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) were analysed in order to identify whether phonological awareness skills are included, the ages recommended by the DBE when particular phonological awareness skills should be taught, how these skills should be taught, and any other relevant information. The planning files of the teachers were analysed in order to identify any planning regarding the teaching of phonological awareness skills done by the teacher. The planning files of all the participants were not available for the researcher due to reasons such as they did not have it available for the researcher to capture.

4.7 Data collection procedure

Cresswell (2007) is of the opinion that the data collection procedure is a series of interconnected activities in order to answer the research questions. The researcher employed Cresswell’s (2007) data collection circle in the following manner (cf. Diagram 4.1):

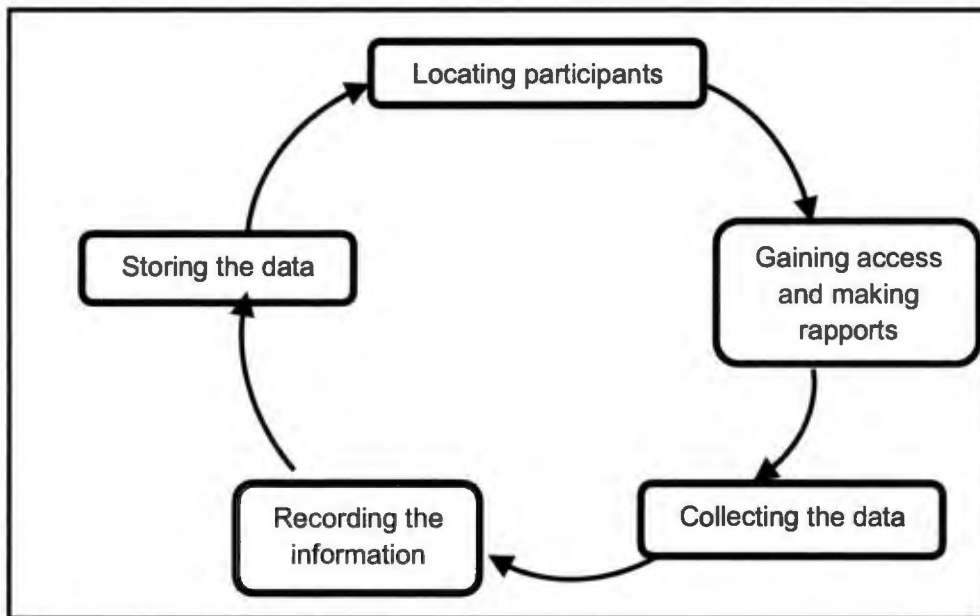


Diagram 4.1: Data collection procedure
(Cresswell, 2007, p. 118).

After permission was granted by the North West Department of Education, the researcher **located the participants** by contacting different schools in the Sunshine District for participation in the study. When the participating schools were identified, the researcher scheduled a meeting with the Grade R teachers in order to **gain access to and establish positive rapport** with the identified participants. The participating Grade R teachers were informed of the details of the study and their participation was requested. The researcher and the participants arranged for an appropriate time to **collect the data** using observations, interviews and the questionnaire. Before visiting the participants to collect the data, the researcher had developed methods of **recording the collected data** that would be gathered, which included recording the interview with a voice recorder, using an interview schedule (cf. **Addendum D**), and providing enough space on the questionnaire where the answers of each question could be written. The last stage of collecting the data necessitated the researcher to download the relevant policy documents from the Department of Basic Education from the internet and make copies of the planning files of the participating teachers in order to complete the document analysis. Lastly, the researcher had to decide on how the **gathered data would be stored**. The questionnaire was kept safely in a folder with the observation schedules. The

observation schedules were also typed in order to be used in the data analysis software program, Atlas.ti 7. The interviews were transcribed and kept along with the original mp3 files in a folder on the researcher's computer. Back-up files of all the electronic files were made in order to ensure that none of the data was lost. The data files will be kept for a period of six years.

4.8 Data analysis

According to Babbie (2007c), the analysis of collected data, within a qualitative study, is the *“non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships”* (p.378). Schurink, Fouche and De Vos (2011) define data analysis as the process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorising in order to reduce the raw information by sorting through it and making sense of it. The aim of data analysis is to summarize what has been found in different categories in order to interpret and to understand the phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a). In most cases qualitative data analysis is on-going, entangled with the data collection, processing, and reporting processes.

Researchers such as Cresswell (2009) and Denscombe (2007) suggest a number of steps should be followed during the process of data analysis and these are the steps that were followed in this study. These steps include:

- Gathering the relevant data.
- Organising and preparing the raw data for analysis by transcribing the mp3 interview recordings, typing the observation notes as well as the questionnaire.
- Reading through the data in order to become familiar with the data,
- Interpreting the data, this entails coding the data to create relevant categories or themes.

Whilst following these steps in data analysis, content analysis was also used to arrive at the categories arising from the data in light of the research questions. Babbie (2005) defines content analysis as the study of recorded human communications, such as the responses to open-ended questions in questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and text.

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007c), content analysis is an inductive process that identifies and summarises information. The data is viewed from different angles with the aim to identify different key themes that will help the researcher to find similarities and differences within collected data. Thus, it is used to reduce the large quantities of raw data to smaller units (codes) of only relevant data (Given, 2008). Denscombe (2007) suggests that content analysis should be completed in logical steps. The researcher utilised these steps as suggested by Denscombe in the following manner:

- Appropriate texts were selected according to an explicit criterion relevant to this study. These texts included documents, transcripts and the questionnaire. The criteria included specific categories concerning the types of phonological awareness and professional development programmes.
- The chosen texts were broken down into smaller units. These units addressed the content and teaching methods of phonological awareness, used by the participants. It also addressed the relevancy of the content of, and the effectiveness of the models and techniques used during the professional development programmes currently available.
- The researcher had to have a clear idea of which issues and ideas she was looking for in the text and how these might appear in the text. This compelled the researcher to be mindful of all the relevant and necessary components involved with the teaching of phonological awareness skills, as well as those components necessary and relevant to ensure that professional development programmes are effective.
- Lastly, thorough attention was given to the text (documents, transcripts and the questionnaire) in order to code all the relevant words and/or sentences. Denscombe (2007) suggests that these codes are either written down or entered via a computer program, in order to refer to it afterwards. In this study the Atlas.ti 7 computer program was utilised for this purpose.

4.8.1 Data Organisation

The collection of rich and descriptive qualitative data requires a well-organised data-collection plan that will support the analysis of the data. This researcher utilised the software program Atlas.ti 7 as a data analysis database. Atlas.ti 7 (2011) was used to organise and manage the data. The program is able to retain documents such as

interview transcripts, observation field and notes. Each document was coded by attributes that provided detail to the content and features, thus facilitating data searches and analysis.

4.8.2 Coding of the data

Coding is the process where the data gathered is read carefully and then divided into meaningful analytical units (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). In this study, data coding took place as each piece of data was collected. By coding the data, the researcher changes the raw data into usable and meaningful data. In this study, the researcher chose to use computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to code the data. Although there are many computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software programs available, Atlas.ti 7 was chosen. With the use of Atlas.ti 7 the researcher coded the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews, the observations and the relevant policy documents. Atlas.ti 7 made it possible for the researcher to ask questions, make comparisons and look for connections between themes in the gathered data. Data coding took place by highlighting sections of the text to identify different codes.

Given (2008: 86) states that coding is done to identify themes drawn from the data, to provide evidence for these themes identified in order to come the conclusions in the end. For this reason, the codes are categorised in order to act as an umbrella term under which a few codes are placed. Using these guidelines, preliminary themes drawn from the literature review included the following:

- Teachers' attitude towards and motivation to attend professional development.
- Methods and techniques currently used during professional development programmes available to Grade R teachers.
- Teachers' knowledge regarding phonological awareness skills.
- The methods used by the Grade R teachers to teach phonological awareness skills in the classroom.
- The inclusion of phonological awareness objectives within the CAPS policy document.
- The inclusion of phonological awareness skills in official documents regarding reading from the Department of Basic Education.

The researcher used the preliminary categories as the umbrella terms in order to group the codes identified during coding. Once the categories were identified, the researcher looked for patterns and comparisons within the data.

4.8.3 Interpretation of the data

Interpretation of the data is necessary to make sense of the data collected (Schurink et al., 2011). Nieuwenhuis (2007c) states that the researcher uses the analysed data in order to uncover new understandings and knowledge. The process of interpreting the data entails the following: the coding of the data, the categorization of the codes, the identifying of the different themes and the development of concepts in order to arrive at some generalised statements (Denscombe, 2007). This requires the researcher to draw the links between the different codes and categories. This research moved from the descriptive level to the interpretive level in order to deepen the understanding of the attitude, motivation, knowledge and practice of Grade R teachers towards phonological awareness and how a professional development programme can be used for support.

4.9 Trustworthiness

The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are "*worth paying attention to*" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). In any qualitative research project, trustworthiness ensures that the four issues of trustworthiness namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are evident in the research (Given, 2008). **Credibility** is an evaluation of whether the researcher has accurately represented the data, thus if the research findings represent a 'credible' conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data (Given, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, credibility was endeavoured by confirming that the data identified from the literature review was summarised and integrated correctly. Furthermore, after studying the research methods and procedures to be followed in depth, it was implemented accurately during the qualitative study. According to Denscombe (2007), **transferability** refers to the degree to which the findings of an inquiry can apply or be transferred beyond the bounds of the study. Providing detailed and rich data enables the reader to consider the transferability of the research findings. Although

qualitative research does not primarily aim to transfer the research findings, in this study, the researcher aimed to gather rich data that could be compared in order to present the findings accurately. **Dependability** is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection and data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the course of this study the researcher rigidly followed the explicit description of the methods and procedures of the research project in order to ensure dependability. **Confirmability** is a measure of how well the research interpretations and findings are supported by the data collected (Given, 2008). Confirmability of this study was ensured by continuously comparing the data collected with the data identified from the literature reviewed.

4.10 The role of the researcher

Before conducting a qualitative study, a researcher must do three things. First, (s)he must adopt the stance suggested by the characteristics of the interpretative paradigm. Second, the researcher must develop the level of skill appropriate for a human instrument, or the vehicle through which data will be collected and interpreted. Finally, the researcher must prepare a research design that utilizes accepted strategies for qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to what they call the "theoretical sensitivity" of the researcher. This is a useful concept with which to evaluate a researcher's skill and readiness to attempt a qualitative inquiry.

Theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data. ... [It] refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't (p.42).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) believe that theoretical sensitivity comes from a number of sources, including professional literature, professional experiences, and personal experiences. The credibility of a qualitative research report relies heavily on the confidence readers have in the researcher's ability to be sensitive to the data and to make appropriate decisions in the field (Eisner, 1991).

While being the researcher of this study, different roles were fulfilled. These roles included the researcher:

- as a link between the participants and the research;
- as developer of the guidelines for the classroom observations and as observer throughout the period spent on classroom observations;
- as developer of the questions for the questionnaire;
- as interviewer during the semi-structured interviews and initiator of guiding questions with the participating teachers;
- as document analyst regarding the curriculum documents; and
- an analyst and reporter of the data.

4.11 Ethics

Mutual trust, cooperation and acceptance are but a few aspects on which any research undertaken should be based (Strydom, 2011). Because qualitative research is concerned with human beings, it is essential for the researcher to be aware of what is viewed as proper and improper practices (Babbie, 2005). This includes:

- **Avoidance of harm:** No harm should come to the participants for the duration of the research project. In the case of this research the researcher ensured that none of the methods used to collect the data would harm the participants in any way, physically or emotionally.
- **Voluntary participation:** All participants should be informed that participation is voluntary. When the participants of this study were contacted for the first time to request participation, they were informed that participation is totally voluntary and their right to withdraw at any time was clearly explained. Thus, all participants that participated during the study did so voluntarily.
- **Informed consent:** Participants should be thoroughly informed of what the research is about and what is expected from them. In this case, prior to participation, all participants were clearly informed about the particulars of the study. They were asked to sign a consent form which detailed their involvement and the study's purpose.
- **Deception of participants:** No information about the research should be kept from the participants, nor should they be misled. The researcher ensured the

participants that they have access to the data gathered in this project. The researcher was totally honest at all times.

- **Confidentiality:** Any information gathered throughout the project should be kept confidential. Right from the outset of this project the participants were informed of the terms of confidentiality for this study. The researcher also coded the participants according to colours in order to ensure the anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of the data gathered (Strydom, 2011).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the North-West University's Ethical Committee before the commencement of the study. Ethics number: NWU-00086-12-A2 (cf. **Addendum G**).

4.12 Summary

This research study is situated within the interpretive paradigm, using qualitative research to assist the researcher to describe and understand the research topic from the participant's point of view. Particular methods of data collection were applied, namely document analysis, observations, interviews and a questionnaire. The data collection procedure guided the application of the methods of data collection. The data analysis procedure was carefully executed according to the identified steps in order to ensure the effective application of Atlas.ti. 7, that was the primary instrument used to organise and manage the data. The process of interpreting the data followed and entailed the coding of the data, the categorization of the codes, the identifying of the different themes and the development of concepts in order to arrive at some generalised statements. By following these guidelines the researcher, that acts as the link between the participant and the research process, as well as analyst and reporter of the data ensured the trustworthiness of the research. Thus, the researcher confirms that the research results are worth paying attention to, and that the relevant ethics were continuously applied during the execution of the research.

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the analysed data is presented and discussed according to the themes identified, in order to address the research questions (cf. paragraph 1.2) regarding professional development (questions 1 and 2) and phonological awareness (questions 3 and 4), namely:

1. What is the attitude and motivation of teachers regarding professional development?
2. What does the professional development currently available to Grade R teachers' focus on, and is it relevant and effective for their needs?
3. What knowledge do Grade R teachers have regarding phonological awareness?
4. How is phonological awareness taught in Grade R classrooms?
5. How is phonological awareness for Grade R addressed in DBE documentation?

5.2 Results

The findings of the data collected through interviews, observations, a questionnaire and data analysis are presented and discussed.

5.2.1 Professional development

The necessary data to address the relevant research questions regarding the professional development of Grade R teachers was gathered by utilising **interviews**.

5.2.1.1 The attitude and motivation of teachers regarding professional development

During the interviews it became apparent that all the participating teachers have a positive **attitude** regarding the idea of professional development. This is evident by the answers from the teachers of which the following are typical:

Yes, because I can help the children..... because I can gain something to do better (Blue school).

Sodat ek beter kan verstaan sodat ek dit in my klas beter kan doen, sodat my klas kan baat daarby (Red school).

Absoluut, daarom het ek op 45 [age] my diploma gekry (Pink school).

Ek is baie positief daaroor (Purple school).

In addition, from the data gathered it is evident that all the participating teachers are **motivated** to attend professional development programmes, because they want to support their learners to achieve the best they can. This is evident when they state that:

As jy dit nie bywoon nie, is jy verlore. Dan gaan die kinders volgende jaar skool toe met geen kennis nie ... jy benadeel nie net jouself nie maar ook die kind se onderwys (Yellow school).

Anything that is gonna make it easier to help the kids (Green school).

Wat my motiveer is om te baat by die opleiding. Of om die opleiding van die kinders te verbeter of om die opleiding ook oor te dra na die ander onderwysers (Orange school).

Om die beste te gee vir die kinders, om te weet dit wat ek doen is die regte ding om te doen (Pink school).

Ek sal slegs gaan as ek voel ek kan dit toe pas in my klas (Purple school).

The data indicate that teachers' positive attitude towards and motivation to attend professional development programmes is dependent on **who** provides the professional development. The participating teachers report that professional development programmes are provided either by the DBE in the Sunshine District, unions or independent organisations. Some of the participating teachers have been to professional development programmes presented by both the DBE in the Sunshine District and the unions.

The teacher from Red school has a negative attitude towards the professional development offered by the DBE in the Sunshine District. This is evident when she states that:

...omdat ek al ervaar het dat ek nie 'n woord kan hoor wat die mens voor in die saal sê nie en omdat ek die CAPS dokument beter as hy ken, dan is ek partykeer moedeloos as ek 'n Departement opdrag kry om iets te gaan bywoon en die helfte van die tyd praat hulle in 'n taal wat ek nie ken nie, maak grappe in 'n taal wat ek nie verstaan...Dis in teendeel baie keer 'n mors van my tyd.... swak georganiseerd en die Departement het verkeerde inligting deurgegee.

The teacher from Blue school shares this attitude and is of the opinion that:

... because they are lazy, if I just check them. Like last time we went to the workshops, it seems that teachers were giving those moderators, they were giving them the information, they just want the information from the teachers. It seems that they just want us to give them the information, then they just write and check whether you are doing everything right, but most of the time they just let you do more work than them.

(The participant is referring to the officials from the DBE in the Sunshine District).

The teacher of Red school (public) has a particularly positive attitude towards professional development programmes offered by her union. The teacher from Red school reports that she has attended many workshops provided by this particular union and always attends PD programmes offered, if possible. She states that her positive attitude towards any professional development offered by this union is due to the fact that she knows that all professional development provided is always of high quality, very informative and relevant. She states that:

... ek weet in die verlede het ek iets gekry wat ek weer kan gebruik... hul gebruik kundige mense, hulle kry nie iemand van hoërskool om my van Graad R te kom leer nie.

The teacher from Green school expressed a similar opinion and although she is not a member of this specific union referred to by the teacher from Red school, she has been to their professional development programmes and she has also found the programmes to be very helpful.

Several of the participating schools in this study are independent schools that operate independently from the DBE in the Sunshine District. Independent pre-primary schools are compelled to register with the Department of Social Development. The Department of Social Development is responsible to ensure that the independent pre-primary schools use an appropriate curriculum and maintain a safe environment for the learners at the school. The independent pre-primary schools are not required to register with the DBE in the Sunshine District. This creates the problem that there is not consistency throughout the entire system regarding the training and professional development of Grade R teachers. The teacher from Purple school (independent school) states that they receive no support from the DBE in the Sunshine District, while the teachers from Pink, Yellow and Orange schools (also independent pre-primary schools) report that they do receive some support from the DBE in the Sunshine District. They state that the representatives of the DBE in the Sunshine District visit them from time to time and some even receive books. The data seem to indicate that there are discrepancies related to the type of support, who should provide the support or if the support should be provided to independent pre-primary schools by the DBE in the Sunshine District.

Independent pre-primary schools are responsible for organising their own professional development and they are not required nor invited to the professional development of the DBE in the Sunshine District. This was confirmed by the teacher from Purple school when she stated that:

...Toe CAPS nou ingekom het, het niemand ons gekontak.

The teacher from Yellow school also stated that they had not received CAPS training, and that she used the internet to help and train herself.

However, the teachers from the Pink, Orange and Yellow schools reported that they received level 1 to level 5 training from the DBE in the Sunshine District. According to the website of the South African Qualifications Authority (2014), level 1 to level 5 training is defined as:

... an entry-level Qualification for those who want to enter the field of Education, Training and Development, specifically within the sub-field of Early Childhood Development (ECD). Many of those who will seek this

Qualification are already practising within the field, but without formal recognition. This Qualification will enable recipients of this Qualification to facilitate the all-round development of young children in a manner that is sensitive to culture and individual needs (including special needs), and enable them to provide quality early childhood development services for children in a variety of contexts, including community-based services, ECD centres, at home and in institutions. In particular, recipients of this qualification will be able to:

- *Plan and prepare for Early Childhood Development.*
- *Facilitate and monitor the development of babies, toddlers and young children.*
- *Provide care and support to babies, toddlers and young children.*

According to the teachers from Yellow, Pink and Orange schools, they have to send the CV's of the teachers teaching at the school to the district office and then the officials at the DBE in the Sunshine District choose teachers to attend the different level training workshops, up to level five. These same teachers also report that they have not been contacted to attend any other professional development programmes provided by the DBE in the Sunshine District.

The subject advisor for English Home Language in the Sunshine District was interviewed to determine her opinion regarding teachers' attitude, within the district, towards professional development programmes. She is of the opinion that teachers have a very **negative attitude** towards professional development, and it is influenced by the following:

..no money or incentives are given for professional development, their salary does not go up with training, teachers are not passionate and not interested to attend training on Saturdays, the pressure is high and there are a lot of paperwork, the classes are overcrowded and lastly there is a lack of resources.

She recommends that teachers should be internally motivated to attend professional development programmes in order to teach learners better, when she states:

Teachers must realise that they must do it (professional development) for themselves, they must love their job and remember that they are doing it for the child.

In summary, it is evident that all the participating teachers have a positive attitude towards professional development that is **relevant, helpful, and of high quality**. When a professional development programme is attended, a positive attitude towards professional development is of the utmost importance. According to Smith, et al., (2003), the motivation and attitude with which a professional development programme is attended, has an enormous influence on whether teacher change takes place and whether the new skills and knowledge gained are implemented. Ottoson (1997) (cf. par 2.4.1) found that attitude and motivation affects implementation of new knowledge and skills learned, positively.

The participating teachers also agree that effective professional development can help them to be better teachers, and this is what motivates them to participate in professional development programmes. This coincides with Guskey's (2002) (cf. paragraph 2.4.1) research when he reports that most teachers believe that by being better teachers (by increasing their knowledge, skills and practice) their learners will achieve better results and this is what motivates most teachers to participate in PD programmes.

However, the reason for the positive attitude towards professional development of the participating teachers teaching at independent schools, might be due to the fact that they are in a position to choose which professional development programmes they want to attend. When they plan their own professional development they are able to choose programmes focusing on topics that are interesting to them, or topics they recognise they need help with. Being interested in or recognising you need help, has a major effect on teachers' attitude when they attend professional development programmes. This coincides with Peneul et al.'s (2007) findings when they state that teachers will have a positive attitude towards professional development when they believe that the professional development programmes will help them to achieve their own goals and the goals of their particular school.

Chen and McCray (2012) (cf. par 2.4.1) are of the opinion that a teacher's attitude towards a content area, subject or instructional practice has an influence on the

teacher's thinking, behaviour, depth of learning and in the end the implementation of the new knowledge, skills and practices learned. Nonetheless, teachers are not always aware that they need professional development regarding a topic or why this professional development is needed. Therefore, if teachers are instructed to attend professional development programmes, it is crucial to attend to the attitudes of the participants during the professional development programme (Chen & McCray, 2012).

Some of the research participants expressed frustration regarding professional development offered by the DBE in the Sunshine District which influenced their attitude negatively regarding these professional development opportunities. When professional development programmes are provided by the DBE within the Sunshine District teachers from the whole district attend. Thus, teachers from diverse teaching contexts are gathered together for professional development, and this might be the reason for the frustration experienced by many teachers attending these workshops. The **context** in which the attending teachers work, their qualifications and prior knowledge was not considered when the professional development was planned or designed by the DBE in the Sunshine District. The literature suggests that a "one size fits all" (cf. par 2.4.1) professional development approach does not work, and these workshops provided by the DBE in the Sunshine District, might be evidence of that. "One size fits all" workshops create situations where some participants are frustrated, because they already know what is being said, while others are angry because they feel insufficient information and knowledge is being shared. This corresponds with the research conducted by Peneul et al. (2007) when they suggest that for a professional development programme to be effective, the presenters of professional development programmes should ensure that they make provision and provide (if possible) in most of the needs of the teacher participants.

5.2.1.2 The focus of professional development programmes

At the time of the research there was no particular professional development programme or initiative from the DBE within the Sunshine District available for Grade R teachers.

Ek kom agter veral wat Graad R betref, is dit nog nie heeltemal prioriteit nie (Red school)

Nothing specifically for Grade R, I've been here, this is my fourth year, I haven't seen anything....

No other opportunities that I know of (Brown school).

The subject advisor for English as a Home Language in the Sunshine District confirmed these statements when she also reported that there are no professional development programmes specifically for Grade R teachers.

There are, however, some professional development programmes that Grade R teachers in the Sunshine District can attend, but these programmes are not designed specially to develop Grade R teachers' knowledge and skills. These professional development workshops are provided by a union in the Sunshine district; they are usually presented on Saturdays, one topic per Saturday is addressed, and the opportunities are not free of charge for the attending participants. Topics of programmes include: mathematics development, development of writing skills, and the use of learning and teaching support material in the classroom. This particular union also distributes written information pieces to its members from time to time regarding the teaching of Grade R learners. No professional development workshops focusing on phonological awareness are available.

Regarding the effectiveness of the professional development programmes available to Grade R teachers, it is important to look at the **content** of the professional development offered, as well as the **follow up support** offered and the **methods** used during the professional development programmes.

The main issue with the professional development available to Grade R teachers is the **content** of the professional development programmes offered by the DBE in the Sunshine District. According to the participants, the only opportunities for professional development available to Grade R teachers provided by the DBE in the Sunshine District are either initial training (i.e., levels 1-5) or workshops on the implementation of CAPS, which is attended by all foundation phase teachers:

... die Education Departement gee vir ons training, maar dit gaan net tot by level 5 (Yellow school).

... they gave us CAPS training, I've been on that. But that is about it (Green school).

Teachers report that during professional development programmes they are taught about lesson plans, the development of the learners, management skills, and sometimes it is just an information session. According to the subject advisor for English as a Home language in the Sunshine District, the CAPS document currently dictates professional development programmes presented in workshop format. These workshops then focus on developing the skills and content knowledge of the teachers related to, for example, reading and writing.

Garet et al. (2001) (cf. par 2.4.2) regard the content of a professional development programme as one of the essential factors that can ensure an improvement in teachers' knowledge and practice. Teachers attending professional development programmes vary according to their prior knowledge and experiences. According to Borko (2004) (cf. par 2.4.1), the context and individuality of each teacher has to be recognised in order to support teacher learning. Since most professional development programmes available do not make provision for individualisation, frustration might be experienced by many teachers attending the professional development workshops. Some attending teachers might feel that much of the information supplied at the workshops is not relevant for them. For example, they feel they are able to plan a lesson according to the requirements of the DBE. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that teachers that attend professional development programmes are grouped according to their prior knowledge and needs, before attending the workshop, in order to ensure that these frustrations are not experienced by the participants. According to Bowman et al., (2001), (cf. par 2.4.1) it is crucial to provide individualised delivery of professional development programmes in order to develop the knowledge and skills teachers need to be able to adapt and individualise their own teaching for learners with different needs. If this crucial aspect is neglected it will lead to frustration among the participants who then regard the professional development as a waste of time.

Follow-up support is another aspect that goes hand in hand with individualised delivery of professional development programmes. The lack of **follow-up support** is a common criticism against most workshops. Neither professional development offered by the DBE in the Sunshine District nor the unions or independent institutions

offer follow-up support. Without follow up support the correct implementation is not always guaranteed as the teacher from Orange school states:

...jy implementeer soos mens dit verstaan...

All the participants are convinced that they always try to implement the new knowledge and skills learned at professional development programmes to the best of their ability or as best suited within their teaching setting. Teachers responded with the following:

I really try to implement it... sometimes it is easy, sometimes it is difficult, but I try to implement. (Blue school)

...I tend to try, I'll try something and if it doesn't work, it doesn't work and it is also dependent on the kids, cause you can do something with this group and it works fine, and the next years' group they just don't take to it. So for me it is always a thing of having to find what's going to work. (Green school)

Although some of the schools received visits from an official from the Department of Basic Education, the participants report that these visits **were not follow-up support visits** after professional development. They define these visits as inspection visits. The teacher from Blue school describes the school visit from the DBE in the Sunshine District as follows:

They just visited the school like you (researcher) did. They just sit there and they look at how you present and they just look at the kids...

This corresponds with the statements from the teachers from Red school and Yellow school. They report that an official from the DBE in the Sunshine District visited their classroom to evaluate their implementation of the CAPS document, assessment, and the work done by the learners. The teacher from Pink school describes the visits from the DBE in the Sunshine District as administrative visits.

According to the participants, **feedback** is not always received after a visit from an official from the DBE in the Sunshine District. According to the teacher from Brown school, she rarely receives feedback after a visit from the DBE in the Sunshine District. However, the teacher from Yellow school reported that when officials visit her school, they make recommendations, such as:

Sy skryf en dan sê sy: ek het gesien jy doen dit so, dink jy nie dit is beter as jy dit so doen nie of op 'n ander manier doen nie, of sy vra: werk dit vir jou?

The subject advisor for English as a Home Language describes these visits of the officials from the DBE in the Sunshine District as visits to observe the teachers, for example, to see how a lesson plan is presented.

When asked, all of the participants responded that they would definitely appreciate follow-up support after attending professional development workshops. This is evident when the teacher from Purple school explains:

O ja, ek dink dit sal regtig baie help. Ek dink regtig so! As hul na jou kan kom en sê so sal ek dit aanbeveel ens. Want dit is ook nogal dat nie alle mense die vermoë het om wat hul hoor, prakties te kan maak nie.. en jy moet daai voorbeeld van toepassing maak in jou klas....

The teacher from Green school agrees that it will be helpful and explains the reason why she would like follow up support when she states:

... cause you think that you are doing something like they've told you and it is not working... somewhere there is a misunderstanding of I've understood it to work this way and it's actually not. So that someone else can come in and say ok what you're doing is sort of right, but you need to maybe do that. So help to guide you in the right direction.

My reflection on this section indicates that none of the professional development programmes available to Grade R teachers offer follow-up support. **Follow up support** after professional development is regarded in the literature as very important and is related to teacher change and the implementation of the knowledge and skills learned. Herbert and Rainford (2013) (cf. par 2.4.3) are of the opinion that change does not take place if the context of learning is considerably different from the context of practice. Thus, without follow-up support most teachers might just not implement the new knowledge, skills or practices learned, or just try to incorporate the new knowledge, skills or practice into what is already being done (Peneul et al., 2007). According to Ball and Cohen (1999), (cf. par 2.4.1) a fleeting spark of imagination and change might be caused after a professional development programme, but as soon as the pressure increases or difficulty is experienced, it will

be back to the old ways of teaching. Although all the participants claim that they always try to implement the new knowledge and skills learned, without follow-up support the correct implementation is not guaranteed.

Time is also an aspect that is always an issue with regard to professional development programmes. This includes time to implement the new knowledge and skills learned as well as when professional development programmes should be presented. The teacher from Purple school explains how time influences the implementation of new knowledge and skills with the following:

Man daar is eintlik net nie genoeg tyd nie. Ek is nie so moeilik, ek verander nogal en ons het so deur die jare die goed wat ons bygewoon het, dan kom ons terug en daai eerste week verander ons alles en die tweede week gaan dit oraait en die derde week gebeur daar iets en iemand is afwesig, so dan is dit net makliker om terug te val op die ou goed, so dis eintlik net 'n geval dat dit nie resistance is nie, dit is net jy sukkel om daarby uit te kom...

The teacher from Green school similarly states that:

...you don't always have the time to make the changes with everything that you have to do... there is so much admin, you have to mark books and extra mural and prep... it is just so difficult to fit everything in.

This links directly with research that suggests that professional development should be on-going over extended periods of time, and preferably not a one-shot workshop. When professional development programmes are of longer duration and happen in multiple cycles, then teachers are more likely to develop in-depth knowledge, skills and practices. One shot workshops, usually, do not supply the participants with enough time to explore and internalise new knowledge, skills and practices and to come back and discuss problems experienced (Peneul et al., 2007). Changing teaching practises usually occur gradually, and the continuous meetings keep the teachers encouraged to persist with the necessary changes. When teachers struggle they quit and fall back into their old ways, clearly stated by the teacher from Green school:

I try, but sometimes you forget and sometimes old habits die hard. It is not always easy to bring it in and depending on my mood, their mood, it all is difficult (Green school).

Research indicates that teachers need to practice a new strategy 30 times before it can be successfully incorporated into daily teaching practices (Lehr & Osborn, 2005).

Collaboration between colleagues has also proven to ensure implementation (Peneul et al., 2007). The teacher from Green school considers collaboration between colleagues as important. This is evident when she stated that:

... some of us actually said that we would like to form a group [afterwards] that brainstorm and share.

...sometimes you feel like you are isolated and nothing happens so it would be nice to talk to other people, to get input from other people.

The last aspect of professional development that is discussed is the **methods** used during professional development programmes. The participating teachers report that the methods used during professional development programmes are interactive, where they often have to work in groups to complete activities at the end of the day. After completion of the activities done during group work, the presenters usually give feedback in order to correct any mistakes. The participants report that some of the activities used during the professional development programmes include practical examples and the participants can ask questions if something is not understood. Some of the responses provided by the participants regarding **activities** used during professional development programmes, include the following:

I can remember there was a rhyme and they let us count the beans, it was kind of a game and it was nice (Brown school).

The previous one they did a lot of practical things with us... they would do things with us, and then they would say, ok I've just done that, how many times did I do it? So it was like ok, I wasn't paying attention... They had a lot of practical methods which made it pertinent to us. They did patterns you know and she had people arranged and she said, "what have I done here?" And you're like confused and then realises oh

it's a pattern, a tall one a short one. Things like that. So it was very practical (Green school).

...verskriklik prakties want mens kon die healtyd vir haar vra, hoekom... So sy het vir ons baie praktiese raad gegee, maniere om dit te toets en maniere om dit reg te maak. So dit was vir my lekker om dit so te doen (Purple school).

Teachers that have participated in the level training presented by the DBE in the Sunshine District reported the following regarding the training sessions:

Iemand gee die klas en aan die einde van die dag word ons opgedeel in groepies, dan word die groepwerk gedoen. Voorbeelde word by die klas gedoen ek dan kry jy die opdrag om dieselfde by jou skool te doen. Dit is dus goed dat die opleier jou leer en dit is goed dat die opleier vir jou wys wat om te doen (Orange school).

Dit hang af. Dit is soos 'n dagprogram waarop jy werk, kry opdragte, klaswerkopdragte, critical work, eie werk waaroor jy navorsing moet doen, bv. jy kry 'n onderwerp oor fisiese ontwikkeling dan moet jy daarvoor navorsing doen hoewel jy dit in die klas gedoen het, moet jy 'n bietjie dieper ingaan, jy moet miskien biblioteek toe gaan indien die inligting nie in die werkboek is nie ... jy moet evidence voorsien van die navorsing wat jy gedoen het, bv. foto's of 'n werksbladsy van die kinders of iets as aktiwiteit en dan insluit in die opdrag (Yellow school).

My reflection on this section indicates that participants are of the opinion that the methods used during professional development workshops are acceptable to them. Opfer and Pedder (2011) state that professional development will have a greater impact and more long lasting effect if it gives teachers hands-on experience (active learning), and if it is integrated into the daily activities of the teachers. This might be due to the fact that teaching Grade R is very hands-on, thus it necessitates that the professional development programmes also be filled with examples of how the relevant knowledge and skills should be implemented in the classroom.

From the interviews conducted, it became apparent that the participating Grade R teachers feel that Grade R is not a priority to the DBE in the Sunshine District at the moment, and that they feel they are left to fend for themselves. This is evident from

the answer the teacher from Blue school supplied, when asked if she thought that she received enough support from the DBE in the Sunshine District:

I don't think so. They just say it, and then it is your problem. You have to sort it how you do it. And if they come here, they just blame you "why didn't you do the work?" but how can you do the work without the resources, that you are supposed to apply on the job. It is really difficult for us.

The data also suggests that the support from the DBE in the Sunshine District is not consistent for public and independent schools, and also among independent schools. The teachers from Pink school and Yellow school (both independently owned schools) reported that they received some support from the DBE in the Sunshine District, such as resources. While the teacher from Purple school (also an independent school) reported that they received no support from the DBE in the Sunshine District. The teacher from Pink school also reported that they were contacted by the DBE in the Sunshine District with regard to CAPS training, whereas the teacher from Purple school had to contact the DBE in the Sunshine District to inquire if there was a possibility to have the CAPS training. A reason for this might be due to the fact that there was not an advisor specifically allocated for Grade R at the time of the study in the Sunshine District.

5.2.2 Phonological awareness

The data presented in this section attempts to address the research questions regarding phonological awareness, namely:

- What knowledge do Grade R teachers have regarding phonological awareness?
- How is phonological awareness taught in Grade R classrooms?

The relevant policy documents and support documents relating to phonological awareness are also analysed and discussed.

5.2.2.1 Teachers' knowledge regarding phonological awareness

A questionnaire was utilised to gather the relevant data concerning the first research question on phonological awareness, namely: What knowledge do Grade R teachers have regarding phonological awareness?

Questionnaire

Three of the eight participants responded to the above mentioned question by stating that they did not know or had never heard the term phonological awareness before. The teacher from Blue school also stated that she had never heard the term before, but tried to explain the term as follows:

*Study of phonics: how the children do understand the phonic words.
And the difficulties they encounter in phonics.*

Three of the participants explained that they understand phonological awareness to be about sound awareness:

Om klanke te kan hoor, identifiseer, te sê waar dit vandaan kom en die kwaliteit (hard, sag, hoog, lag, vinnig, stadig) (Red school).

It is the development of a child's awareness of sounds and words (Purple school).

The awareness of the sounds of the letters (Green school).

The teacher from Yellow school explained phonological awareness as:

... when you teach the learners that you need words to build sentences and to have the concept of reading.

From the questionnaire it is clear that the participating Grade R teachers are uncertain about defining the term phonological awareness. Several of them admitted that they had never heard the term before. Some tried to use the actual words "phonological awareness" in order to try and produce some explanation. Although some of the participants had an aspect of phonological awareness within their definition, such as: *to be able to hear, and identify sounds, and the awareness of sounds and words*, they were not sure at all. According to the literature (cf. par 3.2), the term phonological awareness refers to a general appreciation of the sounds of speech, distinct from the meaning of the words. It is the ability to observe, to notice,

to identify, to think about and to manipulate sound groups within words (Chard & Dickson, 1999; Oakhill & Kyle, 2000; Cassady et al., 2008).

In general, the responses on the questionnaire seem to indicate that there is confusion regarding the difference between the terms auditory perception¹, phonological awareness and phonics (cf. par 3.2).

At the time of data collection it became apparent that all the participants were not entirely sure about the definition of phonological awareness. In order to carry on with the data collection the researcher explained the term broadly to the participants. This was done in order to gather information from the participants that they might be unaware they have.

In the second question, the teachers were asked to name activities that they use in their classrooms to teach phonological awareness. The answers from the participants covered a wide spectrum, from very informal activities of developing auditory skills to the very formal teaching of phonics. These are examples of the activities they reported they use:

¹Sang – rympies, instrumente, prente, fisiese voorwerpe, kyk en luister, guided movements, moet self met eie lyfies klanke vorm. Lettervorming met lyfie, dan klei, dan in sand, dan op papier (Red school).

Words that rhyme, we let them listen to sounds in and outside of the class, while they are still (Pink school)

Words – make sentences, word building (Yellow school).

Music, rhythm – we clap syllables, listening games and read lots of stories. Later in the year I will play games and ask if your name starts with m, do this or that. If there is a story with words like big bag bunny, I will ask what sound do you hear (Purple school).

¹Auditory perception refers to the ability to hear different sounds including speech and environment sounds. It includes the ability to identify the pitch and tempo of sounds, the ability to hear and discriminate between sounds in the foreground and background, and the ability to remember what has been heard.

Teaching the sound using the flash cards, sometimes I show them the pictures. I also use the card boards (Blue school).

Nothing (Brown school).

The answers to the above question raise the concern that learners currently in Grade R are taught aspects of phonological awareness that differ enormously from classroom to classroom. This is a concern as the literature clearly states that it is essential for Grade R learners to develop the necessary phonological awareness skills before formal reading teaching commences (cf. par. 3.4).

Although some levels along the continuum of phonological awareness development are taught in some classrooms, such as rhyme, syllables and sentence awareness, it suggests that the participating teachers are unfamiliar with the continuum of phonological awareness (cf. par 3.3). According to the continuum, it is recommended that the different aspects of phonological awareness have to be developed from less to more complex. Although mastery of one level within the continuum is not a necessity to progress to the next level; the mastery of a particular level will support the development and improvement in the next level (Anthony et al., 2003). It also seems that they are unaware that phonological awareness has to be taught explicitly each day, as research suggests, and not integrated into other activities as is customary within Grade R. Phillips et al. (2008) state that teaching too many skills in a phonological awareness lesson might overwhelm the learners. They recommend that only one phonological awareness skill should be taught per phonological awareness lesson. By teaching only one skill per lesson, the learner's memory demands are not overloaded, thus effectiveness and efficiency of the lesson is ensured.

The next question on the questionnaire aimed to determine whether the participating teachers had knowledge regarding the importance of phonological awareness with regards to reading acquisition. The teachers were asked to name the skills and knowledge they consider as necessary and important for a Grade R learner to acquire that will support the Grade R learner with the complex process of learning to read. The teachers responded with the following answers:

They had to listen to stories, they had to learn about rhyming words, speak word to make sentences out of pictures (Blue school).

Groot motoriese vaardighede en klein motoriese vaardighede – gevestigde en reg vir ouderdom, listening skills. Hoe om met 'n boek te werk, RESPEK! STORIES! Ons teken stories, vertel vir my en klas. 'Lees' mekaar se prente (Red school).

Position in space, sounds of the letters, developmental phases need to be achieved (Green school).

They need to have a wide/broad background of words, vocabulary is very important, they need to have listening skills - not only hear, but listen to the instructions. They need to be able to hear the beginning sound of a word (Purple school).

I think they should be taught about pictures because they understand by looking at the pictures. They should also trace the sound first then they can start writing in the early stage (Blue school).

Skills of learning, skills of listening, skills of speaking, skills of communication (Brown school).

How to read a word and then they would be able to read a sentence. They must also know the sound of the letters in order to spell the words (Yellow school).

To know how to write. To recognise and learn to do things on their own. To develop and to have more skills in learning areas (Orange school).

Most of the knowledge and skills named by the participating teachers are indeed necessary to support learners when they learn to read, however, most of them are not considered as a pre-cursor for reading success. Although some participating teachers were correct in naming things such as rhyming words (teacher from Blue school), vocabulary, initial sound (teacher from Purple school), and letter-name knowledge (teachers from Green school and Yellow school), the gaps in their knowledge regarding phonological awareness is evident. It seems that the participating teachers' knowledge and skills, regarding what is viewed as early reading skills that are pre-cursors to learning to read, are insufficient. This might be due to the absence of effective and good professional development available to Grade R teachers specifically in early reading skills, and that there are gaps in initial

teacher training currently provided to teachers (Van der Merwe, 2011). It might also be due to the gaps or lack of specificity in policy documents and other documentation provided by the DBE regarding the necessary early reading skills such as phonological awareness (cf. par. 5.2.3.3).

The last question on the questionnaire aimed to establish the participating teachers' knowledge regarding the different levels along the continuum of phonological awareness development. The teachers were asked to supply an example of each of the different levels. Research states that if teachers do not have the knowledge they cannot teach the skills (cf. par. 3.3).

Nearly all the participants were able to supply at least two words that rhyme. Four participants were able to divide a word into syllables correctly. Only one participant was able to give an example of a compound word. None of the participants were able to give examples for the questions relating to phoneme isolation, phoneme blending, phoneme deletion, phoneme identity, phoneme addition and phoneme substitution. The teacher from Red school attempted to explain what each term entails by describing it, but was not able to give any examples. She was, however, the only participant able to give an example of phoneme identity.

The inability of the participating teachers to supply examples regarding the isolation, manipulation, deletion and substitution of phonemes is concerning, because these terms are named in the CAPS policy document (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 14 & 15) and examples are also given. The concern is that according to the subject advisor for English as a Home Language in the Sunshine District, all professional development opportunities offered by the DBE in the Sunshine District are organised according to the CAPS policy document (cf. par 5.2.1.2). Yet, the teachers are still unaware of what the concepts mean "at grassroots level". The information within the CAPS document is merely summarised and presented in PowerPoint format during the workshop.

The essence of the data gathered regarding the participating teachers' phonological awareness knowledge can be reflected on as follows: it seems that they are unaware of what phonological awareness is, what it entails and why it is important. Although the participants are aware of some of the levels along the continuum of phonological awareness development, the participating teachers' knowledge is questionable. This

confirms the results that Wessels (2011) (cf. par 3.4) found in her study. This creates the concern that Grade R learners are not properly prepared to learn to read when they start formal schooling, as research clearly states that the development of phonological awareness is a pre-cursor for learning to read (cf. par.3.4). Cunningham et al. (2009) are of the opinion that it is impossible for teachers of preschool learners to teach and respond to phonological awareness problems, if they have not yet acquired the basic content knowledge regarding phonological awareness.

5.2.2.2 Teaching phonological awareness skills in Grade R classrooms

Observations were utilised to gather the relevant data concerning the research question relating to teaching phonological awareness, namely: How is phonological awareness taught in Grade R classrooms?

Observations

According to evidence-based research, phonological awareness should be taught explicitly and systematically. In order to teach phonological awareness explicitly and systematically teachers must be able to plan the relevant activities. In order to plan effective phonological awareness activities teachers should have knowledge regarding the following elements: sequencing of instruction during phonological awareness activities, modelling of the task, scaffolding and feedback (cf. par. 3.4). The data gathered from the observations are discussed according to these elements.

Regarding the **sequencing of instruction** the following was observed: most of the participating teachers used pictures as props to support the learners during the lessons to simplify the task at hand. Utilising pictures aided the learners with the task at hand; although the language of instruction at the participating schools is English, the mother tongue of most of the learners', attending the schools, is not English.

From all the lessons observed that focused on phonological awareness skills, it was evident that the participating teachers planned engaging and interactive activities which the learners enjoyed. This was achieved by, for example, using the learners' names in recognising the same initial sound activities and by using actions such as clapping or jumping to divide words into syllables.

Regarding the sequencing of instructions a few concerns came to light during the observations. The first concern is that two different levels of phonological awareness were taught in a single lesson, which is not recommended in the research (cf. par 3.4.1). Both the teachers from Red school and Purple school taught syllables and initial sound awareness in the lesson observed. The pronunciation of the sounds of the letters is a second concern that was identified. For example, the teacher from Red school used the /ch/ initial sound of a learners' name and matched it with a picture of a cat and a car. The teacher from Brown school made all the sounds of the alphabet and the learners had to repeat the sounds after her, for example, "a for apple", "e for egg". She did, however, teach the learners the incorrect sound for the letter /i/, she used the picture of an ice-cream and not a picture of an insect or instrument. The teacher from Green school was the only participant that pronounced all the sounds of the letters correctly; her home language is English.

Another observation made at all the participating schools was that phonological awareness skills were taught as a whole class activity, and not in small groups as is suggested by research (cf. par. 3.4). This creates a problem with the pacing of the activities. The **pacing** of most of the lessons observed was hindered by the different ability levels of the learners in the class. The teachers tried to keep a good pace during the lesson, but some learners were bored, while some had no idea of what was going on. In the class of the teacher from Red school it was observed that the learners that knew all the answers became agitated if another learner took too long to answer, while there were some learners who in the end did not even try to participate as they did not have enough time to come to an answer. For this particular reason, research suggests that learners should be divided into groups according to their phonological awareness knowledge and abilities (cf. par 3.4). The teacher from Purple school had a very interactive and engaging lesson planned which included reading a story, identifying words with the same initial sound, producing words that had the same initial sound, singing a song and matching objects that go together. This coincides with what is customary in Grade R; that different learning areas are combined in one lesson. The problem with this particular lesson was that in the end the lesson became too long and the learners lost concentration. It was noticeable that during the summary of the lesson, some learners could not remember what they had learnt about words that have the same

initial sound. Phonological awareness lessons should have a fast pace and remain on task in order to keep the learners engaged, and therefore, provide more practice time (Phillips et al., 2008).

Another observation relating to the sequencing of instruction was that the **complexity of the task** was not always kept in mind during the lessons. For example, during the lesson observed at Red school, the learners had to produce a word with the same initial sound and then they had to match pictures of objects to the name of the learner in the class that starts with the same sound. Thus, the teacher did not keep in mind the complexity of the task beforehand, and did not organise it from less to more complex. This suggests that the teacher might not have the relevant pedagogical knowledge necessary to teach phonological awareness skills, as research suggests (cf. par 3.4.1).

In most of the lessons the teachers **explained and modelled the task** of the lesson clearly, thus ensuring the learners knew exactly what was expected of them to complete their task. For example, the lesson observed at Pink school: Firstly, the teacher explained that they were going to count the words in the sentences to see which sentence had the most words. Then she repeated the sentence and clapped once for each word she spoke. The learners then had to join in and do the same. She repeated the sentence again and this time she did not clap the words, she used her fingers to count the words in the sentence. The learners were then asked to count with her, also using their fingers. Lastly, she said the sentence again and this time she stacked blocks for each word she said.

Some of the teachers used repetition to get the learners to understand what was expected of them, thus practicing the skill. For example, in the lesson observed, the teacher from Red school taught identifying the first initial sound of a word. The learners had to complete the same activity repeatedly in order to complete the task, thus they were expected to use the same steps in order to complete the activity. The teacher from Purple class also stated that she used repetition when teaching the learners about syllables, as the learners struggle with dividing words into syllables at the beginning.

The next element observed was the use of **scaffolding** during phonological awareness lessons. Scaffolding refers to the ability of the teacher to provide the

learners with just the right amount of support to enable the learners to complete a task independently (cf. par.3.4.3). There was no clear evidence that the teachers were aware that as the learners gain mastery in the task, the support from the teacher has to become less. At the beginning of the lesson, most of the teachers would model the steps necessary to complete the task, and after a few examples the teachers expected the learners to complete the activity by themselves. In some of the observations such as in Blue school and Brown school, repetition was used instead of scaffolding. If a learner did not know the answer or got it wrong, the teacher would just ask another learner to give the correct answer.

Feedback was the last element observed at the participating schools. The lack of feedback might be due to the size of the class group. It is difficult to give immediate, specific feedback if there are many learners waiting, as some learners might need much support to complete the task required. Again this is another reason why research suggests that phonological awareness should be taught in small groups which consist of learners with the same phonological awareness ability (cf. par. 3.4.4).

Reflection on this section indicates that the data from the observations support the data collected from the questionnaire, namely that participating teachers have some knowledge regarding the different levels of phonological awareness development, and they do teach it in their classrooms. However, gaps are evident in the different elements required to teach phonological awareness skills correctly and effectively, such as pacing, the nature of the task, scaffolding and feedback.

5.2.2.3 Document analysis

A document analysis was made of the following documents: the planning files of the participating teachers, the *National Reading Strategy* (Department of Basic Education, 2008a), the *Teaching Reading in the Early grades – A Teachers' Handbook* (Department of Basic Education, 2008b), and the *National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements* (Department of Basic Education, 2011). These documents were analysed in order to identify whether, if at all, phonological awareness skills are included within the documents, the ages recommended when

particular phonological awareness skills should be taught are specified, how these skills should be taught, and any other relevant information.

5.2.2.3.1 Planning files

The planning files were analysed in order to identify any aspects of phonological awareness that might be taught, that was not observed. After analysing the planning files of the participants that had them available, the following was identified:

Three of the participating independent schools (Pink school, Yellow school and Orange school) are using a Grade R programme supplied to them by a private company. They receive a teacher's guide that consists of the planning for the year. Within this planning the lessons regarding the different levels of phonological awareness along the continuum is evident (cf. Extract 5.1), and included activities on word awareness, rhyming words, syllables, initial sound and blending sounds. Suggestions about activities that can be used during free play to further develop the phonological awareness skill are also included. There is one phonological awareness activity each week, and the teachers are instructed to repeat this activity each day during carpet time. The teachers are supplied with an example of how the different skills should be taught.

Lesson – Phonological awareness: syllables

<p>What happens in the lesson</p> <p>Teacher Marike and Dennis introduce the syllable monster to the learners. The Syllable monster likes to eat words. If the word is short, he takes one bite. If the word is longer, he takes 2 or 3 bites.</p>	<p>Resources needed during lesson</p> <p>Any relevant resources</p> <p>Learner’s activity sheet</p> <p>None</p>
<p>We are working towards achieving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listens without interrupting • Divides multisyllabic words into syllables: uses claps or drumbeats on each syllable in words - ‘Jacqueline’. Children then count the syllables 	
<p>The teacher’s task</p> <p>Being aware and able to divide words into syllables is an important skill that learners must have. This will help them later with the spelling of words. Thus is the focus here on auditory skills and what the learners can hear. Are they able to hear that the word can be divided into smaller parts?</p> <p>NOTE: If you put your hand under your chin, you will be able to feel the different syllables of the words. Each time your mouth opens it counts as one syllable. The word “elbow” therefore has 2 syllables and the Syllable monster will take 2 bites.</p>	
<p>Extra activity</p> <p>During carpet time for the next few weeks, the learners can divide words into syllable. This can be made fun by asking the learners to jump, clap, and wave etc. the syllables. It is important to make it fun and enjoyable. It might take some time for some learners to master the skill.</p>	


Lesson Phonological awareness: How many syllables?

<p>What happens in the lesson</p> <p>Teacher Marike has brought some objects to class. She asks the learners to help her clap the word to find out how many syllables the word has. She then sorts the objects according to the amount of syllables in the word.</p>	<p>Resources needed during lesson</p> <p>Any relevant resources</p> <p>Learner’s activity</p> <p>None</p>
<p>We are working towards achieving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divides multisyllabic words into syllables: uses clapping or drum beats on each syllable in the word ‘ba-na-na’ or identifies the number of syllables (claps) in the names of the children in the class: ‘Lu-ne-tta’ has three claps, ‘Rose’ one clap 	
<p>The teacher’s task</p> <p>Give the learners enough time to clap the word first and to identify the amount of syllables. Learners can be asked to say where each object has to go, with which number according to the amount of syllables.</p>	

Extract 5.1: Example from planning file

The teacher from Purple school uses a Grade R learning programme which is also sold as a teacher’s guidebook. This learning programme uses the outcomes of the NCS (National Curriculum Statements) as a point of departure for planning the different activities in the programme (cf. Extract 5.2). This book consists of planned activities for literacy, numeracy and life skills for each day. This learning programme

consists of activities that include identifying rhyming words and identifying words that have the same initial sounds.

72

Food

Day
2


Literacy

Fruit and vegetables

Learning resources
Oranges, carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, bananas, meaties, grapes, magazines, learners' workbooks

LOs and ASs
HL#LO5: Thinking and reasoning
AS: Uses language to think and reason; matches things that go together, and compares things that are different.
AI#LO5: Thinking and reasoning
AS: Identifies similarities (e.g. by responding to an instruction such as 'Put all the yellow ones together').
HL#LO3: Reading and viewing
AS: Begins to develop phonic awareness. Recognises initial consonant ... sounds.
AI#LO3: Reading and viewing.
AS: Names the sound own name begins with (first step in phonemic awareness).

CASS
Is the learner able to identify similarities and differences in pictures?



Introduction
The teacher briefly refers to the story of Mahlo who goes to buy food. The teacher leads the class to listen carefully and identify beginning sounds, using questions such as: Which sound do you hear first when I say *Mahlo/Mommy*? And when I say *milk/meat*? Can you give other examples? Whose name starts with a m-sound? He/she then explains. Today we are going to look at what Mahlo had to buy for his mommy.

Activities

The learners examine the different products. They describe the different fruits and vegetables. They respond to questions to comment on the colour, shape, growth, etc. Learners point out similarities.

Pass around each of the foods and then ask appropriate questions on each. General questions that can be asked are: What is this? What is its colour? How does it grow? Is it a vegetable or a fruit? Can I eat it raw or do I have to cook it first? Do I have to peel it before I can eat it? Why do I have to wash it before I eat it? What does it look like on the inside when I cut it through?

Learners participate in 3 groups.
Group 1: Learners form pairs. They look for pictures of objects that start with the m-sound.
Group 2: Learners take the food that was discussed earlier and tell each other more about it.
Group 3: Learners wash their hands. They sit at tables, all facing the front of the classroom. They open their workbooks on page 15. Prompted by questions they discuss the top picture, identify the items and count how many there are of each. They compare the two pictures. They count each product in both pictures to find out which items are missing in the second picture. They circle the items that Mahlo bought.
 Learners identify the beginning m-sound in a number of names and give examples of their own. They trace over the small letter m and the capital letter M at the bottom of page 15.

Divide the class into 3 groups that will rotate once a group has completed the activities on the worksheet. Ensure that the learners of the other 2 groups are occupied meaningfully. Ask appropriate questions about the products in the pictures and let them count them. Explain what they have to do.

Lead them with questions to identify the m-sound, e.g. What do you hear first when I say *Mahlo*? And when I say *meatie*?

Conclusion
The teacher gives other examples of words starting with the m-sound, e.g. *mouth, mouse, milk, meat, man, money, mass* etc. The learners identify the sound. If they are able to give examples of words starting with the m-sound it should be welcomed.

Extract 5.2: Example from planning file

Although these teachers use these two different programmes that include phonological awareness activities, the data collected from the questionnaires and observations seem to indicate that the teachers do not have sufficient in-depth knowledge regarding phonological awareness. It might be because the teachers were never formally taught why phonological awareness is important and what it entails.

Rhyming words and initial sound awareness are the two aspects of phonological awareness that were observed in almost all of the planning files analysed, as is evident in an example from Extract 5.3.

Lesson Plan template for Grade _____ Day and Date Thursday (26.09.12) + (1)

My Body

Discuss the various parts of the body.
Which parts are pictured on worksheet
Beginning letters of their name
Eye-hand co-ordination, catch & throw

Whole class Shared Reading Activities:

Big Book

Group Guided Reading activities (at least 2 groups per day):

Group 1	Hold book correctly
Group 2	Turns pages correctly

Independent Reading Activities

Read Picture Books

Whole class Shared Writing Activities:

Writes known letters in own name

Independent Writing Activities:

Write from left to right; top to bottom
Complete the bodies on worksheet
worksheets, Crayons, Big Book,

GE

Extract 5.3: Example from planning file

This might be because these levels of phonological awareness are stated in the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) document. It appears that teachers do use the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) document as a reference when planning activities. This is why the gaps found in the CAPS (Department of

Basic Education, 2011) document regarding phonological awareness are problematic.

From my reflection on this section, it can be concluded from the analysed planning files that the participating teachers have an under-developed understanding regarding phonological awareness. Although some of the planning files showed some planning for the development of phonological awareness skills, it is clear that the different elements such as the awareness of the continuum of phonological awareness development, and that phonological awareness skills should be taught in small groups is noticeably absent.

5.2.2.3.2 Phonological awareness in DBE documentation

When discussing phonological awareness development of learners in Grade R in South Africa, three documents from the DBE are relevant. These documents are: *The National Reading Strategy* (Department of Basic Education, 2008a); *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s Handbook* (Department of Basic Education, 2008b), and *the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS)* (Department of Basic Education, 2011). These documents are discussed and analysed with regard to their relevancy for Grade R teachers in teaching phonological awareness skills.

i. The National Reading Strategy

According to *The National Reading Strategy* (Department of Basic Education, 2008a):

Many teachers in South Africa have an under-developed understanding of teaching literacy, reading and writing. Many teachers simply don’t know how to teach reading. Too often, teachers only know one method of teaching reading, which may not suit the learning style of all learners. Teachers don’t know how to stimulate reading inside, and outside, the classroom. (p 8).

The National Reading Strategy (Department of Basic Education, 2008a) also states that for years some teachers were under the impression that they only had to facilitate learners in learning to read, because the learners will teach themselves to read. The situation was aggravated by the fact that teachers

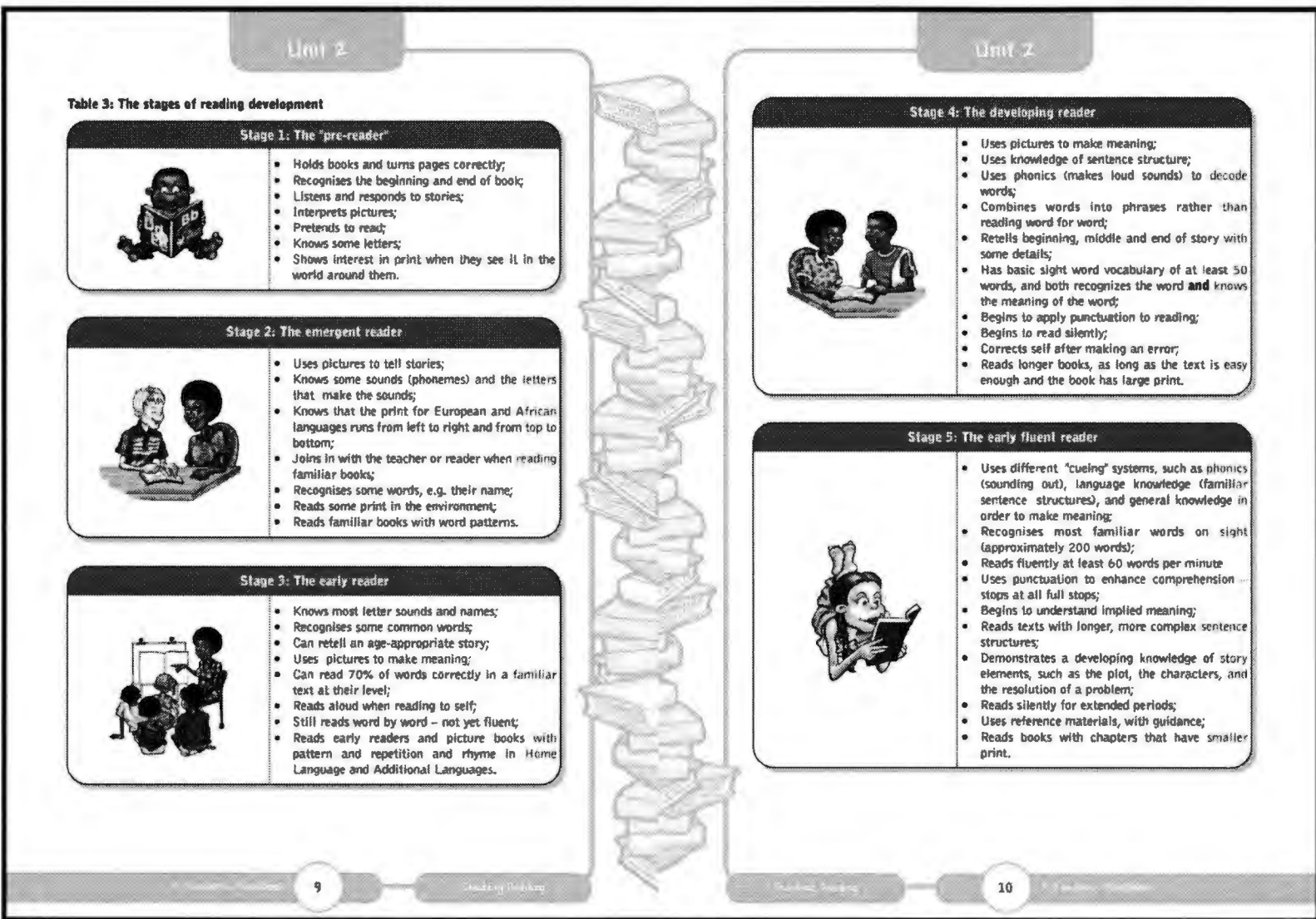
were left to develop their own teaching materials and reading programmes from official policies where the importance of phonological awareness in teaching reading was not given its due recognition. According to the document, it is important for teachers to know how learners learn to read, what is expected of learners and how they should assist learners to achieve the “different stages of reading” (Department of Basic Education, 2008, p.8) in order to be reading proficient. The document states, that if necessary, teachers should ask for professional support and that the curriculum policy documents are created to give guidance on a balanced approach to teach literacy, which includes the teaching of reading. The National Reading Strategy (Department of Basic Education, 2008a) states that it acknowledges that “reading failure begins in early grades, and it is at that level that interventions must be made” (p. 19). According to the National Reading Strategy (Department of Basic Education, 2008a), teachers are the key to the successful teaching of reading and regards teacher training as essential and has, therefore, created the document *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s Handbook* (Department of Basic Education, 2008b) to “... provide teachers with a manual on reading strategies. This manual will contain practical guidelines and strategies for teaching reading in Grades R-6” (p. 15).

ii. Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s Handbook

The *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s Handbook* (Department of Basic Education, 2008b) was developed by the DBE with the purpose to supply teachers with “... information on all aspects of the teaching of reading...” (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 18). This handbook consists of five units covering different aspects of teaching reading such as shared reading, supporting learners with reading difficulties and assessing reading, to name a few. For the purpose of this study, concerned with the knowledge Grade R teachers should have in order to teach phonological awareness skills as essential pre-reading skills, only relevant parts of the document were identified and are discussed.

In the unit on *Teaching Reading* (Department of Basic Education, 2008b), the document suggests that different stages of development can be identified when a learner learns to read. According to the document, learners will ideally

proceed gradually from stage one to stage six when they learn to read. These stages will continue up to the first two years of primary school. The stages are included in the document as follows (cf. Extract 5.4):



Extract 5.4: Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s Handbook
 (Department of Basic Education, 2008b, p. 9, 10 & 11).

Stage 6: The independent reader



- Uses "cueing" systems (phonic, language and general knowledge) unconsciously, having integrated them into his or her general approach to new texts;
- Reads fluently at least 60 or more words per minute
- Understands books with unfamiliar settings;
- Reads and understands implied meanings;
- Reads longer and more advanced books, books with chapters – fiction and non-fiction;
- Uses reference books independently.

**Extract 5.5: Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s Handbook
(Department of Basic Education, 2008b).**

The above extract was taken from the handbook in order to emphasize the absence of phonological awareness and phonemic awareness in the six stages a learner will proceed through in their quest to learn to read. The absence of phonological awareness and phonemic awareness is a cause of great concern as the aim of this handbook is to inform teachers on all the aspects regarding teaching learners to read. Only letter-sound knowledge is mentioned in stage 3. The different levels along the continuum of phonological awareness development should be explicitly stated within the six stages of reading development, and should be added to stages one and two of the six stages.

In addition, the Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s handbook (Department of Basic Education, 2008b) also mentions the five components of teaching reading, namely phonemic awareness, word recognition (sight words and phonics), comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. It is mentioned that these components have to be taught explicitly and daily. Phonemic awareness is defined as *“the ability to name, to think about, and work with individual sounds in spoken words”* (Department of Basic Education, 2008b, p.12). Next, the importance of phonemic awareness is explained, namely that learners need to be aware of the sounds in words and how they work, in order to learn to read. Lastly, activities are

described such as the use of songs and rhymes and the “sounding out” of words can be used to develop the phonemic awareness of learners. An example of how the teacher can teach phonemic awareness is also given. The extract below (cf. Extract 5.5) is taken from the document in order to show clearly how phonemic awareness and the activities to teach phonemic awareness are explained.

Unit 2

Component 1: Phonemic awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with individual sounds in spoken words. Before children learn to read print, they need to become aware of how sounds in words work. They need to understand that words are made up of speech sounds or phonemes.

Phonemes are the smallest parts of sound in a spoken word. For example in the word “hat”, the letter **h** represents the **sound huh**.

Learners instinctively “know” about phonemes, otherwise they would not be able to speak or understand speech. When they learn to read and write, they need to become aware of these units of language – they need to know the sounds (phonemes) within each word.

They also need to become aware that each sound can be written as a letter or group of letters. For example, they learn that the “**huh**” sound is written as “**h**”. This link between the sound and letter is called **phonics**.

What activities develop phonemic awareness?

Phonemic awareness can be developed through the use of poems, songs and rhymes. The explicit ‘sounding out’ of words can be practised during Word-level and Sentence-level time.

You can teach your learners to manipulate phonemes (speech sounds) by engaging in activities such as this one:

Listen I'm going to say the sounds in the word "jam" - j-a-m. What is the word?

jam

You say the sounds in the word jam.

j / a / m /

Now lets write the sounds in jam:
/j/ write j
/a/ write a
/m/ write m

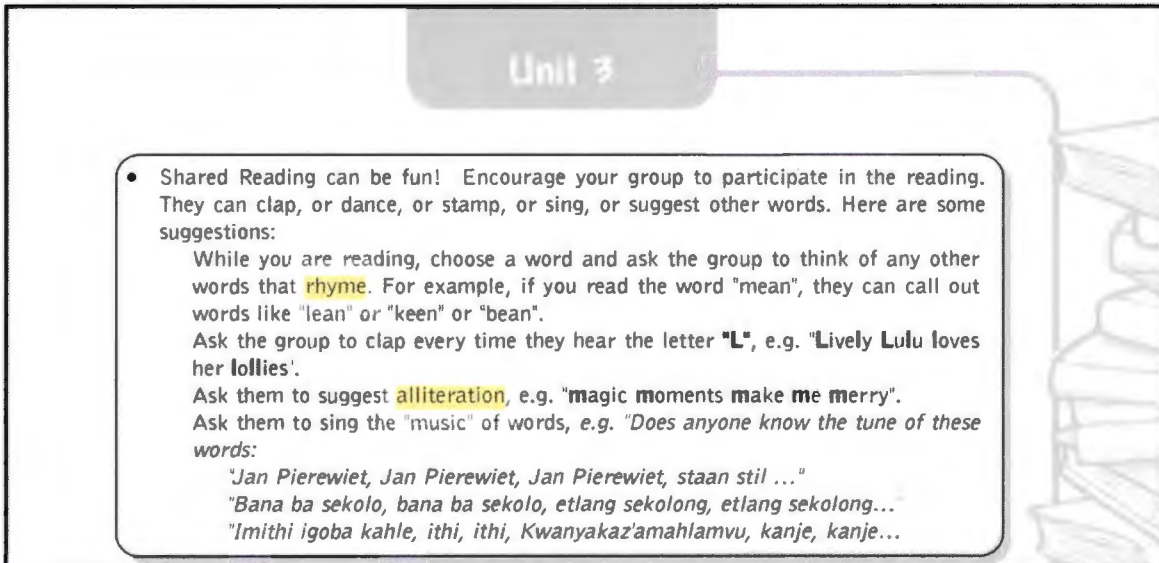
Now we're going to read jam.

Learning Objectives
12
Phonics & Handwriting

**Extract 5.6: Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s Handbook
(Department of Basic Education, 2008b, p. 12).**

In the extract there is a clear absence of reference to phonological awareness. The literature (cf. par 3.3) clearly states that for learners to be able to complete the more complex activities of sounding out words and phoneme manipulation as suggested in the handbook (Department of Basic Education, 2008b), learners have to be competent in less complex phonological awareness skill activities such as identifying and segmenting initial and final sounds in words. Teaching phonics, which is matching the sound of a letter to the written letter, should follow after phonological awareness and phonemic awareness has been mastered.

Only later in the document the suggestion is made that shared reading is a good opportunity to teach rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and some examples of how this can be used in the classroom are included (cf. Extract 5.6):



Unit 3

- Shared Reading can be fun! Encourage your group to participate in the reading. They can clap, or dance, or stamp, or sing, or suggest other words. Here are some suggestions:
 - While you are reading, choose a word and ask the group to think of any other words that rhyme. For example, if you read the word "mean", they can call out words like "lean" or "keen" or "bean".
 - Ask the group to clap every time they hear the letter "L", e.g. "Lively Lulu loves her lollies".
 - Ask them to suggest alliteration, e.g. "magic moments make me merry".
 - Ask them to sing the "music" of words, e.g. "Does anyone know the tune of these words:
 - "Jan Pierewiet, Jan Pierewiet, Jan Pierewiet, staan stil ..."
 - "Bana ba sekolo, bana ba sekolo, etlang sekolong, etlang sekolong..."
 - "Imithi igoba kahle, ithi, ithi, Kwanyakaz'amahlamvu, kanje, kanje..."

**Extract 5.7: Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s Handbook
(Department of Basic Education, 2008b, p. 21).**

Reflection on this section indicates that some concerns can be identified regarding the *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s Handbook* (Department of Basic Education, 2008b) document. The first concern that can be identified is that the importance of phonological awareness and what it entails is lacking. Another

concern identified is that although some examples are given of how phonemic awareness skills should be taught in the classroom, it is left up to the teacher to decide, interpret and implement the relevant knowledge according to what is understood. This can create a problem when phonemic awareness is taught, because a particular path has to be followed when teaching phonemic awareness as is evident in the continuum of teaching phonological awareness (cf. par. 3.3).

iii. National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements

The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (Department of Basic Education, 2011) are the guidelines relating to knowledge and skills a teacher uses in order to plan daily lessons. According to the official website of the DBE, CAPS is defined as:

... a single, comprehensive, and concise policy document...which represents a policy statement for learning and teaching in South African schools...

(Department of Basic Education, 2011).

According to the DBE (S Department of Basic Education, 2011), the CAPS provides teachers with:

- *an introduction containing guidelines on how to use the Foundation Phase document;*
- *content, concepts and skills to be taught per term;*
- *guidelines for time allocation;*
- *requirements for the Formal Assessment Activities and suggestions for informal assessment; and*
- *lists of recommended resources per grade. (p. 8).*

Thus, the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) provides teachers with a guide as to what knowledge and skills learners should achieve in a particular subject by the end of a school year. For the purpose of this study, concerned with the development of phonological awareness skills of Grade R learners, the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) document for English as a Home Language for the foundation phase, Grade R- 3 is relevant and is discussed. The different elements of teaching home

language are also discussed in section 2 of the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) document for English as a Home Language for the foundation phase, Grade R – 3 (cf. Extract 5.7). These elements are: speaking and listening, reading and phonics and writing and handwriting (Department of Basic Education, 2011). As part of the Reading and Phonics aspect in the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) document, it states that reading experts agree that the five main components crucial when teaching reading are: phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency, and that these five components have to be taught explicitly and practised on a daily basis.

ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE GRADES R-3

VI. Second and subsequent readings:

On subsequent days children re-read the text either in pairs or alone. The prime focus here is to develop fluency and provide opportunities to use the text to develop vocabulary, grammar and deeper comprehension of the text. Vary the manner in which this is done, e.g., reading parts of a character or taking turns to read a page or paragraph. Older, more experienced readers may select a particular passage to work on in this time.

Paired and Independent Reading

Paired and Independent Reading provides children with reading practice and encourages reading for enjoyment.

Children can reread their class or group readers, or they can read simple 'fun' books or supplementary readers. The text should be at a lower level than that used for Shared and Group Guided Reading. **Paired reading** can take place at any time, anywhere, as a class reading activity. Children can sit in pairs inside or outside of the classroom to read together or take turns to read or two children who have completed their tasks can read together while other children complete their work.

If children **read books on their own** they also develop fluency, provided that the books are easy enough for the children to read without help. Short, simple books with predictable text and colourful illustrations are ideal. Some teachers like to give children individual reading to do at home. This home reading should consist of re-reading the group reading book or reading simple, 'fun' books. This extra reading practice, done **on a regular basis every day**, plays an important role in learning to read.

The five components of teaching reading

Most reading experts agree that there are five main components to the teaching of reading:

- Phonemic awareness
- Word recognition (sight words and phonics)
- Comprehension
- Vocabulary
- Fluency

Each of these components needs to be taught explicitly and practised on a daily basis.

Phonemic awareness

Phonemic awareness is recognising that speech consists of a sequence of sounds and being able to recognise these individual sounds, how they make words and how these words can make sentences. Developing this awareness should begin early in Grade 1.

A sequence for the teaching of phonemic awareness could be

- Activities that focus on rhyme (e.g. *What rhymes with cow?*)
- Activities that focus on syllable units (e.g. Clap for your name, e.g. *Peu - la*)

Extract 5.8: CAPS: English Home Language – Grades R – 3 (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 14).

Extract 5.8 indicates the absence of reference to phonological awareness in the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) document. Although the five components of teaching reading are mentioned within this policy document, no mention is made of phonological awareness, explicitly. However, the literature clearly

ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE GRADES R-3

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A sequence for the teaching of phonemic awareness could be:

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- Activities that focus on syllable units (e.g. Clap for your name, e.g. *Paul - la*)

ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE GRADES R-3

- Activities that focus on onset (the part before the vowel) and rime (the vowel(s) + the consonant(s) that follow) (e.g. *St + and, br + own*).
- Activities that focus on phonemes: Put these sounds together: */st/-oi-/p/*
- Matching activities: Do these start the same? *Sandwich/sandbag*
- Isolation activities: What do you hear at the beginning of *black*?
- Substitution activities: What word would you have if you replaced */st/* in *stool* with */f/*?
- Blending activities: Which word would you have if you put these sounds together:
 - */str/br/* (blending phonemes)
 - */str/ain/* (blending onset and rime)
 - */mum/my/* (blending syllables)
- Segmentation activities: Say the parts you hear in this word:
 - *Stable: /stɪb-/ble/* (separating syllables)
 - *Dog: /d/-oi-/p/* (separating phonemes)
- Deletion activities
 - Say *stirry* without the *str* (syllable deletion)
 - Say *friend* without the *fr* (onset deletion)
 - Say *Pete* without the *p* (phoneme deletion)

Useful activities to develop basic skills such as listening include listening games, nursery rhymes, rhyming games and games using alliteration (words that begin with the same sound).

Phonics

Phonics refers to the sounds in words and the symbols (letters of the alphabet) used to represent them. It is an important tool in both reading and writing.

There are a range of phonic programmes available. Schools may select the programme that will support explicit and systematic teaching of phonics through the school. Schools should remain loyal to their chosen programme. The suggested sequence of introducing the phonic elements in the CAPS document is a guide. Where phonic programmes have different sequences, follow these instead. However, the pacing of introducing the phonic elements should be similar to the pacing in the CAPS document.

Phonics and handwriting should be linked as the teaching of the letter sound and how to write it go together. Teach the more frequently used sounds first in Grade 1. Also bear in mind letter formation so that, for example, one might choose to teach the letter *c* before *a* and the letter *l* before *h* and *b*. The CAPS document paces the introduction of phonics so that 1-2 new sounds are introduced each week during the first two terms so that at least eight sounds are taught by the end of the first term and the remainder by the end of the second term. Some consonant and vowel

states that phonological awareness is a pre-cursor to learning to read. Although the five components mentioned in the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) document will mostly occur during Grades one to three, this policy document is also relevant for Grade R. For this reason it is very important that phonological awareness should be explicitly named and explained as part of the phonemic awareness component. The literature clearly emphasises phonemic awareness as a component of phonological awareness.

In the same document (Department of Basic Education, 2011), phonemic awareness is defined as the ability to know and recognise that speech consists of sounds, how these sounds make words and that these words can make sentences. It also states that this awareness should be taught in Grade 1. Lastly, examples are given of a sequence of different activities that can be used to teach phonemic awareness, and include the following: activities that focus on rhyme, activities that focus on syllable units, activities that focus on onset and rime, activities that focus on phonemes, matching activities, isolation activities, substitution activities, blending activities, segmentation activities, and also deletion activities (cf. Extract 5.9).

The following important issues are identified in the extract from the document:

The first issue that can be identified is in the definition of phonemic awareness in the CAPS document (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Within the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) document phonemic awareness is defined as:

Phonemic awareness is recognising that speech consists of a sequence of sounds and being able to recognise these individual sounds, how they make words and how these words can make sentences (p. 14).

The problem with this definition of phonemic awareness is that word and sentence awareness falls under the bigger inclusive term phonological awareness, and is not part of phonemic awareness. The literature suggests that before learners can understand and develop phonemic awareness they must first master the less complex aspects of phonological awareness such as word, rhyme and syllable awareness (Vukelich & Christie, 2004). Developing phonemic awareness will take place later.

The second issue identified in the extract is that although examples are given of each of the different levels along the continuum of phonological awareness, no mention is made of what each level entails or why it is important. Yet again, it is left to the individual teacher to decide what is understood from the different examples and how these skills will be taught in the classroom, if she/he decides to teach it at all.

The third issue identified is that a sequence of teaching phonemic awareness is suggested, but again it is up to the Grade R classroom teacher to decide when she will teach which skill. This is problematic as the literature suggests that a particular order should be followed (the continuum of phonological awareness development) when teaching phonological awareness skills, and that particular methods should be used to teach these very important phonological awareness skills (cf. par. 3.3).

The fourth problematic issue in the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) policy is that the policy recommends that the skills in the activities list which include: rhyme, syllables, alliteration and initial and final sound sorting (phonological awareness skills) should be developed in Grade 1, the year during which formal reading instruction will begin. This is in contrast to what is evident in the literature (cf.

par. 3.4). According to the literature, it is important to ensure that learners have developed the different levels of phonological awareness skills by the end of Grade R (kindergarten) in order to provide all learners with a solid foundation for learning to read (Vanden Heuvel, 2005), since phonological awareness skills are regarded as a precursor to further reading success (Cunningham et al., 2009).

In the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) document for English Home Language for Foundation Phase, guideline ² are formulated for phonological/phonemic awareness skills that should be achieved by Grade R learners. Here the term phonological awareness is mentioned for the first time. Only the word phonological awareness is mentioned, but what it entails and why it is important is not mentioned anywhere. Before the guidelines relating to the knowledge and skills for Grade R are given, there is an overview of the knowledge and skills that should be achieved as part of phonics skills (cf. Extract 5.10).

PHONICS - GRADE R

- **Identifies rhyming words** in well-known rhymes and songs such as Humpty Dumpty
- Begins to recognise that **words are made up of sounds**, e.g. the beginning letter(s) of their names
- **Segments oral sentences into individual words**
- Divides multisyllabic words into **syllables**
- **Recognises aurally and visually some initial consonants** and vowels especially at the beginning of a word.

Extract 5.10: Overview of the language skills to be taught in the home language

(Department of Basic Education, 2011, p.24).

Of all of these guidelines recorded in the overview, only the last guidelines are actually relevant to the teaching of phonics. All of the other guidelines are actually phonological and phonemic awareness skills, and not phonics.

² Guidelines refer to the outcomes/objectives the learners should achieve, as stated in the CAPS policy document.

When the order of the guidelines as listed are considered, it is assumed that these guidelines should be achieved in the order as listed. This suggests that the continuum of phonological awareness was not kept in mind when these guidelines were identified. Nowhere has it been stated that these guidelines should be achieved in a particular order. Some of the relevant phonological awareness skills along the continuum of phonological awareness development (cf. par 3.3) such as, alliteration and initial and final sound sorting, onset-rime, segmentation of initial and final sounds, phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation and phoneme manipulation have not been included in these guidelines in the overview.

The extract below (cf. Extract 5.11) outlines the guidelines per term as it is stated in the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) document for Grade R learners. The guidelines that relate to phonological and/or phonemic awareness have been highlighted.

TERM 1

Phonological/ Phonemic Awareness

Distinguishes **aurally** between different **sounds especially at the beginning of own name**

- Identifies a sound that does not belong in a sequence: 'Which sound does not belong - b, b, k, b?'
- Identifies whether two given sounds are the same or different: /p/, /p/ [same]; /p/, /d/ [different]
- **Can identify that oral sentences are made up of individual words:** clap on each word in a sentence where all words have only one syllable [Ben is good]

Relates sounds to letters and words

Begins to recognise that words are made up of sounds: **gives the beginning sound of own name.**

TERM 2

Phonological/Phonemic Awareness

- **Distinguishes aurally between different sounds especially at the beginning of words**

- Listens for the odd word in a sequence where all words begin with the same sound. For example, ring, rose, round, pose) or identifies whether two given sounds are the same or different . /c/, /c/ [same] or /c/, /g/ [different]
- Divides multisyllabic words into **syllables**: uses clapping or drum beats on each syllable in the word 'ba-na-na' or identifies the number of syllables (claps) in the names of the children in the class: 'Lu-ne-tta' has three claps, 'Rose' one clap
- Identifies **rhyming words** in well-known rhymes and songs. For example, Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall - Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
- **Anticipates rhyming words** in new songs and rhymes and completes the line or sentence
- **Recognises initial spoken sounds especially at the beginning of own name**

Relates sounds to letters and words

- **Understands that words consist of more than one sound**. For example, sat - s-a-t done **aurally**
- Can **recognise sounds at the beginning** of some words such as friends' names

EMERGENT WRITING

Works with words

- Groups words that share the **same initial sound or letter**
- Contributes sentences to a class piece of writing: child dictates as the teacher writes

TERM 3

Phonological/Phonemic Awareness

- **Segments oral sentences into individual words** using words of one syllable first (e.g. Sam - is - a - boy).
- Divides multisyllabic words into **syllables**: uses claps or drumbeats on each syllable in words and names such as 'cupboard', 'Jacqueline'. Children then count the syllables.
- **Identifies rhyming words** in well-known rhymes and songs and in sequences of rhyming words such as Incy Wincey Spider...
- **Substitutes rhyming words** in common songs and rhymes. For example,

Humpty Dumpty sat on a ball. Humpty Dumpty said "Oh! I'll fall".

- **Recognises and names some letters of the alphabet** especially own name. For example, My name, Diane, **begins with a letter d**.

Relates sounds to letters and words

- **Recognises aurally and visually some initial consonants and vowels** especially at the beginning of common words. For example, in Helen's name she tells the teacher as she points to the 'h' that it says /h/.
- **Understands that words consist of more than one sound**. For example, 'hand' has four sounds h-a-n-d.
- **Recognises sounds at the beginning of some words**: friends' names or names of animals.

EMERGENT WRITING

Works with words

- **Groups pictures of rhyming words**, e.g. 'bat', 'cat', 'hat'
- Contributes sentences to a class piece of writing: child dictates as the teacher writes

TERM 4

Phonological/Phonemic Awareness

- **Segments oral sentences into individual words**. For example, claps on each word in a sentence using words of one syllable first -'It is time for lunch'.
- **Divides multisyllabic words into syllables**: crocodile - croc-o-dile
- **Identifies rhyming words** in well-known rhymes and songs and in sequences of rhyming words
- **Recognises aurally and visually some initial consonants and vowels** especially at the beginning of common words
- **Recognises and names some letters of the alphabet** such as letters in own name
- **Relates sounds to letters and words and understands that words consist of more than one sound**: duck is d-u-ck – done aurally
- **Recognises sounds at the beginning of some words**

- **Begins to recognise that words are made up of sounds such as the beginning letter/s of their names**

EMERGENT WRITING

Works with words

- **Groups pictures of rhyming words such as 'can', 'fan', 'pan'**
- **Copies short sentences and words written by the teacher**
- **Contributes sentences to a class piece of writing: child dictates as the teacher writes**

Extract 5.11: Grade R home language English requirements per term (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 31-53).

From the above guidelines it is clear that the continuum for the development of phonological awareness was not kept in mind with the development of the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) guidelines. For example, in term one, learners have to show awareness of the initial sounds of words, before they are able to identify rhyming words or divide words into syllables. Another issue that can be identified is that the complexity of tasks was also not kept in mind, for example, in term three learners are expected to produce rhyming words and then in term four they have to identify rhyming words again. Producing a word that rhymes with another is a more complex task than identifying two rhyming words. Some levels of phonological awareness development, as evident in the continuum (cf. par 3.3), are not included in the guidelines, such as onset and rime development, final sound identification and segmentation. If the guidelines are arranged from less to more complex, according to the different levels on the continuum of phonological awareness development, it would not be necessary to repeat the guidelines in each term.

The literature suggests that phonological awareness skills, of which phonemic awareness is an aspect, should be developed between the ages of four and nine (cf. Table 5.1). According to the DBE (2011), learners should start Grade 1 in the year in which they turn seven years old. According to this, the assumption can then be made that learners will start Grade R at the beginning of the year in which they turn six

years old. From this it is clear that within a Grade R class there will be learners that are five, five and a half, six and six and a half years old. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the focus is on the phonological awareness skills that should be developed at these ages. Moats (2009) is of the opinion that the following phonological awareness skills should be developed at these ages (cf. Table 5.1):

Table 5.1: Ages at which 80-90 percent of typical learners have achieved a phonological skill

Age 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rhyme recognition, odd word out ■ Recognition of phonemic changes in words ■ Clapping, counting words
Age 5 $\frac{1}{2}$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Distinguishing and remembering separate phonemes in a series ■ Blending onset-rime ■ Producing a rhyme ■ Matching initial sounds; isolating an initial sound
Age 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Compound word deletion ■ Syllable deletion ■ Blending two and three phonemes ■ Phoneme segmentation of words that have simple syllables with two or three phonemes (no blends)
Age 6 $\frac{1}{2}$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Phoneme segmentation of words that have up to three or four phonemes (include blends) ■ Phoneme substitution to build new words that have simple syllables (no blends)

(Moats, 2009, p. 21).

When these ages from Table 5.1 are compared with the guidelines as organised in the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) document it is clear that some

phonological awareness skills are not included in the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) for foundation phase, such as compound word and syllable deletion. Because of the age range of learners in Grade R, it is also important that phonological awareness skills are taught in small groups (cf. par 3.4). When the different skills that should be taught at the different ages are taken into account, a five year old learner can possibly have a difficult time developing the same phonological awareness skills a six and a half year old should be developing.

My reflection on this section indicates that, according to *The National Reading strategy* (Department of Basic Education, 2008a), it is important that the curriculum policy documents should guide teachers on implementing a balanced approach to teaching literacy, which includes teaching reading (cf. par 5.2.3.1). From the discussion, it is evident that the official DBE documents available to teachers at the moment do not fully comply with these expectations of the *National Reading Strategy* (Department of Basic Education, 2008a). The absence of the explicit mention of phonological awareness in both the *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades – A Teacher’s Handbook* (Department of Basic Education, 2008b) and the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011) policy document create concern as the literature is clear about the importance of teaching learners phonological awareness skills. In addition, the lack of consistent research evidence-based use of terminology and definitions does not assist teachers in the effective implementation of knowledge and skills related to phonological awareness.

5.3 Summary

In this chapter the data collected were analysed and discussed. From the discussion it became evident that the participating teachers have a positive attitude towards professional development programmes, in general. However, this positive attitude is dependent on their belief about whether the content of the professional development programme will be relevant, and if the programme will be of high quality. It was also evident that the participating teachers believe that if they improve their teaching knowledge, skills and practice, through professional development, it will have a positive improvement on their learners’ achievement.

It was concluded that most of the professional development programmes available to Grade R teachers are not successful regarding their content, follow-up support, time and collaboration used. It was stated that the content of many of the professional development programmes are not individualized according to the context and prior-knowledge of the participants. Follow-up support is not offered and all of the participating teachers indicated that they would appreciate follow-up support. Most professional development programmes are not on-going over time and collaboration between colleagues is not explicitly encouraged. The participating teachers agreed that professional development programmes that are interactive and filled with practical examples are the most effective.

Lastly, it was reported that the participating teachers felt that Grade R is not yet a priority to the relevant stakeholders, and the confusion of who is responsible for the professional development of Grade R teachers' has a negative effect on some teachers' attitude towards the DBE in the Sunshine District.

An analysis of the data collected relating to phonological awareness skills indicated that the participating teachers have an under-developed understanding of what phonological awareness skills entail, why it is important to be taught and the continuum of phonological awareness development. It was also apparent that the participating teachers teach phonological awareness skills haphazardly in their classrooms. The teachers are unaware that phonological awareness skills should be taught in small groups, regularly, explicitly and systematically. This suggests that the Grade R learners are not prepared to learn to read when they enter Grade 1.

The document analysis indicated that there are gaps evident in the official documents from the Department of Basic Education regarding the explicit mention of the definition, the importance of and the developmental continuum of phonological awareness skills.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The concluding chapter aims to present a summary of the key aspects of this study, including the research results, the limitations identified and recommendations for further research. The guidelines to develop an effective professional development programme with a focus on phonological awareness are also presented.

The purpose of the study was to determine:

- Grade R teachers' attitude towards professional development;
- what the professional development currently available to Grade R teachers' focuses on, and if it is relevant and effective for their needs;
- what knowledge Grade R teachers have concerning phonological awareness;
- how phonological awareness is taught in Grade R classrooms;
- how phonological awareness for Grade R is addressed in DBE documentation; and
- formulate guidelines essential when developing a professional development programme that focuses on the who (characteristics and context of the teachers and the children they serve), the what (what teachers should know and be able to do) and the how (the organisation and facilitation of learning experiences) of early childhood professional development with a specific focus on phonological awareness, and that takes cognisance of the criticism that has been levelled against professional development programmes.

6.2 Literature review

Professional development (PD) is currently viewed as an approach to improving teachers' knowledge, skills and practice (Desimone, Smith & Ueno, 2006). In this study professional development was defined as those events where teachers review, renew and change their attitude, motivation, skills, knowledge and practices while in employment. These events include formal and informal experiences that are sustained over time. The literature regards professional development as an

important step in achieving better learner results. It is suggested that by improving the knowledge, skills and practice of teachers through professional development, it will lead to better learner results (cf. par 2.1 & 2.2).

In order to ensure that all the relevant concepts of professional development are included when designing a PD programme the following key components are essential, namely the **“who”**, the **“what”** and the **“how”** of professional development.

When a professional development programme is designed it is important to bear in mind **“who”** the participants of the professional development programme will be. It is essential that a professional development programme will consider the context, prior knowledge and teaching practice / experience of the attending participants. By considering these elements, the attitude and motivation of the participants will also be addressed. The attitude that a participant attends a professional development programme with is essential, as it will have either a positive or negative effect on the participants willingness to implement the newly acquired knowledge and skills (cf. par 2.4.1).

The aim of any professional development programme is to familiarise the participants with new knowledge and skills that should result in an improvement in the participants teaching practices. Therefore, when designing a professional development programme it is important to focus on **“what”** the new knowledge, skills and practices will be. The content of any professional development programme should include new approaches to teaching and learning, how to implement and use the new skills and practices in a particular setting, what the purpose of the new skills or practice is, which PD programme goals and objectives relate to the knowledge and skills and lastly, what evidence exists that the knowledge and skills will be effective (cf. par 2.4.2).

Lastly, when designing a professional development programme it is necessary to consider **“how”** the participants will be taught about the new knowledge and skills, thus the models and techniques that will be utilised effectively during the PD programme to bring about change in the participants' teaching practices. The body of research indicates that change in teaching practices, knowledge and skills does not happen overnight and most teachers find it extremely uncomfortable and disturbing. It is suggested that teachers will only truly change their teaching practice after the

new knowledge and skills are successfully implemented and the improvement in learner results is evident. This is due to the fact that the uncomfortable process of change is then justified by improved learner results (cf. par 2.4.3).

Not only is it important to consider the participants, the content and the techniques when designing a professional development programme, but the following characteristics should also be considered: coherency, collaboration, active participation, on-going and follow-up support. To develop and present a coherent PD programme, it is important that the activities utilised reflect the participants' prior knowledge, the guidelines set out in the national curriculum, and encourage professional and sustainable collaboration with colleagues. Active participation is essential as the participants will only be able to integrate theory with practice when they are given opportunities to practice what is being preached. For professional development programmes to bring about change it has to be on-going over time. One-shot workshops do not give participants enough time to implement the new knowledge and skills learned and imbed the skills and knowledge within their practice. This also links with follow-up support. Without follow-up support teachers will fall into their old ways as soon as the process of change gets too uncomfortable (cf. par 2.4.3).

From an analysis of the literature, phonological awareness is defined as the ability to attend to the sound structures of words, separate from the words meaning. However, phonological awareness differs from phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is an aspect of phonological awareness and is the ability to pay specific attention to the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words (cf. par 3.2).

Research recommends that phonological awareness skills are developed before formal reading begins. By having developed phonological awareness skills, learners have a strategy to use when they learn to read. This is due to the fact that when learners have developed phonological awareness skills, they are able to pay attention to the sound structure of spoken words. This ability will support learners during word recognition and decoding processes (cf. par 3.1).

Phonological awareness skills develop along a continuum of levels that must be developed from the less complex skills to the more complex. Researchers agree that mastery in a less complex level is not a requirement to achieve mastery in the next

level, but mastery in a less complex level will support achievement in the next more complex level. The levels along the continuum of phonological awareness include the following levels, from less to more complex: the awareness of words, dividing words into syllables, the recognition and production of words that rhyme; identifying alliteration and sorting words according to their initial and final sounds, dividing words into onset-rime, segmentation of initial and final sounds of words, blending of phonemes into words, segmentation of words into phonemes and manipulating phonemes within words (cf. par 3.3).

These levels along the continuum of phonological awareness development should be taught explicitly and systematically. It is, therefore, essential that teachers have the relevant content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and learner knowledge to teach these skills. Teachers must have the relevant knowledge to plan activities that:

- employ the sequence of teaching correctly, building from less complex tasks to more complex tasks,
- explain and model the tasks, the learners are expected to complete correctly,
- utilise scaffolding during instructional tasks, and
- make use of feedback that is positive, specific and immediate to support the learners during the activities.

Research suggests that if teachers do not have the knowledge it is impossible to teach the skills (cf. par 3.4).

6.3 Summary of the research results

An analysis of the data collected through the interviews indicated that the professional development programmes available to Grade R teachers in the Sunshine District do not consist of all characteristics necessary to be classified as effective professional development programmes (cf. par 5.2.1.1).

The content of the professional development programmes is not always relevant according to the participants' prior knowledge and context. The professional development programmes are one-shot workshops that are not on-going over time, collaboration between colleagues is not encouraged, and essential follow-up support in the participants settings is not offered (cf. par 5.1.2.2).

The data also specified that the participating teachers have a positive attitude towards the idea of professional development, in general. They are confident that professional development that is relevant and of high quality will positively influence their teaching knowledge, skills and practice, which will lead to better learner achievements. This belief influences their motivation to attend professional development programmes positively (cf. par 5.2.1.1).

An analysis of the data collected relating to teachers' knowledge and the teaching of phonological awareness skills indicated that the participating Grade R teachers have an under-developed understanding regarding what phonological awareness is, and the importance of teaching these skill according to the continuum of phonological awareness development. The data further showed that phonological awareness skills are taught irregularly, unsystematically and implicitly as a whole class activity. This suggests that the Grade R learners are not prepared to learn to read when they enter Grade 1. The document analysis of the relevant official documents from the Department of Basic Education revealed that there are gaps evident regarding the explicit mention of the definition, the importance of and the developmental continuum of phonological awareness skills (cf. par 5.2.2).

6.4 Guidelines for a professional development programme focusing on phonological awareness

To develop a professional development programme to support Grade R teachers to acquire evidence-based knowledge and skills to teach Grade R learners phonological awareness skills, certain key elements have to be included.

6.4.1 The “who” (Grade R teachers) of a professional development programme focussing on phonological awareness (cf. par 2.4.1):

- The programme has to attend to the participants' attitude concerning learning about teaching phonological awareness skills within their classroom. The participants have to be aware of the need for teaching phonological awareness skills to Grade R learners.
- The goals of the professional development programme have to be in line with the goals set out by the Department of Basic Education. For this reason, it is

important that phonological awareness is explicitly named and defined within the official documents from the Department of Basic Education or that it is explicitly addressed in CAPS training or professional development programmes focusing on phonological awareness.

- It is important that the context of the participants is taken into account during the professional development programme. This includes the participants' prior knowledge, their formal training, teaching experience, available resources, age, culture and the community they work in. Guskey (2000) suggests that the key elements of the professional development programme are planned and then adapted in order to consider the different contexts of the participants. Concerns raised regarding the contexts of the schools during this study should be addressed, namely:
 - The absence of resources, especially literacy resources available for the learners to interact and play with is a big concern. This absence leads to a huge gap in the continuous development of the crucial skills of Grade R learners through play.
 - Some Grade R classes have a very formal teaching atmosphere which is not beneficial for Grade R learners as they are to learn through play.
 - The size of the Grade R classes and the classrooms poses a problem. The size of the class is problematic, for example, when assessment and individual learning has to take place.
 - The fact that learners are not taught in their home language in Grade R is a concern. Most participants reported that it is the parents that are adamant that their children should be taught in English.
- It is also important to make provision for the participants' ability to learn new skills, because this will have an influence on the amount of support given.

6.4.2 The “what” (content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and learner knowledge) of a professional development programme focusing on phonological awareness (cf. par 2.4.2):

- **Content knowledge**
 - It is essential that the participants are aware of and understand the related phonological awareness concepts and facts and how they relate to each

other. The content knowledge taught to the participants should be based on the following:

- what phonological awareness is (cf. par 3.2);
- what the importance of phonological awareness is (cf. par 3.2);
- the continuum of phonological awareness development, discussing each level in detail according to its definition, importance and examples thereof (cf. par 3.3); and
- The learner's age, when the different levels along the continuum of phonological awareness should be taught (cf. par 3.4).

- **Pedagogical knowledge**

- To teach phonological awareness skills effectively the participants should be familiar with different methods of planning, teaching and assessment.

The following pedagogically oriented aspects should be addressed:

- **The participants' ability to:** consider the nature of the task when planning phonological awareness activities, such as identifying, matching or sorting; consider the cognitive task required to complete the activity, such as blending, segmenting and manipulating; and the planning of activities that teach phonological awareness skills explicitly and systematically (cf. par 3.4).
- **Small groups:** teachers should be able to do the relevant assessment in order to group the learners in the class accordingly to teach phonological awareness skills in small groups (cf. par 3.4).
- **Sequence of instruction:** teachers should be aware that the sequence of instruction of the planned activities is very important. It is important to take into account the cognitive task required of the learner, as well as the nature of task when phonological awareness activities are planned. The sequence of instruction should also be from less complex to more complex (cf. par 3.4).
- **Modelling and explanation of the task:** teachers should be able to explain and model the required tasks clearly to the learners. This is also important because if the teacher is not able to demonstrate the particular skill, the teacher will also not be able to support the learners

during the activity or know when they are doing something wrong (cf. par 3.4).

- **The use of scaffolding:** It is important that the teacher knows exactly how to support the learner during the activities so that the learners can complete the activity independently in the end (cf. par 3.4).
- **Give feedback:** it is important that the teacher is able to correct the learners in a sensitive and constructive manner when necessary. The feedback provided must be positive, specific and immediate. Feedback is essential as it will support the learners to complete the task (cf. par 3.4).
- **Assessment:** to be able to do regular assessment in order to keep track of the learners' progression and to move learners within groups as they progress (cf. par 3.4).

- **Learner knowledge**

- It is important that the participating teachers know and understand how learners come to understand the relating concepts. Therefore, learner knowledge is essential in order for the participants to utilise the appropriate method of instruction and assessment according to the learners' characteristics, which includes their backgrounds, prior knowledge and experiences. The participants must be able to address the amount of support needed and the tempo of mastering the new skills of each of the learners (cf. par 3.4).

Grade R teachers that are able to implement evidence-based knowledge, skills and practices in their classrooms will make a substantial difference in learners' preparedness to learn to read.

6.4.3 The "how" (models and techniques used) of a professional development programme focusing on phonological awareness (cf. par 2.4.3):

- The body of research concludes that an effective professional development programme focussing on phonological awareness must emphasise the following characteristics:

- **Active participation and learning:** A professional development programme focusing on active participation will allow the participants to: observe the different phonological awareness skills being taught, the participating teachers are supported during the planning process of how these skills will be taught in their classrooms, and participating in discussions with colleagues in small groups about why and how these phonological awareness skills should be implemented, and difficulties that are and could be experienced.
- **A coherent teacher learning programme:** The importance of creating a coherent programme lies in the fact that all the activities as part of the professional development programme are connected and correlate with curriculum guidelines and assessment practices. Ensuring that a professional development programme focusing on phonological awareness is coherent, the following has to be included: the participating teachers' prior knowledge should be determined and the new knowledge and skills should build on that. The activities included within the programme should encourage the participants to collaborate with colleagues. The activities should also align with the guidelines within the relevant official departmental documents (such as the CAPS policy document).
- **Collaboration between colleagues:** Encouraging collaboration between colleagues as a technique of professional development urges the participants to pay specific attention to their current teaching practice such as teaching methods relating to phonological awareness, the problems experienced during the implementation of new skills and practices, how learners' develop phonological awareness skills, the assessment of phonological awareness skills and then reflection on these aspects. Through reflection and collaboration the participating teachers will be able to listen to and consider views and beliefs that might be different to theirs. For this reason, reflection should be seen as a necessary technique during a professional development programme focusing on phonological awareness skills. Giving the participating teachers specific questions that will spark reflection might be necessary. Collaboration should not only be

between colleagues, but the presenter of the professional development programme should also be included, thus also fulfilling the role of mentor.

- **Follow-up support:** The process of changing teaching practice is uncomfortable and can be difficult and confusing. For this reason it is extremely important that follow-up support is provided. Follow-up support will require of the presenter (expert) to visit the participating teachers regularly within their teaching setting; thus, the presenter takes up the role of mentor or coach. During these visits the participating teacher can ask for advice regarding implementation of the skills and practices, class management, assessment techniques, special cases regarding learners, etc. The participant can be observed presenting a lesson after which constructive feedback can be given, or the presenter can be observed presenting a lesson. For this process of follow-up support, it is essential that the participating teacher and the presenter build a relationship that consists of honesty and trust. It is essential that the participating teacher is open to suggestions and will listen to any feedback from the presenter.
- **Time:** The literature supports the idea that professional development programmes should be on-going over time. When professional development programmes happen regularly over an extended period of time it requires of the participants to explore and internalise the new knowledge and skills in their teaching practice. When professional development is on-going it also provides time for continuous collaboration, reflection and follow-up support. It is suggested that a professional development programme focusing on phonological awareness should have weekly contact sessions where new skills and practices are taught/discussed. Collaboration sessions between colleagues should be held weekly. Follow up support at the participants teaching setting should be scheduled fortnightly.

6.5 Central theoretical statement

The data collected and analysed in this study supports the statement that the professional development programmes offered within the Sunshine District in the North West Province focusing on phonological awareness are currently presented in

a haphazard and uncoordinated manner. The data suggests that the professional development programmes available within the Sunshine District lack the characteristics of an effective professional development programme, such as focusing on content relating to the development of phonological awareness skills, follow-up support, being on-going and encouraging collaboration.

This could be the result of the absence of the explicit mention of phonological awareness, its importance and the continuum of development in the relevant official documents of the Department of Basic Education.

6.6 Limitations of the study

Within this study some limitations can be identified. Firstly, the findings of this study cannot be generalised, although the necessary measures such as triangulation, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were taken to ensure trustworthiness. It was not the aim of the study to generalise the results, but to understand a specific phenomenon, namely Grade R teachers' knowledge and teaching practice relating to phonological awareness, as well as the professional development programmes available to them.

A second limitation that can be identified was that all the relevant stakeholders such as the teachers' unions, regarding the professional development of teachers were not officially consulted and included in the study.

6.7 Recommendations for future research

The findings of this study identified a few areas of research that need attention. Firstly, it is essential to determine which government departments play which role regarding Grade R, and that the same support is delivered to public and private schools that provides Grade R education.

A professional development programme focusing on phonological awareness can be constructed by following the stated guidelines and implemented in order to teach Grade R teachers to teach phonological awareness skills within their classrooms. This should be done so that learners that enter Grade 1 have developed the necessary phonological awareness skills. By teaching phonological awareness skills to learners in Grade R will make the process of learning to read easier, and as a

result the reading abilities of the South African learners can be improved. The effect of the PD programme focusing on phonological awareness implemented according to the recommended guidelines should be determined by means of a longitudinal study.

6.8 Conclusion

The aim and contribution of this study was to identify the relevant phonological awareness knowledge Grade R teachers should have, in order to teach these skills to Grade R learners and to present guidelines for a professional development programme that will be effective in teaching Grade R teachers the identified knowledge and skills.

Over the last decade, research has shown that phonological awareness skills are the most important predictors of reading achievement during later years of formal schooling. In order to teach Grade R learners these critical phonological awareness skills it is important that Grade R teachers have the necessary content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and learner knowledge regarding phonological awareness skills and the required expertise to teach these skills. This can be achieved by providing effective professional development programmes. These professional development programmes must make provision for the contexts of the participants taking part in the programme in order to attend to their attitude and motivation so that positive and lasting change can be established. These programmes should also consist of the following characteristics, namely they should be interactive, hands-on, on-going over time, provide follow up support and encourage collaboration between colleagues.

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Addenda

District consent form



education and training

Lefapha la Thuto le Katiso
Departement van Onderwys en Opleiding
Department of Education and Training
NORTH WEST PROVINCE

Private Bag X 919
Potchefstroom
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Tel: 018-294 0700/701
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DR KENNETH KAUNDA DISTRICT

TLOKWE AREA OFFICE

OFFICE OF THE AREA MANAGER

TO: PROF CHARISMA NEL
NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

FROM: MS S.S. YSSEL
AREA MANAGER
TLOKWE AREA OFFICE

DATE: 16 AUGUST 2012

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SCHOOLS IN DR KENNETH KAUNDA DISTRICT

The above matter refers.

Permission is herewith granted to you to conduct research at schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District under the following provisions:

- You seek permission from the Principal. You can only proceed with his permission.
- Written permission from parents and learners taking part must be obtained.
- The activities you undertake at school should not tamper with the normal process of learning and teaching.
- You inform the principal of your identified school of your impending visit and activity;
- You provide my office with a report in respect of your visit;
- You will obtain prior permission from this office before availing your findings for public or media consumption.

Wishing you well in your endeavour.


MS S.S. YSSEL
AREA MANAGER
TLOKWE

AO1270/dp

"A vibrant, top achieving region offering accessible quality education"
"Business unusual: All Hands on Deck to speed up change"

Principal consent form



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

April 2013

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear.....

I am busy with an M.Ed research project titled: **A professional development programme for Grade R teachers: A focus on phonological awareness**, at the North West University.

I kindly request your permission to observe the lessons on phonological awareness of the Grade R teachers at your school and ask whether they could complete a questionnaire to determine their understanding of phonological awareness and opinion of professional development.

Permission has been granted by the Education Department of the Kenneth Kaunda District.

All the information gathered, as well as personal details will be kept confidential. Participation is completely voluntary and can be cancelled at any point during the research. Information supplied by the teachers will be available to them at any time.

Please contact me for any additional information.

Kind Regards


Hilette Steyn

Hilette Steyn
Researcher
083 603 4018

Prof. Carisma Nel
Project Leader
072 702 0176 OR (018) 299 1854

Please sign the following.

I, _____, Principal of _____ give permission for the participation in the research project titled: **A professional development programme for Grade R teachers: A focus on phonological awareness**.

Teacher consent form



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

April 2013

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear

I am busy with an M.Ed research project titled: **A professional development programme for Grade R teachers: A focus on phonological awareness**, at the North West University.

I kindly request your permission to observe your lessons on phonological awareness and ask whether you would complete a questionnaire to determine your understanding of phonological awareness and your opinion of professional development.

Permission has been granted by the Education Department of the Kenneth Kaunda District.

All the information gathered, as well as personal details will be kept confidential. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any point during the research. Access to information supplied by you can be requested at any time.

Please contact me for any additional information.

Kind Regards



Hilario Steyn



Prof. Carisma Nel

Project Leader

072 7020 176 OR (018) 299 1854

Researcher
083 603 4018

Please sign the following.

I, _____, Teacher at _____ give permission to participate in the research project titled: **A professional development programme for Grade R teachers: A focus on phonological awareness**.

Interview schedules

Interview Schedule

1. Can you give me some background information regarding the learners in your class?

2. What is your definition of the term "professional development"?
What is the first thing you think about?
What is your attitude regarding professional development?
Do you believe that professional development will improve your teaching practice?
What motivates you to attend professional development programmes?
Would you say that you find it generally easy to change your teaching practice?

3. What professional development is available for you?
Who provides the professional development?
Are you able to choose which professional development programmes you want to attend?

4. The professional development programmes that you have been to:
How was the programme presented?
What would you change about the programme?
Did the providers of the programme provide any resources during the programme?
Did the providers visit your school afterwards to support you with the implementation of the learned skills and knowledge?

Interview Schedule :
Subject Advisor For English Home Language

Reading Initiative for Empowerment project.

1. What professional development is provided to grade R teachers?
 - Who decides on the topics of the professional development?
 - Do teachers have the option of deciding which training they want to participate in?
 - Who does the training?
2. How is the training presented? (e.g., workshops)
 - How often is the training done?
 - Are there any follow-up visits and support regarding implementation for the teachers (i.e., after the training)?
3. What are the limitations or challenges / problems that you experience when planning or implementing training?
4. Which resources are used when training is provided?
 - How is it used?
5. Can you tell, what are teachers' attitude and motivation towards professional development / training?
 - What do you think influences their attitude and motivation towards professional development.
 - What must change to convince teachers to see the importance of professional development?
6. If I think about our interview I was wondering, would you want/like support in the planning and implementation of teachers' professional development?
7. Is there a specific focus in professional development related to phonological awareness?
 - Can you please explain what it entails?

Questionnaire

School:

Questionnaire: Phonological Awareness

The purpose of the questionnaire is to establish teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness.

The information gathered with this questionnaire is confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

Section A: Background Information

1) What training have you received?

Teaching diploma ECD/pre-primary: 3 years	
Teaching diploma ECD/pre-primary: 4 years	
Teaching diploma Primary School: 3 years	
Teaching diploma Primary School : 4 years	
Degree: Pre-primary	
Degree: Primary School	
Other, please name:	

2) How many years teaching experience do you have?

0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45
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3) What is your age?

20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45	45-50	50-55	55-60	60-65
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4) What is your gender?

M	F
---	---

Section B: Phonological Awareness

1. Explain your understanding of " Phonological awareness".

2. Which activities do you use to teach phonological awareness?

3. In your opinion, what skills do grade R learners need in order to achieve success in learning to read in later years?

4. Which teaching and learning support resources do you use to teach phonological awareness?

5. Please provide an example of the following:

Words that rhyme - _____

A Compound word - _____

Divide a word into syllables - _____

Phoneme isolation - _____

Phoneme identity - _____

Phoneme blending - _____

Phoneme segmentation - _____

Phoneme deletion - _____

Phoneme addition - _____

Phoneme substitution - _____

Observation schedule

A professional development programme for Grade R teachers: A focus on phonological awareness.

Observation schedule

The observation schedule is not intended to act as a checklist but a mere guideline or a reminder of what to be alert for. Not all of these guidelines are relevant to each session.

Context

- Number of learners present
- Working in groups, pairs or individually
- Level of learner participation/interaction required by teacher, are the learners involved?
Are the learners observing?

Description of session and delivery

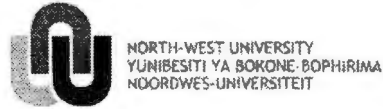
- How does the teacher introduce Phonological Awareness Skills?
- The phonological awareness skills are integrated into the curriculum/lesson or are treated as a “stand alone” entities.
- The teacher reveals confidence in his/her content knowledge.
- Is the teacher able to rectify any errors or areas of concern?
- What kinds of questions does the teacher ask?
- How method/technique(s) does the teacher use to teach phonological awareness?
- How is phonological awareness assessed?

The Learner's Experience

- How easily do the learners relate to the content of the lesson?
- Evidence that learners do/do not understand?
- Can learners relate to the knowledge learned?
- Are the learners clear about what they need to be able to know and do regarding the skill learned?
- What kind of questions do they ask?

Addendum G

Ethical Clearance



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South Africa 2520

Tel: (018) 299-4900
Faks: (018) 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Ethics Committee
Tel +27 18 299 4850
Fax +27 18 293 5329
Email Ethics@nwu.ac.za

Prof C Nel

23 October 2012

ETHICS APPROVAL OF PROJECT

The North-West University Ethics Committee (NWU-EC) hereby approves your project as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-EC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethica number below.

Project title : A professional development programme for Grade R teachers: A focus on phonological awareness.

Project Leader: Prof C Nel

Ethics number: **NWU-00086-12-A2**

Approval date: 2012/09/27 **Expiry date:** 2017/09/26

Special conditions of the approval (if any): None

General conditions:
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

- The project leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-EC.
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project.
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the NWU-EC. Would there be deviation from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-EC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility the NWU-EC retains the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project;
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected,
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the NWU-EC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - the required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately;
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

The Ethics Committee would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Committee for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof Amanda Lourens
(chair NWU Ethics Committee)